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Progression to and success in postgraduate study

For students from BAME and POLAR 1 & 2 backgrounds

Interim evaluation report

Sally Hancock and Paul Wakeling

Department of Education, University of York

March 2019

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Contents

Executive summary	4
1. Introduction	6
1.1. The programme	6
1.2. Evaluation methodology	7
1.3. Focus of this report	7
2. Analysis	8
2.1. Strand 1	8
2.1a. October destinations survey	8
2.2. Strand 1 re-run	12
2.2a. Engagement statistics	12
2.3. Strand 2	14
2.3a. Control and Intervention groups	14
2.3b. Engagement statistics	14
2.3c. Progression to postgraduate study	17
2.3d. Feedback on the course	18
3. Interim conclusions	22
4. References	24
Appendix	25

Executive summary

- This report is focused on the evaluation of Strand 1, the Strand 1 re-run and Strand 2 of the **Progression to and success in postgraduate study** project. Strand 1 trialled the effectiveness of a structured programme of information, advice and guidance in encouraging UK domiciled final-year undergraduates from POLAR quintile 1 and 2 and BAME backgrounds to enrol at postgraduate level during Spring 2018. The Strand 1 re-run was extended to include additional subject areas, and second year students, in Autumn 2018. Strand 2 focused on increasing the confidence and skills of UK domiciled offer-holders from BAME backgrounds, through a targeted online pre-enrolment course during Summer 2018.
- The evaluation made use of a **Randomised Control Trial** design, to monitor and quantify any effects associated with the interventions.
- A survey of graduates' destinations in October 2018 suggests that individuals who engaged with the Strand 1 intervention have **a lower rate of progression to postgraduate study** than that observed for the control group.
- In the Autumn of 2018, Strand 1 was re-delivered to an extended cohort of students. The re-run reached an increased number of individual students, but there is **no evidence that rates of engagement (expressed as a percentage of those invited to participate) increased since the first delivery**. This would suggest that the reasons speculated as the causes of low engagement in the initial delivery – the short lead-in time, industrial action, and the restrictions on recruitment – can be ruled out.
- One-third of students eligible to participate in the re-run opened at least one e-bulletin. However, engagement seldom extended beyond opening an email. All other activities, which included face to face and online delivery, secured considerably less participation (fewer than 1.0% of those eligible). **Engagement from the target groups (particularly those belonging to POLAR 1&2 and BAME) is slightly higher than it is for the cohort as a whole; but the numbers engaging remain extremely small.**
- **There is no evidence that the Strand 1 intervention would be better timed during the second year of undergraduate study** – indeed, these students showed slightly lower rates of engagement than final year students.
- **A more complex picture emerges regarding Strand 2. There is clear evidence of limited offer-holder engagement with online course.** Only around one-tenth of the intervention group completed at least one module of the online course, and participation rates rapidly decline beyond the first two modules.

- **There are, however, clear differences in the progression outcomes of the control and intervention groups assigned to Strand 2.** Considerably higher proportions of the intervention group enrol and remain enrolled on their postgraduate programme. Furthermore, the enrolment rate of those who engaged in the online course is 100.0%.
- **Given the low rate of engagement in the online course, the differences observed between the control and intervention groups are perplexing; and cannot confidently be attributed to the intervention of the online course alone.**
- Though small in number, **participant experiences of the online course are largely positive.** The relevant and customisable content of the online course were praised. In terms of future development, several respondents requested enhanced support with academic writing and referencing. Others commented that there should be greater incentive to engage with the interactive elements of the course. A small number of students stated that videos and modules could be shortened.
- **Across the project strands, student engagement has been disappointingly low.** This is despite the considerable resource invested into each element of the intervention, and the significant efforts of project managers and academic staff across the consortium institutions. Specifically, the numbers of eligible individuals engaging from POLAR quintile 1 and 2 and BAME backgrounds have consistently been very small.
- **On the basis of the numbers involved in the study, it is extremely difficult to discern any clear effects about the interventions, even when differences are observed in progression outcomes.** It is not possible to conclusively attribute differences in progression outcomes to the interventions delivered.
- **The picture of limited engagement across the two strands raises significant questions about the cost-effectiveness of the project.** The data do not support a case for a future delivery of Strand 1. The future of Strand 2 is perhaps less clear cut. Very few offer-holders engaged with the online course – but those who did successfully enrolled onto their programme. Now established, the course can be re-delivered and extended at a relatively low cost. Nevertheless, the risk associated with such a redelivery is that – as with this cohort – relatively few offer-holders will make use of the resource.

1. Introduction

1.1. The programme

Widening participation to postgraduate study is increasingly recognised as a socially, politically, and economically important objective. Over the last decade, a number of influential academic and policy studies have highlighted both persistent inequalities in access to postgraduate study, and the cultural and material significance of having a postgraduate qualification (Milburn, 2012; NUS, 2012; Lindley and Machin, 2013; Wakeling and Hampden-Thompson, 2013). The Postgraduate Master's loans, introduced in 2016, were intended to assist with the immediate financial outlay of postgraduate study, and demonstrates the strategic attention paid to this issue by the UK government.

This project - Progression to and succession in postgraduate study - was enabled through the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) Catalyst fund (now administered by the Office for Students). It brings together five research-intensive UK universities to trial a series of interventions focused on increasing the participation of two groups known to be underrepresented in postgraduate study:

1) Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students

Defined in accordance with the convention used by the Equality Challenge Unit in defining this group (i.e. to include all non-White ethnic groups based on student/offer-holder self-reported ethnicity)

2) Students from areas of low participation in higher education

Defined as quintiles 1 and 2 in the POLAR3 classification. This is calculated from the postcode of the student's address at the point of entry to their current programme.¹

The consortium developed two intervention programmes - 'Strand 1' and 'Strand 2'. Strand 1, known outwardly as 'Discover Postgrad' - trialled the effectiveness of a structured programme of information, advice and guidance in encouraging UK domiciled final-year undergraduates from the above backgrounds to enrol at postgraduate level. Strand 2 – known also as 'Prepare for Postgrad' – focused on increasing the confidence and skills of UK domiciled offer-holders from BAME backgrounds through a targeted online pre-enrolment course, with the aim of increasing enrolment to taught postgraduate programmes. Both strands of the intervention have been subject to a robust evaluation, the results of which will inform future decisions on whether to extend or adapt these approaches. At the time of writing, both intervention strands have concluded, including a re-run of the Strand 1 component.

¹ See <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/polar-participation-of-local-areas/>

1.2. Evaluation methodology

The interventions were evaluated through a randomised control trial (RCT) design. RCTs are considered to be the best method of demonstrating and quantifying the effect of an educational intervention (Torgerson & Torgerson 2008). Since selection into one of two groups (control or intervention) is randomised, the selection bias associated with choosing which student, subject area, or institution should receive an intervention is minimised. By avoiding selection bias, any observed differences in the outcomes of the control and intervention groups can be attributed to the intervention itself, rather than to unobserved variables introduced through the selection process. Should group outcomes not differ - or differ unexpectedly - the RCT can still be considered a success, because it will have furthered understanding of the potential impact of the intervention, regardless of the nature and extent of this. A detailed account of the approach to randomisation and evaluation can be found in an earlier report arising from this project.²

Analysis

The following analysis is limited to individuals who consented to share their data for the purposes of the evaluation. Across both Strands, actual engagement in the intervention activities were higher than is implied here, but the evaluation analysis is necessarily limited to those for whom we have consent and corresponding data.

1.3. Focus of this report

This report is focused on three areas of the evaluation. Firstly, it reports the graduate destinations of those who participated in the initial Strand 1 intervention. Specifically, this section of report is concerned to compare differential rates of transition to postgraduate study by October 2018 (2.1). Secondly, it summarises engagement with the Strand 1 re-run (which was open to a greater range of subjects and students, and not subject to a RCT evaluation). The principal purpose of this element is to explore whether many of the factors thought to inhibit participation in the original Strand 1 – the short lead-in time, industrial action during Spring 2018, and the restrictions placed on advertising the programme (necessary in light of the RCT design) – can be discounted (2.2). Thirdly, the report relates rates of engagement, progression and participant experiences associated with the Strand 2 online course (2.3).

² See Hancock, S. and Wakeling, P. (2018). Progression to and success in postgraduate study: interim evaluation report. University of York, Department of Education.

2. Analysis

2.1 Strand 1

2.1a October destinations survey

The original evaluation design intended to make use of the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey to document immediate transition to postgraduate study. Since DLHE was replaced by the Graduate Outcomes survey in 2018 (which surveys graduates 15 months after completing their studies), four consortium institutions decided to administer a destinations survey in October 2018. This brief survey was modelled on the DLHE and included additional questions on future intentions for postgraduate study. The survey was open for three weeks and distributed to all those who had consented to the follow up in May 2018. In total, 107 graduates responded to the survey (a response rate of 46.5% – from 230 survey invitations).

Chart 2.1a., below, details graduates' main activity as of October 2018. Consistent to the intentions reported in the last interim report, those who engaged with the Strand 1 intervention have a lower rate of progression to postgraduate study than is observed for the control group; conversely, a higher proportion of the engaged intervention group entered full time paid work.

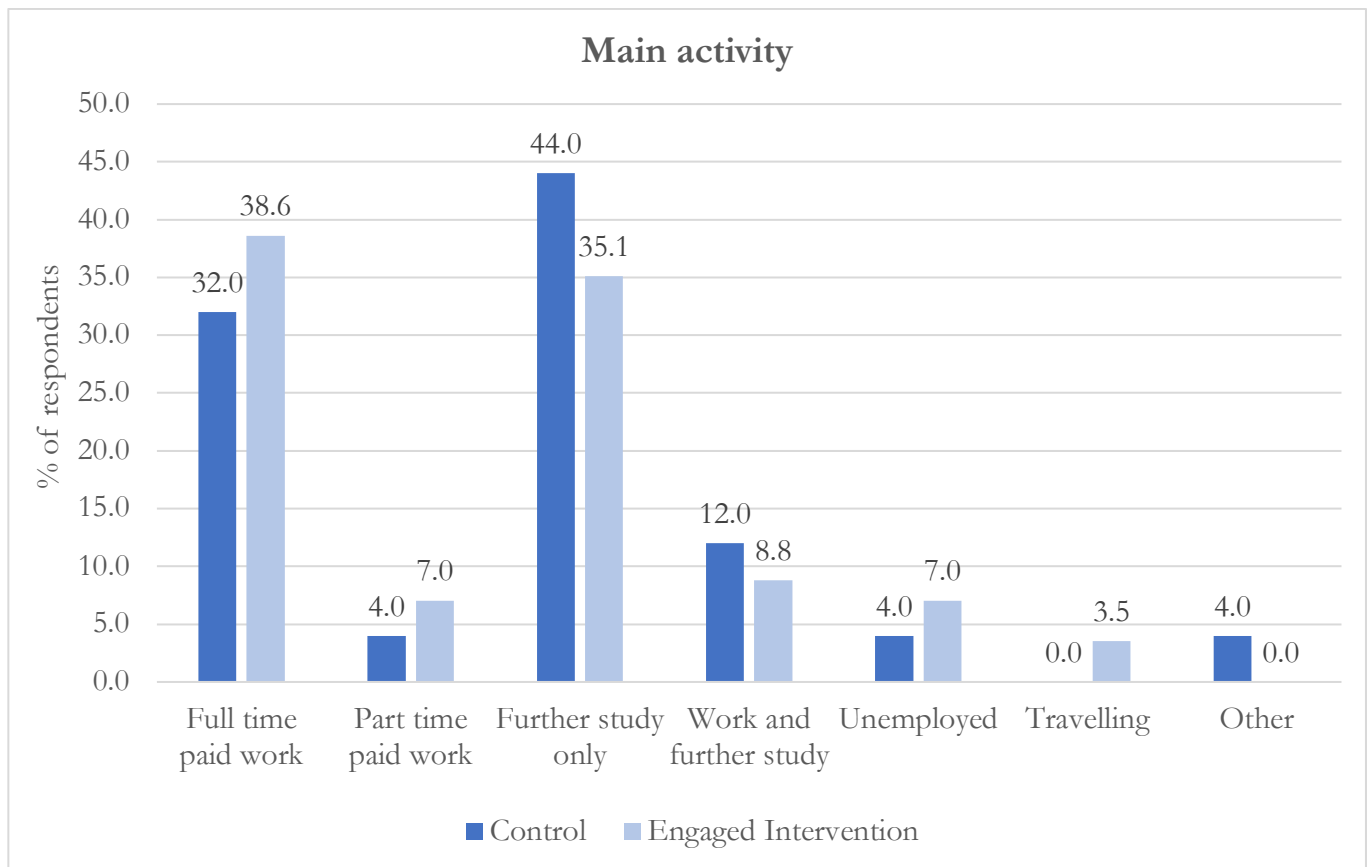


Chart 2.1a. Main activity as of October 2018 (all respondents; $n=107$)

Chart 2.1b., below, focuses only on those who had entered postgraduate study by October 2018, and reports the type of postgraduate programme graduates have progressed to. Comparing those who engaged with the intervention to those who did not, we observe a lower rate of progression to taught postgraduate study, but slightly higher rates of progression to research degrees (both taught and research only).

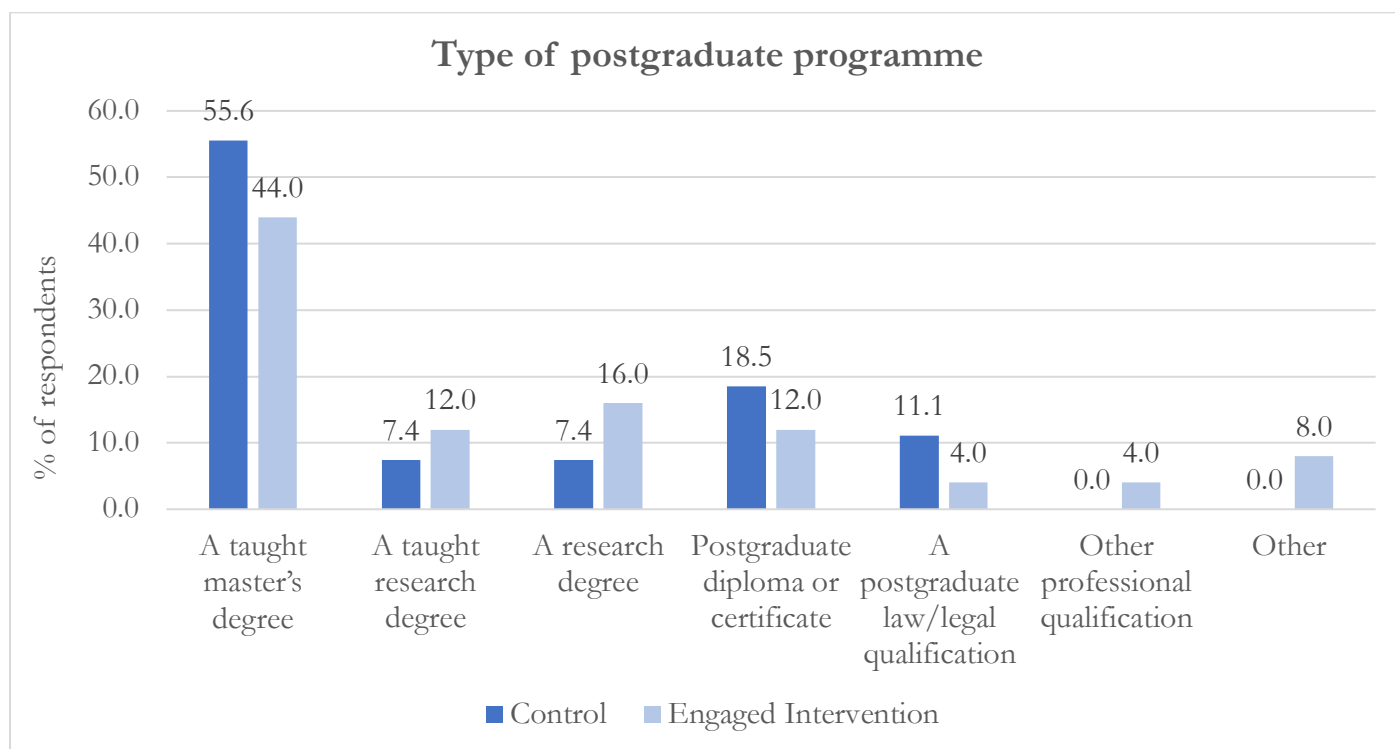


Chart 2.1b. Type of PG programme (limited to those who have progressed as of October 2018; $n=52$)

Overleaf, charts 2.1c. and 2.1d. report the responses of those stating they were still considering future postgraduate study. These questions were answered by only 18 respondents, meaning that firm conclusions cannot be drawn from the data shown. Regarding the reasons why postgraduate study continues to be considered, ‘entering a profession’ is cited by around one third of both control and intervention respondents (chart 2.1c.). Furthering subject knowledge is the second most frequently cited factor selected by respondents from both groups. Moving to chart 2.1d., which documents factors that would encourage these individuals to apply for postgraduate study, we observe the dominance of financial factors for both groups. One third of those from the control group, and half of those from the intervention group, state the significance of having access to additional financial support.

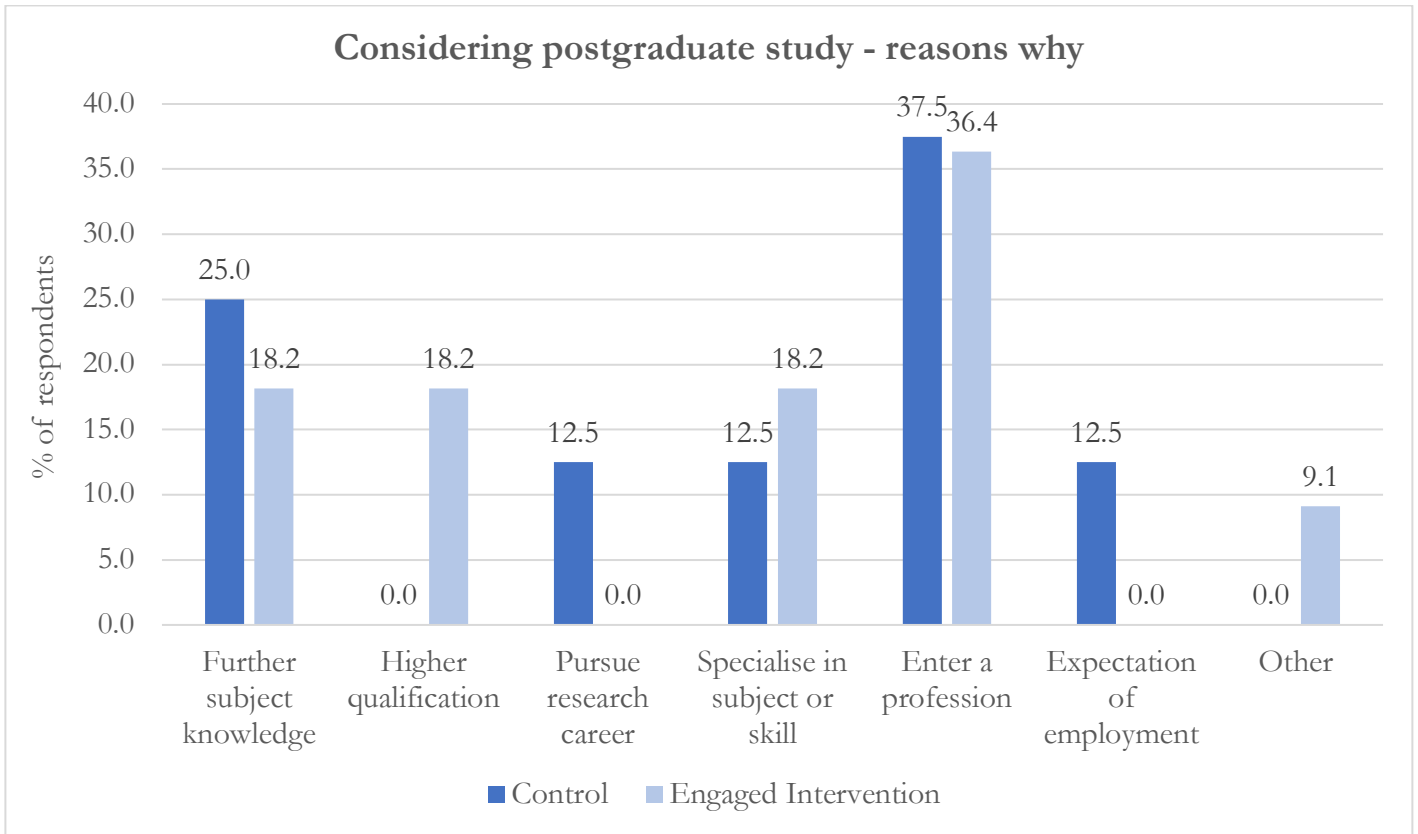


Chart 2.1c. Reasons for postgraduate study (limited to those who have not progressed but are considering postgraduate study as of October 2018; $n=18$)

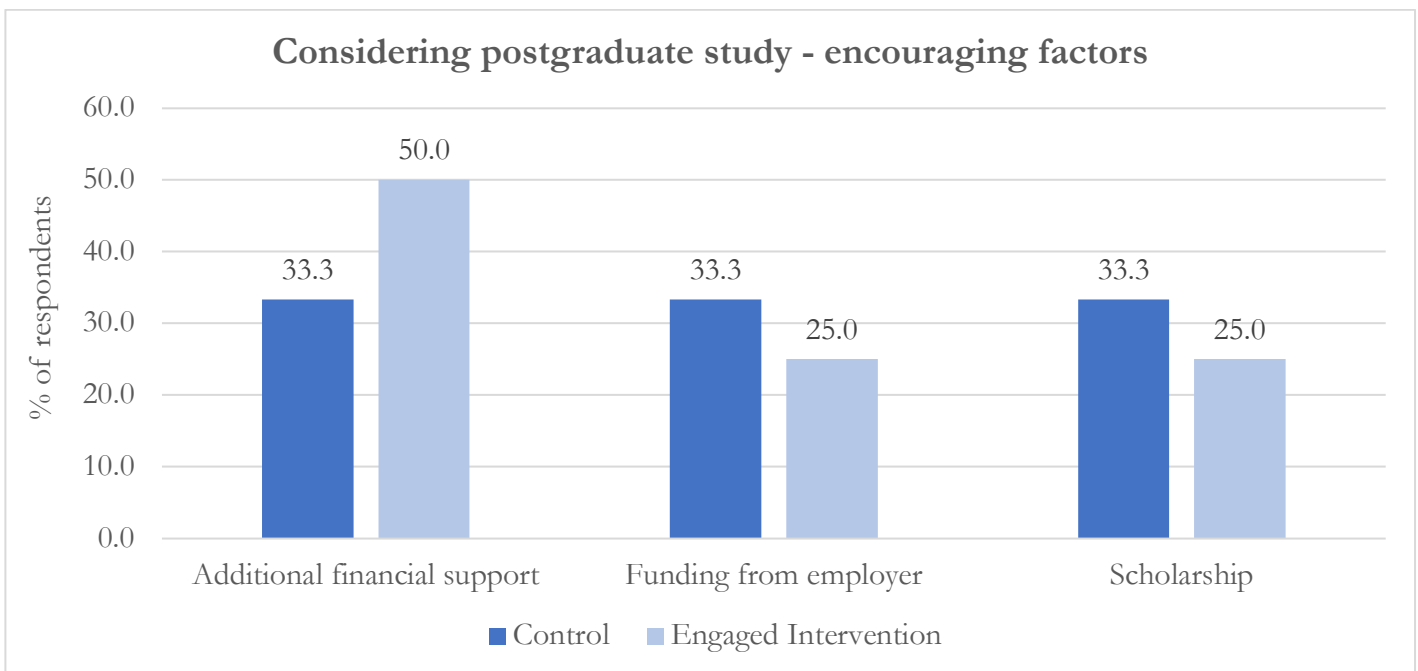


Chart 2.1d. Factors that would encourage postgraduate study (limited to those who have not progressed but are considering postgraduate study as of October 2018; $n=18$)

Chart 2.1e. sets out the reasons offered by those not considering postgraduate study as of October 2018. The small number of responses ($n=27$) once again prohibits any firm conclusions being drawn. We do however see some differences between the answers given by the control and intervention groups. Financial factors are most dominant in the control group's responses; the intervention group appear less concerned about these aspects. Instead, respondents from the intervention group more frequently cited having already been offered a graduate job, as well as not feeling sufficiently confident or knowledgeable for postgraduate study.

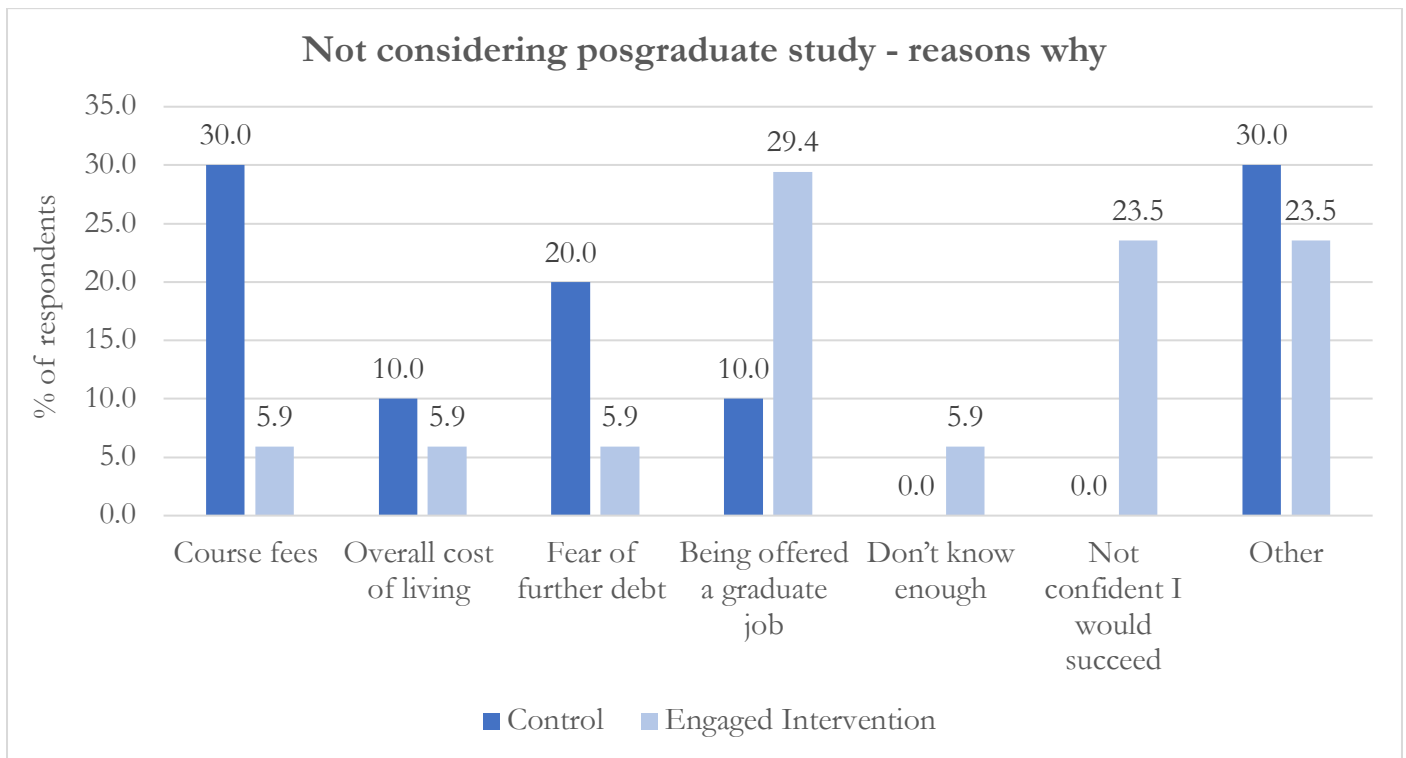


Chart 2.1e. Reasons against future postgraduate study (limited to those not considering postgraduate study as of October 2018, $n=27$)

2.2. Strand 1 re-run

2.2a. Engagement statistics

The re-run of the Strand 1 programme ('Discover Postgrad') took place at four institutions over October to December 2018. The programme design followed the model initially established during 2017/18, with delivery this time unconstrained by the RCT evaluation. The sessions were delivered to second and final year students from an extended range of subjects at each institution.

Early analysis of the Strand 1 re-run suggested that engagement *numbers* were higher than the initial delivery.³ While the following analysis demonstrates this to be true, when these numbers are contextualised as a *percentage* of eligible participants, engagement with the Strand 1 programme remains very low.

According to the data shared with the evaluation team, one-third of those eligible to participate in the re-run opened at least one of the four e-bulletins delivered (see table 2.2a., overleaf). All other activities, which included face to face and online delivery, attracted considerably less student engagement. Engagement with the activities is slightly higher within the target groups (those belonging to POLAR 1&2 *and* BAME in particular) than it is for the cohort as a whole; but the numbers remain extremely small. The findings for the mentoring element of the strand are somewhat at odds with earlier data presented on this activity and require clarification.⁴ Some 75 students expressed an interest in mentoring, and half of these were from the target groups (with more expressions from BAME students). Some 35 of these students were then matched with a mentor. However, in the data shared with the evaluation team, there are no recorded interactions of mentoring. Furthermore, the mentoring networking events were mostly cancelled due to a lack of registrations.

In regard to the inclusion of second year students, there is no evidence from the data shared that the programme is better aimed at this stage – indeed, these students showed slightly lower rates of engagement than final year students.

In summary, although the numbers engaging in the Strand 1 re-run are higher than the initial delivery, once the greater pool of eligible students is taken into account, engagement expressed as a proportion remains very low. Indeed, the percentage of students engaging with the re-run has not risen since the first delivery. Engagement rarely extends beyond the opening of the initial e-bulletins. This would suggest that e-bulletins are not an effective means of encouraging students to participate in the other, more intensive elements of the programme. Given the very small proportion of students engaging with Strand 1 – particularly from the target groups – it is difficult to justify the continuation of the intervention from a cost-effectiveness perspective.

³ See 'Strand 1 re-run: overview' prepared by K. Butler and presented to the consortium project Steering Group, 8th January 2019.

⁴ Ibid.

	Activity									
	E-bulletins (opened)		Academic led seminar*		Alumni seminar*		Making it Happen webinar*		Mentoring**	
All institutions	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Second year										
Total	1941	27.1	34	0.5	13	0.2	11	0.2	0	0.0
Male	826	25.3	10	0.3	2	0.1	8	0.2	0	0.0
Female	1115	28.6	24	0.6	11	0.3	3	0.1	0	0.0
POLAR 1&2										
Male	134	22.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	0.5	0	0.0
Female	209	27.1	8	1.0	1	0.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
BAME										
Male	178	29.1	3	0.5	2	0.3	1	0.2	0	0.0
Female	244	34.2	11	1.5	5	0.7	0	0.0	0	0.0
POLAR 1&2 and BAME										
Male	33	26.6	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Female	46	27.1	5	2.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Final year										
Total	1904	27.6	89	1.3	44	0.6	13	0.2	0	0.0
Male	704	24.2	40	1.4	20	0.7	8	0.3	0	0.0
Female	1200	30.2	49	1.2	24	0.6	5	0.1	0	0.0
POLAR 1&2										
Male	91	20.1	8	1.8	5	1.1	1	0.2	0	0.0
Female	199	25.2	9	1.1	5	0.6	2	0.3	0	0.0
BAME										
Male	154	28.4	11	2.0	5	0.9	1	0.2	0	0.0
Female	222	32.6	18	2.6	7	1.0	1	0.1	0	0.0
POLAR 1&2 and BAME										
Male	13	15.7	4	4.8	3	3.6	0	0.0	0	0.0
Female	57	33.1	7	4.1	1	0.6	1	0.6	0	0.0
Total (both years)	3845	27.3	123	0.9	57	0.4	24	0.2	0	0.0

Table 2.2a. Participation in the Strand 1 re-run across the consortium (n=3845)

*Attended the seminar or webinar

**Interacted with mentor

2.3. Strand 2

2.3a. Control and Intervention groups

Table 2.3a., below, shows the number of individual applicants who consented for their data to be shared for analysis in Strand 2. Some 613 BAME offer-holders were invited to participate in the intervention group, with just under half agreeing (44.7%; 274). The number consenting from the control group is larger (643) – the reason for this is unclear, but it could relate to different mechanisms of obtaining consent. For both control and intervention groups, there is notable variation in the numbers consenting across the institutions, yielding a total of 914 participants in this element of the evaluation. Table A, in the Appendix, provides more detail on the characteristics of those assigned to the control and intervention groups.

	A	B	C	D	E	Total
Control						
Consented	37	189	114	124	179	643
Intervention						
Consented	10	70	26	115	53	274

Table 2.3a. Sample of participants in the Strand 2 evaluation ($n=914$)

2.3b. Engagement statistics

Of the 274 offer-holders who consented to participate in the intervention, almost two-thirds (61.7%) entered the online course to watch the opening video ‘My Master’s’ (table 2.3b.).

Module	Video	Viewings (n) Dec 2018
1. Prepare for Postgrad - Introduction	1.1 My Master's	169
3. Manage Your Time Effectively	3.1 Priorities and Prioritisation	48
5. Take Control of Your Learning	5.1. Greater Independence during Master's Study	45
2. Becoming a Postgrad	2.1. Skills Gained from Master's Study	42
	2.3 You're not on your own: meeting people	37
	2.6 You're not on your own: career options	41
6. Reading for Masters	6.1 Making Effective Notes	33
2. Becoming a Postgrad	2.2 You're not on your own: returning to study	35
1. Prepare for Postgrad - Introduction	1.2 What is doing a master's like?	34
2. Becoming a Postgrad	2.5 You're not on your own: managing your money	32
3. Manage Your Time Effectively	3.3 Distractions and Other Productivity Issues	32

Table 2.3bi. Ten most frequent video viewings in the Strand 2 online course

It is perhaps to be expected that the opening video would be viewed most; but thereafter, video viewings fall considerably. Fewer than one fifth viewed the next two most watched videos. The online course included 26 videos in total; 5 of these were viewed by fewer than 5% of the offer-holders.

Turning to consider the proportion of offer-holders who followed through to *complete* a module - defined as taking the final module quiz and obtaining a score of 50% or more - the attrition rate is higher still. Table 2.3bii. sets out this information. Across the consortium, 'Becoming a Postgrad' and the 'Next Steps Quiz' were each completed by approximately one-tenth of offer-holders. There is a degree of variation in module completion across the institutions; these percentages differences are however affected by the varying sizes of each institution's intervention group.

	A		B		C		D		E		Consortium	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Modules completed												
Becoming a Postgrad	2	20.0	5	7.0	4	15.4	6	5.2	13	24.5	30	10.9
Next Steps Quiz	1	10.0	0	0.0	5	19.2	11	9.6	14	26.4	31	11.3
Manage Your Time Effectively	1	10.0	4	5.6	3	11.5	6	5.2	3	5.7	17	6.2
Living Well and Postgrad Life	2	20.0	2	2.8	3	11.5	6	5.2	2	3.8	15	5.5
Take Control of Your Learning	0	0.0	2	2.8	3	11.5	6	5.2	4	7.5	15	5.5
Reading for Master's	0	0.0	2	2.8	3	11.5	6	5.2	4	7.5	15	5.5
Writing with confidence	0	0.0	2	2.8	2	7.7	6	5.2	3	5.7	13	4.7

Table 2.3bii. Module completion in the Strand 2 online course (intervention group only, n=274)

The overarching picture to emerge across the consortium is one of limited engagement from the intervention group, especially after completing the first two modules of the online course. The Next Steps Quiz, designed to guide offer-holders towards modules that will be of most individual relevance, does not appear to have encouraged continued engagement with the course. Moreover, from the time data shared with the evaluation team, it is evident that most engagement occurred soon after the course was launched, with limited consistent engagement over the summer, and very little engagement once the October term began. Very few participants engaged with the course into December.

Given the rates of module completion, it is perhaps not surprising to report that interactions recorded in the module Padlets (discussion spaces) were small (26 comments recorded in the first module; dropping to 0 for 4 modules.) In some instances, comments from module tutors (current postgraduate students) outnumbered those from offer-holders. Similarly, ten per cent of the intervention group recorded comments using the 'journal' facility. Overleaf, table 2.3biii., offers some insight into which offer-holders participated in the online course (defined as having completed at least one module).

Characteristics	Engaged intervention*		Intervention
	<i>n</i>	%	%
Age (at 1 August 2017)			
20-22	16	53.3	57.1
23-25	8	26.7	19.7
26-29	2	6.7	9.6
30-39	2	6.7	11.2
40+	2	6.7	3.2
Gender			
Male	8	26.7	53.4
Female	22	73.3	46.6
Ethnicity			
Arab	1	3.3	1.6
Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	1	3.3	1.4
Asian or Asian British - Indian	4	13.3	21.7
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	6	20.0	14.1
Black or Black British - African	8	26.7	18.5
Black or Black British - Caribbean	1	3.3	4.3
Chinese	1	3.3	3.5
Gypsy or Traveller	0	0.0	0.0
Mixed - White and Asian	1	3.3	10.6
Mixed - White and Black African	0	0.0	2.5
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	1	3.3	3.0
Other Asian Background	0	0.0	6.1
Other Black background	0	0.0	1.2
Other Ethnic background	3	10.0	5.7
Other Mixed background	2	6.7	5.1
Disability			
Yes	6	20.0	20.6
No	24	80.0	79.4
Undergraduate institution			
Consortium institution	3	10.0	25.0
Other Russell Group	2	6.7	22.8
Non Russell Group	25	83.3	55.7
Area of postgraduate study			
Arts and Humanities	2	6.7	10.6
Social Sciences	12	40.0	43.7
Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths (including Medicine)	16	53.3	45.7
Mode			
Full time	30	100.0	93.5
Part time	1	3.3	6.5

Table 2.3biii. Characteristics of the engaged intervention group ($n=31$; $n=274$)

*Engaged intervention is defined as having completed at least one module of the online course

As has been emphasised earlier in the report, it is not advisable to draw firm conclusions from small numbers – such is the case with the ‘engaged intervention’ group in Strand 2 ($n=31$). There is some evidence that female offer-holders, STEM offer-holders, and those with a first degree from an institution outside both the consortium and the Russell Group, engaged with the online course at a higher rate. Furthermore, there are variations in the engagement of distinct ethnic and age groups. Here however, the numbers become so small that drawing any general inferences is not possible.

The emerging picture of limited engagement with Strand 2 raises significant questions about the cost-effectiveness of the intervention. The initial outlay involved in developing the course was considerable. Now established, the course can of course be re-delivered and extended to other cohorts of offer-holders at far less expense. Nevertheless, these findings would suggest that relatively few offer-holders will make use of the resource.

2.3c. Progression to postgraduate study

Chart 2.3c., below, documents progression to postgraduate study among the offer-holders. Specifically, it reports the proportions who declined their course offer, enrolled, and remained enrolled as of December 2018. There are marked differences between the control and intervention groups on each of these measures. The decline rate observed for the control group is 8.4% higher than that of the intervention group. The enrolment rate of the intervention group is 22.2% higher than the control group. Further, more of the intervention group remained enrolled in December 2018 - by a difference of 8.7%. Looking only at the subset of ‘engaged intervention’ participants, we see enrolment and continued enrolment rates of 100.0%.

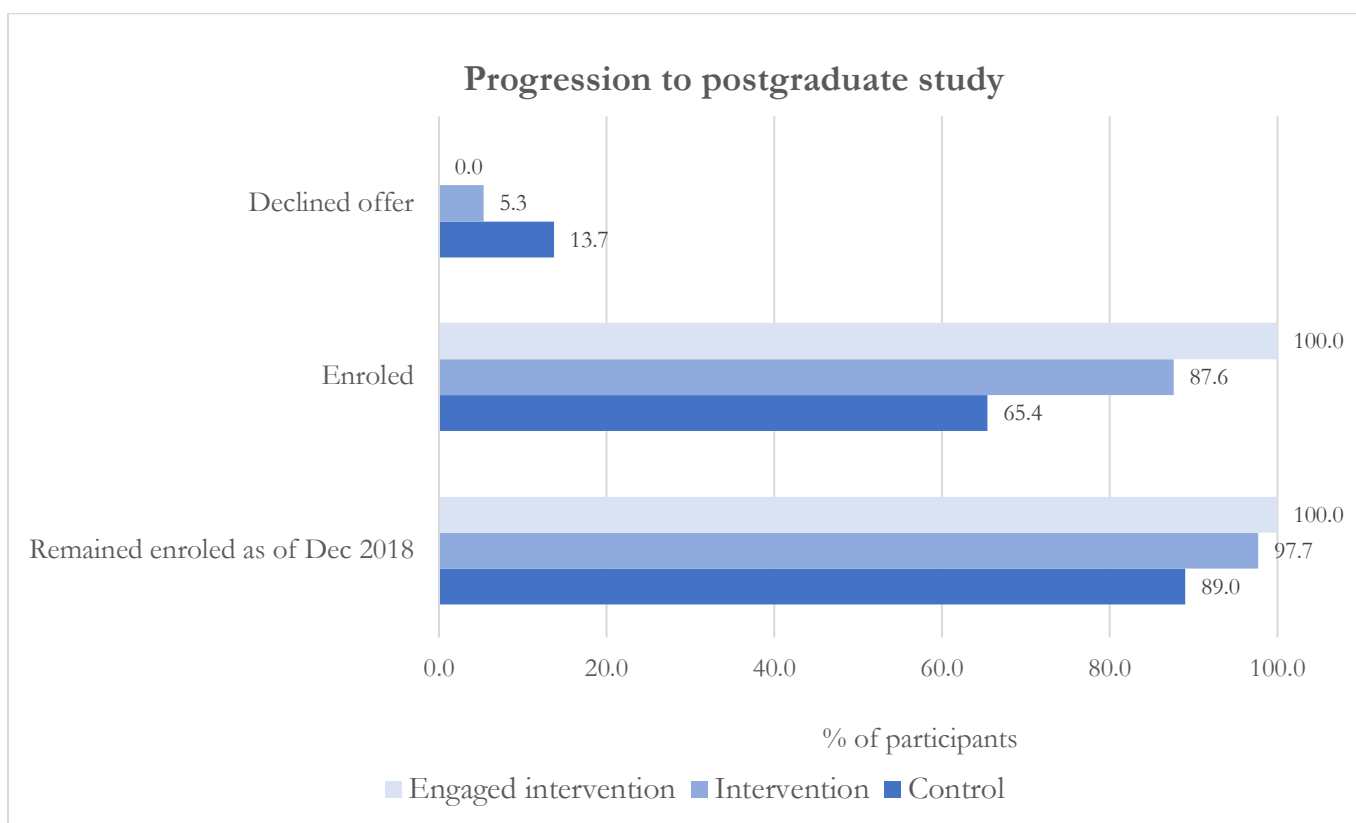


Chart 2.3c. Progression to postgraduate study by offer-holders across the consortium
(Engaged Intervention $n=31$; Intervention $n=274$; Control $n=643$)

These differences are striking - but also surprising, given the evidence that only around ten per cent of the intervention group meaningfully engaged with the online course. Put simply, it is not certain that these differences in progression can be attributed to the online course, when so few engaged with the intervention. We should further note that due to the very different sample sizes of the control and intervention groups, the percentages here represent quite different quantities in terms of individual participants. One explanation for the higher rates of progression observed in the intervention group might be that the presence of the course alone (and the sentiment of institutional support implied) encouraged participants in this group to be more positively disposed to confirming their offer – but such an inference cannot be substantiated by the data collected. We might further hypothesise that due to the self-selecting nature of engaging with the intervention, those who engaged in the online course had already decided to accept their offer before doing so. In other words, with regard to the engaged intervention group specifically, the causality of their outcomes cannot be attributed to the course with any confidence. Below, table 2.3c sets out the rates of decline, enrolment and continued enrolment for each institution.

Institution	Declined offer	Enroled	Remained enroled Dec 2018	<i>n</i>
A				
Control	10.8	83.8	96.8	37
Intervention	0.0	90.0	100.0	10
Engaged intervention	0.0	100.0	100.0	2
B				
Control	23.3	73.0	97.8	189
Intervention	15.5	77.5	100.0	70
Engaged intervention	0.0	100.0	100.0	5
C				
Control	50.9	49.1	100.0	114
Intervention	3.8	96.2	100.0	26
Engaged intervention	0.0	100.0	100.0	4
D				
Control	8.9	66.1	96.3	124
Intervention	1.7	78.3	97.8	115
Engaged intervention	0.0	100.0	100.0	6
E				
Control	11.7	55.3	54.2	179
Intervention	3.8	94.3	90.6	53
Engaged intervention	0.0	100.0	100.0	13

Table 2.3c. Progression to postgraduate study by offer-holders (all institutions)

2.3d. Feedback on the course

A small number of individuals ($n=12$), completed a short survey about their experiences of using the online course. Overleaf, chart 2.3di. indicates that the majority of respondents favourably perceived the contribution of the online course to their preparations for postgraduate study.

Respondents were slightly less certain that the course had impacted on their decision or enabled contact with other Master's students. Most modules also received positive usefulness ratings (chart 2.3dii.), with only student stating that they did not find the first two modules useful.

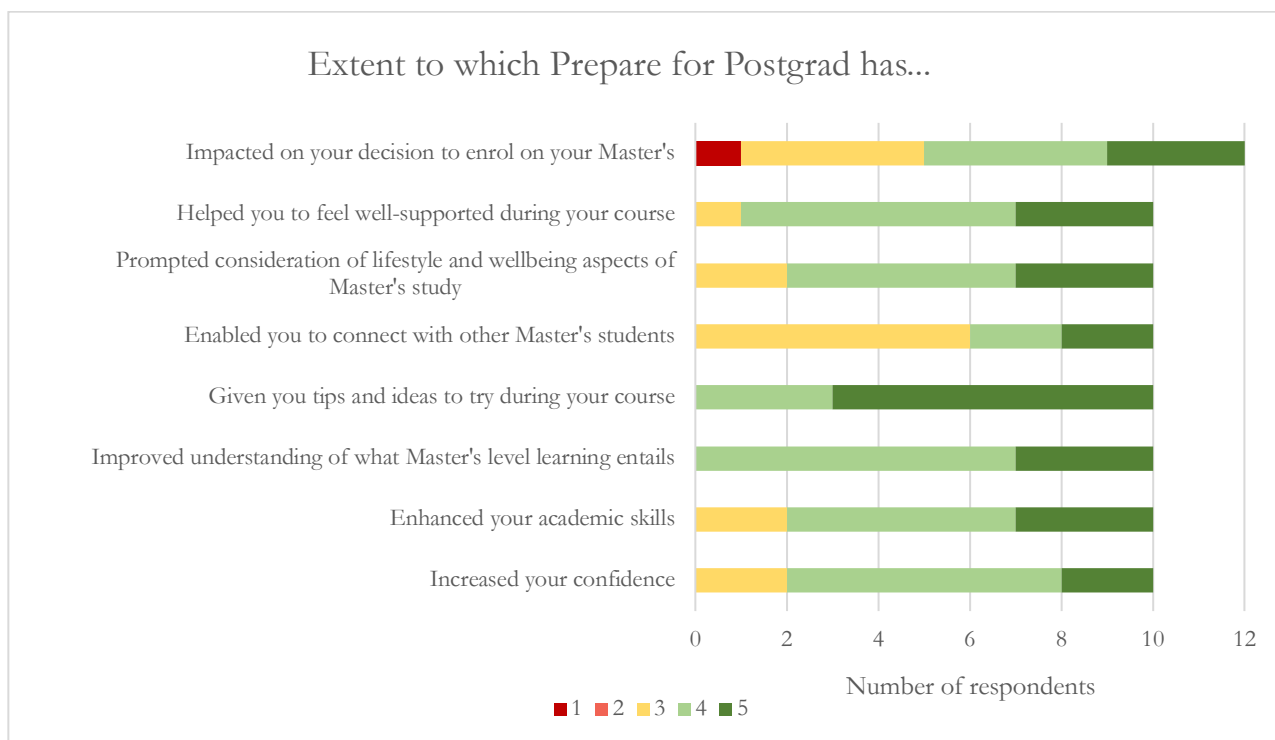


Chart 2.3di. Reflections on Prepare for Postgrad (n=12)

1=Strongly Disagree; 5=Strongly Agree

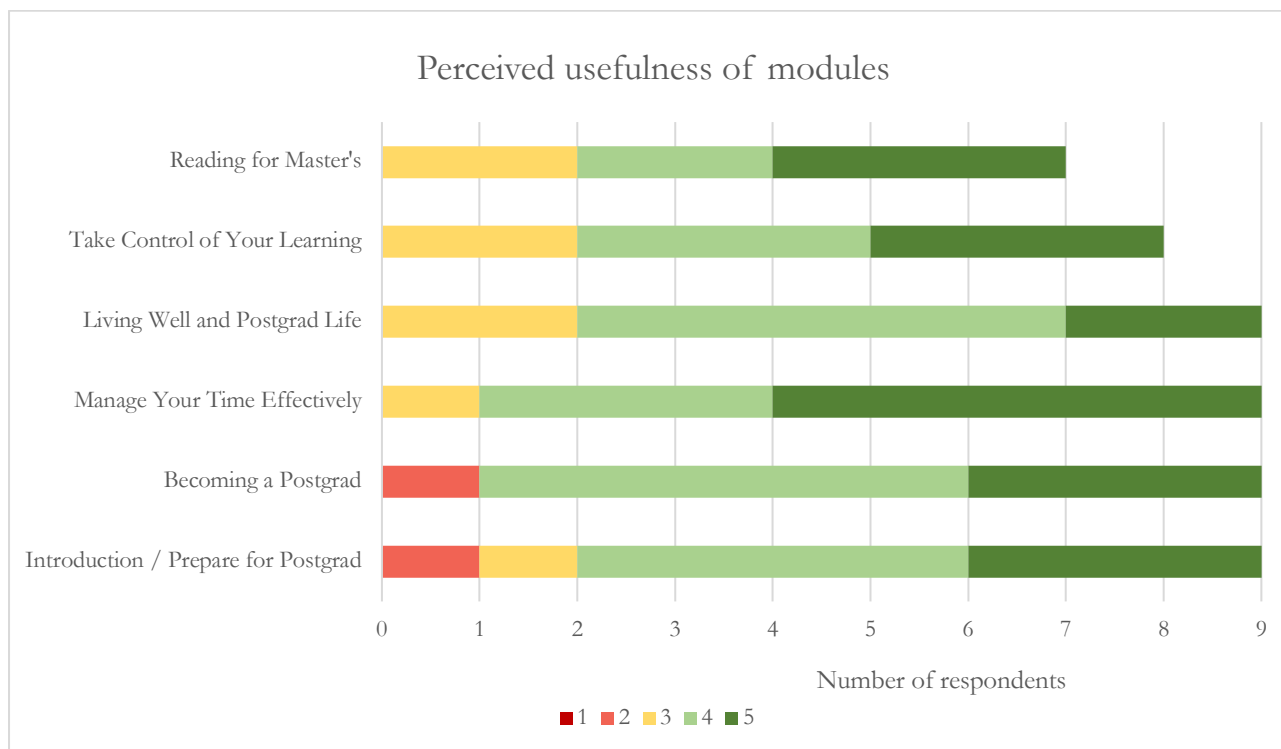


Chart 2.3dii. Perceived usefulness of Prepare for Postgrad modules (n=9)

1=Not Useful; 5=Very Useful

Charts 2.3diii and iv detail the perceived helpfulness of the module activities and sources of support. While these are again rated vastly positively, there is slightly greater variation in the responses. The helpfulness of the Padlets and ‘Check my Progress’ tools is less certain to participants, which aligns with the limited use of these. The contribution of the Facebook group (not all institutions integrated this) also seems to have been less clear to respondents.

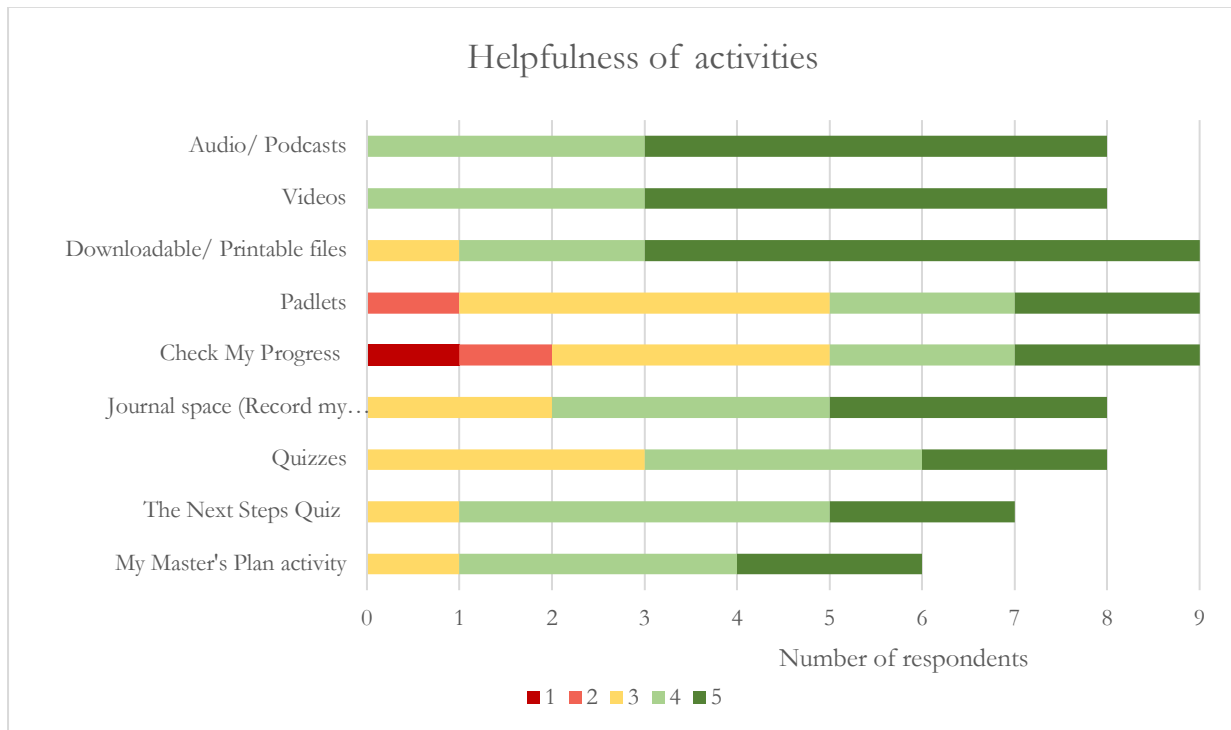


Chart 2.3diii. Perceived helpfulness of module activities (n=9)

1=Not Helpful; 5=Very Helpful

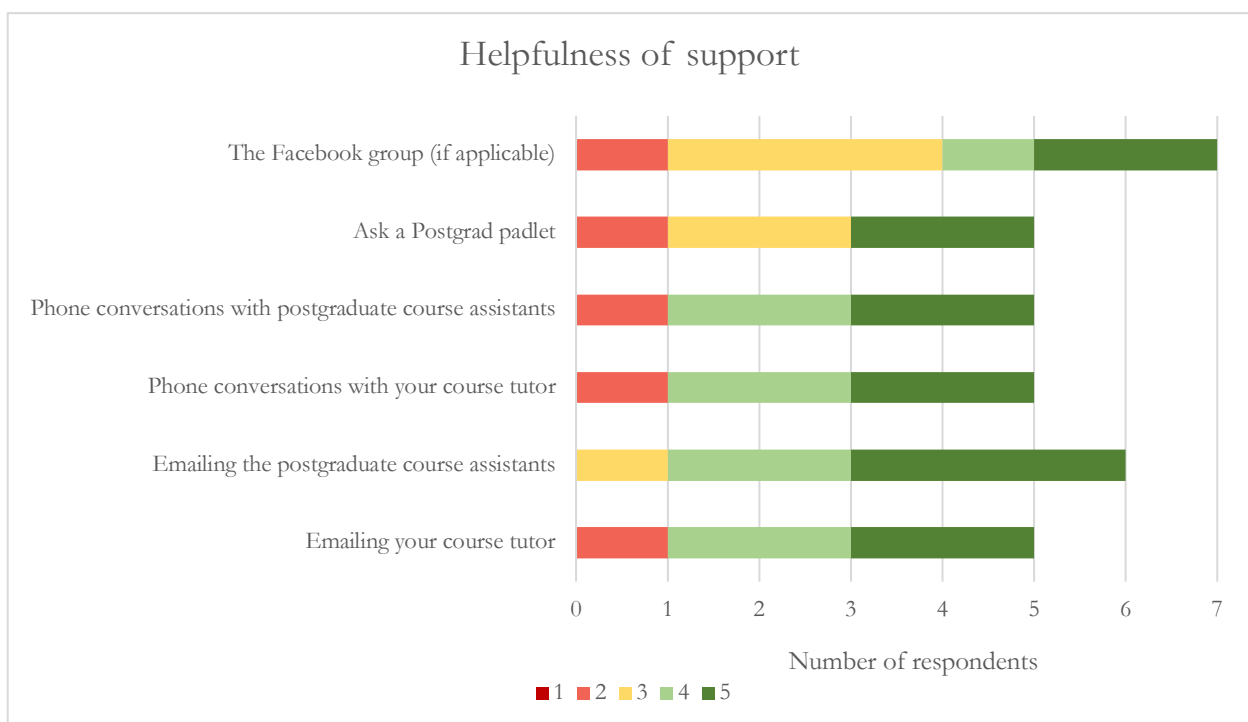


Chart 2.3div. Perceived helpfulness of module support (n=7)

1=Not Helpful; 5=Very Helpful

Two qualitative questions at the end of survey, seeking areas for improvement and positive reflections of the course, offer further insight into the experiences of those who engaged. Highlighted for praise were the 'relatable' and customisable content of the course, time management support, and the contributions from current postgraduates through videos and podcasts. One respondent stated they had found the course especially beneficial as they had not previously studied at a Russell Group institution.

In terms of areas for improvement, several respondents requested enhanced support with academic writing and referencing. A small number of participants specified greater support with revision strategies. While the interactive components of modules were valued by some respondents, several recommended that there needed to be more incentives to engage with these; suggesting that postgraduate tutors ought to take a more proactive role in instigating discussion and encouraging use of the journal tool, for example. A small number of students mentioned that videos and modules could be shortened. Finally, one participant commented that they would like more information on the longer-term benefits of postgraduate study (this was covered in Strand 1 of the programme).

3. Interim conclusions

This report is focused has focused on results from Strand 1, the Strand 1 re-run and Strand 2 of the Progression to and success in postgraduate study project. Strand 1 - 'Discover Postgrad' - trialled the effectiveness of a structured programme of information, advice and guidance about postgraduate study for UK domiciled final-year undergraduates from the POLAR quintile 1 and 2 and BAME. The Strand 1 re-run was extended to include additional subject areas, and second year students. Strand 2 – 'Prepare for Postgrad' – focused on increasing the confidence and skills of UK domiciled offer-holders from BAME backgrounds, via a targeted online pre-enrolment course which sought to increase enrolments onto taught postgraduate programmes. The evaluation made use of a Randomised Control Trial design, to monitor and quantify any effects associated with the interventions.

Strand 1

Consistent to participants' intentions reported in the last interim report, the October destinations survey suggested that individuals who engaged with the Strand 1 intervention have a lower rate of progression to postgraduate study than that which is observed for the control group. Conversely, a higher proportion of the engaged intervention group have since entered full time paid work.

Concentrating only on those who had progressed to postgraduate study, those who engaged with the Strand 1 intervention reported a lower rate of progression to taught postgraduate study, but slightly higher rates of progression to research degrees (both taught and research only). For those who were still considering postgraduate study but had not yet applied, financial concerns dominated – a finding true for both control and intervention groups. Those stating that they are not considering future postgraduate study reported a range of justifications. Control group participants were more preoccupied with financial matters, while engaged intervention group participants cited having already been offered a graduate job, as well as feeling insufficiently confident or knowledgeable for postgraduate study.

Strand 1 re-run

The Strand 1 re-run reached an increased number of individuals, but there is no evidence that rates of engagement (expressed as a percentage of those invited to participate) have increased since the first delivery. This would suggest that the reasons speculated as the causes of low engagement in the initial delivery – the short lead-in time, industrial action, and the restrictions on recruitment – can be ruled out.

According to the data shared with the evaluation team, one-third of those eligible to participate in the re-run opened at least one of the four e-bulletins delivered. All other activities, which included face to face and online delivery, secured considerably less engagement. Engagement with the activities is slightly higher within the target groups (those belonging to POLAR 1&2 *and* BAME in particular) than it is for the cohort as a whole; but the numbers engaging remain extremely small. There is no evidence that the intervention would be better timed during the second year of undergraduate study – indeed, these students showed slightly lower rates of engagement than final year students.

In summary, although the numbers participating in the Strand 1 re-run are higher than the initial delivery, once the greater pool of eligible students is taken into account, engagement remains very low. Interaction with the strand rarely extends beyond the opening of the initial e-bulletins. This would suggest that e-bulletins are not an effective means of encouraging students to participate in the rest of the programme.

Strand 2

A rather complex picture emerges in regard to Strand 2. There is clear evidence of limited offer-holder engagement with online course. Only around one-tenth of the intervention group completed at least one module of the online course, and participation rates rapidly decline beyond the first two modules. Very few offer-holders interacted with the discussion functions of the online course. Nevertheless, there are clear differences in the progression outcomes of the control and intervention groups. Considerably higher proportions of the intervention group enrol and remain enrolled on their postgraduate programme. Furthermore, the enrolment rate of those who engaged in the online course is 100.0%. However, given the low rate of engagement in the online course, the difference observed between the control and intervention groups cannot confidently be attributed to the intervention of the course alone.

Though small in number, participant experiences of the online course are overwhelmingly positive. The relevant and personalisable content of the online course were praised. In terms of areas for improvement, several respondents requested enhanced support with academic writing and referencing. A number of participants commented that there should be greater incentives to engage with the interactive elements of the course - suggesting that tutors ought to take a more proactive role in this. A small number of students stated that videos and modules could be shortened.

Concluding remarks

Across the project strands, student engagement has been disappointingly low. This is despite the considerable resource invested into each element of the intervention, and the significant efforts of project managers and academic staff across the consortium institutions. Specifically, the numbers of eligible individuals engaging from POLAR quintile 1 and 2 and BAME backgrounds have consistently been very small.

From the numbers involved, it is extremely difficult for the evaluation team to conclude any clear effects about the intervention, even when differences are observed with progression outcomes. It is not possible from the data shared to conclusively attribute differences in progression outcomes to the interventions delivered.

The emerging picture of limited engagement across the two strands raises significant questions about the cost-effectiveness of the project. The data do not support a case for re-running the Strand 1 intervention. Decisions regarding the future of Strand 2 are perhaps less clear cut. Very few offer-holders engaged with the online course – but those who did successfully enrolled onto their programme. Now established, the course can be re-delivered and extended at relatively low expense. Nevertheless, the risk associated with such a redelivery is that – as with this cohort – relatively few offer-holders will make use of the resource.

4. References

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Appendix

Institution	A		B		C		D		E	
Age (at 1 August 2017)	C	I	C	I	C	I	C	I	C	I
20-22	40.5	40.0	61.4	60.6	57.0	57.7	70.2	59.1	60.3	67.9
23-25	18.9	30.0	11.6	19.7	14.0	15.4	12.9	18.3	20.7	15.1
26-29	2.7	10.0	10.1	5.6	11.4	15.4	3.2	9.6	6.1	7.5
30-39	13.5	10.0	11.6	12.7	11.4	15.4	9.7	8.7	6.1	9.4
40+	2.7	10.0	5.3	1.4	6.1	0.0	2.4	4.3	6.7	0.0
Gender										
Male	29.7	100.0	40.2	42.3	43.9	38.5	55.6	50.4	47.5	35.8
Female	51.4	0.0	59.8	57.7	56.1	61.5	44.4	49.6	52.5	64.2
Ethnicity										
Arab	2.7	0.0	4.2	4.2	2.6	0.0	0.8	0.0	1.1	3.8
Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	2.7	0.0	3.2	4.2	12.3	0.0	4.0	2.6	2.8	0.0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	18.9	30.0	11.6	16.9	14.0	23.1	24.2	27.0	16.8	11.3
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	16.2	10.0	21.7	18.3	1.8	0.0	12.1	13.9	23.5	28.3
Black or Black British - African	21.6	10.0	12.7	15.5	22.8	26.9	21.0	17.4	14.0	22.6
Black or Black British - Caribbean	2.7	10.0	4.2	2.8	2.6	7.7	0.8	0.9	3.4	0.0
Chinese	5.4	0.0	0.0	5.6	5.3	0.0	11.3	6.1	7.8	5.7
Gypsy or Traveller	2.7	0.0	10.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Mixed - White and Asian	2.7	30.0	3.2	7.0	7.0	11.5	8.1	2.6	9.5	1.9
Mixed - White and Black African	2.7	0.0	2.1	4.2	2.6	0.0	0.8	0.9	1.1	7.5
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	0.0	0.0	2.1	2.8	6.1	7.7	4.0	2.6	4.5	1.9
Other Asian Background	2.7	0.0	5.8	8.5	5.3	7.7	4.0	8.7	5.6	5.7
Other Black background	2.7	0.0	1.6	1.4	0.9	3.8	0.8	0.9	1.7	0.0
Other Ethnic background	2.7	10.0	2.1	2.8	5.3	7.7	1.6	4.3	1.1	3.8
Other Mixed background	8.1	0.0	9.5	5.6	11.4	3.8	6.5	10.4	7.3	5.7
Disability										
Yes	16.2	30.0	14.8	14.1	8.8	34.6	20.2	13.0	8.4	11.3
No	64.9	70.0	85.2	85.9	91.2	65.4	79.8	87.0	81.6	88.7
Undergraduate institution										
Leeds	8.1	0.0	1.1	0.0	1.8	0.0	0.0	0.9	12.8	11.3
Manchester	0.0	0.0	28.6	26.8	0.9	0.0	0.8	2.6	2.8	0.0
Sheffield	2.7	0.0	2.6	15.5	26.3	23.1	0.8	0.0	1.7	1.9
Warwick	0.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	1.8	0.0	16.9	12.2	0.6	0.0
York	24.3	20.0	1.1	0.0	0.9	0.0	4.0	0.9	0.6	0.0
Other Russell Group	18.9	20.0	13.8	16.9	11.4	23.1	23.4	40.9	20.1	13.2
Non-Russell Group	45.9	50.0	28.6	35.2	57.0	76.9	54.0	42.6	61.5	73.6
Area of postgraduate study										
Arts and Humanities	27.0	10.0	9.0	8.5	10.5	11.5	7.3	9.6	14.0	13.2
Social Sciences	59.5	80.0	35.4	28.2	35.1	19.2	54.0	47.8	45.3	43.4
Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths (including Medicine)	13.5	10.0	55.6	63.4	54.4	69.2	38.7	42.6	40.8	43.4
Mode										
Full time	100.0	100.0	79.9	88.7	96.5	92.3	76.6	92.2	87.7	94.3
Part time	0.0	0.0	20.1	11.3	3.5	7.7	3.2	7.8	12.3	5.7

Table A. Characteristics of Strand 2 control and intervention groups, by institution ($n=917$)