

Institution: University of York		
Unit of Assessment: 23 - Education		
Title of case study: Fairer Access for UK Postgraduates		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2008-2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Paul Wakeling (PI) Sally Hancock	Professor Senior Lecturer	2008 - present 2014 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: Aug 2013 – Dec 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Research conducted by Professor Paul Wakeling at the University of York strongly influenced the creation – by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) – of a GBP75,000,000 Postgraduate (PG) Support Scheme (PSS: 2014-15, 2015-16). The PSS was the largest ever government intervention in UK PG education, and it directly benefited some 12,000 students across over 100 institutions. Wakeling's analysis of the PSS played a key role in the evolution of its successor: the Master's Loan Scheme in England, which saw around 146,000 students take up loans of up to GBP10,000 in 2016-17 and 2017-18. Together, these schemes led to a significant increase in the number of graduates progressing to PG study and, specifically, a greater rate of progression to PG study for graduates from under-represented backgrounds, including black and minority ethnic students, students with disabilities, and students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Wakeling's research has also informed initiatives designed to enhance equality, diversity and inclusion in graduate admissions at universities including Cambridge, Leeds, the London School of Economics, Manchester, Oxford and Sheffield.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
Context for the research		
<p>The UK Government identified access to PG education as a policy priority in a 2011 Higher Education White Paper (<i>Students at the heart of the system</i>). The arena of postgraduate education had quadrupled in size between 1990-91 and 2000-01, and then doubled again by 2011 to account for one in every four students in the UK. This huge expansion – and debate surrounding the Browne Review of University funding in 2009-10 – prompted concern about how little was known about the progression between first-degree graduation and PG education. Evidence was required to understand whether patterns of progression to PG education were in any way hampering attempts to widen participation, with the Chair of the government's Social Mobility Commission warning that there was a danger of this '<i>becoming a social mobility time bomb</i>'.</p>		
Providing new evidence of inequality		
<p>In a report commissioned by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) [A], Wakeling provided proof of inequalities in access to PG education on the basis of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background, with important differences across subject of study and institution attended for first-degree. In a subsequent study, he demonstrated that this inequality was growing across cohorts and could serve to negate the social mobility gains made in the expansion of access to undergraduate qualifications [B].</p>		
Researching the causes of inequality		
<p>Wakeling and colleagues went on to study factors that could explain the inequalities they had identified. They demonstrated that debts from undergraduate study do not necessarily act as a deterrent to continuation at PG level, but that there are other more important factors such as the identity of the student's first degree institution. Most importantly, they were able to show that</p>		

ease of access to resources (including credit) was a significant factor in the decision to progress to PG level [C]. Wakeling also investigated whether the effects of socio-economic background differ depending on the timing of the transition to PG study. He found that background played less of a role when the transition was made immediately following graduation from a first degree, but that it mattered more when the transition was made at a later point [D]. Again, this indicated that a lack of access to financial resources was a significant deterrent when considering later transition to PG study.

Analysis of the effectiveness of government initiatives

In July 2013, HEFCE announced plans to launch a new PG funding scheme, which would become known as the Postgraduate Support Scheme (PSS). Wakeling's report for the HEA [A] was quoted extensively in the HEFCE report accompanying this announcement (*Postgraduate Education in England and Northern Ireland: Overview Report 2013*), and he made multiple direct contributions to HEFCE's decision to create the PSS. In recognition of the influential role of his research, Wakeling was then commissioned by HEFCE to analyse the effectiveness of the PSS. He found that the scheme, which ran from January 2014 to June 2015, provided 'evidence of latent and frustrated demand for PGT study, with lack of finance being a particular barrier to entry' and that 'realistically, only the Government can provide access to finance on the scale required to have an impact on PGT participation' [E]. After Phase 2 of the PSS, which ran through to late 2016, Professor Wakeling, together with Dr Sally Hancock, was again asked to carry out an evaluation of the entire scheme [F].

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[A] Wakeling, P. and Hampden-Thompson, G. (2013) *Transition to higher degrees across the UK: An analysis of national, international and individual differences*. York: Higher Education Academy

[B] Wakeling, P., & Laurison, D. (2017). Are postgraduate qualifications the 'new frontier of social mobility'? *British Journal of Sociology* 68(3): pp.533-555 <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12277> (peer reviewed and returned to REF 2021).

[C] Wakeling, P., Hampden-Thompson, G. and Hancock, S. (2017). Is undergraduate debt an impediment to postgraduate enrolment in England? *British Educational Research Journal* 43(6) pp.1149-1167 <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3304> (peer reviewed publication)

[D] Wakeling, P. (2017) A glass half full? Social class and access to postgraduate study. In R. Waller, N. Ingram, & M. Ward (eds.), *Higher Education and Social Inequalities: University Admissions, Experiences, and Outcomes* (Sociological Futures) (pp. 167-189) Abingdon: Routledge <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315449722-11> (peer reviewed and returned to REF 2021)

[E] Wakeling, P. (2015) *Programme Analysis of HEFCE's Postgraduate Support Scheme: Final Report to ESRC and HEFCE*. Bristol: HEFCE

[F] Wakeling, P., Hancock, S. and Ewart, A. (2017) *Evaluation of the Postgraduate Support Scheme 2015/16: Report to HEFCE*. Bristol: HEFCE

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Wakeling's research was instrumental in the creation, analysis, refinement and impact of a series of UK government schemes and policies – all of which ran during the period between August 2013 and September 2020. Together these schemes and policies brought about significant, material change in the socio-economic diversity of the PG student population.

Context for impact

In September 2013, Wakeling was appointed by HEFCE to play a key role in the execution of a new PG funding scheme: the Postgraduate Support Scheme (PSS). This appointment was made in recognition of the fundamental part that his research had played in HEFCE's decision to launch the scheme.

Explaining the influential role played by Wakeling, the OfS's Director of Fair Access and Participation (Director of Policy at HEFCE at the time) writes: *"I was conscious that there was an active community of professionals supporting PG education within English universities, but only limited research expertise. Paul was the exception to this, so we engaged with him early on to understand the evidence available to understand the barriers to PG participation and the interventions that could be made to address this."* [1].

Impact on the execution of Phase 1 of the Postgraduate Support Scheme

The scope of the scheme – and of Wakeling's role in it – is explained in HEFCE's annual report for 2013 to 2014. According to the report, the first phase of the PSS would be: *"a £25 million fund for pilot projects to test activity and finance models to support progression into PG taught education, especially for students who are under-represented at PG level and in subjects aligned with the Government's growth strategies. The 20 successful projects will support more than 2,800 students and involve a range of activities including financial and pastoral support, mentoring and networking, changes to curricula, funded studentships, work placements and a variety of bursary and loan schemes. With the Economic and Social Research Council, HEFCE has appointed Dr Paul Wakeling of the University of York to draw out findings from the projects, to provide examples of good practice across the sector, to inform further research in this territory, and to inform the allocation of £50 million the Government has set aside to support PG participation in 2015-16"* [2a].

This first phase of the scheme ran from 2014 to 2015. A total of 78 proposals were received for the available GBP25,000,000 grants (augmented to GBP50,000,000 by matched institutional and third-party funding) and a total of 20 projects, involving 40 institutions and 2,000 students, received support. It represented the largest ever intervention in PG education in the UK.

Impact on Phase 2 of the Postgraduate Support Scheme

The analysis and recommendations made by Wakeling following Phase 1 of the PSS were instrumental in shaping Phase 2 (2015-16). The OfS Director of Fair Access and Participation writes: *"I approached Paul to become the Programme Analyst for the first scheme in September 2013, as a result of which he worked between the projects funded and HEFCE to shape activity and draw out findings. In doing so, he created a typology of the different interventions to support PG progression we were supporting, demonstrating how they could work in different contexts and with different groups of students. He also made recommendations for future policy, which were communicated through reports published on the HEFCE website and in person to HEFCE Board and Committee members and government officials"* [1].

The second phase of PSS (PSS2) was twice the size of the first. A further GBP50,000,000 was made available (again doubled by matched funding to GBP100,000,000). This fund was used to enable institutions to award scholarships worth GBP10,000 to 10,000 individual PG students. In HEFCE's guidance to institutions on PSS2, it confirms that the Government had *"signalled that its approach to allocating the funding would build upon lessons derived from [the first phase of] the Postgraduate Support Scheme"*. For example, following direction from Wakeling, preference

was given to institutions with proven success in recruiting students from selected disadvantaged groups [2b].

Impact on the creation of the Master's Loan Scheme

PSS2 was designed as a bridge towards the introduction of a third phase of PG support: the Master's Loan Scheme. This too was influenced by Wakeling's evaluation of the PSS. According to HEFCE's Director of Fair Access, "*HEFCE's advice, based on its Postgraduate Support Schemes, was central to the government decision to launch a PG master's loan scheme in England from 2016-17*" [1]. Under the Master's Loan Scheme, which made credit available to all in England regardless of institution of study, a total of 64,000 students took up loans of up to GBP10,000 in 2016-17 and a further 82,000 in 2017-18.

HEFCE's successor body, the Office for Students (OfS), published an early evaluation of how the scheme had affected the size and makeup of the entrant population on eligible PG courses in England [3]. This showed that:

- following the introduction of the loan system, there was a large increase in the number of Master's students – from 73,880 in 2015-16, to 96,465 in 2016-17
- the proportion of black students rose from 8% in 2015-16, to 11% in 2016-17
- the proportion of disabled students rose from 12% in 2015-16, to 15% in 2016-17
- rises in entrant numbers were most marked in students from historically low participation areas (a proportional rise of 59%) compared to a rise of only 24% for students in the highest participation areas

A separate evaluation of the scheme was carried out for the Department for Education by an independent research agency [4]. Backing up the OfS findings, and in line with Wakeling's original evaluation, it also reported that:

- there was a 36% increase in the number of England-domiciled (loan-eligible) Master's students enrolling at English HEIs between the academic years 2015/16 and 2016/17, while enrolments from students based outside England remained static
- the absolute numbers of England-domiciled black students enrolling on Master's courses rose to 8,945 in 2016/17 compared to 4,867 in 2015/16 – an 84% increase
- 72% of students starting their Master's course in 2016/17 felt that they would have been unable to do so without the Master's Loan, while 36% stated that they would not have even considered progressing to Master's level without it
- the scheme helped individuals and the state to benefit from the return on investment in Master's level education earlier: students in receipt of the Loan were more likely to have progressed from undergraduate to postgraduate study within a year (48%) than those not in receipt of the Loan (23%); and the proportion of loan-eligible students studying full-time increased from 56% in 2015/16 to 62% in 2016/17, with 89% of full-time students who took out a Loan stating that they would otherwise have had to study on a part-time basis

Impact on fairness of access to postgraduate education at individual institutions

Professor Wakeling's research has informed the policy and practice of several higher education institutions in the area of equality, diversity and inclusion in graduate admissions, including Cambridge, Leeds, the London School of Economics, Manchester, Oxford and Sheffield. The Head of Widening Participation and Outreach at the University of Manchester, for example, has said that Wakeling's work on the PSS made them aware of "*the need for pre-arrival support and the demystification of PG study among WP cohorts*" [5a].

At the University of Cambridge, Wakeling's research directly informed a successful effort by the Graduate Union President, the Director of Admissions and the Head of Graduate Admissions to break from a proposed nationwide increase in postgraduate application fees. The Graduate Union President writes: "*My opposition to this fee increase was supported by Professor Paul Wakeling's research: I read his papers on progression to postgraduate study, watched a presentation given at Leeds University, and read a Times Higher Education article in which the postgraduate application fee is described as a barrier to access and an 'expensive surprise'.*"

Paul's research helped me place the application fee in the context of postgraduate widening participation work. With the support of Paul's data, his other research, and a helpful phone conversation with him, [we] prepared a paper ... and presented it at Cambridge's Postgraduate Admissions Committee. With Paul's advice, I succeeded in reducing the proposed increase in the application fee, and succeeded in my request for the implementation of application fee waivers for low-income British applicants, and for applicants with refugee status" [5b].

At the University of Oxford, Wakeling was invited to be an external adviser to its Graduate Access Working Group (GAWG), which was established in 2018 to address issues relating to graduate access to the University's postgraduate degree programmes – in particular the under-representation in the graduate student body of students from particular ethnic and socio-economic groups. The Chair of GAWG writes that Professor Wakeling provided “*a strong evidence base, grounded in the available research, much of which he has conducted himself, within the field of graduate access, for all of the GAWG activities*” [5c].

With Wakeling's direct involvement at all of the group's meetings, and active support of the group's Chair, the GAWG has introduced application fee waivers for applicants from the 30 lowest income countries on the World Bank list, and for all UK applicants who, as undergraduates, received the maximum amount of financial support from their LEA. They have also begun to collect socio-economic data from all graduate applicants to the University, achieving a response rate of over 90% and have initiated a large pilot project exploring how contextual information can be used in the graduate admissions process. They have also initiated the UK's first graduate access summer internship scheme and as GAWG's Chair puts it: “*The importance of Professor Wakeling's input into the development of the above activities and the wider work of the GAWG cannot be overstated*” [5c].

Beyond individual institutions, Wakeling's work has informed research and policy in the sector more broadly. The Sutton Trust's Research and Policy Manager said that his work on postgraduate access has: “*put the issue back at the top of our priority list*” and commented that the Master's Loan Scheme has “*helped many more students to access this level of study*” [6]. It is noteworthy that Wakeling's research is also beginning to impact access to doctoral study. The Chair of UKRI's Research Careers Network writes that through his research: “*the importance of considering socio-economic diversity alongside other forms of inequality has been cemented*” and describes how it has been incorporated into assessment processes for Doctoral Training Partnerships and Centres for Doctoral Training [7]. Wakeling is leading the sector in identifying optimal ways of measuring and monitoring the socio-economic background of PG (including PhD) students. As the Director of Educational Engagement at the University of Leeds puts it: “*This has been instrumental in developing our institutional strategic approach but also leadership in developing sector approaches. This is reflected in the use of the research to establish guiding principles for the direction of travel in a national working group on postgraduate diversity*” [5d].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- [1] **Testimonial**, Director of Fair Access and Participation, OfS, 17/9/20.
- [2] Documentation from HEFCE ((a) HEFCE annual report 2013-14, 12/5/14; (b) HEFCE's guidance to institutions on PSS2, 15/12/14).
- [3] OfS evaluation of the Master's Loan Scheme, May 2018.
- [4] DfE evaluation of the Master's Loan Scheme, May 2019.
- [5] **Testimonials** from institutions influenced by Wakeling's research ((a) Manchester, 05/02/21; (b) Cambridge, 29/03/19; (c) Oxford, 8/12/20; (d) Leeds, 08/02/21).
- [6] **Testimonial**, Research and Policy Manager at The Sutton Trust, 08/02/21.
- [7] **Testimonial**, Chair of UKRI's Research Careers Network, 05/02/21.