

UEA Widening Participation Research Project Fellowships

Introduction and rationale

The UEA Widening Participation team are offering four fellowships to develop small scale research projects to enhance our understanding of widening participation within the university. We are offering up to £5,000 for individuals or groups to carry out projects in collaboration with the WP team during academic year 2017-18.

Every year UEA must agree with the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) how it proposes to work to widen participation in higher education by underrepresented groups among undergraduate home students. This involves improving the aspirations and attainment of pupils in schools that are in areas where participation in higher education is lowest. This work is undertaken by our Outreach team based in ARM. We also must support the recruitment, retention and success of underrepresented groups from a range of backgrounds whilst at UEA as well as helping those students get graduate jobs or go on to further study when they leave. The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) also scrutinises the University's performance on widening participation (WP).

In early 2017, it was decided to further strengthen this area of our work with the appointment of an Academic Director for WP and a WP Manager overseeing activity to support students and an expanding team in the Finance, Planning and Governance Division who are focussed on supporting an effective WP strategy through monitoring and evaluating WP activity in the sector and at UEA. Each year we report on our achievements in this area of work to OFFA via our access agreement¹. While the statistical detail is vital, we would like to add more richness to our understanding of WP issues, both to enhance our reporting and to inform future action and investment. As a consequence, we have decided to fund 4 WP fellowships to carry out a small scale project each to illuminate a particular issue.

We are now inviting **applications** for the fellowships. For details of the fellowships and how to apply, please email Annamari Ylonen, WP Senior Research Associate a.ylonen@uea.ac.uk

Questions about the fellowships and application process are welcomed by Helena Gillespie, Academic Director of Widening Participation - h.gillespie@uea.ac.uk

How to apply

What are the projects about?

Each project will be a small scale research study focussed on a particular issue related to the retention, success and/or progression to graduate employment of a group of students with one or more of the WP characteristics. Due to the specific requirements of WP funding we are only able to fund work which focuses on undergraduate home students from the target groups.

The projects are not intended to finance new interventions or support new work – they are about understanding our current work better and informing potential new approaches.

The WP groups are:

- Students from a low participation neighbourhood (POLAR quintile 1)
- Mature students (including specifically those with no previous HE experience)
- Disabled students (including consideration of different subgroups including students with mental health issues, specific learning difficulties and/or who are on the autistic spectrum)
- Students from black and minority ethnic groups (BME)
- Young white males from LPN (see above) or with low household income
- Students with caring responsibilities
- Students who are care-leavers

¹ <https://www.offa.org.uk/agreements/The%20University%20of%20East%20Anglia%201718.pdf>

What do we mean by retention, success and progression, and how are these measured?

Because the projects will be part of our work reported to OFFA, we use prescribed metrics to define each of these measures:

Retention means students who make it into the second year of a degree programme - we measure this early in year 2

Success means students who get a Good Honours Degree – we measure this during and at the end of degrees

Progression means the student goes on to further study or a graduate level job as measured by the DHLE survey.

The projects can source existing data and insight from our Business Intelligence Unit including profiling and performance data and insight gathered through existing survey and qualitative research approaches. The projects are unlikely to need to collect large-scale quantitative data, much of which we already hold.

What will the projects investigate?

We welcome projects aimed at investigating the factors which influence retention, success and progression of WP students in any way, by we are particularly interested in projects that aim to fill current knowledge gaps in the following areas:

1. The nature of the performance gap between WP and non-WP students in a particular cohort and the features of a course which have been developed to close the gap
2. How best to support the wellbeing of students with a focus on supporting the retention success and progression of students with mental health conditions
3. To what extent students who come with non-A level qualifications (BTEC, Access courses etc) need additional support with literacy or numeracy to be successful and, if so, how this can be best provided
4. The most effective ways in which students with specific learning difficulties (for example Dyslexia or an Autistic Spectrum Disorder) can be supported to succeed in their studies

Selection criteria

We are particularly looking for projects that meet all or some of the following criteria:

1. Projects which fit well into some of our existing knowledge gaps (defined above)
2. Projects with clearly defined and realistic objectives and timescales
3. Projects which plan to work collaboratively across schools, divisions and/or the Students' Union
4. Projects which involve students in the research process

Selection of successful projects for funding will be based on the above criteria whilst ensuring these cover a range of topics and subject areas as relevant.

Who can apply and what will we fund?

All staff on academic contracts can apply, as well as staff from the professional services and the UEA Students Union. It is anticipated that the successful projects will be run by teams, which may include both academics and those from professional services. Projects might also include a student intern.

Funding is up to £5,000 and will be paid to the school or professional service hosting the project to allow those taking part to have time to complete the work. Costing should be based on internal, not full economic costing. We cannot fund equipment or consumables. Those wishing to travel as part of their project may apply to the WP team for this funding separately

How will projects be supported?

This is not intended to be standalone work and all staff undertaking the work will be invited to join WP Research Group for the duration of the project. They will also work closely with the WP team to ensure the project has the information it needs and stays on track, particularly the WP Research Associate who will meet with the project teams monthly to offer support and guidance.

How do I apply?

Applications should be made by email to the WP Team – address below and should include the following;

- Names of staff involved in the project and their schools or divisions – with an indication of the project lead who will be the main contact
- The project title and rationale for choosing the topic
- Expected benefits and outcomes of the project
- Requirements for existing data
- Deliverables (if in addition to deliverables in timeline below)
- How the project progress will be managed and monitored
- How the budget will be spent
- A short statement of support from the Head of School and/or Division confirming they are happy to release staff to do the work and for the study to take place in the school
- *All of this should be presented in approximately 1000 words*

Timeline

22nd November 2017 – project proposals to be sent to WP Research Associate Annamari Ylonen a.ylonen@uea.ac.uk

27th November 2017 - Applicants notified of the outcomes

3rd January 2018 - Deadline for submission of ethical approval forms through EDU Ethics committee

Mid-January 2018 - Projects begin (subject to ethical approval – committee sits on 17th January)

14th March 2018 – Update from all projects to WP Committee

22nd May 2018 – Interim reports from all projects to WP Committee

End of July 2018 - Final project written up for dissemination

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