Student engagement: power and vulnerability of the UK Engagement Survey data

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UK Engagement Survey (UKES)

- HE Sector is shifting focus from 'satisfaction' to 'engagement'

    'Enhancing student engagement has moved on from the cottage-industry stage to become a high stakes, [sector-wide] imperative' (Krause & Armitage, 2014).

- UKES introduced by the HEA in 2013 as an instrument to measure and benchmark 'student involvement in educationally purposeful activities'.
- The role of the survey is becoming more prominent in recent HE policy developments.

UKES at LJMU

- **2014 - first institutional pilot of the survey** (one of 32 institutions)
- **Mandatory scales:** *High Order Learning skills, Course Challenge, Collaborative Learning and Academic Integration*
- **Optional scale:** *Time Spent*
- 24 programmes from 3 Faculties took part
- Response rate - 15%

UK Engagement Survey

1st AND 2nd YEARS
SHARE YOUR STUDENT EXPERIENCE

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UKES pilot: insights

Majority of results were in line with the national figures

Strong areas: usefulness of feedback, interaction with staff, career advice

Course challenge: *'To what extent has your course challenged you to do your best work?'* (responses varied by programme, 13% didn't respond)

Collaborative Learning: *'Asked another student to help you understand course material'* (Post-1992 institutions seem to have a positive contribution towards Collaborative Learning and Academic Integration (Bokhove and Muijs 2016), but LJMU scores were relatively low)

Academic integration: *'Contributed to course discussions'* (49% -LJMU, Post92- 61%)

Time Spent: *'Participating in extra-curricular or co-curricular activities'* (60% of LJMU students don't take part, Sector – only 37%)

2015 - all non final year students invited to take part (*response rate - 17%*)

Findings from the 2015 institutional data
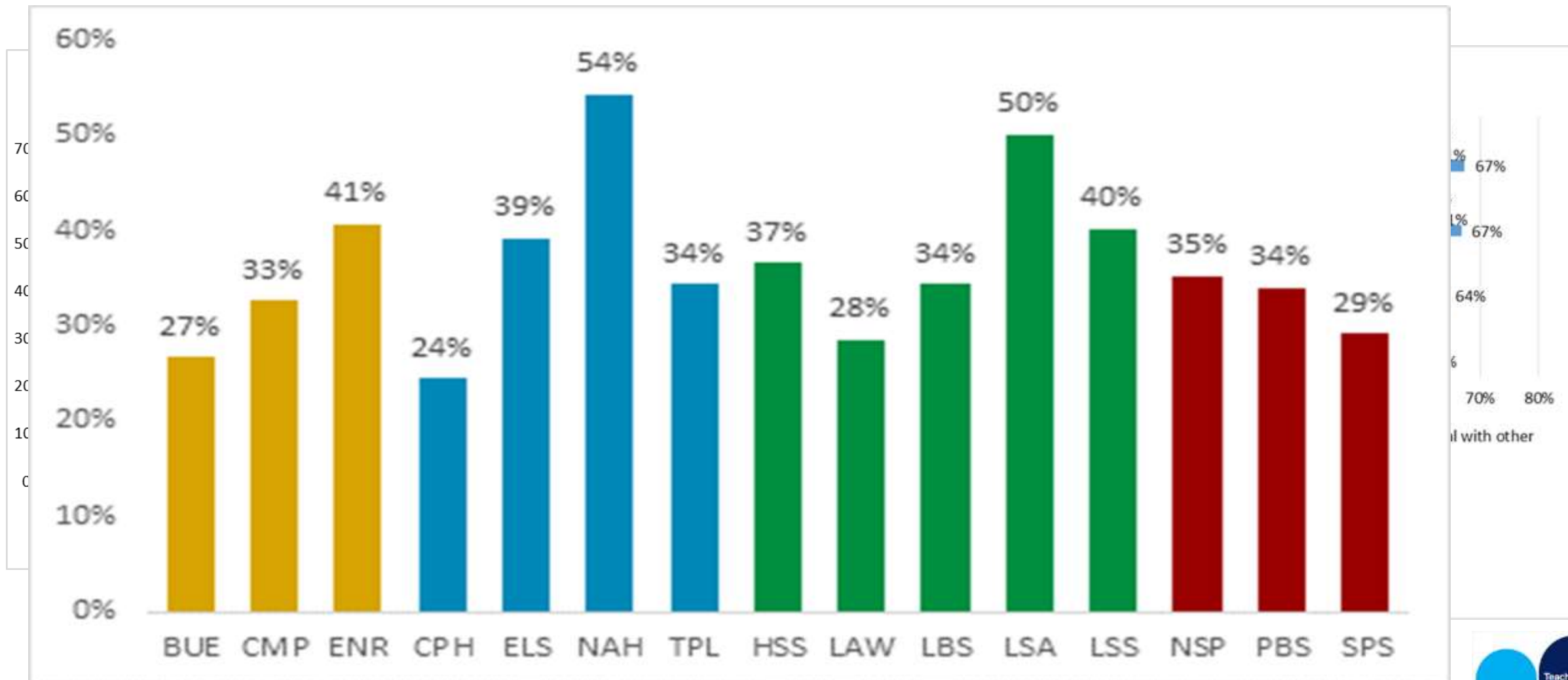
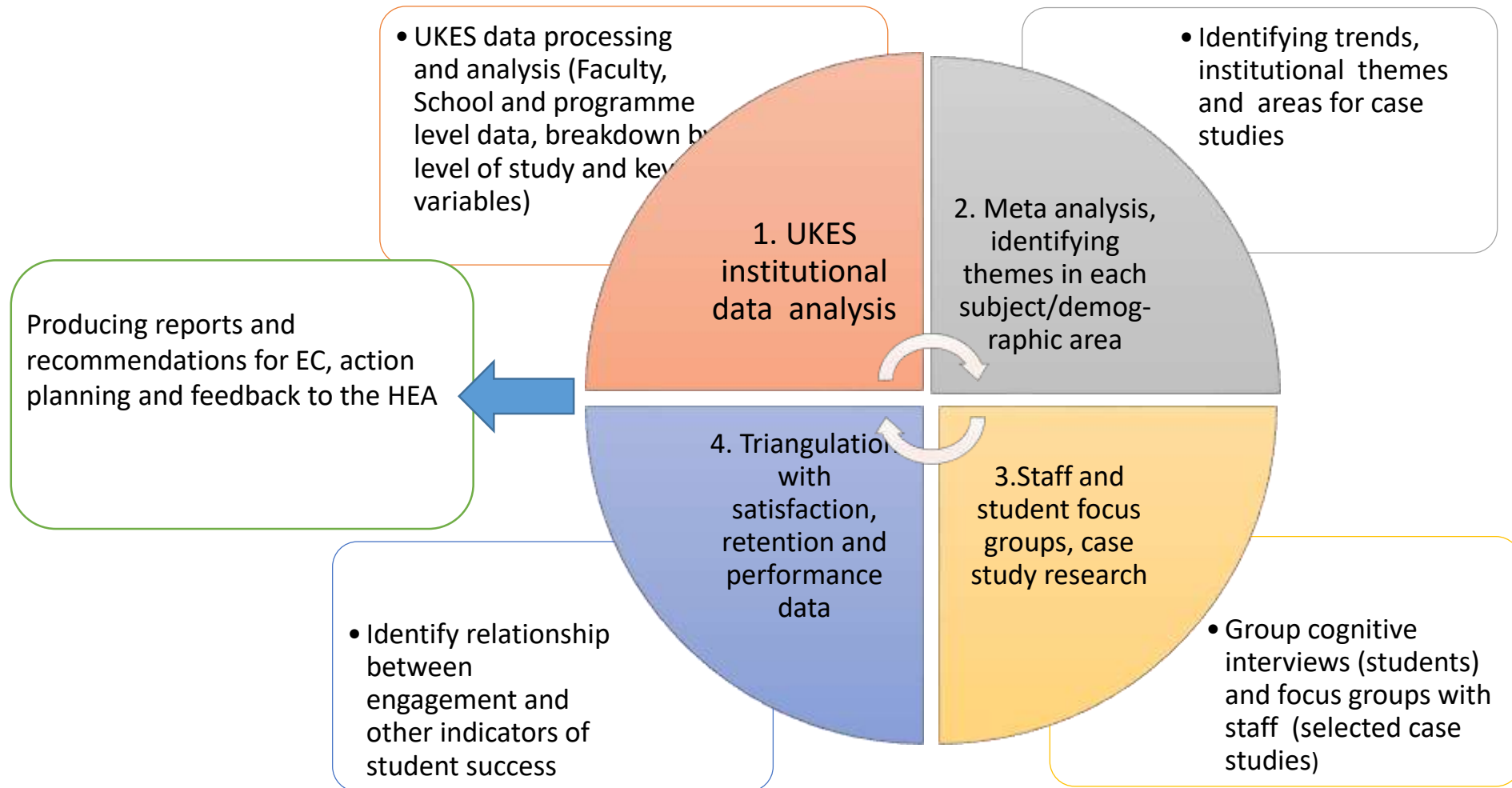# Harnessing Effective Engagement with Engagement Data [HEEED] Project

Strategic Excellence (VC) initiative funded by the HEA

Exploring:

- Utility of UKES data for curriculum enhancement
- Relationships between UKES results and student outcomes including performance, retention and satisfaction
- Relationships between survey scales and/or items [conditional independence analysis]
- Unpick the meaning of engagement scores [case study focus groups]
- How can we embed UKES outcomes within institutional QE processes?

HEEED research cycle

- UKES data processing and analysis (Faculty, School and programme level data, breakdown by level of study and key variables)

- Identifying trends, institutional themes and areas for case studies

Producing reports and recommendations for EC, action planning and feedback to the HEA

1. UKES institutional data analysis

2. Meta analysis, identifying themes in each subject/demographic area

4. Triangulation with satisfaction, retention and performance data

3. Staff and student focus groups, case study research

- Identify relationship between engagement and other indicators of student success

- Group cognitive interviews (students) and focus groups with staff (selected case studies)

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HEEED research

137 programmes surveyed in total; 23 programmes included in research; 3 case studies

Programme	r/r	Programme	r/r
Sport Exercise Science	10	Policing Studies	41
Business Studies	11	Media Production	41
Law	**20**	Maths and Education	42
Biomedical Science	23	Human Resource	43
Primary Education	23	**Geography**	**50**
Computer Forensics	33	Policing Studies	51
Management, Transport	33	Computer Animation	53
History of Art	34	Sport Development	58
Midwifery (SHA)	34	Mechanical Engineering	59
Environmental Health	38	**Mathematics**	**66**
History	38	Paramedic Practice	73
Architecture	40		

■ Year 1   ■ Year 2
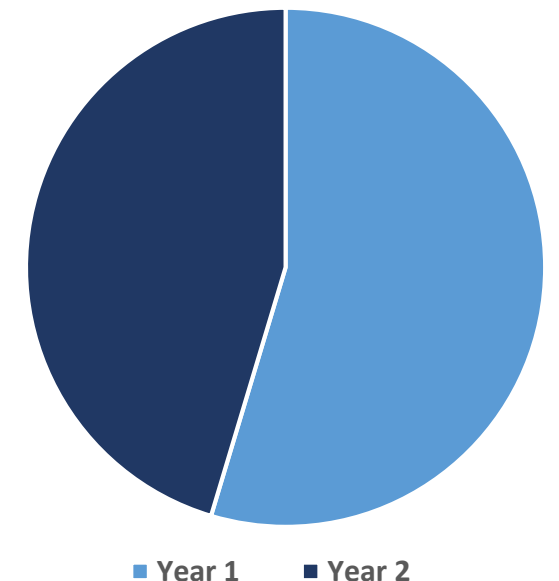
UKES results: relationships with other indicators of students success (programme level)

Student outcome	Correlation with UKES scores	Detail
Withdrawal	Strong negative	Overall programme engagement score
Cohort size	Moderate negative	Interacting with staff, staff-student partnership, study time
Good honours	Strong positive	Higher order skills
NSS satisfaction	Weak positive, not significant	
Individual student performance (level mean mark)	Correlation: **course challenge** (*taking responsibility for your own learning*) correlated strongly with academic performance (significant)	Multiple regression: **course challenge** – the strongest contributor; **interacting with staff** is second unique contributor to individual academic performance

Qualitative research: focus group discussions

Each programme: high r/r and distinctive strengths and weaknesses demonstrated by UKES scores

Law

- Strong areas: Critical thinking and Reflecting and connecting
- Weaker areas: Learning with others and Interaction with staff

Geography

- Strong areas: Critical thinking, Learning with others and Staff-student partnerships
- Weaker areas: Classroom activity, Study time (combined)

Mathematics

- Strong areas: Critical thinking, Reflecting and connecting, Interaction with Staff
- Weaker areas: Learning with others and Study time

Law case study: Institutional policy- collusion or collaboration?

- **Staff :** *The structure of academic framework [in year 2 and 3] doesn't really give space for a number of these group things to go on.*

- **Student:** *We go the library. Me and my group get a study group together. We get book but we never get the same books. So I can walk in with a big pile of book and be like 'That's yours, that's yours...'. We never get the same book because if they see anything the same, they say 'You worked together'. 'You colluded'.*

Geography case study: Student cohort dynamic

- **Staff :** *You see groups of students that goad each other on and to cooperate. The group collectively do well. I think there very different things because they use each other as sounding boards. So can be very helpful.*

- **Student:** *Leading the group… If there's someone who is prepared to put their hand up, then others copy or join in. But someone has to be brave to start off with. But if you don't have somebody brave then basically they all sit there waiting for Jones next door to do something.*

Mathematics case study: Programme team cohesion and philosophy, subject relevance

- **Staff :** *... we know from the NSS that we're second in the North West for our student's satisfaction. Our group sizes are manageable - 50 or 60 students. As a team we pride ourselves on how we interactive with the students. What help we give them..., it's an open door policy. We have great personal tutoring...That's why you got such a good response rate from them.*

- **Student:** *No, there no one ... unapproachable. Some people are just more personal like asking how you're doing and then other people are like 'Is there something I can help you with?*

- **Staff:** *In terms of a Maths context, I don't get [this question]. Examining the strengths and weakness of your own views on a topic or issue ...That question is being designed by someone who has the social sciences in mind.*

UKES questions interpretation

Staff: *What is 'best work'? Is that the best assessment mark or what they got the most out of or the most enjoyment? Or the most effort?*

Time spent is important scale. But how they interpret what's a taught session?

Student: *[The survey] is quite long winded... Some of the questions seem pretty similar. Like in the phrasing... You basically give the same answer...*

Taught sessions are ... how many I attended?

Student: *Strengths and weakness of your own views on a topic or issue' wasn't relevant to our course.. We had warnings from staff against using first person tense in essays. Need re-wording of this question to focus on the quality of student analytical expression rather than opinion...*

HEEED Project outcomes

- Strong links between engagement data with other indicators of student experience and success (Learning Gain)

- Unique view of student experience - generated good programme team discussions and opportunity to reflect

- Staff and students were positive about of UKES's ability to influence good practice with limited concerns about length and metrics involved.

Data complexity

- Some questions need prompts/further clarification for students

- Academics questioned relevance to their subject areas and how students understand UKES questions

- Qualitative data limited (further dialogue with students is needed)

- Timing of the survey might influence results

HEEED Project outcomes

General challenges

- Survey reliability (low r/r, how informative are national benchmarks?)

- Finding a firm place in the institutional QE/QA processes

- UKES data as an additional evidence in TEF

Only a small percentage of variance in all three of the surveys (UKES, PTES and PRES) can be explained at both discipline and institutional level'. … It seems pertinent to not aim for a university-wide approach for student experience and student engagement. Rather, individual factors could be addressed by every institution individually (Bokhove and Muijs, 2016)

UKES in LJMU Quality Enhancement

- Student-Staff Forums (subject level) – advisory capacity

- UKES data goes on the web-hub (Business Intelligence portal)

- Boards of Study (programme level) – near future

- Student experience plans (Faculty level)

- Strategic Pro VC (Ed) support as 'culture change' takes time

References

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