Formative Evaluation of the OfS Addressing Barriers to Student Success Programme

Report to the Office for Students
by Warwick Economics & Development Ltd.

September 2018

Contents

WECD

Warwick Economics & Development
Two Snow Hill
Birmingham
B4 6GA
T: 0121 2313425
www.w-ecd.com

List of Figures

Abbreviations

ABSS	Addressing barriers to student success
ARC Network	Aimhigher Research & Consultancy Network
BAME	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
BEng	Bachelor of Engineering
BIS	Department of Business Innovation and Skills
BTEC	Business and Technology Educational Council
CPD	Continuing professional development
DLHE	Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education
DRIVER project	Data Responsive Initiatives as a Vehicle for achieving Equity in Results
DSA	Disabled Students' Allowance
DSSLG	Disabled Students Sector Leadership Group
EAT Framework	Evans' Assessment Tool Framework
ECU	Equality Challenge Unit
EEF	Education Endowment Foundation
FACE	Forum for Access and Continuing Education
FIS	Financial Information Systems
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Agency
HEAT	Higher Education Access Tracker
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEP	Higher Education Provider
HERAG	Higher Education Race Action Group
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
IAGD	International Association for Geoscience Diversity
ICF	Inclusive Curriculum Framework
JISC	Joint Information Systems Committee
MIS	Management Information Systems
NCOP	National Collaborative Outreach Programme
NSS	National Student Survey
NTU	Nottingham Trent University
OFFA	Office for Fair Access
OfS	Office for Students
PATS	Personal and Academic Tutoring Support
PI	Principle Investigator
PVC	Pro-Vice Chancellor

RAFA2	Re-imagining Attainment for All 2
RARA	Raising Awareness, Raising Aspiration
SAP	Student Attainment Project
SCALE-UP	Student Centred Active Learning Environment with Upside-down Pedagogies
SPSS	Student Priority Support System
STEM	Science discipline, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TBL	Team-Based Learning
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
TPB	Theory of planned behaviour
UUK	Universities UK
UWE	University of the West of England
VA	Value added
VfM	Value for money
WECD	Warwick Economics & Development Ltd.

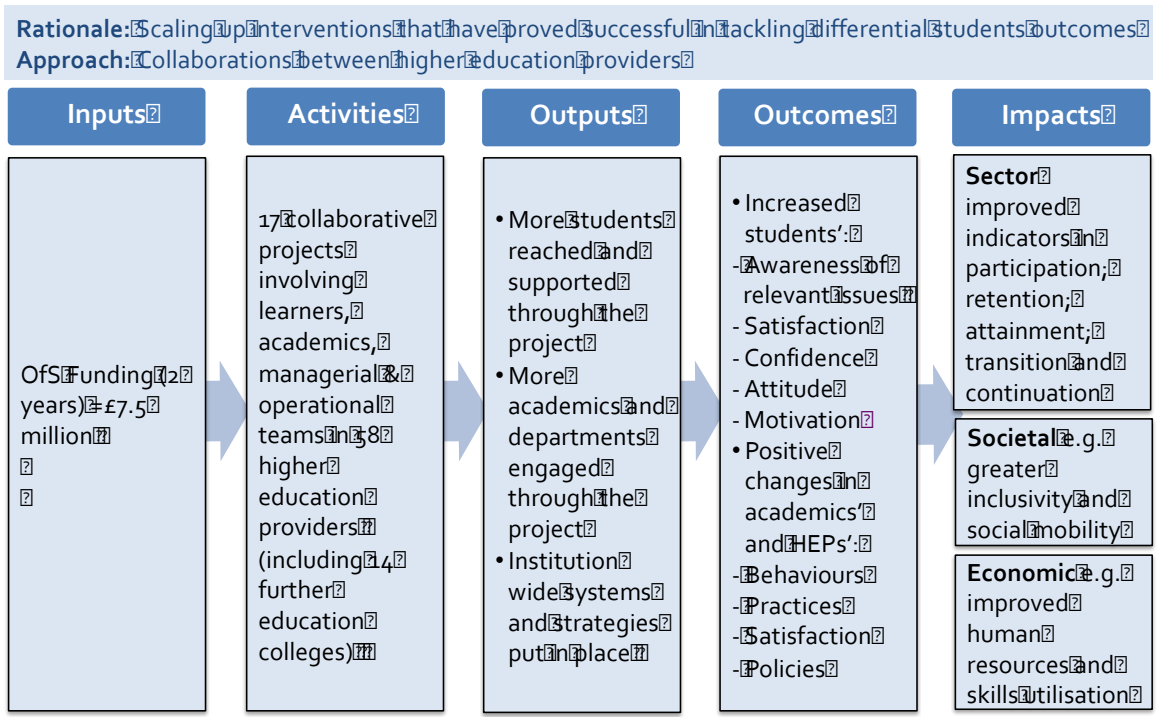
Executive Summary

Addressing Barriers to Student Success (ABSS) is a £7.5 million programme that aims to scale up pedagogical and student support approaches that have proved successful in addressing differential educational and employment outcomes, especially for underrepresented groups of students.

The programme is delivered through 17 collaborative projects involving a minimum of three higher education providers (HEPs) that are working together to better understand the issues that underpin differential student outcomes and are implementing approaches that have been successful in reducing and breaking down barriers to student success. The focus of most projects is addressing gaps in educational and employment outcomes of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students and students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Most of the 17 projects aim to address these issues by increasing students' levels of satisfaction, belonging and engagement with higher education (HE), and consequently participation, retention and attainment. The 17 projects also aim to increase HEPs' (management and academics) understanding of the issues underpinning differential student outcomes and awareness of effective solutions.

Student participation, experience and outcomes are at the heart of the work of the Office for Students (OfS). The ABSS programme forms part of a wider policy agenda that aims to support a more systematic and strategic response to combating the key barriers faced by underrepresented groups of students in achieving successful HE outcomes, including employability outcomes. As illustrated by the programme's logic chain below, addressing these issues would mean that some significant sector, societal and economic impacts would ultimately be delivered in the future. For example, the programme could improve participation, attainment and continuation rates for the targeted groups of students, thus closing the gaps in outcomes between different student groups across the sector. In turn, such a success would lead to societal and economic impacts including greater social mobility and improved skills and human resource utilisation in the labour market.

Logic Chain of the ABSS Programme



This evaluation report covers the first year of programme delivery, from April 2017 to March 2018, and presents the findings of the formative assessment of the delivery of the programme to date. It looks at how the programme is working and what lessons can be drawn to date, in particular in terms of cross-institutional partnerships as enablers for trialling and scaling up organisational and pedagogical approaches that seek to address differential student outcomes. Findings are based on a range of interviews and reports from each of the projects and from the wider stakeholder group. Key findings are presented below.

Key Evaluation Findings to Date

The evaluation has established that, as a result of the support offered by the ABSS programme, 85 different organisations are currently involved in the programme. Of these, 58 are HEPs (including 14 further education colleges) and 27 are other organisations including Local Enterprise Partnerships, charities and businesses.

It is also estimated that, in total, some 30-40 thousand students could potentially benefit from this programme.

Many projects are focussed on inclusive and active teaching and learning practices, while others focus on the wellbeing of students, employability and postgraduate studies. To maximise benefits for the students and ensure their sustainability, the projects have also started taking actions to embed organisational improvements, including by building and reinforcing new approaches and raising awareness across HEPs. In particular, in the last six months, a lot of activity has been undertaken to raise awareness of effective initiatives internally (within HEPs' own organisations) and externally to the wider sector and key policy stakeholders.

The ABSS programme is universally seen as an opportunity to add to, and go beyond, existing activities relating to student success and outcomes that HEPs are involved with. As this review has taken place relatively early on, the main outputs to date as a result of the ABSS programme, have been around establishing working practices, production of materials, and setting up of events and working groups. At this stage, scaling up also tends to be 'localised' i.e. a new initiative focuses on a specific course, subject area or student cohort rather than being implemented at institution-wide level. Nevertheless, in some cases, all this activity has started to have an influence on students, with products like online tools and tailored sessions being mainstreamed. In general, however, outcomes and impacts will mostly become apparent later on.

There have also been a number of learning points emerging from the projects so far, in particular around collaborations. Collaboration is an important part of the project and although the projects are at an early stage, review of the partnership arrangements to date and discussions with the HEPs that work together, have provided useful insights into what works well and what can be learned for the future. For example, a number of benefits have been cited as emerging from these partnerships. These include:

- Faster and efficient expansion of 'proven' good practice, given that in most cases the lead HEP has already gone through the testing stages of an initiative and lessons learnt are transferred to partner HEPs.

- Bringing together various university and student support services and academic staff.

- Initiating new processes for students to be heard, learn and contribute to learning (content and infrastructure).

- Enabling smaller HEPs to enhance their capacity and capabilities and build useful networks.

- Allowing partners to bring different expertise together and learn from each other, and use each other as a sounding board.

- Helping to increase influence within a HEP – input from other HEPs means the intervention and concepts are taken more seriously at a senior level, given that management buy-in needs reassurance that the proposed activities are working.

- The ABSS projects are also learning and strengthening their capabilities from a number of challenges they have faced. Some of these challenges and lessons learned are summarised below.

- Time and resources required for delivering key project activities, in particular where partners have not been consulted early on and have not been involved in the project design. Rolling out interventions in different disciplines has proved a resource intensive task – and two of the projects have also had a partner withdrawing from their project. The same applies to multi-site interventions that need more development time and greater awareness of local contexts.

- Delays in the signing of collaborative agreements as well as signing of data sharing agreements. There have also been problems with some partners not submitting financial returns or sharing data collected from interventions. Within each HEP there are different teams that need to be involved (legal, ethics and data projection) – and this has not always been taken fully into account in the initial design of the projects.

- Staff buy-in can be difficult, including participation in joint staff and student workshops, in particular where organisational changes are taking place. Academic staff have teaching responsibilities that makes it difficult for them to invest considerable time into the project. Therefore, they need to be involved (but they may not be leading these projects), especially as academic workload (teaching) is not always evenly distributed.

- HEPs represent different, multi-dimensional organisations, and at different stages of maturity, when it comes to specific types of initiatives. Different starting points between partners and across or within disciplines have meant that some tailoring of the original delivery plans has been required, and ABSS project partners have been working closely together to accommodate individual contexts.

- Student engagement by the ABSS projects has increased over time. This takes many forms i.e. from students involved in the production of relevant assessment and learning materials, to directly contributing to the delivery of the ABSS projects by undertaking secondary and primary research) or more strategic engagement by sitting on project governance structures. Although it is too early at this stage to assess the impact of this engagement on the ultimate aims of the ABSS programme, delivery of the ABSS projects has clearly provided additional opportunities for academics, professional staff and students, to work together for better mutual understanding and learning of effective educational practices in higher education.

1. Introduction

1.1. Warwick Economics and Development (WECD) were commissioned in April 2017 by the then Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to undertake a formative evaluation, capacity-building and evidence review of the Addressing Barriers to Student Success (ABSS) programme.

1.2. To meet the evaluation requirements, the evaluation requires review and assessment of the funding in a formative way (in the first year of the evaluation) and in a summative way (in the second year). This evaluation report covers the first year of programme delivery, from April 2017 to March 2018, and presents the findings of the formative assessment of the delivery of the programme to date. It looks at how the programme is working and what lessons can be drawn to date, in particular in terms of the effectiveness of additional funding and cross-institutional partnerships as enablers for trialling and scaling up organisational and pedagogical approaches that seek to address differential student outcomes.

Context and Scope of the Evaluation

1.3. ABSS is a £7.5 million programme that aims to support collaborative projects involving a minimum of three HEPs that are working together to develop effective approaches to addressing differential student outcomes.

1.4. The aim of the ABSS programme is to scale up successful pedagogical and student support approaches that cover a range of lifecycle issues to groups of students identified as most affected by differential outcomes and differences in success in terms of participation and attainment during their studies, progression to postgraduate study and progression into work.

1.5. As discussed in more detail in section 2 of this report, the programme was developed in response to the recommendations made in the review undertaken by King's College London, Aimhigher Research & Consultancy (ARC) Network and the University of Manchester on the 'Causes of Differences in Student Outcomes'[1]. It is also highly relevant to the delivery of the recently published Office for Students (OfS) Strategy 2018-2021 (30 April 2018)[2].

1.6. Seventeen collaborative projects have been funded as part of the ABSS programme and the key aim of the two-year evaluation, with an evidence review and summative evaluation to be produced in March 2019, is to explore and ultimately assess 'what works, why and in what context' in addressing barriers to student success. Assessment is based on reviews of these 17 projects, with the specific objectives of the evaluation summarised as follows:

- To discuss progress and effects of different types of interventions (what works, why and in what circumstances).
- To highlight areas for future research that will enable detailed exploration of the causal effects of these interventions, in recognition of the relatively short timeline of the evaluation and the time it takes for impacts to materialise.

[1] https://tinyurl.com/y9z2orh2

[2] https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/1435/ofs-strategy-2018-to-2021.pdf

- To provide an overall assessment of the difference to the student, society and economy in terms of outcomes that can be attributed to this funding (i.e. impact assessment), if/where possible, within the time of this evaluation.
- To identify the extent to which funding is spent according to plan (accountability for public funds).
- To demonstrate the value of changes achieved and difference made as a result of this funding (and interventions) at individual, provider, project and national levels (i.e. return on investment) at the end of the evaluation.

1.7. The evaluation objectives reflect the broad classes of question that any policy evaluation would seek to answer[3]:

- How is the policy delivered? This is the main focus of the formative evaluation and report.
- What difference did the policy make? This is the focus of the outcomes and impact evaluation.
- Did the benefits of the policy justify the costs? This is the focus of an economic evaluation.

1.8. At this stage, the evaluation is focusing on 'how' the programme is delivered and better understanding the aims, objectives and composition of the ABSS projects, their achievements to date, and the role of partnerships and collaboration in scaling up successful projects – ultimately assessing how the success of the ABSS programme and individual projects are driven by collaborations and partnerships. In particular, the evaluation seeks to identify and discuss good practice for wider adoption by better understanding:

- What are the benefits of working in collaboration with other partners – over and above what would have happened at individual intervention/partner level?
- What works well in the partnerships and why?
- What the challenges have been for partnerships and solutions/mitigations?
- What are the (early) experiences for scaling-up activities and initiatives that aim to address differential outcomes at different levels?

1.9. This evaluation report also presents early evidence on what difference the funding is making – by exploring what has been delivered to date and how activities and actions are impacting upon academics, students, management teams and processes and systems in place at institutional and partnership level.

Evaluation Approach

1.10. Key tasks planned for the lifetime of the evaluation to meet the evaluation requirements combine qualitative and quantitative elements at different stages of each project's delivery. These include:

[3] HM Treasury, The Magenta Book, Guidance for Evaluation

- Desk-based review of relevant project documentation – including business cases, evaluation plans, monitoring reports and baselines and evaluation reports produced by individual projects;
- Interviews with projects (leads and partners);
- Interviews with academics and students;
- Review of information collected by HEPs;
- Interviews with various stakeholders throughout the lifetime of the project evaluation;
- Review of national data and analysis; and
- Capacity building activities including webinars and workshops.

1.11. Key evaluation tasks undertaken to date include are the following.

- Early review of background documents and data (to understand the wider policy context for the programme). This involved building on the existing research/policy knowledge base to synthesise both qualitative and quantitative information, by:
  - Extracting and distilling key messages from national policy/strategies for access and student success in higher education (HE);
  - Summarising findings from research into student outcomes, widening participation and inequalities in HE; and
  - Reviewing relevant data.
- Interviews with key strategic stakeholders to understand the policy commitments and investments that have already been made in HE and beyond to understand the causes of differential student outcomes). Stakeholders interviewed to date include:
  - Disabled Students Sector Leadership Group (DSSLG)
  - Equality Challenge Unit (ECU)
  - Forum for Access and Continuing Education (FACE)
  - GuildHE
  - Higher Education Academy (HEA)
  - Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE)
  - Higher Education Race Action Group (HERAG)
  - Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC)
  - Office for Fair Access (OFFA)
  - The Runnymede Trust
  - Universities UK (UUK)
- Two rounds of discussions (a mix of telephone interviews and face-to-face meetings) with all 17 project leads between July 2017 and February 2018, and a first round of telephone interviews with project leads in partner HEPs in March and April 2018. The purpose of these discussions has been to establish baseline position/delivery models, elucidate early

experiences from partnership and project working, and support the development of a typology of interventions/approaches for addressing barriers to student success and learning potential under the programme).

- Establishing a communication plan (for the programme, projects, evaluation team).
- Establishing an overarching evaluation framework (a copy of which is attached in Appendix A), and producing a six-month early formative review of ABSS in October 2017.

1.12. Key capacity building activities to date include:

- A first assessment of evaluation plans produced by the ABSS projects and commentary that informed early feedback to projects and request for further clarification – produced between July and August 2017.
- Production of logic models for all 17 projects, shared with the projects and HEFCE – produced in August and September 2017.
- A webinar focused on the development of logic models (to support project capacity for firming up evaluation approaches and completing the first monitoring return to HEFCE).
- Guidance on preparation of logic models that was shared with all 17 projects – produced in September 2017.
- A second review of evaluation plans to establish the extent to which comments have been addressed in September 2017.
- Review of monitoring forms returned to HEFCE by the ABSS projects in September 2017.
- Discussing/working with the project leads and partners to identify practical opportunities (with good probabilities of success) for:
  - Using and implementing experimental and/or quasi experimental methodologies (where appropriate/relevant);
  - Using counterfactual analysis to help illuminate the level of attribution, causality or correlation in order to determine the 'net' impact of different types of interventions; and
  - Establishing cost-effective and proportionate measures of measuring the impact of the projects.
- Responding to individual support requests from project evaluation teams, as required.
- Detailed review of monitoring forms returned to HEFCE by the ABSS projects in February 2018.

Report Structure

1.13. The report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 summarises the rationale underpinning the ABSS programme and key issues surrounding differential outcomes for students in HE. It draws upon desk-based review of relevant policy documents and data.

- Section 3 provides an overview and descriptive analysis of the ABSS projects, drawing upon desk-based review of business cases and monitoring reports returned to HEFCE by the projects in March 2018. Information is also provided about the institutional context within which project activities are taking place, represented by study and student outcomes data for the HEPs involved in the 17 projects.
- Section 4 presents an overview of partnership arrangements and provides feedback received to date on how well partnerships are working to scale up effective methods for addressing barriers to student success.
- Section 5 provides an overview of achievements to date and commentary on the approaches adopted by the ABSS projects for monitoring progress and measuring success.
- Section 6 draws conclusions and makes recommendations.

2. Policy Context for the ABSS Programme

2.1. This section provides an overview of the background to the ABSS programme and the latest relevant policy developments and OfS data.

Background to the ABSS Programme

2.2. The HEFCE reports 'Higher education and beyond' in 2013[4] and 'Differences in degree outcomes' in 2014/2015[5] both highlighted statistically significant differences in study outcomes and student experiences for different groups of students. These differences relate to academic attainment, employment and further study outcomes when other student background characteristics have been accounted for; the modelling techniques used by HEFCE control for prior attainment and make allowance for differences in the performance of students at different universities, thus controlling for institutional effects. In addition to this analysis, variance in students' experiences was also captured by the National Student Survey (NSS)[6].

2.3. To respond to these findings, HEFCE commissioned research by King's College London, ARC Network and the University of Manchester to explore the causes of differential outcomes and experiences. The research explored why students from some groups tend to do less well than other groups and particularly focused on the disparities between white students and students from ethnic minority groups as well as differences between students from different socio-economic backgrounds. The research also explored the reasons white students tend to report the highest levels of student satisfaction compared with their peers from ethnic minority backgrounds. The resulting report highlighted four key causes of differences in student outcomes:

1. Curricula and learning: Different student groups indicate varying degrees of satisfaction with HE curricula and the representativeness of learning, teaching and assessment practices.
2. Relationships between staff and students and among students: A sense of 'belonging' and the presence of academic role models are perceived as key in supporting attainment and progression as well as positive peer-to-peer relationships and networks.
3. Social, cultural and economic capital: Recurring differences in how students experience HE, how they network and how they draw on external support were noted.
4. Psychosocial and identity factors: The extent to which students feel supported and encouraged in their daily interactions was a key variable to facilitate or limit students' learning and attainment.

2.4. The researchers concluded that differential outcomes for different student groups are underpinned by influences at three levels:

[4] Higher education and beyond, Outcomes from full-time first degree study, HEFCE (July 2013/15), http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180405120050/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2013/201315/
[5] HEFCE (2014) Differences in degree outcomes: Key findings: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180405115303/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2014/201403/
[6] http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180405125317/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/nss/results/

- The macro level. This is the wider context of learning, including both the structure of the HE system and socio-historical and cultural structures such as those of race, ethnicity, culture, gender and social background that are embedded in the general environment in which universities, employers and students operate.
- The meso level. This covers the individual HEPs and related structures that form the social contexts within which student outcomes arise.
- The micro level. This is the level of communication between individual students and staff in the HE environment, including the micro-interactions that take place on a day-to-day basis.

2.5. The research also emphasised that the causes of differences in student outcomes (listed in paragraph 2.3) intersect and, therefore, the ways to tackle these issues need to link academics, professional service staff and students. The ABSS projects are doing this and are concerned in particular with both meso and micro factors (with the expectation that addressing these will eventually influence the macro level).

2.6. In March 2016, a key message from a conference organised by HEFCE ('Addressing differences in student outcomes') to discuss strategic ways of addressing these issues was that student experience and outcomes have to be tackled as part of a broader approach to equality and diversity across HEPs.

2.7. The 2016-17 HEFCE grant letter from the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), set out among other priorities for HEFCE the following: 'We also look to you to continue your work supporting the sector in addressing the differential outcomes for some groups of students, as part of the whole lifecycle approach to access and success for disadvantaged students, as emphasised in the Green Paper. This should build on the analysis that underpinned the National Strategy for Access and Success[7] and the more recent work you have done in this area'.

2.8. In August 2016 HEFCE invited expressions of interest by HEPs to scale up activities to address barriers to student success, supported by the HEFCE Catalyst Fund[8], which aims to drive innovation in the HE sector, enhance excellence and efficiency in HE, and support innovative solutions. Specifically, the ABSS programme aims to provide strategic support to HEPs and their partners for collaborative innovative pedagogical approaches that have already proven successful within individual HEPs and cover a range of issues across the student lifecycle (given that differences in outcomes are in evidence during undergraduate study and progression into postgraduate study and employment). These approaches could include any of the following:

- Inclusive and active teaching and learning practices
- Well-being for students
- Progression to postgraduate study

[7] This refers to the National Strategy for Access and Success in Higher Education, produced by HEFCE and the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) and published by the Department for Businesses, Innovation & Skills in April 2014.

[8] http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180405115134/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/funding/catalyst/

- Graduate employability

2.9. These should be supporting student groups most affected by differential outcomes including:

- Students of particular ethnicities;
- Disabled students;
- Students from areas of low higher education participation, low household income and/or low socioeconomic status; and
- Mature students.

Latest Policy Developments

2.10. The ABSS programme forms part of a wider policy agenda that aims to support a more systematic and strategic response to combating the key barriers faced by underrepresented groups of students in achieving successful HE outcomes, including employability outcomes, and ultimately addressing social mobility[9].

2.11. The Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) also brings into greater focus both strategic and operational issues relating to student progression and success (counting/accounting for this early on, with 1st year students' progression)[10]. The 2016-17 grant letter from BIS[11] requested that Student Opportunity Funding be re-targeted for 2016-17 to more effectively support government priorities; put a greater focus on HEPs with higher proportions of at-risk students from disadvantaged backgrounds, including part-time students; and support access for those students with the educational attainment or potential to succeed in particular geographical areas where there is evidence that entry rates are below expectations. Key interventions aiming to address the latter include:

- The National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) – targeted specifically at students in years 9 to 13 in areas where HE participation is low overall and lower than would be expected given General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) attainment rates.

- The government's commitment to an additional £72 million over three financial years to provide tailored interventions in 12 Opportunity Areas[12] across the country that experience significant challenges in social mobility.

[9] White Paper 'Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching, Social Mobility and Student Choice' (May 2016), the State of the Nation Report on Social Mobility in Great Britain (November 2016) and Working in Partnership: Enabling Social Mobility in Higher Education, the final report of the Social Mobility Advisory Group (October 2016), and the Higher Education and Research Bill (April 2017) and Implementation Plan (June 2017)

[10] TEF includes outcomes-focused criteria and metrics that will, among other things, recognise and reward those HEPs making most progress in supporting the success of students from a range of backgrounds, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/658490/Teaching_Excellence_and_Student_Outcomes_Framework_Specification.pdf

[11] http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180405122357/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/newsarchive/2016/Name,107598,en.html

[12] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-mobility-and-opportunity-areas

2.12. Opportunity Areas are part of the government's national plan for dealing with social mobility through education published in December 2017. The plan – 'Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential, A plan for improving social mobility through education'[13] – sets out how the government aims to remove obstacles that could stop people from achieving their potential. Student experience and outcomes are also at the heart of the recently published OfS Strategy 2018-2021[14], as shown in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: 2018-2021 OfS Strategy

Source: OfS

Latest Data on Student Differential Outcomes

2.13. The rationale for the ABSS programme is to support the development of a strategic approach to addressing differential outcomes and thereby to deliver significant progress in closing the gaps in outcomes between different student groups in HE in England. An overview of the latest student outcomes among UK-domiciled graduates is provided below.

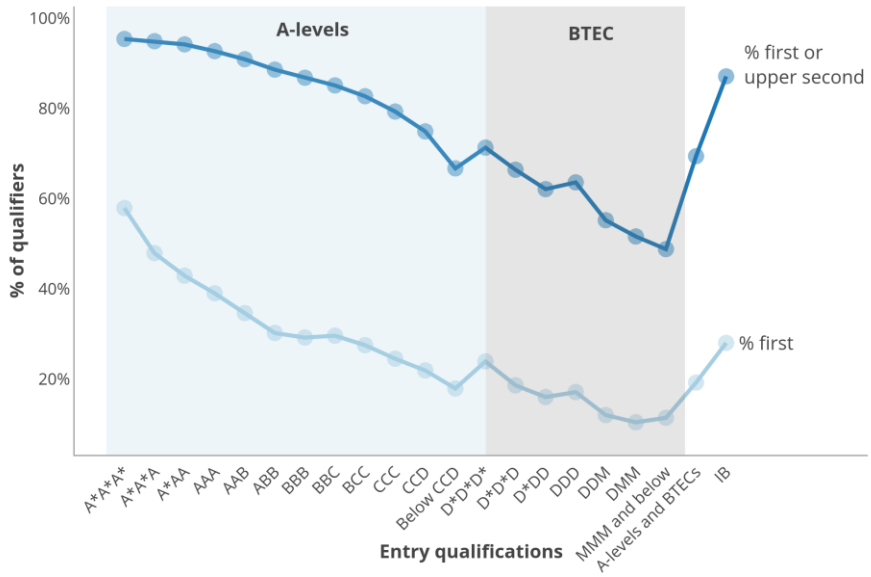
[13] Department for Education (DfE), 14 December 2017
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-social-mobility-through-education
[14] https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/1435/ofs-strategy-2018-to-2021.pdf

2.14. Data analysis released by OfS in April 2018 presents differences in student outcomes. The report presents the employment outcomes of 2015/16 HE graduates and the degree outcomes of the 2016/17 UK-domiciled first degree graduates from HEFCE-funded HEPs (excluding further education colleges). It considers how outcomes differ according to various student characteristics measured in terms of class of degree awarded and outcomes six months after graduation. It also considers the changes that have taken place since the previous reports on 2013/14 graduates.[15] Key findings presented in this report are summarised below.

Degree Outcomes

- In 2016/17, 76% of graduates achieved either a first or upper-second class degree (27% gained a first, 49% gained an upper-second). Since 2013/14 there has been an increase in the percentage of graduates gaining a first or upper-second class degree for all A-level and Business and Technology Educational Council (BTEC) entry qualifications. Nevertheless, a smaller proportion of BTEC students continue to gain a first or upper-second degree than students with A-levels, as shown in Figure 2.2. For example, students entering with the highest possible qualification at BTEC of D* D* D* are 21 percentage points less likely to receive a first or upper-second class degree than those entering with the equivalent tariff points of AAA at A-level.[16]

Figure 2.2: Degree classification by entry qualifications for 2016-17 Graduates



Source: OfS[17] (population: 2016/17 graduates with a classified degree)

- The data shows that there is an attainment gap between male and female graduates, with

[15] https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/differences-in-student-outcomes/
[16] Higher Advanced level (A-level) grade is A* followed by A, B, C, D and E and the highest BTEC grade is D*D*D* for BTEC Extended Diploma. For further information, see https://www.ucas.com/file/63536/download?token=lKi4qZse
[17] https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/differences-in-student-outcomes/

81% of females gaining a first or upper-second class degree compared to 76% of male graduates in 2016/17; this gap has remained the same since 2013/14. The gender attainment gap remains regardless of A-level entry qualifications, with a lower proportion of male graduates gaining a first or upper-second class degree compared to female graduates. The gap ranges from three percentage points (for those entering with A*A*A to seven percentage points (for those entering with AAB). It is worth noting that the attainment gap is smaller for BTEC entry qualification, and for grades DMM and below there is a higher proportion of male graduates gaining a first or upper-second class degree classification than female graduates.

- The proportion of graduates without a disability who achieved a first or upper-second class degree was higher (80%) than the proportion of disabled students (77%); this gap has remained the same since 2013/14. The proportion gaining a first or upper-second class degree was higher for graduates without a disability regardless of A-level grades, but outcomes are more mixed for other Level 3 entry qualifications.

- White graduates were the most likely to gain a first or upper-second class degree at 82%, compared to Black graduates (60%) and Asian graduates (72%), respectively. The gap between white and black graduates and white and Asian graduates has decreased slightly since 2013/14. However, once other factors are controlled for[18], the unexplained difference in degree outcomes is 17 percent for Black graduates and 10 percent for Asian graduates.

- Graduates from POLAR quintile 1[19] were the least likely to gain a first or upper-second class degree (73% of graduates), compared with 83% of graduates from quintile 5. Once the other factors are taken into account, the unexplained difference between quintile 1 and quintile 5 falls to two percentage points. Much of this decrease in difference is explained by entry qualifications.

Employment Outcomes

- The data shows that the proportion of graduates in employment or continuing with further study has increased over time. In 2013/14, 71% of graduates were in highly skilled employment or further study at six months after graduation. By 2015/16 this had increased to 74%.

- The data also shows that graduates with a first class degree were more likely to get a highly skilled job or be continuing with further study at six months after graduation than other class degrees; the proportion of graduates in employment or further study is eight percentage points higher among those with a first class degree than those with a third class degree. Overall, since 2013/14 there has been an increase in the proportion of graduates in highly skilled work or further study for all degree classifications, with the

[18] These characteristics include: entry qualifications, subject they study, ethnicity, where they live, gender, mode of study, type of course, previous school type, region where the HEP is based, and degree classification.
[19] Areas with the lowest young participation in HE (most disadvantaged) – based on POLAR. The participation of local areas (POLAR) classification places areas across the UK into groups based on the proportion of the young population that participates in HE. POLAR classifies local areas into five groups – or quintiles – based on the proportion of 18 year olds who enter HE aged 18 or 19 years old. Quintile 1 shows the lowest rate of participation; quintile 5 shows the highest rate of participation.

biggest increase among those graduating with a lower-second class degree (five percentage points).

- Mature graduates were more likely than young graduates to have a highly skilled job or be in study at six months after graduation (even after the differences in degree classification were taken into account): 77% of mature graduates were in highly skilled employment or further study in comparison with 73% of young graduates.

- In 2015/16, female graduates were marginally more likely than male graduates to do better in the labour market. For example, 73% of female graduates were in highly skilled employment or further study at six months after graduation, compared to 72% for male graduates; this gap has increased slightly since 2013/14. This difference is not consistent once degree classification is taken into account i.e. male graduates gaining a first class degree are 1.8 percentage points more likely to be in highly skilled employment or further study than female graduates. It is the other way around for all other degree classifications.

- The data also shows that a higher proportion of graduates without a disability were in highly skilled employment or further study at six months after graduation, compared to both graduates in receipt of Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) and disabled graduates not in receipt of DSA – 73% compared with 71%. The data also shows that this gap between graduates without a disability and those who report a disability has increased since 2013/14, and the gap remains around two percentage points across degree classifications. The difference between the groups is reduced only slightly once other characteristics are accounted for[20].

- Analysis of employment outcomes for different ethnic groups indicates that white graduates were more likely than other ethnicities to get a highly skilled job or be continuing with further study at six months after graduation: white graduates had a 74% highly skilled employment or further study rate compared with 69% for Black graduates and 72% for Asian graduates.

- The gap between white and Black graduates' employment and further study rate decreased between 2013/14 and 2016/17 by two percentage points (i.e. from seven percentage points in 2013/14 to five percentage points in 2015/16). Among Black graduates, the differences are reduced to around one percentage point for all degree classifications, meaning that degree classification accounts for a lot of these differences.

- Analysis of employment and further study data by both degree classification and ethnicity shows that white and Asian graduates display similar proportions in employment and further study rates across all degree classifications (i.e. first, upper-second, lower-second and third class degrees). Therefore degree classification accounts for much of the differences between these groups. However, in terms of the difference between actual value and their expected proportion, Asian graduates have a difference of two percentage points; this means that only some of the differences between Asian graduates and white

[20] These characteristics include: entry qualifications, subject they study, ethnicity, where they live, gender, mode of study, type of course, previous school type, region where the HEP is based, and degree classification.

graduates are explained by controlling for additional factors beyond entry qualifications[21].

- The data shows that in 2015/16, quintile 1 graduates had the lowest representation in highly skilled employment or further study (71%), while those in quintile 5 have the highest (75%). The gap between quintile 1 and quintile 5 graduates for highly skilled employment or further study decreased from six percentage points in 2013/14 to four percentage points in 2015/16. Furthermore, the data shows that the trends in employment or further study rates for the five quintiles varied by degree classification: the higher the degree classification, the smaller the difference in employment outcomes between the quintiles. For example, there is little difference in employment and further study rates for graduates in quintile 1 and quintile 5 with a first class degree, but the difference is nine percentage points between the two quintiles for those with a third class degree. Therefore, class of degree cannot be the only factor affecting the difference between these rates.

Non-continuation and Transfers

2.15. Non-continuation rates refer to the proportion of students starting a first degree but leaving HE during or after their first year. Analysis of relevant Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data[22] shows that:

- Overall, non-continuation has increased from 7.4% for entrants in 2014/15 to 7.6% for entrants in 2015/16 – thus continuing the upward trend that started in 2012/13 (at 7% compared with 6.6% in 2011/12).

- This increase is consistent for male and female students: for male students, the non-continuation rate increased from 8.6% in 2014/15 to 8.8% in 2015/16; and, for female students, from 6.4% in 2014/15 to 6.6% in 2015/16.

- The increase in non-continuation rates is also consistent for young and mature students: for young students, it increased from 6.3% in 2014/15 to 6.5% in 2015/16; and, for mature students, from 11.6% in 2014/15 to 11.9% in 2015/16.

- Between 2014/15 and 2015/16, the non-continuation rates for white and Chinese students remained the same, at 6.9% and 4% respectively. Within the same period, the non-continuation rates for Black and for Asian students increased: for Black students, from 10.3% in 2014/15 to 11.4% in 2015/16; and, for Asian students, from 7.2% to 7.5%.

- In 2015/16, the lowest non-continuation rate was 3.8% for students who entered with three A-levels (and the data indicates that this has remained the same since 2014/15). The non-continuation rate for students with three BTECs increased from 13.9% in 2014/15 to 14.3% in 2015/16.

2.16. Transfer rates refer to the proportion of students who leave their first-degree course during the first year and start at a different HEP. Analysis of relevant HESA data shows that[23]:

[21] Factors include: entry qualifications, subject they study, ethnicity, where they live, gender, mode of study, type of course, previous school type, region where the HEP is based, and degree classification.

[22] http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180405121258/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/transfers/nc-rates/

- Transfer rates for all students increased from 2.4% in 2014/15 to 2.6% in 2015/16. It is worth noting that transfer rates had remained unchanged between 2010 and 2014 (at 2.3%).

- The data shows that transfer rates are related to prior attainment, with students with lower entry qualifications more likely to switch to a different HEP. In 2015/16, the transfer rate for students who entered with three A-levels was 2.1% (from 2% in 2014/15) compared with 4% for students with three BTECs (from 3.4% in 2014/15).

- The transfer rate for mature students has declined from 2.9% in 2008/09 to 2% in 2015/16.

- White students had the lowest rate of transfer of any ethnic group at 1.9% in 2015/16 (up from 1.8% in 2014/15). The highest transfer rate has consistently been for Black students – this was 4.8% in 2015/16 (up from 4.5% in 2014/15). The transfer rate for Asian students was 4.2% in 2015/16 (compared with 3.9% in 2014/15). Chinese students had the second lowest transfer rate at 2.1% (compared with 2.2% in 2014/15, i.e. the transfer rate for Chinese students has declined over the two periods, contrary to the other ethnic groups that have experienced an increase between the two periods).

2.17. The ABSS projects described in the next section give an insight into the activities undertaken by HEPs to address some of these differential outcomes.

[23] http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180405121258/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/transfers/nc-rates/

3. Overview of the ABSS Projects

3.1. The aims of the ABSS programme funding call are to[24]:

- Support collaborations that will develop systematic and strategic approaches to addressing differential student outcomes;
- Support collaborations that will scale up successful innovations for students with specific learning difficulties;
- Support collaborations that will scale up successful innovations which support students with mental health issues; and
- Identify how good practice and interventions can be validated, replicated, transmitted and embedded across a diverse range of providers, and identify what conditions need to be present to facilitate this.

3.2. This section provides an overview and descriptive presentation of the ABSS programme and projects. The overview follows a logic chain approach i.e. providing an overview of:

1. Resources and inputs – organisations involved and funding;
2. Rationale for activities undertaken – key issues to be addressed including reference to national data (with information presented also usable as baseline contextual information by the individual ABSS projects in the future);
3. Types of interventions – proposed solutions tested and scaled up to address differential outcomes with the funding support; and
4. Expected results – key outputs, outcomes and impacts.

Partner HEPs

3.3. The total value of the ABSS programme is £7,446,923 for the period March 2017 to February 2019. This represents 46% of the total value of the ABSS projects after taking into consideration contributions made by the HEPs themselves. The total value of this investment is approximately £16 million.

3.4. Figure 3.1 provides an overview of the ABSS projects – giving the lead HEP, key partners and project titles. These projects are taking forward a range of initiatives across geographical administrative boundaries mainly in England. Two ABSS projects also bring in partner HEPs from the other UK nations i.e. Northern Ireland (University of Ulster) and Wales (University of Cardiff). The 17 projects bring together 85 different organisations – 58 HEPs (including 14 further education colleges) and 27 other organisations including charities and businesses. (A detailed list of participating organisations is provided in Appendix B.) Review of the set-up of these projects' indicates that:

- The size of partnerships ranges from three (most common) to nine HEPs; and
- In the majority of projects, the rationale for specific partnerships is bringing together academics/researchers who have previously worked together/know each other's work.

[24] http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180405115215/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2016/CL,202016/

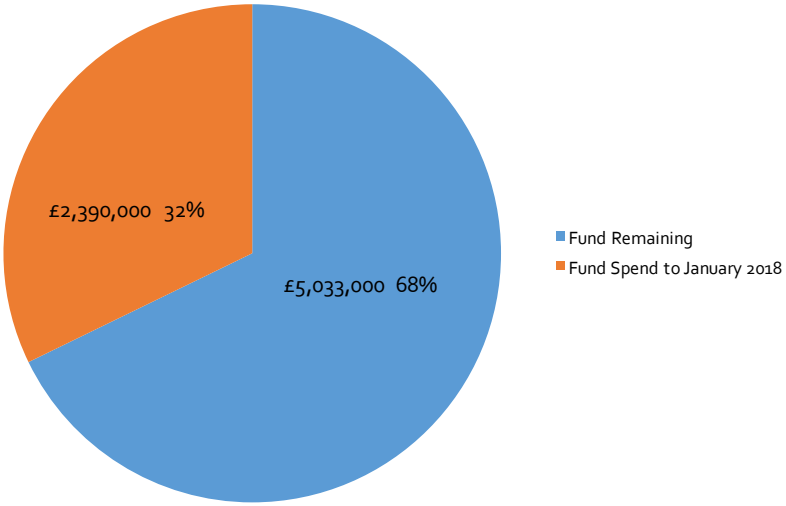
Figure 3.1: The 17 ABSS Projects

Project Title	Lead HEP	Partners
Levelling the Playing Field through Work-Based Learning – Addressing Differential Graduate Employability Outcomes	Aston University	City University, University of Ulster, Birmingham City University
Driver: Data Responsive Initiatives as a Vehicle for achieving Equity in Results	Coventry University	Staffordshire University, Birmingham City University, 6th Form College Solihull, Coventry University College, Stoke College, University of Wolverhampton, Halesowen College
BRIDGE: Building Routes Into Degrees with Greater Equality	Gateshead College	University of Northumbria at Newcastle upon Tyne, Derby College
Using a value added metric and an inclusive curriculum framework to address BAME attainment gap	Kingston University	University of Wolverhampton, University of Hertfordshire, De Montfort University, Greenwich University, University College London
HE Academic Support Tutor – additional support to address barriers to student success	New College Durham	Sunderland College, Darlington College
Scaling Up Active Collaborative Learning for Student Success	Nottingham Trent University	Anglia Ruskin University, University of Bradford
Embedding and sustaining inclusive STEM practices	The Open University	Plymouth University, University of Leeds
Diversity and Inclusion Student Ambassador Programme	The University of Manchester	Manchester Metropolitan University, University of Birmingham
Student Attainment Project	University of Derby	Southampton Solent University, University of West London

Project Title	Lead HEP	Partners
Transforming Transitions	University of Exeter	University of Birmingham, Loughborough University, Queen Mary University of London, Pearson Education, Exeter College, Leicester College, Hereford Sixth Form College, City and Islington College
Intervention for Success	University of Huddersfield	Coventry University, University of Lincoln, Manchester Metropolitan University
Progression to, and success in postgraduate study, for students from BAME and low participation neighbourhoods	University of Leeds	University of Manchester, University of Sheffield, University of Warwick, University of York
Changing Mindsets: Reducing stereotype threat as a barrier to student success	University of Portsmouth	University of the Arts London, Canterbury Christ Church University, University of Brighton, University of Winchester
Re-imagining Attainment for All 2 (RAFA 2)	University of Roehampton	Carshalton College of Further Education, Queen Mary University of London
Raising Awareness, Raising Aspiration: A Targeted Personal Tutoring Support Programme for Narrowing Gaps in Student Achievement and Ambition	University of Sheffield	King's College London, University of Portsmouth
Maximising student success through the development of self-regulation	University of Southampton	University of Surrey, Kingston University
Implementing a strategic approach to mental wellbeing in HE	University of the West of England	University of York, Cardiff University, Student Minds, Universities UK

3.5. Based on the end of Year 1 monitoring returns by the projects (January 2018), a third of the ABSS budget has been spent to date, as shown in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2: ABSS – spend to date



3.6. Consultations with the HEPs participating in the ABSS projects reveal that the ABSS funding is viewed universally as an opportunity to add to, and go beyond, existing activities related to other policy and programmes HEPs are involved with. For example, building on:

- Equality and Diversity and Safeguarding Strategy (such as Equality Charter Action Plans, responding to the UUK Harassment Task Force 2016 recommendations and Mental Health Policy developments).
- Innovation in teaching and learning (i.e. developing centralised personal support systems, virtual learning approaches and use of learning analytics).
- Enhancement of other initiatives and discretionary funding activities (i.e. the Catalyst Fund 'safeguarding' call, NCOP, and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)).
- Access agreements.

3.7. Background research undertaken by our team has also shown that in the 2018/19 access agreements, 13 out of the 16[25] lead HEPs mention their ABSS project. All 16 lead HEPs have targets in their 2017-18 access agreements relating to access, student success and progression based on baseline data and targets for each year up to 2020/21. Many of these targets reflect the ABSS projects' overall aims, including: narrowing the gap or improving retention rates between different groups of students; narrowing the gap or improving degree outcomes between different groups of students; and increasing progression to further study or employment in target groups. Fifteen out of the 16 HEPs have targets relating to non-continuation and retention, 8 out of the 16 have targets relating to degree outcomes and

[25] Sixteen rather than 17 lead HEPs given that Gateshead College that is leading one of the projects does not have an Access Agreement.

attainment, and 11 out of the 16 have targets relating to progression into further study or employment.

Rationale for ABSS Project Activities

3.8. The rationale underpinning the work of the majority of projects is reflected in the (most commonly referenced) expected project outcomes and impacts, which are the following:

- Improvement of the attainment levels of the targeted students;
- Improvement in retention and continuation levels of the targeted students;
- Changes in confidence, resilience, engagement and belonging levels of the targeted groups;
- Changing attitudes and culture within HEPs and the sector; and
- Raising awareness among management and academics in more HEPs and the sector.

3.9. Figure 3.3 presents a summary of the student groups that are the focus of activities addressing barriers for success for the 17 projects. This is based on review of rationale and target groups and proposed activities and interventions presented in projects' business cases, monitoring reports and consultations with projects (leads and partners).

Figure 3.3: ABSS projects – key student groups (number of projects)

BAME	Low socio-economic status	Disability	Mature	BTEC, Care leavers, Other
13	11	6	1	12

3.10. The rationale for the 17 ABSS projects can be summarised as follows:

- In terms of student groups affected by differential outcomes, most projects aim to address issues affecting more than one group. As shown in Figure 3.3, for most projects, the key focus is on improving differential outcomes for students from specific ethnic backgrounds (BAME) and low socio-economic backgrounds. Not all projects have provided information about the number of students potentially affected by the activities undertaken (or the cohorts involved); however, on the basis of the information provided by 12 of the 17 projects, it is estimated that around 30,000 – 40,000 students will potentially directly benefit from the activities introduced.
- In terms of other specific categories of students that projects are looking to explore differential outcomes for, these include the following – with examples of some of these projects given in paragraph 3.11.
  - Students who are carers (by one of the projects)
  - BTEC students (by two projects)
  - Students who are commuting (by two projects)
  - International students (by one project)
  - White working class male students (by two projects)

- Success in STEM subjects (by two projects)
- Muslim female students (by one project)

3.11. The following examples highlight the variety of projects and types of intervention.

Re-imagining Attainment for All 2 (RAFA2)

RAFA2 project is led by the University of Roehampton, with partners Queen Mary University of London and Carshalton College, and aims to eliminate the attainment gap between BAME and white students, as well as focusing on attainment issues affecting Muslim women students.

RAFA 2 follows from two previous research projects led by the University of Roehampton, RAFA 1 and Journeys to Success. Journeys to Success showed that many assessment interventions placed responsibility onto students to change their own behaviours instead of university teams delivering institutional change. RAFA 1 built upon this further with a focus on transparency in the process of assessment.

The main programme objectives replicated by RAFA 2 in the other two HEPs are: to enhance processes and behaviours of academic staff in relation to assessment; and to provide insight into how to address the attainment gap.

Key activities to be replicated include: a) review of quantitative data on BAME and white student performance and outcomes in the areas of attainment, retention and graduate employment alongside collecting qualitative data from staff and students; b) intensive continuing professional development (CPD) for academic staff, focusing on confronting the issues, exploring staff views about students, examining current practice and next steps; and c) student masterclasses, led by fellow students, which are based on themes identified by students.

Transforming Transitions – improving the experience for students entering HE with BTEC qualifications

The Transforming Transitions project led by the University of Exeter, partnering with the University of Birmingham, Loughborough University, Queen Mary University of London, Exeter College, Leicester College, Hereford Sixth Form College, and City and Islington College, aims to develop evidence-based interventions to transform the transition of BTEC students into HE and in this way reduce differential outcomes.

The project is specifically focusing on the experiences and differential outcomes of BTEC cohorts of students in Sports and Health Sciences, Business and Management, and Computer Science.

The project is split into three stages: investigation, design and implementation, and evaluation. The investigation phase has explored BTEC students' learning experiences across the transition from further education to HE, identifying barriers to students' successful progress leading on to employment.

Supporting progression to postgraduate studies for students from low socio-economic backgrounds and BAME students

The project led by the University of Leeds, with partners the Universities of Manchester, Sheffield, Warwick and York, aims to close the gap in students success outcomes with a focus on progression to and success in postgraduate studies. The project specifically targets undergraduate and postgraduate students from low participation neighbourhoods and BAME backgrounds.

Elements of two existing interventions have been scaled up: a) the Discover Postgrad programme which involves pairing final year undergraduates with postgraduate students and alumni and webinars on postgraduate study; and b) an adapted version of the Access to Leeds pre-entry course for undergraduates that is suitable for supporting taught postgraduate offer-holders and scaling it up across the partner HEPs.

3.12. The nature and extent of differential outcomes within HEPs vary dependent on context. Projects vary in terms of their student populations and non-continuation, degree outcomes and employment outcomes[26].

Types of Interventions

3.13. Ten of the 17 projects focus their interventions on developing and expanding inclusive and active learning and teaching, while four focus on student well being, two focus on employability and one focuses on progression to post-graduate studies.

3.14. The activities proposed for scaling up in order to address barriers to students' success vary, ranging from adopting the techniques of learning data analytics to personal tutoring and one-to-one support, to staff training and workshops bringing together staff and students. The word cloud in Figure 3.4 provides an overview of activities undertaken and Figure 3.5 lists the range of activities in place that have already proved to be successful within an institution and which are being scaled up and transferred through the ABSS programme.

Figure 3.4: Overview of key activities addressing barriers to student success

Note: Words are sized according to how commonly the activity appears among the ABSS projects.

[26] Information presented here can be used as baseline contextual information by the individual ABSS projects.

Figure 3.5: Examples of Successful Activities Addressing Barriers to Student Success

- Scaling up proven employability activities such as:
  - Establishing employer stakeholder groups to understand employers' recruitment needs;
  - Reviewing employment sector initiatives to establish and promote inclusive career pathways;
- Producing best practice guides and materials including visuals;
- Training and developing institutional project teams;
- Training and developing staff and students;
- Holding programme discussions;
- Holding enhancement discussions informed by programme metrics;
- Recruiting (academic) tutors;
- Providing personal tutoring/one-to-one support;
- Scaling up current academic support services;
- Providing pastoral support such as personal learning coaches, progression coaches and counsellors;
- Expanding the use of active, collaborative, student-centred learning approaches;
- Reviewing and enhancing institutional procedures and development workflows;
- Development of student self-regulatory assessment practices and development of staff understanding of student self-regulatory assessment practices;
- Introducing learner analytics to provide or improve personalised support for students;
- Conducting widening participation seminars for senior management and academics;
- Putting systems in place so that students are in regular contact with personal academic tutors;
- Monitoring and offering support to all students systematically;
- Developing on-line academic development programmes with associated interactive materials;
- Developing an interactive diagnostic test that tutors can offer to students to support the analysis of their specific learning needs;
- Developing subject/discipline specific learning resources designed for independent study;
- Developing activities and resources to support students living at home;
- Pairing final year undergraduates with postgraduates, putting in place webinars on postgraduate study and pre-entry courses for postgraduates to increase take up of postgraduate studies;
- Introducing interactive/joint student and staff workshops;
- Rethinking the design of curriculum and framework – in particular whether the curriculum is: i) accessible (conceptually and practically); (ii) reflects the needs of diverse students; and (iii) prepares students to contribute positively to a global and diverse economy;
- Student engagement via co-creation and production of resources.

3.15. How scaling-up takes place varies by project. For some projects, the intervention is 'localised' i.e. the scale-up starts with a specific model or student cohort. Examples of such an approach include the projects led by Gateshead College, the University of Derby and Nottingham Trent University (NTU). Initiatives to scale up activities within partner organisations at institution-wide level are less common and examples of these include the projects led by the University

of the West of England (UWE), the University of Coventry and Kingston University. All these are presented in the next two pages and section 4 discusses scaling-up approaches and partnerships in more detail.

Gateshead College – BRIDGE Project

The BRIDGE project led by Gateshead College, with partners Northumbria University and Derby College, involves working with a partnership of 16 employers within the built environment sector to offer an innovative new HE programme. It aims to address barriers to HE participation and progression into successful careers in the built environment sector by women and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds – focusing on a Bachelor of Engineering (BEng) in Architectural Engineering. It involves recruiting students into paid internships for the duration of the programme; the internships are delivered on a rotation basis over two years, giving students a multi-disciplinary grounding in Building Services, Civil Engineering, Architecture, Surveying, Project Management, Construction Management and Structural Engineering.

University of Derby – Student Attainment Project 2

This project led by the University of Derby, with partners Southampton Solent University and University of West London, builds on the success of the Student Attainment Project (SAP) at the University of Derby. The SAP has been running since 2012 and has been successful in halving the institutional good honours attainment gap between BAME and non-BAME students. This project aims to extend and scale up the SAP approach to address a range of student attainment issues including for students from low socio-economic backgrounds, white working class males, students leaving care and disabled students. To address these, it is trialling interventions in a selection of modules, then conducting analysis to:

- Assess the impact on student attainment overall and by the target student groups;
- Assess the impact of different interventions on different student groups; and
- Measure attainment in other modules where the interventions have not been trialled.

Feedback from staff involved in the project and intervention delivery will also feed into the final evaluation.

NTU – Scaling up Active Collaborative Learning for Student Success

This project that is led by NTU with partners Anglia Ruskin University and University of Bradford aims to increase the use of active learning pedagogies at the three HEPs as a strategy to address attainment disparities. The student cohorts who are targeted are those studying at level 4 and the impact of the strategy on their progression into level 5, and specifically the impact on disparities for ethnicity and socio-economic background, is monitored. The interventions being scaled up through the project are SCALE-UP and TBL.

SCALE-UP (Student Centred Active Learning Environment with Upside-down Pedagogies) is an active, collaborative mode of learning. The re-designed classroom environment replaces normal lectures with problem-solving and enquiry-based activities in small student groups. Team-Based Learning (TBL) is an active, collaborative learning and teaching strategy that uses a special sequence of individual study, group work, immediate feedback and teacher-facilitated discussion and debate to create a motivational framework for students' learning. The approach focuses on the readiness of students by providing (or directing them to) learning resources to engage with before formal classes.

UWE – Implementing a Strategic Approach to Mental Wellbeing

This project is led by the University of the West of England, Bristol with partners Cardiff University, York University, Student Minds and Universities UK (UUK) and builds on UUK's Step Change Framework[27]. The intervention is a whole institution approach with multiple components including piloting the implementation of the approach across three HEPs, developing a suite of tools and a validated health and wellbeing audit, dissemination of these tools across the wider sector, and exchanging good practice. Each university is working on different local case studies based on elements of the framework:

- University of the West of England is working on 'Prevention'
- York University is working on 'Data'
- Cardiff University is working on 'Leadership'

All three HEPs are receiving input and support from UUK and Student Minds, and UUK is also working on the development of a validated audit tool for universities and the development of a knowledge exchange digital platform.

Coventry University – DRIVER

The 'DRIVER' project – Data Responsive Initiatives as a Vehicle for achieving Equity in Results – led by Coventry University with Staffordshire University, Birmingham City University, University of Wolverhampton, Coventry University College, the 6th Form College Solihull, Stoke on Trent College and Halesowen College, is implementing an intervention using learner analytics to personalise support for HE students and deploy an institutional change model of inclusion. The intervention is a collaborative change model approach using learner analytics to inform and enhance student success through effective signposting to student support activities. The focus of the project is on all students entering HE from colleges where students from disadvantaged backgrounds are highly represented, yet less likely to achieve a higher classification degree (first or upper-second). This includes BAME, commuter, mature and low socio-economic background students. These students will not only benefit from the project but will also be co-creators in the design and delivery of the work. Partners are currently at various stages of implementing institution-wide learner analytics programmes.

Kingston University – Value Added Metric and Inclusive Curriculum Framework

Led by Kingston University, with partners University of Wolverhampton, University of Hertfordshire, De Montfort University, University of Greenwich and University College London, this project offers an institutional approach to reducing the BAME attainment gap. The approach is based on two interventions, a value added metric (VA) and the Inclusive Curriculum Framework (ICF). The VA metric (developed by Kingston University) highlights differences in attainment that cannot be explained by student entry qualifications or subject of study. The metric itself provides robust quantitative evidence of the impact of interventions, by showing a positive or negative change in the institutional VA score for target students following interventions. ICF identifies intervention points at which the principles of inclusivity can be enacted to ensure effective education. These intervention points include curriculum content, learning and teaching practices, assessment strategies, feedback/feed-forward mechanisms and the review of outcomes including differential progression and attainment.

[27] https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/stepchange

Expected Project Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts

3.16. Various metrics have been proposed by the projects to capture the achievements of their interventions. These are summarised below.

Project Outputs – those most frequently cited by the ABSS projects include:

- Number of students and staff involved in interventions – as noted in paragraph 3.11, 12 of the 17 projects have provided information about the number of students to be targeted by the activities undertaken (or the cohorts involved); on the basis of this information it is estimated that around 30,000 – 40,000 students will potentially directly benefit from the activities introduced.
- Production of relevant materials (e.g. toolkits, sector 'how to' guides, updates on websites, academic papers).
- Number of dissemination events participated in and held (e.g. workshops and conferences).
- Updated/revised systems in place (e.g. policies or curricula) by the next academic year to accommodate new approaches.
- Sharing of good practice with other HEPs and scaling-up of the approaches/interventions at institutional level with other HEPs.

Project Outcomes – the results of the interventions, with the most frequently cited including:

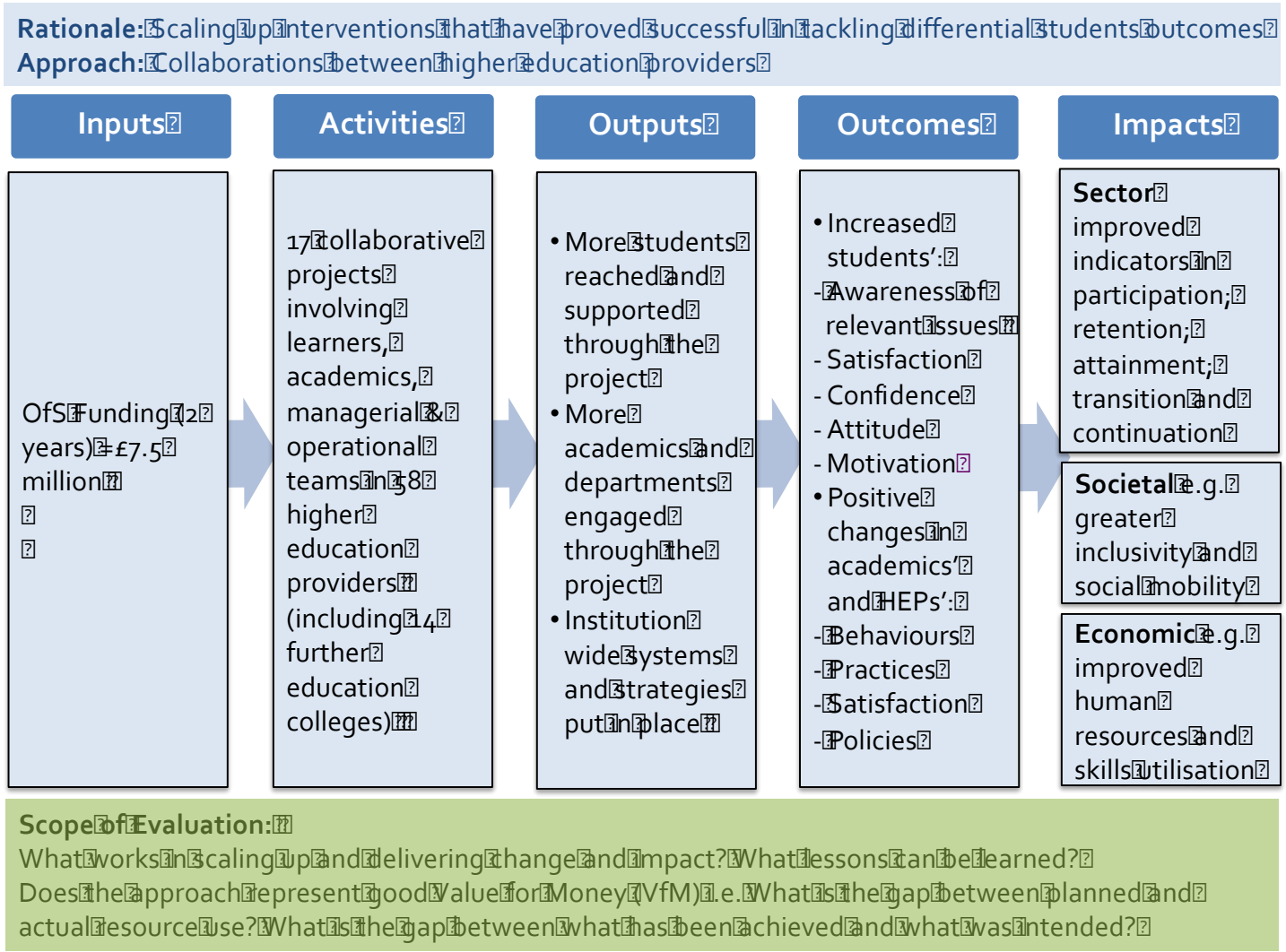
- Improved student learning and satisfaction.
- Enhanced academic buy-in and satisfaction.
- New approaches embedded into partner HEPs' processes and resources.
- Raising awareness within HEPs and within the sector.

Project Impacts – which include shorter- (within a year or two of the intervention) and longer-term (beyond two years) measures of impact as follows:

- Changes in confidence, resilience, engagement and levels of belonging of targeted student groups (shorter-term impact).
- Improvements in HE retention and continuation levels of the targeted students (longer-term impact).
- Improvement of the attainment levels and outcomes of the targeted students (longer-term impact).

3.17. Figure 3.6 presents the emerging logic chain for the ABSS programme drawing upon the above information and the rationale and policies underpinning this funding.

Figure 3.6: Logic chain of the ABSS Programme



4. Partnerships and Scaling-up

4.1. One of the key objectives of this stage of the formative evaluation is to assess:

- What are the benefits of working in collaboration with other partners – over and above what would have happened at individual intervention/partner level;
- What works well in the partnerships and why;
- What the challenges have been for partnerships; and
- Early experiences for scaling-up activities and initiatives that aim to address differential outcomes at different levels.

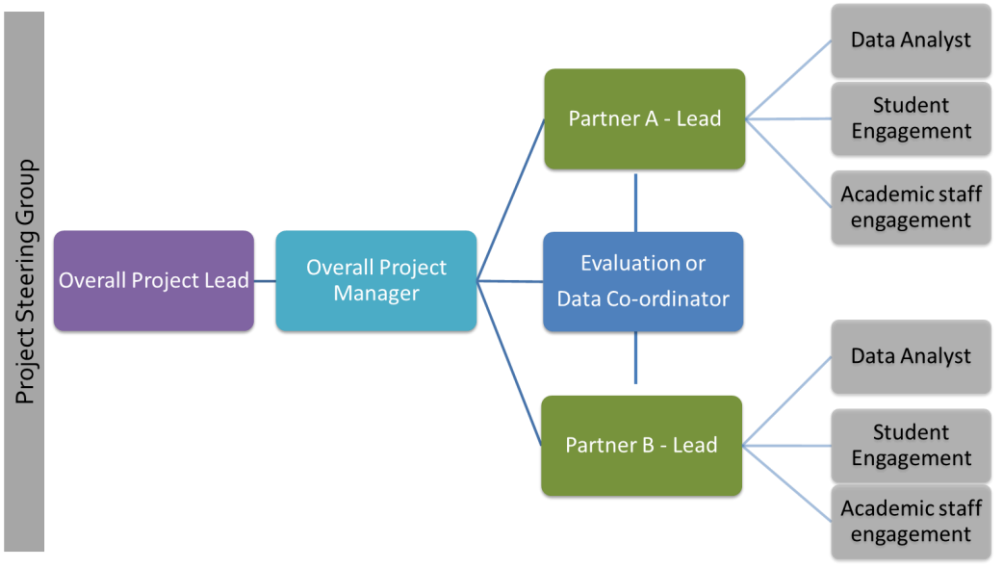
4.2. As noted in section 2, the 17 ABSS projects bring together 85 different organisations – including 58 HEPs (including 14 further education colleges) and 27 other organisations such as charities and businesses. Two ABSS projects also bring in partner HEPs from other UK nations i.e. Northern Ireland (University of Ulster) and Wales (University of Cardiff).

4.3. This section provides an overview of the partnership and scaling-up models that have been put in place to deliver the ABSS projects.

Management and Delivery Models

4.4. As shown in Figure 4.1, an ABSS project management team typically comprises an overall project lead and an overall project manager; project managers or institutional leads (or both in some cases) in partner HEPs; an overall evaluation lead (who may be employed by the lead or the partner HEPs); and various project officers (usually on a part-time basis) and students (on a paid or voluntary basis) contributing to various project tasks i.e. data and information collection, collation and analysis, student engagement, and preparation of marketing materials.

Figure 4.1: ABSS project – typical management structure



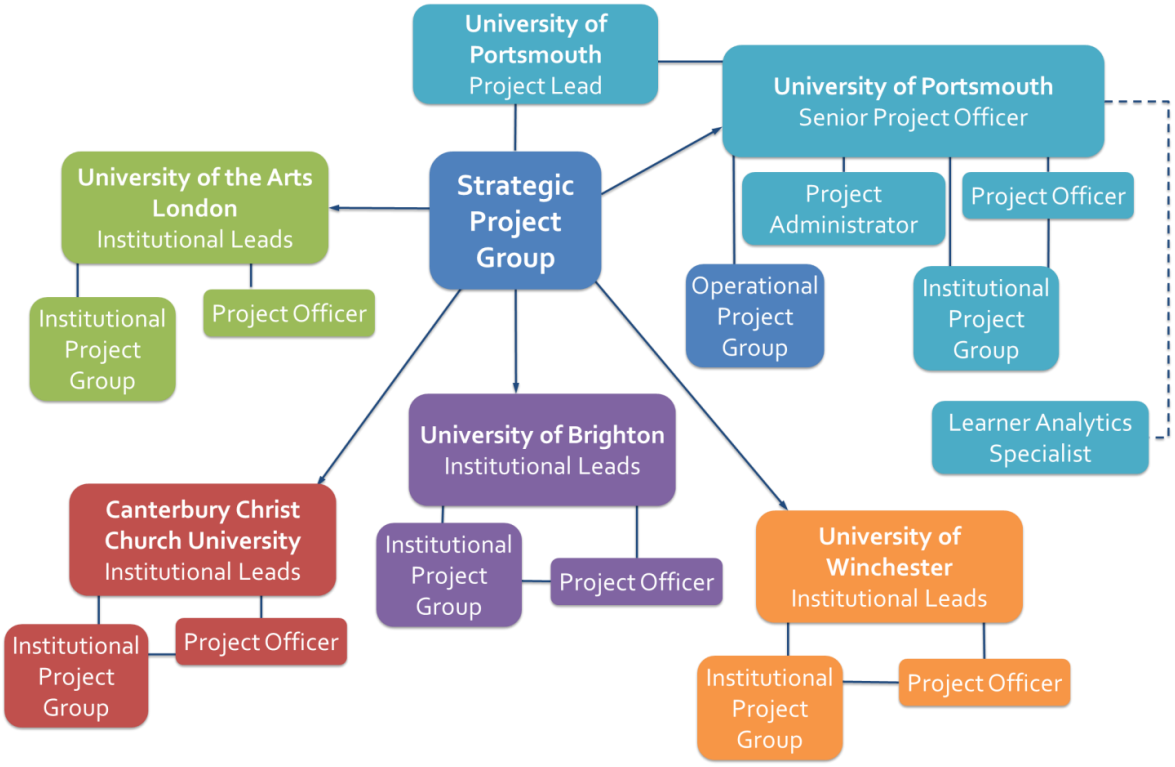
4.5. Project Steering Groups tend to consist of the lead HEP's team and partner HEPs' lead officers. Some have membership from a wide range of individuals from within the HEIs including principal investigators (PIs), project managers, Pro Vice-Chancellors (PVCs), and in some cases student representatives but also external organisations e.g. Local Enterprise Partnerships. It is worth noting that student engagement among projects has increased over time, with a number of funded projects committed to involving students actively in the process of introducing/testing new approaches (see also discussion in section 5).

4.6. Around this basic structure there is some considerable variation, with different levels of resource dedicated to the overall project and varying management arrangements. For example, some projects have a relatively flat structure e.g. the DRIVER project led by Coventry University where each university partner is responsible for leading one element of the project, and the steering group consists of representatives of all partners. Another similar example is the project led by Aston University in which all partners are equally engaged in all the project activities (as shown in Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2: Aston University-led project operational model

4.7. A different structure has been adopted by the project led by the University of Portsmouth with additional officers supporting the project at overall project management level and individual HEP level (as shown in Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3: University of Portsmouth-led project operational model



Scaling-up Routes

4.8. In most cases, partners have come together on the basis of previous work they have jointly undertaken or general knowledge of one another's policies – at academic, operational or management level – as illustrated by the following feedback:

'The two teams know each other well through the Learning Gain project.'

'The project collaboration was driven by good relationships at PVC level, and working with HEPs that would have this senior level support, and thus be well-placed to 'get things' done. There is strong alignment between this project and institutional priorities.'

4.9. The review of projects has shown that scaling up good practice can take various forms. As shown in Figure 4.4, individual approaches have implications for management and operational models and resources. The effectiveness, however, of each of these in bringing about change, yielding impacts or representing value of money is not yet clear, given the early stages in the life of the projects. Furthermore, in the majority of projects, no early baselines/feasibility studies appear to have been undertaken to establish the suitability of transferability of their approaches – and in most cases, it is the feasibility of the transferability that is tested.

Figure 4.4: Scale-up routes

Scaling route	Key activities by lead partner	Emerging partnership operational models
1. Grow capability across partner organisations via training and transfer of knowledge and tools by lead partner	✓ Training ✓ Advising ✓ Sharing tools and good practices ✓ Exploring opportunities and generating ideas	Strategic/advisory role by the lead partner – more likely to require more resources by the lead partner.
2. Pilot a single intervention or different types of interventions	✓ Transferring knowledge ✓ Creating a sense of common values and mission – there are core aims, shared learning aims, but different delivery processes among partner organisations ✓ (Ideally) Bringing together/brokering and strengthening of relationships between the other partners ✓ Coordination	Flat approach[28] – more likely to require similar levels of resources across all partners; in a pilot and flat mode, partners have more flexibility to refine/adopt the lead partner's successful intervention; each partner considers how they can best deliver these ideas, and adapting the resources to fit the different institutional and disciplinary contexts.
3. Roll-out of single intervention	✓ Transferring knowledge ✓ Standardising/codifying processes ✓ Sharing good practices ✓ Providing tools ✓ Training, support and quality assurance	Flat or hierarchical approach – resources required by all adopting organisations can be significant; in the hierarchical model, the lead partner is in charge of evaluating adopted interventions; flexibility may not always be possible.

4.10. The example below presents how the second model of scaling-up in Figure 4.4 (i.e. pilot a single intervention) is delivered in practice by one of the ABSS projects.

[28] Borrowing from the language of business and innovation; the chief distinction between a hierarchical and a flat form of governance is who gets to define the problem and choose the solution. Harvard Business Review https://hbr.org/2008/12/which-kind-of-collaboration-is-right-for-you

Maximising Student Success through the Development of Self-Regulation

The University of Southampton leads this project with partners Kingston University and University of Surrey. The project aims to implement and scale up a research-informed assessment feedback approach in order to reduce differential learning outcomes for all students and especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and BAME groups. There are two strands to the project:

1. Supporting students' development of self-regulatory assessment feedback skills through a focus on assessment literacy, feedback recipience skills and engagement in assessment design; and
2. Developing staff understanding of inclusive assessment practices that promote self-regulatory behaviours through extensive training and support.

The assessment feedback approach enables students to be more resilient. Resilience in learning can be developed through the use of a self-regulatory approach to assessment feedback that is encapsulated within the Evans' Assessment Tool (EAT) framework developed at the University of Southampton. The framework considers three core dimensions: assessment literacy, how students can become savvy feedback seekers, and developing inclusive integrated assessment design.

All three partners are scaling up the intervention in a relevant way to the context of each HEP:

- The University of Surrey is focusing on embedding ideas within one faculty with the potential to scale up in other faculties.
- Kingston University is focused on embedding the EAT framework into existing structures to support enhancement of understanding across the university as well as attending to the direct needs of those projects that are involved directly in the interventions across six faculties.
- The University of Southampton is scaling up using a variety of approaches, with the aim of implementing the EAT assessment framework across all disciplines in the university while also focusing on interventions in four faculties.

To date there are approximately 40 discipline subgroups involved in the intervention, which is more than originally planned. Events have taken place across all three partners including conferences, faculty learning and teaching days, and cross-discipline events to support the implementation of the project.

To evaluate changes in outcomes that are directly attributed to the intervention, results will be compared with similar disciplines across HEPs and also using a quasi-experimental approach to analyse and counterfactually compare the results of students involved in the interventions and those who are not.

Scaling up of good practice

What Works Well

4.11. In general, the ABSS programme has been important for bringing HEPs together. The funding has enabled more resources and processes to be put in place to bring different organisations together including organisations operating in different geographies and contexts. It has also

helped by making things happen earlier than would have been the case without this support. As stated by partners:

'We would have been an awful lot slower if we did not have this funding.'

'This approach has saved us 2-3 years.'

4.12. The collaborations enabled by the ABSS programme are particularly benefiting the participating HEPs. As stated during the consultations:

'We have learnt a lot from each other, and shared good ideas.'

'There is great benefit in talking about things. Resources can be adapted and shared, and pooling is valuable as you don't have to build things from scratch.'

4.13. More specifically, interviews with the project partners have highlighted a range of benefits emerging from the support provided by the ABSS programme and different HEPs working together. These include:

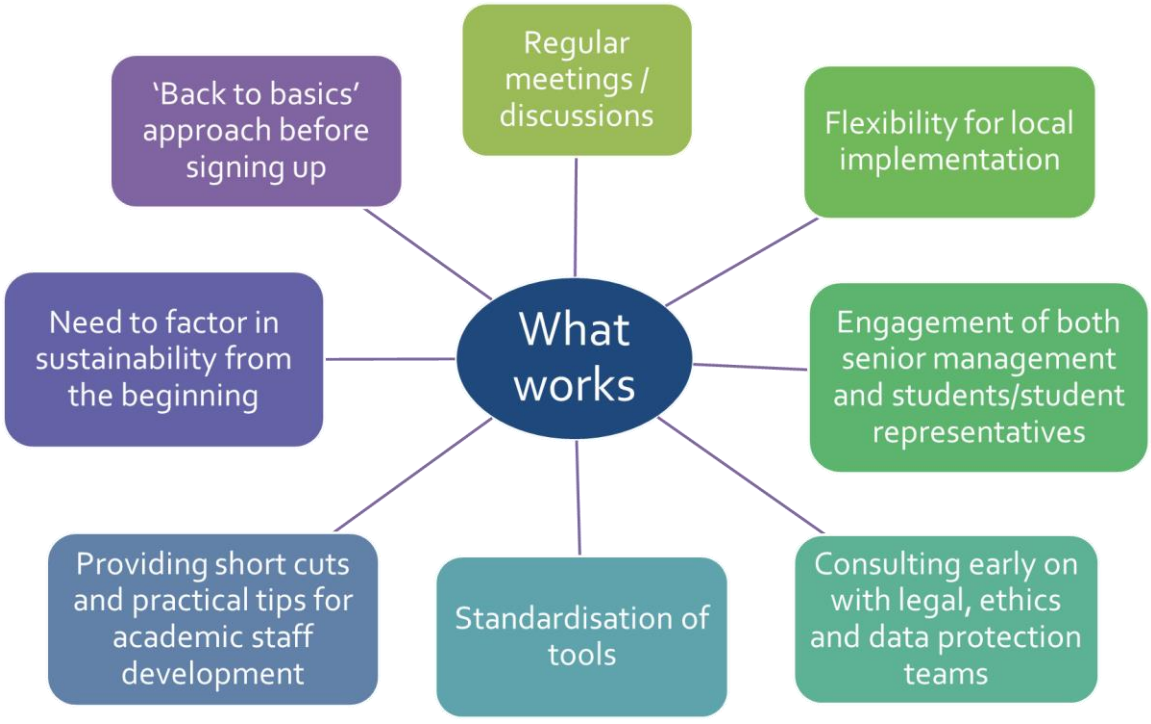
- More accurate and faster implementation of 'what works', given that lead/partner HEPs have gone through the testing stages.
- Buying dedicated researcher, academic or expert time to better understand conditions and situations and roll out an activity.
- Bringing together various university and student support services and academic staff.
- Initiating a process and providing a platform for students to be heard, learn and contribute to learning (content and infrastructure).
- Enabling smaller HEPs to enhance their capacity and capabilities and build useful networks.
- Allowing partners to bring different expertise together and learn from each other, and use each other as a sounding board.
- Helping to increase influence within an HEP – input from other HEPs means the intervention and concepts are taken more seriously at a senior level, given that management buy-in needs reassurance that the proposed activities are working.

4.14. During the consultations, a number of key enablers were identified for maximising the benefits of partnerships. These are summarised in Figure 4.5 and include:

- **Regular meetings/discussions –** although online platforms and tools are convenient for busy individuals, personal relationships, face-to-face meetings and lots of informal conversations are necessary to move a project forward. At a very practical/project management level, pre-planning all the meetings until the end of the project ensures project partners are available. In general, however, HEPs have stated that they have been *'very generous with their time'.*
- **Flexibility for local implementation –** in particular when different contexts and disciplines are involved.

- **Standardisation** of tools that enables a consistent approach to project delivery and to collecting and analysing data and evaluation. It also saves time and resources. However, there needs to be flexibility to accommodate for each individual partner's operational environment.
- **Consulting early on with legal, ethics and data protection teams**. The need to establish good working relationships with relevant data protection teams at the outset.
- **Engagement of both senior management and students/student representatives** in a project, bearing in mind that dedicated (and often significant) resources will be needed to manage the expectations of both groups but also guide them through the process and ensure their continuous interest and commitment.
- **Providing short cuts and practical tips for academic staff development** rather than long sessions of training, meetings or completion of paperwork, as academic staff members are pushed for time.
- **Need to factor in sustainability from the beginning** – focusing on staff training helps to achieve this, as once the funding comes to an end the knowledge will remain amongst the staff base.
- A **'back to basics' approach before signing up** to collaborations of this nature i.e. good resource planning and budgeting.

Figure 4.5: What works – transfer and scaling-up of good practice



What has been challenging

4.15. The whole process has generated significant learning to date, as partner HEPs feed back that they have been working through a number of challenges. These are summarised below:

- **Time and resources required for delivering key project activities,** in particular where partners have not been consulted early on and have not been involved in the project

design. Rolling out interventions in different disciplines has proved a resource intensive task – and two of the projects have also had a partner withdrawing from their project. The same applies to multi-site interventions that need more development time and greater awareness of local contexts.

- **Delays in the signing of collaborative agreements as well as signing of data sharing agreements**. There have also been problems with some partners not submitting financial returns or sharing data collected from interventions. Within each HEP there are different teams that need to be involved (legal, ethics and data projection) – and this has not always been taken fully into account in the initial design of the projects.
- For some projects, **continuous student engagement** in delivery of projects has been challenging given that students (like academic staff) have competing demands on their time and may need to drop out from project tasks and commitments from time to time. Engagement often requires significant resources including dedicated training, mentoring and guidance.
- **Staff buy-in** can be difficult, including participation in joint staff and student workshops, in particular where organisational changes are taking place. Academic staff have teaching responsibilities that makes it difficult for them to invest time into the project. They need to be involved (but they may not be leading these projects), especially as academic workload (teaching) is not always evenly distributed.
- **Partner HEPs are different, multi-dimensional organisations, and at different stages of maturity,** when it comes to specific types of initiatives. Different starting points between partners and across or within disciplines have meant that some tailoring of the approach has been required. At the same time, expecting all partners to be moving at the same speed is not realistic – and projects should take this into account in the original design of their activities.
- The **nature of the project funding** i.e. short-term, and the fact that it starts and ends mid-way through the academic year (February or March). This means that, due to the business planning of HEPs, the projects can only be delivered over one academic year.
- **Lack of a pilot or developmental period** to review and revise interventions to meet institutional and/or discipline/programme context.

Recommendations for OfS

4.16. Drawing upon these experiences, a number of recommendations were made by the projects for OfS as follows:

- The development stage of projects, i.e. raising awareness and establishing systems in new contexts, could take at least six to eight months. This means that a two-year period may be too short for a project to test and establish new processes and at the same time see results. A three-year project would also allow for monitoring of progress and effectiveness, using national data/databases.
- Ensure as part of the contractual arrangement that that the lead PI or other academic has sufficient time to invest in the project or that other robust structures and resources are in place.

- Engage with all partners directly as part of the contract (including with funding contracts and allocation of resources).
- Consider the academic calendar when funding programmes of this nature.

5. Progress to Date

5.1. As noted in the introduction of this report, the purpose of the evaluation at this stage is to assess how the programme as a whole is delivered. A secondary objective is to identify and highlight emerging effects on students, academics, other university staff, participating HEPs and partners and the wider community. This section provides an overview of key outputs and achievements reported by the projects to date. It also summarises approaches adopted by the projects to capture and measure their progress and success.

Key Achievements to Date

5.2. Significant activity has taken place in the last year and in particular the last eight months to March 2018. In the first four to six months of the programme, i.e. up to August and September 2017, the main focus was on getting projects off the ground including revisiting their business cases and evaluation plans (and in some cases refining these), and securing the appropriate resources, either through the lead partner or across all partners. Therefore, it is not surprising that key achievements to date mainly focus on activities completed and outputs delivered (and in the majority of cases, as planned). At the same time, however, there is evidence of emerging outcomes and impacts. These are described below.

Key outputs to date

5.3. Key outputs to date include:

- **New programmes embedded into university mainstream activities e.g. recruitment of new academic staff relating to raising awareness** about specific actions and initiatives that 'work' – and hence, a first step to transferring knowledge.
- **New modules developed,** with some already embedded into courses.
- **Personal development training** for academics in particular in relation to personal tutoring and mentoring.
- **Fora bringing together academics, student advice and support services and practitioners, and academics and students**.
- **Production of relevant on line resources and outputs including digital applications** – for use by either academics or students. These, for example, include an interactive diagnostic test that tutors can offer to students to support the analysis of their specific learning needs.
- **Disseminations events** – internally (i.e. within HEPs) and externally (i.e. wider sector).
- **More engagement with and involvement of students** – in the design and delivery of the ABSS project and related activities, with the ultimate aim being a co-production education model where students and staff come together first, to design how to take action on addressing barriers to student success within an institution, and secondly, either to tackle race, gender and social inequality in general or enhance students' employability skills.

5.4. The examples provided below offer an overview of the range of key outputs produced to date by the projects (and also give a short description each project's evaluation approach).

Intervention for Success

The Intervention for Success project led by the University of Huddersfield, partnering with Coventry University, University of Lincoln, and Manchester Metropolitan University, scales up the Huddersfield Student Priority Support System (SPSS).

SPSS uses data to pre-identify students at risk of withdrawal and underachievement, monitors those students closely and intervenes to offer support where there is any sign of disengagement. The project aims to reduce differential achievement by focusing on two aspects: achieving a degree and achieving a first or upper-second degree. It has the potential to benefit all undergraduate students in the four partner HEPs.

Evaluation of the interventions is focused on specific cohorts within each HEP in courses where students from target groups have a higher representation, particularly those students with BTEC entry qualifications, students from ethnic minority groups and commuter students. To date, the following has been achieved (with a plan to share all materials across all partners at the end of the project):

The University of Huddersfield has produced: i) leaflets, brochures, postcards and webpages for students who commute into university from home, offering advice and guidance to families; and ii) Flying Start, which is an introduction to undergraduate study, aiming to help students realise what studying at university really means and to building connections with peers and with tutors. For two weeks in September 2017, 900 students attended an intensive timetable of innovative sessions. A guide to implementing this curriculum change has been produced and shared with partners.

The University of Lincoln has produced a range of digital resources for staff and students across the university. They were shared with partners in September 2017 and are generic so they can be repurposed at these and other HEPs. Their Creative Commons license means that information is universally available as open access materials and has been also adopted beyond the partnership by NTU. A further output is a personal tutoring staff development programme entitled 'Tutoring the Tutors'.

Coventry University is producing subject specific resources that can be used to support students struggling in particular disciplines – focus has been on students in the school of Health, particularly disabled students. A web App was designed to deliver accessible, user-friendly information for students and university staff preparing for a placement.

Manchester Metropolitan University has created a diagnostic tool for students to self-assess against graduate outcomes as a basis for conversations with their personal tutor. It has developed a web-based diagnostic tool 'Tutorial Talks'. Students enter their email, complete the diagnostic and then receive a pdf via email of their results with advice to take this to personal tutors as a basis for a developmental conversation.

Changing Mindsets – inclusive and active teaching and learning practices for students from BAME groups and students from low socio-economic backgrounds

The Changing Mindsets project led by the University of Portsmouth, with partners the University of the Arts London, Canterbury Christ Church University, University of Brighton, University of Winchester, aims to close the attainment gap in student experience, retention, progression, academic attainment and employability by eroding stereotype threat and implicit bias as barriers to learning.

The intervention, initially developed at the University of Portsmouth for schools and further education colleges, is an interactive staff and student development workshop that helps to build a growth mindset: the belief that ability develops through effort and by embracing challenge.

The target groups to benefit from this intervention are students from low socio-economic backgrounds and BAME students; however, the intervention will benefit many other groups. The aim of the workshops is to take staff and students through a process in which they explore their own beliefs around the nature of ability and intelligence. Each institutional project team has adapted the intervention for delivery in a way that suits their HEPs and selected intervention subject areas. To date all intervention workshops have been delivered and evaluation data is being collected.

The impact evaluation will follow a mixed methods approach comparing a range of pre- and post-intervention data, as well as comparison group and intervention group data. All partners will adopt the same core evaluation methods including:

- Attainment and outcome student data for the past five years in the schools in which the intervention will be run;
- Attainment data for the cohort of students who participated in the intervention after the first term concludes and at the end of their first year;
- Pre- and post-intervention online student survey data from the intervention cohorts;
- Pre- and post-intervention online staff survey data from the intervention cohorts;
- Individual interviews with a sample of student participants;
- Focus groups with a sample of staff participants; and
- Longitudinal data collection through the four partner HEPs that are members of Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT).

In addition to the core evaluation methods, each partner HEP may choose to adopt additional methods to enable appropriate impact evaluation for their interventions.

5.5. As noted earlier, an additional output of the ABSS programme at this stage is '*more engagement with and involvement of students*' in the delivery of the ABSS projects. The following two examples illustrate how projects have engaged students to date.

Diversity and Inclusion Student Ambassador Programme

The Diversity and Inclusion Student Ambassador Programme is led by the University of Manchester, with partners the University of Birmingham and Manchester Metropolitan University, and aims to improve outcomes, specifically attainment and student experience, for BAME students. The aim is to produce a set of modular based sessions that will empower students to safely speak out against harassment and discrimination, stereotypes and micro-aggressions and to intervene where appropriate. It will achieve this by improving knowledge and encouraging behaviour change by increasing the skills and confidence in students' ability to act as bystanders and intervene safely when necessary.

The project will use the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) as a framework and will help students to understand the five stages of bystander intervention: 1) noticing the event, 2) interpreting it as risky, 3) assuming responsibility for addressing the problem, 4) identifying a course of action and 5) implementing that course of action. The intended learning outcomes will include:

- Improved knowledge of harassment and discrimination, stereotypes and micro-aggressions and understanding of the severity of these issues for individuals and wider society;
- Recognising the links between negative attitudes, discriminatory practices and hate crimes;
- Learning and understanding bystander intervention theory;
- Understanding the five stages for bystander intervention;
- Being motivated to become committed active bystanders; speaking out against harassment and discrimination, stereotypes and micro-aggressions;
- Knowing where to go for help and support; and
- Increasing the likelihood that students will use intervention strategies in everyday life.

The Student Ambassador Programmes across the three HEPs will benefit from the development of two online tools, an Ambassador Platform and an interactive toolkit that can be shared with others across the sector. To date:

- 10 ambassador schemes have been launched across the three HEPs.
- 298 Student Ambassadors have been recruited in 2017/18;
- 40 lead ambassadors have been recruited across the three HEPs, with an additional 258 volunteers;
- A cross institution event was held in December 2017, which provided an opportunity for ambassadors to meet and share ideas and form collaborations; and
- All four of the blended learning Active Bystander Modules have been drafted.

Raising Awareness, Raising Aspiration (RARA)

The Raising Awareness, Raising Aspiration project led by the University of Sheffield, with partners King's College London and the University of Portsmouth, involves implementation in the HEPs of a PATS (Personal and Academic Tutoring Support) approach to personal tutoring already successfully rolled out across the University of Sheffield, along with the development of an evidence-based best practice toolkit and CPD package, and the dissemination of a National Best Practice Support Menu. Each institution has autonomy for coordinating student engagement in their projects, reflective of each institution's different structures and student representative functions within departments and Students' Unions.

Each institution has received a dedicated ring-fenced pot of £4,781.00 dedicated to facilitating student-experience activity, and is currently in the process of designing and developing student engagement activities in co-creation with students on the topics of the project. Reflective of being in the midst of the 'during' phase, and responding to different institutional timelines, each partner is at a different stage of deploying this resource. The most common model, employed at Sheffield and Portsmouth, has been to appoint two to three paid student associate roles at each institution. These roles are typically appointed, where possible, from the student target groups. The associates are given briefings on core elements of the work and the roles involve both significant work experience and the opportunity for staff to benefit from reflexivity. Portsmouth has had these roles in place since October 2017, Sheffield since February 2018, with Kings in the process of developing their offering drawing on the best practice of the partners' current progress.

Placing the student associates in control of significant pieces of activity on the project builds in reflexivity and representation of the target groups for staff, while also allowing student associates to develop significant skills in an applied setting of project delivery. Examples of this include students helping to deliver and analyse data as part of the evaluation strategy, students conducting their own research and evaluation projects aligned to the core aims and objectives of the project, as well as leading on the development of internal communications strategy – such as at Sheffield the production of an 'Alternative Guide to Personal Tutoring' written for students by students, with its completion facilitated by the Students' Union.

Key outcomes and early impacts

5.6. Although the projects are early into the delivery of activity, some evidence of early outcomes exists. These outcomes mostly relate to:

- Benefits relating to partners working together, as described in section 4 of this report (paragraphs 4.11-4.14).
- Raising awareness of inclusive management and learning practices within participating HEPs.
- Raising awareness of these issues among other
- HEPs and the education and scientific community (as illustrated by the example overleaf).
- Prompting strategic reviews and audits of existing institution-wide strategies and policies.

Embedding and Sustaining Inclusive STEM Practices

This project led by The Open University, with partners Plymouth University and the University of Leeds, aims to scale up inclusive educational practices within STEM module design and delivery to benefit all students, but in particular students with disabilities including students with mental health issues and specific learning difficulties. Key institutional developments in module and curriculum design at each partner provide opportunities to review and extend existing inclusive practices, as well as capturing case studies about the application of inclusive STEM practices and further evidence of the impact on student success.

Institutional documentation has been collated from the three partner HEPs, reviewed and summarised in an internal project report. Surveys with specific student and staff groups have been run at the three partner HEPs. The surveys in particular identified specific opportunities for training and support for staff. A key outcome to date includes raising awareness of, and interest in, inclusive educational practices among institutional and external stakeholders.

As a result, institutional presentations and meetings have been held with leaders in STEM schools/departments, disciplinary HE networks and accreditation bodies. There has also been engagement with the wider scientific community (Geoscience), through attendance and invited presentations on inclusive fieldwork and virtual fieldwork with colleagues at the International Association for Geoscience Diversity (IAGD).

5.7. Early impacts have been reported by the HE Academic Tutor Support project led by New College Durham: as a result of the intervention, there has been an improvement in grade average, as described below.

HE Academic Tutor Support – inclusive and active teaching and learning practices for students from low socio-economic backgrounds and in particular young white men

This project led by New College Durham, with partners Darlington College and Sunderland College, aims to improve outcomes for HE learners within further education colleges by making improvements to their learning, boosting engagement with course content, enhancing the learning experience, and raising confidence and resilience. The intervention is to provide specific academic support to learners, in the form of one-to-one support sessions, group tutorials and IT based learning resources, via dedicated HE Academic Support Tutors. The project focuses on students enrolled on foundation degrees and higher national programmes, where attainment and progression to Level 6 and 7 studies is low within the three colleges. The specific target groups are students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, in particular young white males and those with learning difficulties or mental health issues. As stated by the project partners:

The lead college saw an increase of 24% in student numbers accessing the support service and 21% in 1:1 tutorials booked, between the first two years of the current formatted provision, which could be also anticipated at the two partner colleges. Those who had accessed the service throughout their studies improved their grade average by approximately of 8% (variance 1% - 17%).

Measuring Progress and Success

5.8. The funding call for the ABSS programme emphasised the role of evaluation in delivering the ABSS projects and required demonstration of a rigorous approach to the design of the project and the evaluation of its effectiveness and impact. The ABSS projects have been given, to date, extensive feedback on their monitoring and evaluation plans by WECD.

5.9. In the early stages of the ABSS programme, a small number of projects allocated specific resources to evaluation, demonstrated by either the appointment of a dedicated evaluator (internal or external) or clearly allocating this responsibility to one of the project partners. Increasingly, however, projects have dedicated more resources to undertaking project reviews and evaluations and a lot of evaluation activity is currently under way.

5.10. A range of sources is also used to establish baselines and assess the benefits and effectiveness of the interventions over time. These include:

- Pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys with students and staff when relevant (relatively small numbers in most cases and limited to individuals participating in/affected by the intervention);
- Focus groups with students and staff participating in the interventions;
- Interviews with students participating in the interventions;
- Interviews with academic staff participating in the interventions;
- Interviews with senior management in project participating HEPs (in one project);
- Review of course-related continuation and retention data;
- Review of HEAT data;
- Attendance at events/ interventions; and
- Longer-term impact metrics e.g. HESA data on student outcomes and Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) data.

5.11. Nevertheless, a number of issues remain to be addressed. The review of the ABSS project evaluation plans to date has shown that, in general:

- Logic chains/models tend to be focused on monitoring activities rather than presenting the pathways to impact for the proposed interventions. They are also rarely used as performance management and reference tools.

- A range of metrics has been presented in the original business cases (as summarised in section 2). However, as projects are evolving, partner organisations are redesigning their evaluation plans and approaches to accommodate methodological and project data limitations. Early review of evaluation plans indicated that data sources and information referred to in the business cases did not always appear to have clear linkages to the specific issues interrogated.

- Further work is needed to capture how multiple interventions and/or the same intervention across HEPs will be joined up to demonstrate the success of scaling-up activities – in particular, in those projects that involve a range of activities, with each HEP independently evaluating their own activity.

- In terms of counterfactual comparisons, one project of the 17 is proposing to use a control group. For the majority of projects, the approach to assessing the alternative position (what would happen without the specific intervention) is based on:

    - Identification of comparison groups (identified by non-randomised selection and not exposed to the proposed intervention/activity); and/or
    - Self-assessment (before/after conditions/experience – same group).

- In all cases, isolating attribution and contribution of the funded interventions (scale-up, change, and other ultimate goals) are proving challenging (or it is not clear as yet how both these elements will be captured over time).

- All projects recognise that impacts will materialise after the funding period and additional resources will be required to monitor impacts in the future. A handful of projects, therefore, have stated that they are putting systems and resources in place to enable the assessment of impacts of the interventions at institutional level.

- At this stage it is difficult to ascertain how and whether value for money assessments will be demonstrated by the projects. Most projects currently focus on acknowledging that efficiencies will be achieved through the collaborative nature of their projects. Delivering efficiency and value for money is a key operational priority of the sector and the next stages of the evaluation will explore the approach to this assessment in more detail.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1. The ABSS programme has sought to support:

- Innovative approaches that have already proven successful within individual HEPs, and in doing so to achieve a more systematic and strategic response to combating the key barriers faced by underrepresented groups of students in achieving successful HE outcomes, including employability outcomes.

- Collaborative projects involving a minimum of three HEPs across which scaled-up outcomes can be measured and evaluated.

6.2. This evaluation has shown that as a result of the support offered by the ABSS programme, significant activity has been taking place in the last year to transfer successful initiatives led by 17 organisations operating in the HE sector to an extended network of HEPs and key stakeholders. This extended network is currently represented by 85 different organisations – 58 HEPs (including 14 further education colleges) and 27 other organisations including charities and businesses. In the last six months, a lot of activity has also been taking place at most partners HEPs involved in the ABSS projects to raise awareness of their work internally within their own organisations and externally to the wider sector (HE and careers advice and education in general) and key policy stakeholders.

6.3. In the majority of projects, the ABSS partnerships have brought together academics, researchers and practitioners who have previously worked together or know each other's work. This approach has its advantages and disadvantages. The main disadvantage is that no early baselines or feasibility studies have been undertaken to establish the suitability of transferability of approaches – and in most cases, it is the feasibility of this transferability and 'translation' of successful initiatives within a new context that is tested. This has impacted upon the start of the projects, with project partners needing to revisit (and review) their business cases to ensure that proposed approaches can be delivered, and fully develop these to a realistic and realisable action plan. In particular, in a number of cases, there seems to have been quite a significant underestimation of the differences in institutional management and administrative arrangements and the time and resources it may take to align these among organisations of different sizes, resources and priorities. The introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) may have accentuated this issue.

6.4. Furthermore, in some projects, there has been some underestimation of the nature and extent of resources needed by the lead and partner HEPs to jointly deliver agreed project outputs for projects, which have an average size of around £0.5 million, within a relatively short period of time. On the other hand, given prior working relationships, partners have pulled resources together relatively quickly to respond to project requirements and deadlines – often despite the geographical distances involved and busy schedules. This means that a range of benefits has already emerged as a result of the ABSS programme and different HEPs working together, including:

- More accurate and faster implementation of 'what works', given that lead/partner HEPs have gone through the testing stages.

- Buying dedicated researcher, academic or expert time to better understand conditions and situations and/or roll out an activity.
- Bringing together various university and student support services and academic staff.
- Initiating a process and providing a platform for students to be heard, learn and contribute to learning (content and infrastructure).
- Enabling smaller HEPs to enhance their capacity and capabilities and build useful networks.
- Being able to bring people with different expertise together, enabling them to learn from each other and use each other as a sounding board.
- Helping to increase influence within an institution – input from other HEPs means the intervention and concepts are taken more seriously at a senior level, given that management buy-in needs reassurance that proposed activities are working.
- Student engagement among projects increasing over time, with a number of funded projects committed to involving students actively in the process of introducing and testing new learning and management approaches.

6.5. Within this context, in the first four to six months of the programme, i.e. up to August and September 2017, the main focus of projects was getting off the ground, including revisiting their business cases and evaluation plans (and in some cases refining these), and securing the appropriate resources, either through the lead partner or across all partners. Therefore, it is not surprising that key achievements to date mainly focus on activities completed and outputs delivered (and in the majority of cases, as planned). At the same time, however, there is evidence of emerging outcomes and impacts, including benefits relating to partners working together (as described in paragraph 6.3); raising awareness of inclusive management and learning practices within participating HEPs; raising awareness of these issues among other HEPs and the wider education and science community; and prompting strategic reviews and audits of existing institution-wide strategies and policies.

6.6. The ABSS projects have been given extensive feedback to date on their monitoring and evaluation plans by WECD and, increasingly, projects are dedicating more resources to undertaking reviews and evaluations. A lot of evaluation activity is currently under way. Nevertheless, a number of issues remain to be addressed. For example, it remains unclear, in most cases, how success of multiple interventions and/or the same intervention across HEPs will be joined up to demonstrate the success of scaling-up activities – in particular, in those projects that involve a range of activities, with each HEP independently evaluating their own activity.

6.7. Furthermore, the importance of robust counterfactuals (in particular in relation to issues addressing individual behaviours, mental health issues or psychological factors) is often underestimated. This should be a significant consideration by all involved given the number of students potentially affected by the introduction of new learning and management initiatives. Not all projects have provided information about the number of students to be affected by the activities undertaken (or the cohorts involved), but on the basis of the information provided by 12 of the 17 projects, it is estimated that around 30,000 – 40,000 students will be potentially affected by ABSS-related activities.

6.8. Introducing organisational and pan-institutional changes given the size and resources affected also requires significant consideration. There is more than one way to scale up good practice and different models are emerging. The effectiveness of each of these in bringing about change, yielding impacts or representing value of money is not yet clear, given the early stage of the projects. At this stage there is very little detail on how and whether value for money will be demonstrated by the projects. Most projects currently focus on acknowledging that there will efficiencies achieved through the collaborative nature of their activities. Delivering efficiency and value for money is, however, a key operational priority of the sector and the next stages of the evaluation will explore the approach to this assessment in more detail.

6.9. In all cases, isolating attribution and contribution of the funded interventions (including scale-up, change, and other ultimate goals) is proving challenging (or it is not clear as yet how these elements will be captured over time). All projects recognise that impacts will materialise after funding finishes and additional resources will be required to monitor impacts in the future. A handful of projects, therefore, have stated that they are putting systems and resources in place to enable the assessment of impacts of the interventions at institutional level. However, future resourcing to enable a better assessment of early impacts also needs to be explored at the level of the funding organisation (i.e. OfS) – see recommendations below.

Recommendations

6.10. This evaluation has shown that entirely new (working) partnerships may be as effective as well-established partnerships in project delivery. In general, however, projects are getting off the ground faster and projects are run in a more cohesive manner if those responsible for delivery at an operational level have been involved in the project from the outset (i.e. in the bid development stages or early in contract award). Early engagement of partners needs to be encouraged in the future and bid or business case documents may need to be signed by all participating partners prior to submitting.

6.11. It is also worth noting that a number of HEPs are involved in more than one project and although project contacts may be different, one of the issues to be explored in the second year of the evaluation is the extent of complementarity of their engagement in various projects and how this (may) effect changes in institutional processes, benefits and impacts at institutional/organisational and partnership levels, and ultimately support scaling up of good practice.

6.12. Background research undertaken by our team has shown that, in the 2018/19 Access Agreements, 13 out of 16 lead HEPs[29] mention their ABSS project. Evidence of the results of ABSS activities embedded into the institutional arrangements could be provided through regular review of strategic documents such as the access and participation plans.

6.13. Scaling-up activities that address barriers to student success is a complex process (multi-level, multi-dimensional). For the ABSS projects, its success would increase if related activities were based on:

[29] As mentioned in an earlier section, this refers to 16 rather than 17 lead HEPs given that Gateshead College that is leading one of the projects does not have an Access Agreement.

- Well-thought through approaches (at operational or strategic level). Strategic planning for the expansion and institutionalisation of successfully tested ABSS systems and initiatives is essential.

- Having both a Plan A and Plan B given that project plans as outlined in the business cases may not always be feasible due to dynamic environments or theories of change not having been previously tested under certain conditions for certain target groups/contexts, and also unforeseen circumstances (organisational/methodological).

- Well thought out logic and action pathways. Impacts will take a relatively long time to materialise and therefore incremental changes matter. It will be easier to trace and demonstrate these over a well-designed pathway to impact. Inclusion of draft logic chains should be included in the bid documents for similar programmes in the future.

6.14. For ABSS and similar programmes, building evaluation into the projects and programme early on (internal evaluation and external evaluation) improves the sense of accountability among all participants. It also by default reinforces the message that for public funding and investment awarded to deliver certain outputs, assessment of 'what works' is not always sufficient – a good understanding of 'what works and makes a difference for the target group' is needed.

6.15. Scaling up involves 'deliberate *efforts to increase the impact of successfully tested innovations so as to benefit more students and to foster policy and programme development on a lasting basis*'[30]. The ABSS programme provides support for a more systematic and strategic response to combating the key barriers faced by underrepresented groups of students in achieving successful HE outcomes, including employability outcomes, and ultimately addressing social mobility. To achieve a broader impact, the following factors should be considered in the future:

- Significant awareness-raising activity is taking place by the providers involved in the ABSS projects to share ongoing approaches and practice with the wider HE sector. Review of relevant national data and trends indicates that barriers to student success are apparent across the sector and, therefore, a strong rationale exists for all HE providers to review current practices and approaches and benefit from the work of the ABSS programme. Therefore, as a first step, there is scope for HEPs not currently involved in the ABSS programme to be invited to ABSS dissemination events.

- Scale-up requires systematic planning of how pilot-tested interventions can be implemented on a larger scale and hence achieve a broader impact – and this message needs to be reinforced in communications with the sector.

- Innovative approaches are still being piloted in some cases and at the point of scale-up additional resources may be limited. Rolling out these approaches can therefore become challenging for participating organisations (and policy delivery) with no further secured funding.

[30] Adapting NESTA and ExpandNet definitions (ExpandNet is a global network of public health professionals and scientists).

APPENDIX A: Evaluation Framework

The Rationale for Robust Evaluation

Understanding what works – in terms of interventions and the impact they have on outcomes for individuals, the economy and society – is important to ensure that public funding and tuition fee income are being invested effectively.

HEPs across the sector have developed and delivered an impressive range of interventions and approaches aimed at improving student success and outcomes. However, few of the interventions that have been initiated to date have been evaluated systematically and a recurring theme across recent research[31] is the need for rigorous and systematic evaluation of different interventions adopted and approaches taken[32].

Addressing the attainment gap remains a key priority for the OfS with student experience and outcomes at the heart of the recently published OfS Strategy 2018-2021. The need for and commitment to a joined-up sector-wide response to secure a step-change to maximise outcomes for all students was informed by the review undertaken by King's College London, ARC Network and the University of Manchester on the 'Causes of Differences in Student Outcomes'[33]. This set out a number of key findings and actions to address effectiveness and impact, namely:

- Higher education providers tend to rely on patchy and anecdotal information that the support delivered is meeting student needs.
- Many HEPs have concentrated resources in an exploratory phase of confirming the existence of differential outcomes and then understanding their cause, so interventions are fairly recent and impact yet to be realised.
- Consequently, relatively few interventions have therefore been evaluated systematically.
- The time-limited nature of the funding of current initiatives has limited the scope for longer-term evaluation.
- The data issues are complex.
- Frameworks for evaluation are needed and should be integral to project design and planning – making use of lessons from approaches to evaluation in other sectors, such as the What Works Networks (which guide decision making in public services) and the Education Endowment Foundation – EEF (which works in the schools sector).

This means that the evaluation of ABSS needs to be aware of, learn from, and contribute to the wider body of evidence on access, student success and progression but it also needs to provide fit for purpose, robust and actionable recommendations that can inform delivery and approaches almost immediately as well as for future programmes and delivery.

Aims and Objectives of the Evaluation of ABSS

The key aim of the evaluation is to explore and assess 'what works, why and in what context'. National data shows that the sector has made significant progress on access and participation, but it is increasingly untenable not to be able to demonstrate which interventions (in which contexts, and to which learners) have been instrumental in delivering the genuine progress that has been made, and which could have the

[31] For example, HEFCE (2015) Student opportunity outcomes framework research: in depth study, CFE Research; HEFCE (2015) Student opportunity outcomes framework research: data return project, CFE Research

[32] As originally articulated in HEFCE proposals for approaches to quality assessment in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland: Consultation (June 2015)

[33] https://tinyurl.com/y9z2orh2

most impact. Within this context, the key objectives of the evaluation are:

- To identify the extent to which funding is spent according to plan (accountability for public funds);
- To enable an overall assessment of the difference to student, society and economy outcomes that can be attributed to this funding (impact assessment);
- To demonstrate the value of any impact at individual, provider, project, and national levels (return on investment);
- To identify differences between project approaches to see if these differences are associated with differential participation rates and progress (benchmarking of outcomes); and
- To discuss the emerging effects of different types of interventions (what works, why and in what circumstances) and highlight areas for future research and methods to further explore and establish the causal effects of these interventions.

The evaluation is particularly focusing on:

1) The role of partnerships and collaboration in scaling up successful projects: Assessing how successfully the ABSS programme and individual projects are driving/have been driven by collaborations and partnerships that have: developed systematic and strategic approaches to address differential student outcomes; supported collaborations that have scaled up successful inclusive practice interventions for disabled students; met specific project aims, objectives and success criteria; invested funds according to plan; and achieved overall programme objectives. In particular, the evaluation will seek to: identify good practice for wider adoption; validate good practice interventions and the necessary conditions and practices to facilitate it; identify if and how good practice can be replicated, transmitted and embedded across a diverse range of providers; and improve and enhance local project evaluation. Key issues to be explored during the evaluation are:

  - The rationale for working in partnership on student success and outcomes;
  - What are the benefits of working in collaboration with other partners?
  - What works well in the partnerships and why?
  - What the challenges have there been for partnerships and solutions/mitigations?

2) What works and lessons learned from inclusive practice vs. targeted interventions drawing upon:

  - The rationale for why certain projects have chosen to focus on one or the other type of intervention;
  - Their own definitions of what inclusive practice means (if they are using inclusive methods);
  - Any ethical issues associated with using one or the other method; and
  - Potential impacts on the student of inclusive practice vs. targeting (where possible).

Approach – Key Evaluation Questions/Lines of Enquiry

Figure A.1 summarises the overarching lines of evaluation enquiries at programme and project levels and Figure A.2 presents the different aspects of the formative and summative evaluations.

Figure A.1: Summary of ABSS Evaluation Objectives at Programme and Project Level

Evaluation at Programme Level	• The extent to which funding as a whole is spent according to plan (accountability for public funds) • An overall assessment of the difference to student, society and economy outcomes that can be attributed to the funding (effectiveness and impact assessment) • Capturing qualitative and quantitative value of any impact (and hence return on investment) at individual, provider, project and national levels (efficiency and 'return on investment') • Assessment of various approaches (benchmarking of outcomes) • Exploring the causal effect of different types of interventions in particular in the areas of collaborations and partnerships and inclusive vs targeted approaches (what works, for whom, why and in what circumstances/conditions) and the routes to scaling up and sustainability (including behavioural and institutional change) • Disseminate lessons and make recommendations to inform OfS's advice to Government on future student success policy (learn, share, influence)
Evaluation at Project Level	• Evaluate the success of the projects against the wider aims of the programme • Evaluate the progress, outputs and outcomes of each project funded against their individual aims and success criteria • Capture challenges faced by the projects, and the conditions and contexts within which they operate • Identify emerging themes and particular issues as they arise • Identify knowledge gaps across the programme for which further investigation is required • Disseminate findings amongst the projects and the wider external audience

Figure A.2: Summative and Formative Evaluation Lines of Enquiry

		Lines of Enquiry and Research	Methods	When
Formative Evaluation	**Review of Processes**	• Description of activities – alignment/fidelity with original business case • Description of pathways to impact (i.e. from funding to delivering change) • Review of Evaluation Plans	• Desk-based review • Consultations with Project Leads • Consultations with Evaluators • Consultations with Project Partners	May 2017-March 2018 (interim) April 2018- March 2019

		Lines of Enquiry and Research	Methods	When
		• Review of Partnership Arrangements – operational models	• Consultations with academics and management teams	(final)
	Review of Projects' Progress	• Progress with activities • Achievements – in terms of activities delivered and outputs • Progress with monitoring and evaluation	• Desk-based review • Consultations with Project Leads • Consultations with Project Partners • Consultations with academics and management teams • Consultation with Evaluators	
	Experiences and Lessons	• What is working • What could have been better developed • What needs to be/can be changed • Understanding of the context – enablers, barriers, challenges • Emerging Good Practice • Review of the extent to which HEPs refine their projects as a result of this formative evaluation	• Desk-based review • Consultations with Project Leads • Consultations with Project Partners • Consultations with academics and management teams • Consultation with Evaluators	
	Evidence from Projects (presented in aggregated format)	• What has been the investment on the programme to date (grant and other expenditure) • Has there been a difference between originally proposed resources and actually committed • How many and who has been engaged (students, cohorts, academics, departments, HEPs – fully, partially and not at all, even when targeted) • Evidence of experience from participation (students, cohorts, academics, departments, HEPs – fully, partially and not at all, even when targeted) • What has been achieved (comparison with plans and intentions) • What are the short-term/medium-term benefits e.g. to continuation, completion, attainment, satisfaction, employment? (students, cohorts, academics, departments, HEPs) – based on qualitative information and any baseline information and progress data produced by the projects	• Information from the individual projects (desk-based reviews of data contained in Management Information Systems (MIS) and Financial Information Systems (FIS+ consultations with leads and partners, academics and management)	

		Lines of Enquiry and Research	Methods	When
		• Are achievements and impacts attributable to the intervention/the ABSS programme and to what extent • To what extent achievements and impacts go beyond direct participants • How have students, academics/staff and the institution changed as a consequence of this intervention • To what extent activities/benefits are sustainable • Factors affecting/influencing delivery of outputs and outcomes		
Summative Evaluation	**Benefits and Impact Assessment**	• Benefits for learners • Benefits for academics • Benefits for the organisation • Benefits for the sector • Unintended/additional benefits or consequences		April 2018-March 2019
	Synthesis and Analysis	• Qualitative and quantitative • Summary of findings from all projects • Better understanding of the effectiveness of the operational model i.e. collaborative approaches, and efficiencies achieved • Added value of interventions/the ABSS support • Lessons learned and good practice to inform policy and funding		
	Key Hypotheses to Be Tested	• Institutional/departmental successes can either be scaled up through a strategic (i.e. top down) approach, a bottom up approach, or a combination of the two. • Differences in attainment/retention among participant HEPs and non-participant HEPs – based on desk-based review of available research and baseline information (to inform further/later research exploring equivalent data that could provide evidence of significant differences between participants and non-participants) • Collaborative projects are (more) effective in delivering results in closing the gap of attainment – HEPs involved and sector		

		Lines of Enquiry and Research	Methods	When

		• Collaborative projects are (more) efficient in delivering results in closing the gap of attainment – HEPs involved and sector
		• **For learners (aggregate)**
		  ○ Take up of (new) initiative enhances **awareness, sense of belonging, peer interaction, interaction with staff, motivation, positive attitudes**
		  ○ Take up of (new) initiative improves **likelihood** of completion/degree award, satisfaction, continuation (employment/success)
		• **For academics involved (aggregate)**
		  ○ Participation improves awareness (more academics knowing + academics knowing more)
		  ○ Participation changes/improves behaviours
		  ○ Participation enhances teaching performance (student satisfaction + internal assessment)
		  ○ Participation enhances quality of teaching materials
		• **For HEPs**
		  ○ Adoption of initiative at departmental/institutional level improves student satisfaction (department/institution)
		  ○ Adoption of initiative improves attainment at departmental level
		  ○ Adoption of initiative catalyses a strategic commitment to embed practice at departmental level and/or whole institutional level		

APPENDIX B: ABSS Project Partners

Partner Organisations	Number			
HE Providers	58	Anglia Ruskin University	Manchester Metropolitan University	University of Exeter
		Aston University	New College Durham	University of Greenwich
		Birmingham City University	Northumbria University	University of Hertfordshire
		Canterbury Christ Church University	Nottingham Trent University	University of Huddersfield
		Cardiff University	Plymouth University	University of Leeds
		Carshalton College	Queen Mary University of London	University of Lincoln
		City and Islington College	Southampton Solent University	University of Manchester
		City, University of London	Staffordshire University	University of Portsmouth
		Coventry University	Stoke on Trent College	University of Roehampton
		Coventry University College	Sunderland College	University of Sheffield
		Darlington College	The 6th Form College Solihull	University of Southampton
		De Montfort University	The Open University	University of Surrey
		Derby College	Ulster University	University of the Arts London
		Exeter College	University College London	University of the West of England, Bristol
		Gateshead College	University of Birmingham	University of Warwick
		Halesowen College	University of Bradford	University of West London
		Hereford Sixth Form College	University of Brighton	University of Winchester
		King's College London	University of Derby	University of Wolverhampton
		Kingston University		University of York
		Leicester College		
		Loughborough University		
Other Partners	27	Student Minds	D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership	Xsite
		Universities UK	3e Consulting Engineers	Pearson Education
		Chartered Institute of Builders	ARUP	Persimmon Homes
		Institution of Civil Engineers	Cundall	University of Manchester Students' Union
		Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors	Desco	University of Birmingham Guild of Students
		Chartered Institute of Architectural Technologists	Esh Construction	Manchester Metropolitan Students' Union
		Construction Industry Training Board	Faulkner Browns Architects	
			NAPPER Architects	

Partner Organisations	Number			
		North East Local Enterprise Partnership	Ryder Architecture Sir Robert McAlpine Summers Inman Construction & Property Consultants Surgo Turner & Townsend	
TOTAL	**85**			