



Measuring educational gain: Bath Spa University case study

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Introduction

This case study explores the approach Bath Spa University (BSU) will take to identify and measure educational gain. We will identify an institutional approach to educational gain and will develop a framework for measuring this. This will be undertaken within the context of our strategy for Access and Participation and our Education Strategy and we will therefore integrate this with our approach to the Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR).

Context

A 2015 report by Rand Europe for HEFCE defined learning gain as 'the difference between the skills, competencies, content knowledge and personal development demonstrated by students at two points in time'.¹ In her report on the OfS Learning Gain Pilot Projects, Camille Kandiko Howson defines this as 'the change in knowledge, skills, work-readiness and personal development, as well as enhancement of specific practices and outcomes in defined disciplinary and institutional contexts'.²

TEF requires providers to report on measures used to capture educational gain. This is identified within BSU's 2023 TEF submission with relation to cohort tracking of student performance and to soft skills which we define as 'resourcefulness, creativity, resilience and confidence'. We adopted a set of graduate attributes in 2015 and are currently reviewing these along with a set of generic programme learning outcomes that relate to transferable skills. We are also reviewing our suite of open modules which are available to all students across Levels 5 and 6 with the intention of refreshing and expanding these.

We have recently launched a brand review, which involves conducting a series of brand workshops involving an external agency and internal and external stakeholders, including students and staff. The purpose of the brand review is to identify and articulate our institutional identity, and to consider how better to integrate this within the way we promote the institution to students, parents, the wider HE sector, the community and employers. The

¹ McGrath, C.H., Guerin, B., Harte, E., Frearson, M. and Manville, C., 2015. Learning gain in higher education. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. Available from: www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/11b42adc-534c-481e-91e9-aa87fbddff62/learning-gain-rand-report.pdf

² Kandiko Howson, Camille B. 2019. *Final Evaluation of the Office for Students Learning Gain Pilot Projects*. p.18. Available from: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/20ffe802-9482-4f55-b5a0-6c18ee4e01b1/learning-gain-project-final-evaluation.pdf>

brand review provides a context for considering educational gain within the distinctive parameters of BSU's institutional culture and networks.

Project description

The CEP provides an opportunity to define our approach to educational gain and to connect it to our Education Strategy through activities related to enhancing access and participation, skills and employability. BSU will draw on measures for professional gain, employability data and skills reflection, where possible using the same data sources that relate to TEF and for Access and Participation.³ We will adopt the multiple measures recommended by Kandiko Howson (i.e. 'cognitive measures, affective measures of soft skills development and behavioural measures of employability and career readiness').⁴ We will therefore run qualitative surveys for students at enrolment and graduation on their perceptions of confidence, self-efficacy and work-readiness, as well as integrating skills reflection within the curriculum and linked module evaluations. We will then follow up with a further survey approximately twelve months after graduation (i.e. prior to the Graduate Outcomes Survey). We will cross reference the survey outcomes with data relating to each stage of the student life cycle, i.e. access, continuation, completion, attainment and progression. We will investigate the association between educational gain and the acquisition of graduate attributes through engagement with open modules and extra-curricular activities. We will explore the relationship between educational gain and the identification, recognition and acquisition of transferable skills. This work also connects with projects to define level descriptors, to refresh the prescribed set of programme learning outcomes related to transferable skills, and to introduce a curriculum design framework in the form of Education Design Principles aligned to the Education Strategy.

Key challenges

1. The longitudinal nature of data collection will mean that we will be able to access the first full set of results after a minimum of six years. However, regular skills reflections (aligned to module evaluations), will give us more immediate data for interim work.
2. It will be necessary to anonymise data and to comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018.
3. It will be challenging to attribute causation to any single element within the student journey.

Key features ensuring success

1. Multiple measures of educational gain.
2. Robust data collection and analysis.

³ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard>

⁴ Kandiko Howson, Camille B. 2019. *Final Evaluation of the Office for Students Learning Gain Pilot Projects*. p.21. Available from: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/20ffe802-9482-4f55-b5a0-6c18ee4e01b1/learning-gain-project-final-evaluation.pdf>

3. Ensuring that students are appropriately informed of educational opportunities within their student journey and that they have access to these opportunities.
4. Opportunities for reflection within the curriculum and related support from Academic Advisors.

What comes next?

There will be interim opportunities to report on progress, starting with initial data collection in September 2023 and following on to other sampling points which include module selection in spring 2024 and graduations from summer 2024 onwards. We expect to conclude a first complete cycle of data in 2027.

Evaluation and reflection

Evaluation will be built into each stage of the project, using NERUPI methodology⁵. Students will be engaged in the design and implementation of the project. The project will evaluate how students collate and reflect on aspects of their student experience most relevant to their own educational goals.

Publication

We will publish outcomes of project interventions alongside our EORR evaluations at regular points.

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⁵ <https://www.nerupi.co.uk/>