

HeppSY

Cohort Evaluation

HE Knowledge Matched Analysis

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Authors: Daniel Fletcher and Greg Brown

Introduction

Building on previous cohort-level analyses which focused on students' expectations of progressing to HE (Fletcher and Brown, 2020a), in the present report we use this approach to consider another important outcome: knowledge of higher education. HE knowledge is one of the four strands of the HeppSY programme, in addition to: career knowledge, confidence and resilience, and attainment. Increasing the HE knowledge of target students is a valuable goal in its own right as it supports students in making well-informed decisions about their education - specified as a key aim of the Uni Connect programme by OfS (OfS, 2020). Additionally, it has been posited that a lack of access to salient HE information advice and guidance is an enduring barrier to entry for students from underrepresented areas, with the implication being that provision of such information could increase participation rates (Moore, Sanders and Higham 2013).

Drawing on data from Wave 1 and Wave 2 of the CFE annual learner survey, and HeppSY and partner activity data held in the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT); the aim of this project was to investigate the association between the number of contact hours that students participated in between waves and their self-reported HE knowledge at Wave 2, focussing on a Year 10 (W1) and a Year 12(W1) cohort of students.

The following research questions are addressed:

After controlling for prior HE knowledge, what is the association between the number of HeppSY contact hours received by students in Year 10, and their self-reported HE knowledge in Year 11?

After controlling for prior HE knowledge, what is the association between the number of HeppSY contact hours received by students in Year 12/Level 3 Year 1, and their self-reported HE knowledge in Year 13/Level 3 Year 2?

Methodology

Matching Process

Individual students were matched across the two waves of survey data using fuzzy matching in Excel Power Query. Matches of 90% or higher were accepted, subject to random spot-checks of the data. Student records were merged so that every case had a W1 and a W2 response for each survey question.

the present analysis focused on students who were in Year 10 or Year 12 at W1, and therefore only used a subset of the overall matched dataset. The final sample for the study included 585 Year 10 (W1) students and 385 Year 12 (W1) students.

Measures

HE Knowledge

At each wave, students were asked how much they knew about a range of HE topics, providing responses on a three-point scale (1 – Nothing, 2- A little, 3 – A lot). Responses to individual items were combined to form a W1 and W2 HE knowledge scale. Separate HE knowledge scales were created for secondary (Year 10 – W1) and post-secondary (Year 12 – W1) year groups, with three items that were included in the W2 post-secondary student scale being omitted from the W2 secondary student scale.

Contact hours (HEAT)

Contact hours reflect the cumulative hours of HeppSY activity that students participated in between the two survey waves. Contact hours is a broad measure, which does not differentiate between different types of activity – some of which will be more specifically focused on HE knowledge than others. However, due to the practical difficulty of classifying the level of HE knowledge focus for each activity delivered (which is not a binary classification), and given the theoretical expectation that the majority of sessions would build towards improving HE knowledge in some sense (even where it was just a peripheral element), it was considered to be a suitable measure.

Analytical Method

First, descriptive statistics were calculated to overview the HE knowledge scores at W1 and W2 for pre and post-16 samples. This gave an indication of the change in responses between waves prior to controlling for activity and other theoretically significant variables.

For the main analyses, hierarchical linear regression analyses were conducted on W2 HE knowledge scores. Prior HE knowledge (W1) was entered as a control variable in Block 1, gender and HE potential were added in Block 2, school was added in Block 3, and contact hours (our predictor variable of interest) was added in Block 4. This method provides an estimate of the additional variance in the outcome measure explained by the variable(s) added in the current block, after controlling for theoretically important variables added in preceding blocks.

Headline Outcomes and Conclusions

For pre-16 learners, this study highlights an association between increased engagement with the HeppSY programme and higher levels of HE knowledge, after controlling for prior HE knowledge. A similar analysis for the post-16 cohort found no evidence for an association between number of contact hours and greater HE knowledge. For model outputs, please see the full write up of this study (Fletcher and Brown 2020b).

This could be the result of a number of factors relating to research design, the type of post-16 HE knowledge provision delivered as part of the HeppSY programme, and HE knowledge acquisition outside of the programme. Further work is required to focus on the associations between engagement with specific types of HE knowledge provision and change in HE knowledge scores for this cohort.

It is important to note that whilst this analysis offers evidence of a positive association between engagement with the HeppSY programme and increased HE knowledge (for the pre-16 cohort), no causal inferences can be made due to the omission of theoretically important variables, such as prior attainment. Further work to obtain attainment data and create matched control groups would be required to make causal claims about the impact of engaging with the HeppSY programme.

Recommendations

Recommendations for HeppSY Practice

The following recommendations are made for HeppSY practice moving forward:

1. Before undertaking HE knowledge activity with post-16 cohorts, work should be done with centres to understand what is being provided in curriculum, to ensure the HeppSY programme is delivering added value. These discussions may be best undertaken during the delivery planning phase.
2. HE knowledge activity that is delivered to post-16 students should be specific and tailored. The progression framework should be further consulted to ensure that this is the case.

Recommendations for Further Research and Evaluation

The following recommendations are made for future research and evaluation to develop that outlined in this report:

1. Further analysis should be undertaken for the post-16 cohort, based on a subset of activities that are determined to be primarily focused on HE knowledge provision. This will help to determine whether under more concentrated conditions – absent the potentially dilutive effects of less focused activity - these specific sessions are associated with increased HE knowledge.
2. Qualitative research should be conducted with post-16 students to understand more about which sources they get HE-related information from, which areas they believe they have inadequate knowledge of, and how different information/sources have influenced their decision-making regarding HE progression.
3. Further qualitative research should be undertaken to explore how and why HeppSY provision was associated with HE knowledge amongst pre-16 students.

References

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To find out more please contact:

Mike Garnock-Jones

Director, Hepp

M.Garnock-Jones@shu.ac.uk

Greg Brown

Evaluation and Data Manager, HeppSY

G.Brown@shu.ac.uk

Sharon Woodward-Baker

HeppSY Programme Manager

S.Woodward-Baker@shu.ac.uk

