

Research Project: Practices & Impact during Covid-19

The Specialist Evidence, Evaluation & Research ([SEER](#))¹ collaborative is undertaking research into HE provider responses to Covid-19 and impact on students, particularly in respect of institutional access and participation outcomes and under-represented groups.

Understanding the impact of Covid-19 on student access and participation has become a key focus of work for our SEER partners and the broader sector. This follows recent [OfS communications](#) which highlight the importance of continuing fair access and participation activity despite current social distancing restrictions. When monitoring commitments against Access and Participation Plans (APPs), the OfS has stated that a provider will need a clear and robust rationale if it is not able to meet a commitment in its plan and will need to demonstrate it has explored reasonable alternatives.

We are inviting providers to participate in this research. Benefits include:

- **Supports providers in meeting the OfS expectation**, providing an evidence base for the exploration and implementation of mitigating activity (“reasonable alternatives”) during Covid-19, where required.
- **Understanding the experiences and challenges of your students (current and prospective) during the crisis** and how they are engaging with their study and university experience. This will inform current ongoing mitigation activities, but also provide essential data for the mid-to-longer term, and inform activity in 2020-21 onwards.
- **Understanding what practice is working (value) and what is not (waste)**, allowing you to determine how effective mitigation activity is and implement required changes to improve activity. Evaluation here can also capture the potential longer-term value of activities and used to develop evidence-based practice improvements that generate efficiency measures or improve performance trajectories.

Research Aims

- To understand the impact of Covid-19 social distancing measures on APP commitments and document adjustments and alternative practices adopted by providers
- To understand staff and student responses to alternative practices introduced
- To explore the experiences of under-represented groups and whether and how experiences / impact may differ between different groups
- To identify successes and lessons learnt which can be applied to future practice
- To build an evidence base to underpin OfS reporting in relation to any ‘reasonable alternatives’ implemented by providers in relation to APP commitments during Covid-19

¹ SEER is a collaborative service designed to effectively and efficiently deliver required regulatory outcomes in data and evidence, evaluation and research relating to the Access and Participation agenda, for small, specialist or newly registering providers. The provision of research toolkits, analyses and reports are part of the SEER service.

Summary of Research timeframe

The following table provides a summary of the estimated timeline for the research (this may be subject to change):

Phase 1 – est May to August 2020

- Mapping institutional changes to activity (APP and Covid-19: Activity Change Map)
- Implement surveys for prospective students, current students and staff
- Provisional feedback for providers

Phase 2 – est September to October 2020 (adjusted to align with when students and staff are able to return to provider)

- Data analysis: enrolments, retention and attainment exploring potential impact
- Data analysis: Phase 1 survey results
- Implement returning to study surveys with students, and returning to work survey with staff

Phase 3 – est November to December 2020

- Data analysis: Phase 2 survey results
- Final report, findings and recommendations
- Disseminate report to sector/ OfS/ TASO

Research toolkit

Providers will be supported by the SEER team to implement the research project, and been designed to reduce burden on providers wherever possible. SEER will also provide with an end-stage report, including comparisons to other participating providers (all micro, small and/or specialist institutions).

Research tools:

1. APP and Covid-19: Activity Change Map
2. Theory of Change template
3. Data collection template – setting out the data we will ask you to provide
4. Survey Tools
 - a. Detailed surveys for prospective and current students
 - b. Short post-activity surveys for academic activity evaluation, digital student support activity evaluation, and digital outreach activity
 - c. Return to study survey for students, and return to work survey for staff

Contact

If you would like further details, or to discuss your providers' involvement in the Research, please contact the SEER Director via the details below:

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