



THE LONDON SCHOOL  
OF ECONOMICS AND  
POLITICAL SCIENCE

AN LSE WIDENING PARTICIPATION  
RESEARCH BRIEFING

# JOURNEYS INTO HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT: THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON YOUNG PEOPLE



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# CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1 EFFECTS OF THE LOSS OF WORK</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1 LOSS OF INCOME	5
1.2 LOSS OF EXPERIENCE	9
<b>2 EFFECTS OF THE LOSS OF TEACHING</b>	<b>12</b>
2.1 LOSS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INFORMATION, ADVICE, AND GUIDANCE	13
2.2 LOSS OF CAREER INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE	15
<b>3 LSE'S RESPONSE</b>	<b>17</b>
3.1 WP INTERVENTIONS	17
3.2 FINANCIAL SUPPORT	19
3.3 STUDENT SUPPORT AT LSE	20
<b>ENDNOTES AND REFERENCES</b>	<b>22</b>



# INTRODUCTION

This research report considers how the COVID-19 pandemic may shape the educational and career pathways of young people now and in the future, and proposes ways that the higher education sector can respond to counter the negative impacts of the crisis.

The particular focus of this report is the young people who participate in LSE's widening participation (WP) outreach programmes. These are students from backgrounds that are under-represented in higher education (HE): those from low-income households; those who would be the first generation in their family to attend HE; those living in areas of high socio-economic deprivation or low rates of participation in HE; and those in specific under-represented groups such as care-experienced students.

To avoid inequalities in education and employment widening, we argue that HE institutions must address four key challenges:

- 1** Students from low-income households will likely experience increased financial stress or even an inability to cover essential living expenses due to a loss of income from hard-hit sectors like hospitality and retail. Research indicates that these kinds of financial problems present a real barrier for students achieving their full academic potential.
- 2** A greater number of students are likely to choose to study close to home and commute to university due to an increase in relative costs. Research shows that living at a distance to your institution can have negative implications for accessing university support networks, feeling part of an academic community, and taking up valuable extra-curricular activities.
- 3** Access to career guidance and work experience opportunities has been significantly limited; not only will this worsen employment prospects, but a lack of quality careers support and first-hand work experience could negatively impact students' confidence and ability to make informed decisions around post-16 choices.
- 4** Given the loss of contact hours with schools, students' interaction with key sources of information, advice and guidance including subject teachers, advisers, and pastoral support has decreased. Our research indicates that students without a family history of higher education are likely to be most impacted by the loss of this help in confidently navigating the HE application process.



In addition to a review of current research, which was in part commissioned from the Bridge Group, this report draws on a survey, conducted by LSE's widening participation team in July and August 2018. This survey collected 700 completed responses from young London residents aged 14-17, who had applied to one of LSE's pre-entry WP programmes. Respondents came from the following demographics:

- Most of the young people who completed the questionnaire were in year 12 (70 per cent), with the remainder in years 10 and 11.
- The majority had been accepted onto one of our WP programmes (70 per cent).
- 60 per cent would be the first in their family to go to university.
- 40 per cent had received free school meals sometime in the last six years.
- The ethnicity breakdown of the responses (42 per cent Asian, 26 per cent Black, and 11 per cent White, 4 per cent Mixed, 16 per cent other/unknown) was similar to our WP programme applicants.

Overall, the makeup of the survey respondents closely resembles the demographic of students who LSE works with as part of its WP outreach. As the survey data in this report only allows us to make claims concerning this particular set of students, for clarity and simplicity, we will use the term "WP students" to refer to them.

Alongside this survey, we undertook three focus groups in April 2018, involving year 13 participants from three of our sustained engagement WP programmes (Pathways to Law, Pathways to Banking and Finance, LSE CHOICE). Insights from these focus groups have been included within this report alongside the survey results.





# 1 EFFECTS OF THE LOSS OF WORK

A growing body of evidence confirms that the UK's COVID-19 related lockdowns have led to substantive loss of employment and earnings across the economy.<sup>1</sup> However, as research by the Centre for Economic Performance at LSE details, this loss has not been evenly distributed across society; “[t]hose aged 16-25 were over twice as likely as older employees to have suffered job loss, with over one in ten losing their job, and just under six in ten seeing their earnings fall.” Furthermore, data reveals that some people have been more adversely impacted than others, with those from “poor family backgrounds” experiencing higher job and earnings losses.<sup>2</sup> As many WP students come from low-income families, it is likely that these students have experienced a loss of work and income at higher rates than their more affluent peers. Our survey data allows us to sketch two ways in which this loss of work might affect WP students in particular: firstly, as a lack of critical income; secondly, as a lack of valuable work experience. According to our data, it is thus likely that students from groups underrepresented in HE will face lasting negative impacts on their decision-making about higher education, their success while at university, and ultimately their progression into the job market.

## 1.1 LOSS OF INCOME

Our survey confirms that WP students are likely to be impacted by the job and income losses reported by the literature. It also suggests that this impact will be felt unevenly, as take up of paid work varied substantially across survey participants. The most important factor for this was age: while only 10 per cent of year 10 pupils report undertaking any form of paid work, 47 per cent of year 12 pupils did. Further differences were seen in relation to the survey participants' ethnicity; looking at year 12 students, just 28 per cent of Asian students reported being in regular paid work, compared to 34 per cent of Black students and 48 per cent of White students (fig. 1). Thus, although the exact extent of job and earnings losses varies, a significant minority of WP students are likely to be affected.

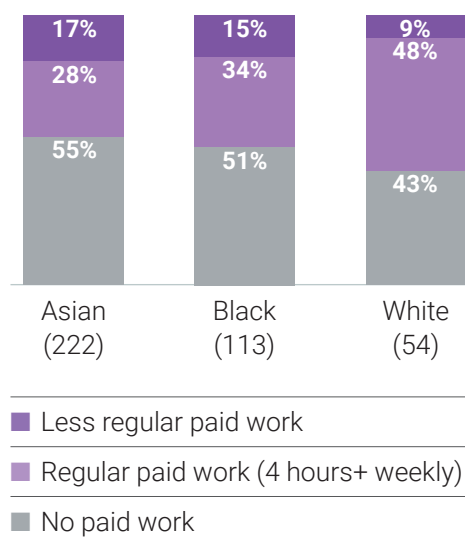


Figure 1: Work uptake by ethnicity (year 12 students only)



## Financial worries are prominent among WP students, and will likely increase further due to the pandemic

At the time of our survey in 2018, well before the pandemic, 54 per cent of respondents already stated that they were worried about paying for university. Considering the reported income losses due to the COVID-19 crisis, financial concerns are likely to have increased for these students. Indeed, recent work by Access HE suggests that for around 37 per cent of students overall, COVID-19 has increased concerns about whether they can afford to go to higher education. Among students receiving Free School Meals (FSM), a common proxy for low household incomes, this figure was as high as 43 per cent.<sup>3</sup> As part of our survey, we asked students about their reasons for taking up paid work. Although factors such as “paying for leisure activities” and “getting work experience” were mentioned most frequently, 31 per cent of year 12 students indicated that they worked to help pay for their essential living costs. In addition, 29 per cent of year 10 and year 11 pupils and 31 per cent of year 12 indicated that they worked to save for university (fig. 2). These findings suggests that for a sizeable minority of WP students, losing part-time work due to the pandemic will have had a tangible impact on their finances.

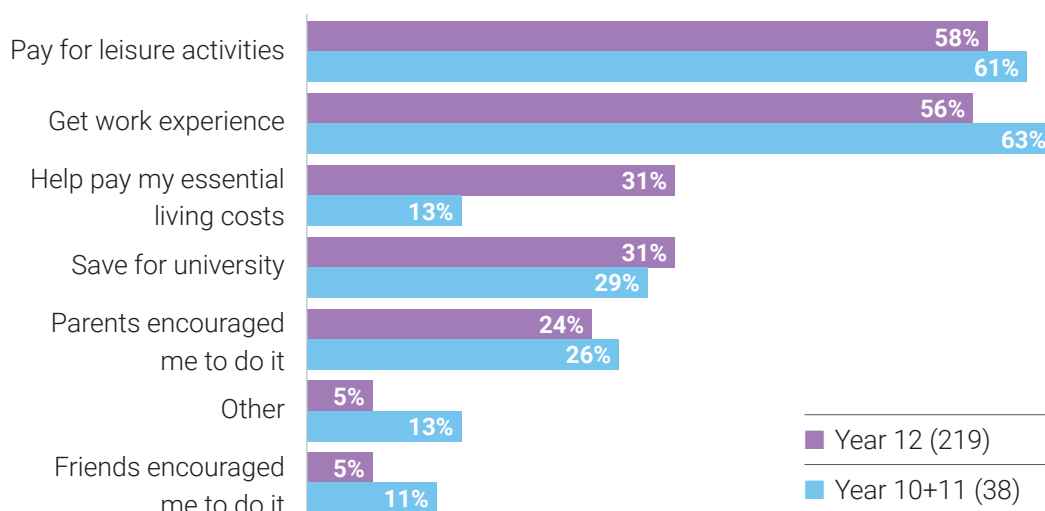


Figure 2: Reasons for taking up work by year group

## Those who lose income needed to pay for living expenses might face worse educational outcomes

For students working to help pay for their essential living costs, a lack of income could translate into an inability to meet these basic costs. Among survey respondents, 41 per cent of those who had received FSM when they were younger indicated needing to work to contribute to essential living cost, compared to 24 per cent of those who had never received FSM. As FSM eligibility is based on receipt of particular income related state benefit, this suggests that low-income households are also more likely to face additional financial hardship due to COVID-19. Already, students in receipt of FSM face worse educational outcomes, including Attainment 8 scores that are on average 14 points lower than for pupils not in receipt of FSM.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the proportion of students in receipt of FSM that achieve at least three A/A\* grades is less than half of that of students not receiving FSM (4.9 per cent vs. 11 per cent in 2015/16).<sup>5</sup> Now, COVID-19 related losses in income are likely to increase this disadvantage further.



In addition to an inability to pay for technical equipment or private tutoring to compensate for educational losses, this disadvantage might further play out via mental and physical well-being. Research shows that students in receipt of FSM are more likely to report mental health difficulties, which in turn are related to lower educational attainment.<sup>6</sup> For university students, financial stressors, such as concerns about the ability to pay for education and the need or perceived need to work full-time to finance education, are linked to a broad range of adverse outcomes, including worse self-reported mental and physical health, as well as lower educational achievement.<sup>7</sup> If we assume that post-16 WP students are similarly affected, those in the most strained financial circumstances may experience poorer wellbeing, impacting their educational attainment and ultimately making them less likely to progress to HE institutions with highly selective admissions criteria.

### Students already enrolled at university will be equally affected

WP students currently enrolled at university are similarly at risk of suffering substantial negative effects from financial stress.

As part of our survey, we asked students if they were planning on taking up part-time work during their studies and, if so, why. Seventy-two percent of respondents planned to work during term-time, and over 94 per cent of respondents planned on working during the holidays (fig. 3).

In terms of reasons for working, 81 per cent of students felt that they would need to work to pay for essential living costs. If these self-estimates are accurate, many students may now be facing substantial financial risk, as sectors that typically offer flexible and part-time work opportunities, such as hospitality and retail, have been significantly impacted by lockdown measures for over a year.<sup>8</sup>

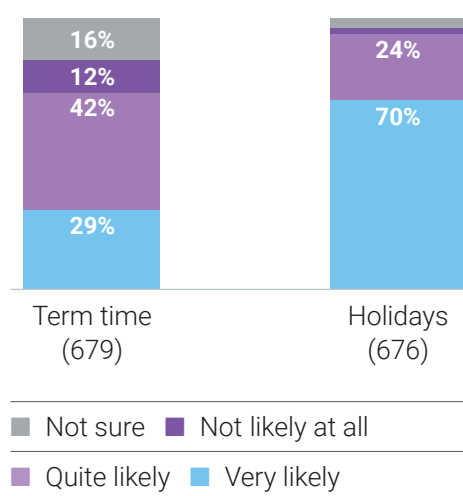


Figure 3: Likelihood of taking up work at university by time period

### Higher relative cost changes university choices, but not attendance

In addition to the negative impacts of financial stress more broadly, educational opportunities and aspirations of WP students are likely to be adversely affected by changes in the cost of higher education relative to their (reduced) available income. This effect may be strongest for the 30 per cent of survey participants stating that they worked to save money for university. However, even students relying on family income for support might suffer economic or emotional distress by losing family support, or having to support their family with their income. Fortunately, there is little data to suggest that this will deter students from applying to higher education altogether. UCAS data for the 2020 admission cycle shows that students “from virtually all demographic groups entered HE in line with historic trends.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly, looking at the application trends for 2021, the October deadline saw substantive increases in the absolute number of applications from students from areas of high socio-economic deprivation, as measured by IMD quintiles.<sup>10</sup> Instead, the observed economic effects are more likely to influence *where* students go for university, and *how well* they will do once they are there.



## **Staying close to home and living at home are likely responses to relative cost increase**

In our survey, we asked WP students if the cost of university would influence their decision on where to study and where to live while at university. Forty-two percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “because of the cost of university, I’ll probably choose to study near where I live”. About one quarter were neutral on the question, and the remainder (34 per cent) disagreed or strongly disagreed. According to AccessHE, COVID-19 related disruptions will likely increase these figures further, especially for students from low-income households. Asking 1,000 pupils across England, around 30 per cent reported that COVID-19 had made it more likely that they would choose a university close to home. Among students receiving free school meals, this figure was even higher at 42 per cent.<sup>11</sup>

## **Living at home while studying might make it more difficult to thrive at university**

If the pandemic has caused the relative cost of going to university to increase for WP students, it is thus likely that greater numbers will opt to study closer to home and live with family during their studies. Our survey asked students if they would “probably choose to live at home while studying” because of the cost of university. Before the pandemic, in 2018, 42 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, highlighting that for a sizeable proportion of WP students, studying close to home is directly linked to wanting to save money. Again, research by AccessHE suggests that this share will increase further, especially for pupils from low-income households, with 42 per cent reporting that COVID-19 made it more likely that they will live at home while in higher education.<sup>12</sup> This might mean that WP students have fewer university options available to them, and thus fewer options to pursue degrees that suit them and their interests. This possibility is also concerning as being a “commuter student” has been linked to a number of negative outcomes, including lower academic attainment. Research suggests that students living at home have a well below average likelihood of reporting strong gains in learning, while being more likely to regret their choice of institution and course.<sup>13</sup> Research by the Sutton Trust highlights that commuting from home is strongly related to a student’s background; “[over] three times more students in the lowest social class group commute from home than do so from the highest group (44.9 per cent compared with 13.1 per cent).”<sup>14</sup> Although differential drop-out rates between socio-economic groups persist even when living at home is controlled for, being a commuter student is likely to have a negative impact on students above and beyond their socio-economic circumstances.<sup>15</sup> If greater numbers of young people chose to live at home while studying next academic year, additional barriers faced by WP students may negatively impact on their sense of belonging, ability to build social networks and make the most of extra-curricular activities which may prevent them from feeling a sense of belonging at university, building social networks, and making the most of extra-curricular opportunities.<sup>16</sup> Even in the current academic year, with some campus facilities unavailable, WP students may find it challenging to fully engage with teaching and learning due to lacking a quiet study space, appropriate technology or a reliable internet connection.





## 1.2 LOSS OF EXPERIENCE

In addition to the direct and indirect effects of financial stress and the higher relative cost of university, some WP students are likely to also miss out on career building information. In our survey it became clear how much students relied on paid part-time employment to inform their future career plans; 56 percent of year 12 respondents stated that they had undertaken paid work in order to gain work experience; and 65 per cent said they planned to find a job while at university to gain work experience. Part-time work, even if it is low-skilled or not directly relevant to ones career aspirations, has been shown to be valued by recruiters, suggesting that a loss of part-time work may impact graduate prospects.<sup>17</sup>

Separately, WP students will likely also struggle to access work experience and placements at pre-pandemic levels. Firstly, research indicates that fewer schemes are going to be available in the short to medium term. According to the Sutton Trust, “just over three fifths (61 per cent) of employers surveyed [cancelled] some or all of their placements.” A further 48 per cent of organisations surveyed stated that the number of work experience opportunities available in their business would decrease over the next year.<sup>18</sup> Secondly, disrupted schooling may impact WP students ability to find out about remaining schemes. In our survey, we asked students how they had secured their work experience; through school was by far the most common answer (41 per cent of all year 12 respondents) (fig. 4).

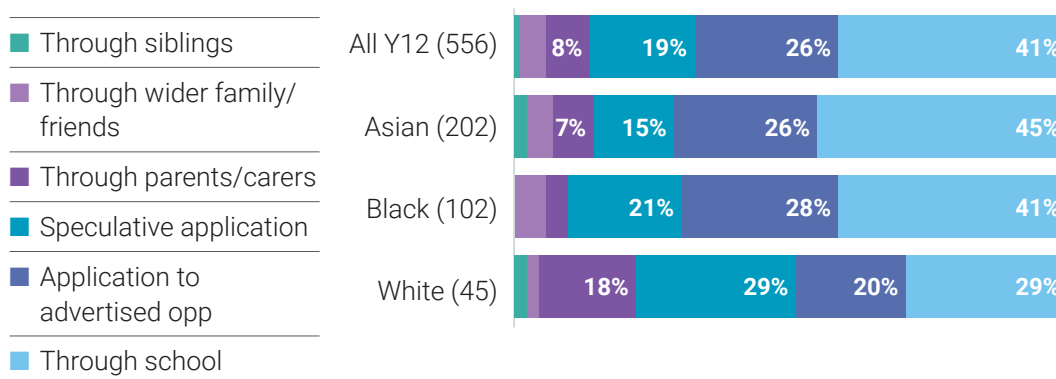


Figure 4: Ways of securing work placements by ethnicity (year 12 students only)

### Work experiences provide significant career IAG that may now be lost

A common theme in our focus groups was the careers insights that students had gained from pre-university work placements. As one participant put it: “the most valuable thing I got from work experience wasn’t learning anything technical, it was just talking to them because they know things that teachers at my school don’t know”. This sentiment was echoed by other participants, in particular concerning guidance on entering a given profession: “the only way that I’ve really been given any advice on how to get into the financial sector is from the work experience I did, if you’re talking to them. I haven’t really had any advice through any other method.” While work experience placements are no doubt useful for students from all backgrounds, research suggests that for professions such as medicine, law, and journalism, which remain dominated by those from higher socio-economic backgrounds, work experience is a particularly crucial source of career insight and information that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds can draw upon.<sup>19</sup>



## A loss of career IAG may impact higher education choices and confidence

In the focus groups, participants further described how work experience influenced their degree choices. One participant mentioned that this guidance was affirmatory: "I think it was good because it sort of did like affirm the fact that I want to go into Law." Two other participants reported that work experience dissuaded them from studying a subject: "I kind of knew that I didn't want to do a Law degree from that, from that work experience"; "[The internship] was really good because I kind of realised how much I hated accountancy." Importantly, academic interests and career interests do not present a simple one-way relationship, but rather feature as important factors in a more complex decision matrix. This becomes clear in the response of one participant, who detailed that the work experience affirmed his choice to study a subject only indirectly related to their career aspiration in finance:

“ I was speaking to one of the investment bankers there and they were saying that a lot of them actually did Engineering degrees and got into Finance, and I thought that was quite relatable to me, because I'm doing Physics A Level and I'm quite interested in that, but at the same time I'm interested in Economics as well. So I think in terms of like options, like Finance is quite wide because you could get into it through something which has like maybe maths in it or something quite academic. ”

### Our survey responses also suggest a connection between HE and career certainty

This link between career and degree plans is also evident in the survey responses. There was a clear relationship between how certain students say they are about their career ideas, and how certain they are about applying to university. Seventy-one percent of students that indicated they "definitely" know what career they want to pursue after their education also stated that they would "definitely apply to university", compared to 63 per cent of students who "kind of" knew and 57 per cent of students who were "not sure yet" (fig. 5).

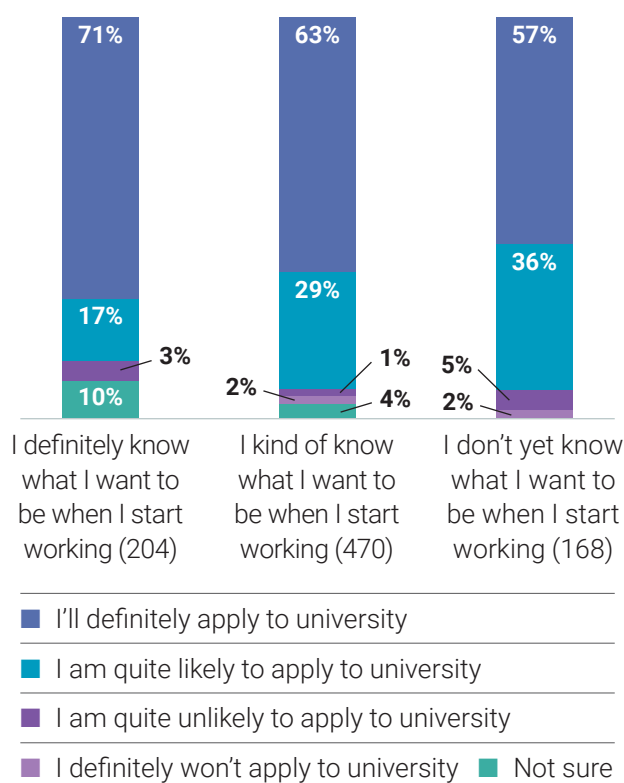


Figure 5: Likelihood of applying to university by career certainty



## Conclusion

These findings suggest that LSE's WP students could be disproportionately disadvantaged by the pandemic as lockdowns restrict access to paid employment and work experience opportunities that previously provided them with crucial income, helped them to develop employability skills and offered insight into possible future careers. Financial worries may curtail the ability of some students to achieve their full academic potential and dissuaded others from pursuing the best university or programme for them because of its distance from home. Once enrolled, WP students may face additional barriers to succeeding at universities they commute to. In losing opportunities to undertake work experience in sectors that interest them, WP students may miss out on a vital source of information and guidance for planning their career pathways and be less confident making choices about which degree subjects to pursue. Ultimately, the COVID-19 crisis could thus have a lasting negative impact on students who were already experiencing worse short term graduate employment outcomes.<sup>20</sup>





## 2 EFFECTS OF THE LOSS OF TEACHING

Another significant result of the COVID-19 related lockdowns is the closure of schools. Despite the best efforts of school and college staff to move teaching online, students faced a significant loss of teaching hours, especially in the first lockdown of 2020 – regardless of educational stage. On average, pupils in the UK were experiencing 42 per cent of normal schooling during the first lockdown. Even by autumn 2020, teaching had not returned to normal, although it increased to 85 per cent of normal schooling time.<sup>21</sup> Like many inequalities brought to the surface by the pandemic, however, this loss of teaching time has not been evenly distributed across society. Seventy-four per cent of private school pupils were still experiencing full school days during the first lockdown compared to just 39 per cent of state school pupils. This fall in teaching hours has been intensified by a lack of access to devices to enable remote learning, like laptops and tablets, for students attending poorer schools. In a survey by the Sutton Trust, 32 per cent of teachers in the most deprived schools reported more than 1 in 5 pupils lacked such devices, compared to just 5 per cent of teachers at the most affluent schools.<sup>22</sup>

### **The pandemic will likely lead to a difference in attainment; however, there is limited data available so far**

A likely consequence of this difference in learning time will be a difference in educational attainment between students from poorer and wealthier backgrounds. This effect is likely to be compounded further by the ability of more affluent families to supplement school hours with private tutoring. Already, Major et al. found that parents from the top 20 per cent earnings quintile pay for private tutoring at more than four times the rate of those in the bottom 20 per cent earnings quintile (16 per cent versus 4 per cent).<sup>23</sup> Similarly, 55 per cent of teachers at the least affluent state schools report “lower than normal” standards of work, compared to 41 per cent of teachers in the most affluent state schools, and 30 per cent at private schools.<sup>24</sup> However, without conclusive data on the qualitative dimension of educational changes or exam results, the exact nature of this impact is as of yet unclear. Instead, the following two sections will sketch likely, but more subtle, effects of the differential learning provisions: that students from underrepresented backgrounds will miss out on information, advice, and guidance (IAG) about entering higher education, and will miss out on IAG for making career choices.





## 2.1 LOSS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INFORMATION, ADVICE, AND GUIDANCE

In our survey, we asked young people a series of questions aimed at understanding how they received and evaluated information about higher education. This included questions around who initiated conversations about university, whose advice they considered trustworthy, and who they considered knowledgeable (fig. 6). Notably, parents/carers were felt to initiate conversations most frequently (mentioned by 80 per cent of respondents) and were considered to have good knowledge of how university choices would affect one's future career. However, subject teachers were by far the most trusted source, with 73 per cent of respondents indicating that they would trust their subject teacher's advice about university, compared to only 38 per cent for parents/carers. Subject teachers, together with other school staff, were also the named as the most common source of help with planning or completing university applications.

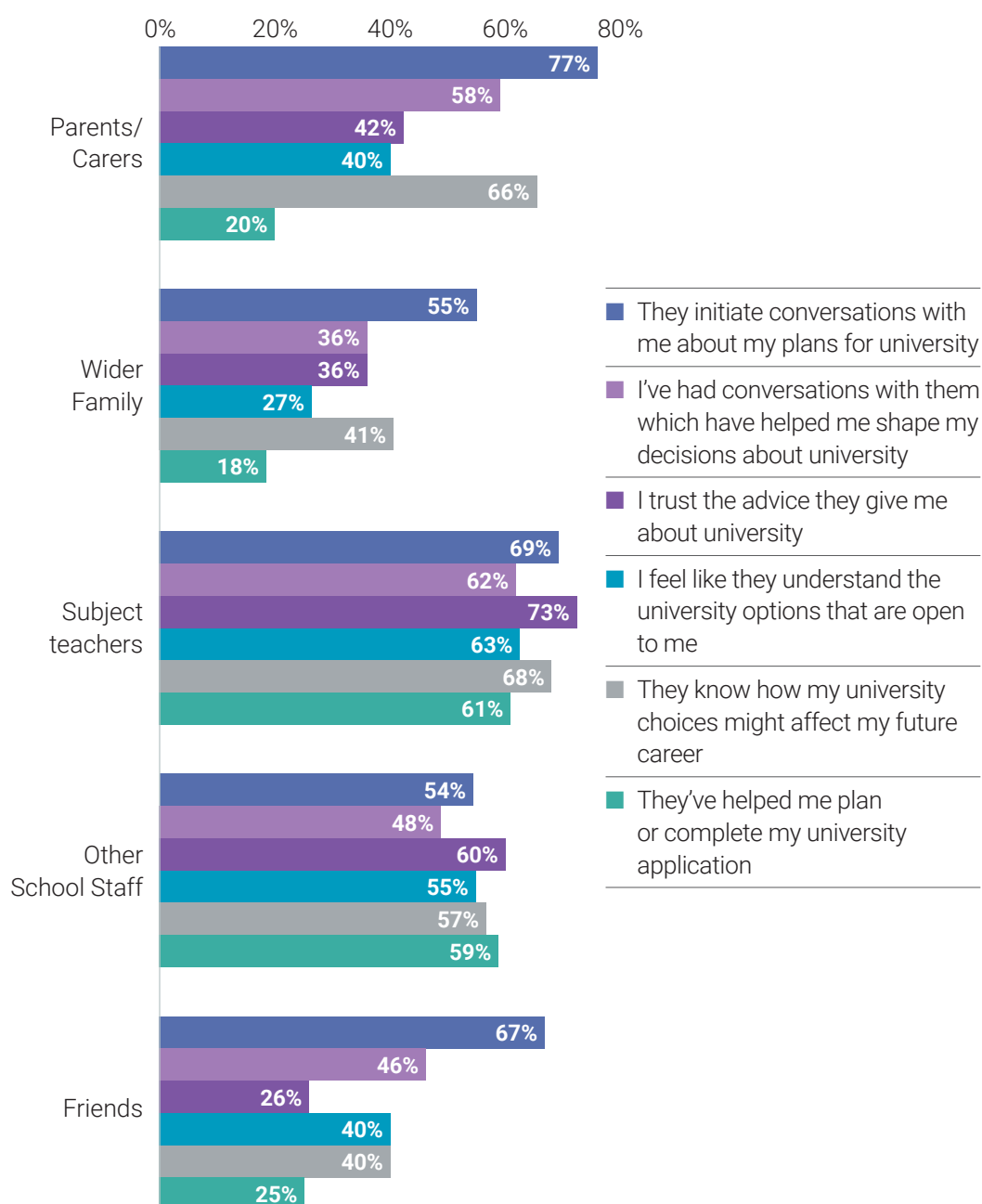


Figure 6: Attitudes towards HE information and support from different sources



## First generation students stand to be particularly affected by this loss of HE IAG

An underlying pattern becomes visible when comparing the answers of students whose parents/carers attended higher education with those whose parents/carers have not. Students from first generation households are less likely to indicate that their parents/carers were a trusted source of information or support, compared to students with at least one parent/carer who attended higher education. This difference is particularly marked for help with university applications, where students from first generation households were half as likely to report having received help: 16 per cent, compared to 32 per cent of students with at least one parent/carer who attended university (fig. 7). Instead, first generation students were most likely to have considered subject teachers a reliable source of information: 65 per cent of first-generation students reported trusting their teachers' advice, while only 49 per cent of students with parents/carers who had attended higher education did.

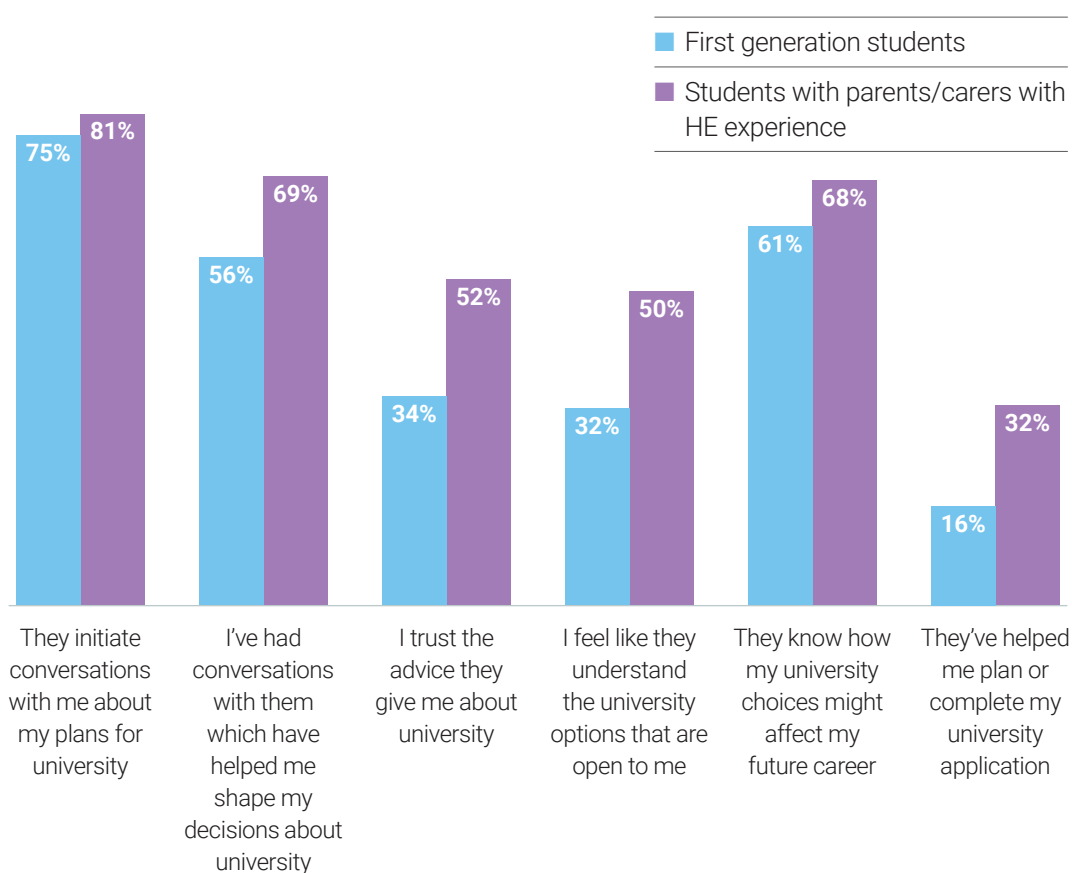


Figure 7: Attitude towards parent's/carer's HE IAG by parental education

## Conclusion

These results suggests that if the loss of teaching time experienced during the pandemic translates into a loss of contact with subject teachers and school staff, the pupils LSE works with as part of its WP work are likely to miss out on information, advice, and guidance for their higher education journeys, including direct help in submitting applications. This loss will be particularly strong for those students who would be the first in their family to attend university. Indeed, research by the Sutton Trust appears to confirm this; in a recent survey they found that 35 per cent of students were overall not satisfied with the university application support they were receiving from their school during lockdown.<sup>25</sup>



## 2.2 LOSS OF CAREER INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

Closely related to the hypothesised impact on educational choices, our survey suggests that WP students will experience a loss of information, advice, and guidance related to career choices, as contact hours with school staff reduce. Mirroring the questions around sources of information and influences for higher education choices, the careers question asked participants who initiated conversations about career plans with them, who they thought were reliable sources of information, and who's advice they trusted. The results resembled those for higher education. Although parents/carers most often initiated conversations around career plans (80 per cent of responses), it was subject teachers and other staff that were most commonly trusted with the advice they gave (59 per cent and 52 per cent of responses) (fig. 8). Furthermore, it was other school staff such as career advisers that were most likely to be considered able to help with making connections or organising work experience (59 per cent) and most frequently considered knowledgeable about the job market and its options (55 per cent).

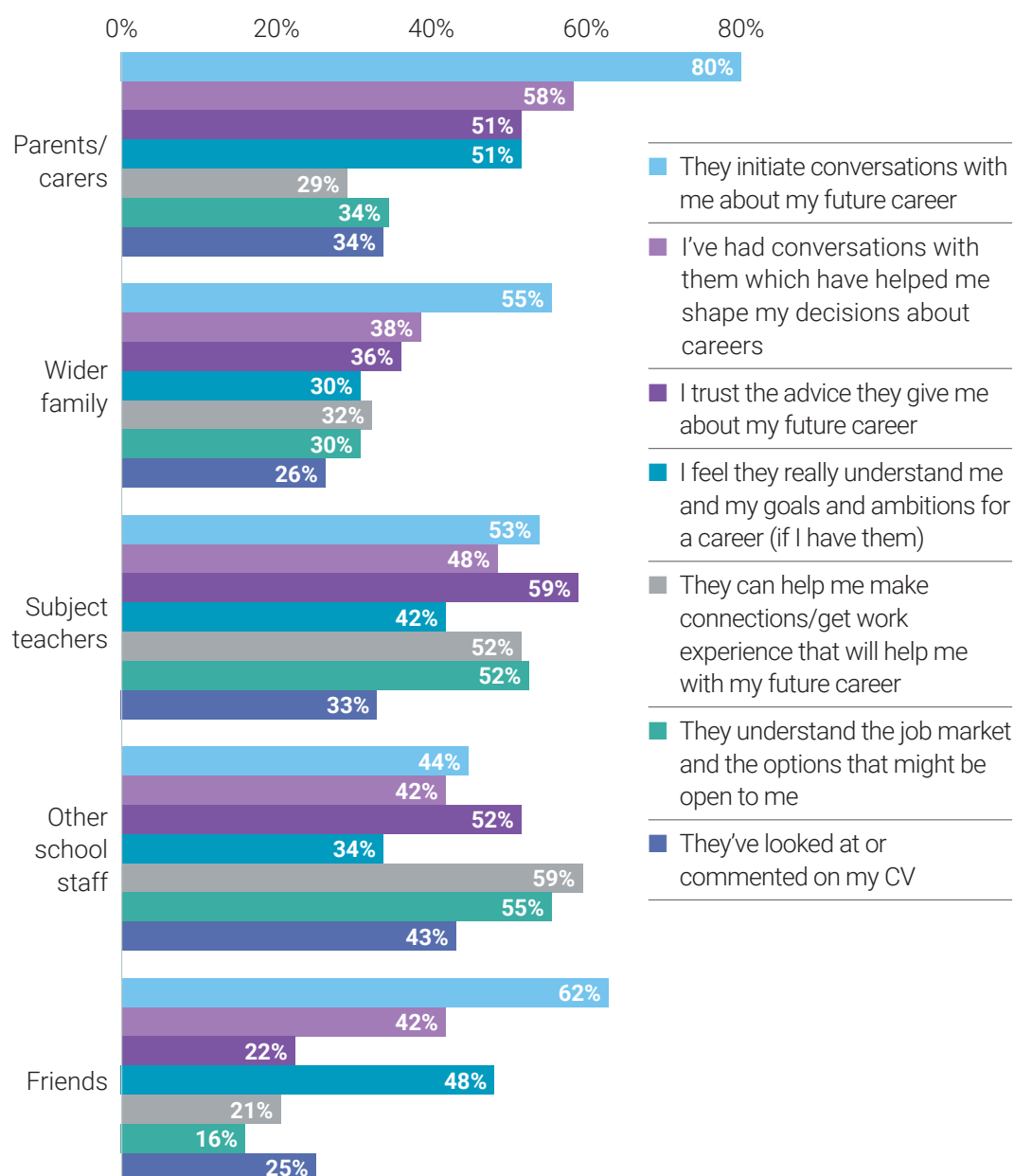


Figure 8: Attitudes towards careers information and support from different sources



## Again, first generation students stand to be particularly affected by a loss of careers IAG

As with our question about higher education IAG, there were notable differences in the reported sources of support accessed by first generation students and those with parental experience of higher education. In addition to a gap in practical help with applications from parents/carers (29 per cent vs. 50 per cent), first generation students were also almost half as likely to think their parents/carers could help them make connections or get work experience (23 per cent vs. 41 per cent for students with parents with higher education). First generation students were also much less likely to trust the advice that their parents/carers gave in this area compared to advice from their teachers (fig. 9). With access to school staff limited, this suggests a worrying picture for the career advice available to first generation students.

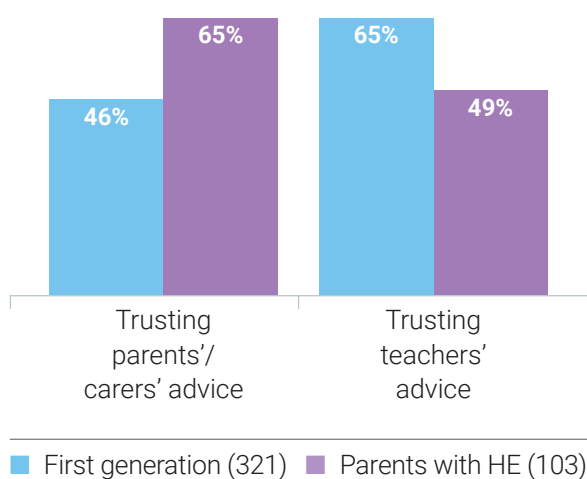


Figure 9: Share of students saying they trust the HE advice they receive by source and parents'/carers' education.

## Conclusion and further implications

Again, if we assume that the loss of teaching hours that has been disproportionately experienced by students from less affluent families translates into a general loss of contact with subject teachers, the WP students that LSE has surveyed will be experiencing a substantial loss of careers guidance. This loss may be particularly severe, as a lack of support and guidance is likely to compound by the lack of available work and work-experience discussed in section 1.2. Notably, this might not just impact a student's ability to think about and plan a career, but further influence how well they are able to engage with careers advice at university. Students' career readiness at the point of entering higher education is already linked to graduate outcomes; those that enter higher education with a commitment to develop their employability are more likely to take up the opportunities available to them, and in turn increase their employment outcomes.<sup>26</sup> This suggests that the careers education missed at school could only partially be made up for once students are at university.





## 3 LSE'S RESPONSE

The students LSE works with as part of its WP programmes are likely to face particular disadvantage due to the COVID-19 pandemic in three main areas: financial hardship, and the related challenges of attending university, participating fully in campus life, worse well-being, and lower attainment; a lack of IAG to help them choose and prepare for a career; and a lack of IAG to support them in making choices about their future education and potential progression into HE. As LSE, we aim to address these challenges and support students in accessing LSE, higher education and highly skilled careers despite the negative impact COVID-19 may have had. Key interventions to help us achieve this will be WP projects working with school students; financial and material support to students enrolling or already studying at LSE; and targeted careers support for current LSE students and recent graduates.

### 3.1 WP INTERVENTIONS

Our WP projects allow us to address some pandemic-related challenges by working with affected students while they are in school/college. Depending on the project and its objectives, we work with students from: specific ethnic groups; low participation neighbourhoods as measured by POLAR; neighbourhoods with high levels of deprivation as measured by IMD; low income households using FSM as a proxy; disabled students; and care experienced students. Thus, our projects work with the student groups most likely to experience the severe negative effects of COVID-19 set out in sections 1 and 2 of this report.

#### **Our WP programmes aim to offset some of the HE IAG loss that is likely to have been caused by COVID-19**

Addressing potential HE IAG losses, our long-term WP programmes – including LSE CHOICE, Pathways to Law, and Pathways to Finance – each include university readiness in their curriculum. Partially, this is built into the programmes, which follow the structure of learning at university, giving participants an idea of what university life, academically and socially, is like. These projects further include content around university and course choice, giving participants an overview over the options available to them, and introducing them to key concepts of study in HE. More recently we have also included personal statement support sessions in these projects to help participating students make competitive applications. Lastly, our projects include information on the support available at many institutions, from bursary schemes to academic development to mental health support, highlighting that universities can form a part of their support network. Even though COVID-19 has forced us to conduct these projects online, our evidence suggests that we were still successful in improving participants university readiness across a range of measures. For example, in a post-project survey of our LSE CHOICE project participants, we found that 91 per cent of participants were confident in their ability make the right choice about their future, up from 75 per cent in the project pre-project survey. In the same survey, 66 per cent of students stated that the LSE CHOICE project had made them more likely to attend university, in addition to the 32 per cent that indicated they had already been certain. Similarly, in a survey of Pathways to Banking and Finance participants, 83 per cent stated that they were confident in their ability to choose a university that is right for them. Thus, for the students we work with, we can at least partially counteract the loss of HE IAG they were disproportionately likely to experience due to school closures.



## **Our WP programmes work to address the career IAG loss that is likely to have been caused by COVID-19**

The careers sessions built into all of our long-term programmes go some way to compensate for the potential losses due to school closures. Given LSE's status as a purely social science institution, a central objective of these sessions is to show the breadth of careers open to students with a social science degree, and outline what journeys into these fields might look like. The Pathways to Law and Pathways to Banking and Finance programmes, run in collaboration with the Sutton Trust, take this approach further by providing participants with work experience opportunities and placements in the respective professions. These projects can thus also compensate for the potential loss of practical work experience, outlined in section 1.2. Even though COVID-19 has equally caused disruption to these programmes, they continue to operate and provide careers IAG: a virtual "insights weeks" for each Pathways to Law and Pathways to Banking and Finance is providing IAG sessions and employer meetings; the work placement scheme also continues, although the placements may be virtual.

## **Our WP programmes, in combination with contextual admissions, try to address the lower attainment of WP students that is likely to have been caused by COVID-19**

Lastly, our pre-16 work with two partner schools aims to raise student attainment. Our year 10 and year 11 mathematics tutoring programme works intensively with 40 pupils, the majority of whom are eligible for FSM, to help them achieve their full potential and raise their attainment in GCSE mathematics. The project is offered in conjunction with the education charity Team Up who contribute their expertise to the design and conduct of the programme, as well as training LSE students to deliver the sessions. This work can thus address the indirect consequences of a potential loss of income, discussed in section 1.1: that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely than their more affluent peers to experience financial stress, study in unsuitable learning environments, or miss out on receiving private tutoring, and subsequently, that these students are less likely to achieve their full potential at school.

This understanding is also underpinning our contextual admissions policy, which uses a range of contextual information to gain a more complete picture of the education and individual context of an applicant. Admissions selectors are able to make offers to applicants whose academic record or personal statement are marginally less competitive in recognition of their personal circumstance, or make contextual offers that allow applicants to meet grades criteria lowered by a single grade. All departments use contextual information in their admissions process, while for the 2021 entry, 14 out of the 18 LSE departments that offer undergraduate courses are also making contextual offers. With these interventions, we try to compensate for potential learning losses at a school level by directly supporting student attainment, and at the admissions stage, acknowledge that lower attainment is not necessarily representative of a student's academic ability or potential.



### **We know that our WP programmes are limited in scope, and collaborate with the Sutton Trust to provide careers and HE IAG to a broader audience online**

Despite the positive impact of our interventions, we are aware that our projects cannot address the discussed challenges on a scale proportionate to the number of students impacted. And with an undergraduate intake of only around 850 domestic students per year, the scope of students we can support at LSE is equally limited. Thus, we are grateful to be working with the Sutton Trust, an education charity that we have a long-standing partnership with, on its Sutton Trust Online Platform. The Sutton Trust Online platform will be accessible to over 6,000 students who had applied to programmes run by universities and the Sutton Trust across the country, and either were admitted, or who met the eligibility criteria but were not successful in securing a place due to capacity. Content for the platform will be provided by all universities partnered with the Sutton Trust. We are now working to contribute a number of materials, including live chats with LSE student ambassadors as well as LSE specific IAG resources. With this, we want to support to the efforts of the Sutton Trust and other partner universities, to provide careers IAG and HE IAG on a scale that will allow a substantial number of students to make informed decisions about their next steps in education.

## **3.2 FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

As section 1.1. of this report outlined, COVID-19's likely impact on WP students is in large parts due to reductions in available income. The financial support LSE offers is thus essential to counteracting the resulting barriers, helping students to pay for the cost of study, living, and the digital equipment necessary for successful learning.

### **LSE's Scholarships and Bursaries can counteract some of the financial hardship that WP students are disproportionately likely to experience**

LSE's pre-enrolment financial support for WP students incorporates two types of funding: scholarships and bursaries. Scholarships are funded by private or corporate donations and provide a limited number of students a substantive amount of funding. In 2020/21, scholarship amounts range between £8,333 and £20,060, depending on the scholarship in question. As all scholarships are awarded on the basis of financial need first, they help to address the financial challenges COVID-19 is likely to have caused for a limited number of WP students.



LSE's bursaries target a broader range of students. They guarantee non-repayable financial support to all UK students with a household income below a threshold, in 2020/21, £42,875. This funding was provided to around 290 Home UG students in 2019/20, although there is no limit to the number of bursaries given out. For this year, bursary amounts ranged between £500 and £4,000, the exact amount fully determined by household income. In cases where the fixed amount is insufficient, however, LSE's discretionary bursary can "top up" an existing bursary to up to £4,000. This discretionary bursary can also be awarded to a student that would ordinarily be above the household income threshold, but is facing exceptional financial need. Given the maximum bursary amount of £4,000, this funding is unlikely to cover a given student's full cost of study. However, it can offset partial income losses students may have experienced due to COVID-19, and help to reduce the burden of the higher cost of living in London. Thus, this funding can allow students to access LSE, and reduce their financial stress once enrolled.

In addition, the LSE Accommodation Bursary supports students living in halls of residence with bursaries between £750 and £2,500 paid towards accommodation fees. This support helps students to live in accommodation and increase the likelihood of students choosing to live in accommodation in the first place. Subsequently, the funding can reduce the chances that COVID-19 forces WP students to live at home, and thus reduce the likelihood that WP students face the adverse educational outcomes that might be linked to being a "commuter student".

### **LSE's In-Course Financial Support fund can support students with the cost of digital learning and unexpected hardship**

Section 1.1. of this report highlighted the barriers caused by inadequate learning equipment. In response to a move to online learning and teaching, LSE launched a Digital Support Fund specifically aimed at ensuring that lack of appropriate technology would not present a barrier to students' success. The fund provides up to £500 for equipment such as laptops, additional monitors or covering some of the costs of internet access. More generally, the In-Course Financial Support fund can award bursaries of up to £3,500 to compensate for unexpected financial difficulties, specifically including those caused by COVID-19. Thus, this funding addresses the immediate consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for students currently at LSE.

## **3.3 STUDENT SUPPORT AT LSE**

The focus of this report was to outline the effects of COVID-19 on school students and their transition to higher education. However, some of these challenges will continue to be felt by students during their time of study, especially the lack of careers IAG. Our efforts to counteract these in turn fall within the remit of LSE's careers service.

### **LSE's Careers Service Registration allows us to understand the needs of WP students and target interventions accordingly**

As discussed in section 2.1., WP students are likely to lose and have lost a substantial amount of career's IAG due to school closures. This is concerning, as there is evidence to suggest that students who enter university with little career knowledge are also less likely to engage with careers support offers during their study. Counteracting this, LSE's Careers Service has made the careers registration questionnaire mandatory for students enrolling from 2021 onwards. As such, students are strongly encouraged to disclose if, and to what extent, they have taken steps to plan their careers. This will allow us to better understand



the career-readiness of WP students, and track their career planning through their time at LSE. Using these insights, the LSE Careers Service can then actively engage with students and provide the relevant support. These interventions will exist against the wider background of targeted careers initiatives already in place. For example, LSE's Careers Service is hosting networking and recruiting events for Black and minority ethnic groups, and the "Access to employment" event, aimed at bringing together disabled students from LSE and Imperial College London with graduate recruiters. With these projects, the Career's Service is vital in addressing gaps in career readiness that may have been caused by COVID-19 and related school closures, which may continue to prohibit WP students from successfully moving from university into a career.

### **LSE's careers service, the Volunteering Centre, and LSE itself can support WP students in getting work experience and even provide them directly**

The related issue that WP students are disproportionately likely to have missed out on work experience and internships can be partly addressed by LSE's internship support programmes, offered by the Careers Service. The Internship Fund Scheme is available to first- and second-year students in the international relations and the social policy department. The scheme supports a limited number of students to undertake summer internships within UK based charities and small to medium sized enterprises, providing students with the funding they need to undertake this work. Similarly, the Micro Internship Programme provides undergraduate students with graduate level work experience. This scheme allows participants to undertake 2-5 days of work shadowing or a 140-hour internship, fully funded by LSE, and as such can help to make up for a lack of pre-enrolment work experience opportunities.

Relatedly, LSE is supporting students in finding volunteering opportunities that can similarly function as work experience and provide relevant careers IAG. Key to this work is the Volunteer Centre at LSE which aims to connect students with volunteering opportunities. For example, the "one off volunteering programme" which allows students to sign-up for a single volunteering activity might be particularly relevant to providing careers IAG to WP students affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. By organising volunteering projects for a single day, the programme allows students to gain work experience without the long-term commitments that might otherwise act as barriers to entry. These brief projects are also more likely to fit around schedules involving for example part-time work.

LSE itself provides multiple paid work opportunities to students to gain experience and develop key employability and research skills, relevant for further study or moving into the labour market. For example, the WP team regularly employs students to support the delivery of its outreach work, in the form of student ambassadors, course assistants, mentors or tutors. In these roles, we recognise the experience of our WP project "alumni" and other students from under-represented backgrounds, as they have an excellent understanding of the nature of our projects and can address the questions of participants based on their own experiences. These student staff roles currently play a vital role in the delivery of our projects and the WP Team plans to provide further work opportunities in the planning, design and evaluation phase of future programmes. Through another initiative called the "Change Maker" programme, which is a collaboration between LSE and the LSE Students' Union, current students receive funding for investigating a particular aspect of LSE, based on their own research proposal. This provides students with the agency and support to develop their research skills in an area which they are passionate about.



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