Evaluation of the Postgraduate Support Scheme 2015/16

Report to HEFCE

Paul Wakeling, Sally Hancock and Alex Ewart

August 2017

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and context

i This report evaluates the Higher Education Funding Council for England's Postgraduate Support Scheme 2015/16 (PSS2). The scheme was launched in December 2014, following an announcement of £50M funding in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's 2014 Autumn Statement to address concerns about funding for taught postgraduate (PGT) programmes for UK/European Union (EU) graduates. Some 10,000 awards of £10,000 each were available, with institutional allocations determined formulaically. Each award comprised a 50% contribution from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and 50% from the individual higher education institution (HEI) in which the award was offered. Awards were available at eligible HEFCE-funded institutions for UK/EU-domiciled graduates graduating from a first-degree in 2015 who had paid tuition fees at the higher rate (>£6,000 per annum) and enrolling on a PGT master's programme of one or two years' duration. Award holders were required to be from a group evidentially underrepresented at PGT level, as determined by awarding institutions.

ii Our evaluation of PSS2 is based on site visits to ten case-study institutions, involving interviews with staff and students. The case studies included institutions of different location, size and mission. Institutions which had recruited successfully and less successfully under PSS2 were included, as well as one institution which had declined funding. In addition, we conducted an online survey of all institutions allocated PSS2 funding, reviewed analysis of Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) student record data for 2014/15 and 2015/16 about PGT prepared by HEFCE, and analysed HEFCE data about allocation of awards.

Key findings

iii Overall, about three-quarters (≈7,300) of the total available awards were allocated to students. Most institutions were able to match-fund awards and the majority had launched their scheme by March 2015. While PSS2 ran relatively smoothly, its one-off nature helped in this; ongoing match funding and administration might prove more challenging. Fifty institutions dispensed 90% or more of their allocated studentships, with the rest achieving a lower success rate (69) or declining funding altogether (12). Those declining funding felt PSS2 did not align with their institutional strategy or expected to be unsuccessful in recruitment.

iv There was considerable variation across institutions in the additional criteria adopted for awarding studentships. However certain criteria were popular, including the following: coming from a low-income household; having been in receipt of Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA); being a care leaver; and coming from a low-participation neighbourhood (POLAR[1]). While these are valid criteria, we found there was scope for better use of evidence in criteria setting. Judging by early indications from the 2016/17 master's loan scheme, a single national scheme with fixed criteria may have fared better in terms of numbers of awards made. It would have been easier to obtain a clear 'signal' from such a scheme in order to evaluate success. However, this would have been at the cost of institutions being able to determine underrepresentation locally. Were a similar scheme to be offered in future, there would be a choice to be made between greater focus and targeting along with clearer evaluation; or devolution to institutions, which promises greater institutional ownership but will mean more diffuse effects, which are harder to detect.

v Institutions strongly expressed the view that the success of the scheme was weakened by two aspects of its design. Firstly, the timing of the announcement of funding by government meant schemes were launched too late in the postgraduate recruitment cycle to affect decision-making by many students. All the PSS2-funded students we interviewed already had clear plans to pursue a postgraduate course prior to hearing about the funding, although many stated categorically that they could not have afforded to do so without their PSS2 studentship. This claim was supported in a few cases by institutional surveys of PSS award holders which reached the same conclusion. Second, while institutions recognised the rationale for the 'end-on' criteria whereby PSS2 awards were only available to those graduating from higher-fee courses in 2015, they nevertheless felt they could have recruited significantly greater numbers of students from underrepresented groups without this limitation to 2015 graduates.

vi Some institutions reported substantial increases in students with the targeted characteristics. Overall however there appears to have been a quite modest impact of PSS2 on demand. Comparing like-with-like across 2014/15 and 2015/16 shows increases in the proportion of taught master's students from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds; from the lowest participation neighbourhoods; reporting a disability; first generation in higher education (HE); and from lower socio-economic occupational groups. However, changes in absolute numbers of such students were perhaps disappointing given the number of PSS2 awards made. If we instead see PSS2's principal purpose being to mitigate a decline in students from the targeted backgrounds as a result of higher undergraduate tuition fees, then it can claim success. In some categories, PSS2 award holders were more

[1] Participation of Local Areas – The most recent iteration of the classification is POLAR3. This is based on the combined participation rates of those aged 18 between 2005 and 2009, who entered HE between 2005-06 and 2010-11 academic years.

likely to be from target groups than among in-principle PSS2 eligible population of postgraduates. This was particularly the case for students of Black ethnicity, from low participation neighbourhoods, students with a specific disability and those without a parental history of HE.

vii There appeared to be little effect of PSS2 on student choice relating to field of study. PSS2-funded students were more likely to remain within their undergraduate institution for their master's degree. Here it is important to note that a greater number of students from backgrounds underrepresented at postgraduate level are enrolled as undergraduates in medium- and low-tariff institutions. Policy on widening participation in postgraduate study and allocation of funding could helpfully take this into account (i.e. by targeting the broader pool of potential, not simply currently realised potential in distributing awards). Some institutions appeared to have benefitted from a PSS2 'bounce', but there was no pattern of 'spillover' from PSS2 into higher enrolments for the whole sector.

viii Many institutions were unable to determine the impact of PSS2 on the enrolment of students with targeted characteristics as they had not previously collected relevant data. There were also problems initially in the completion of the HESA Student Record return at some institutions, such that PSS2 students were not consistently identified. (This was rectified through a *post hoc* data reconciliation exercise.) A conclusion from our evaluation is that better data collection and monitoring is needed about postgraduates to evaluate the success of initiatives and determine patterns of application and entry.

ix There have been some lasting effects of PSS2, although they are patchy. Some institutions have been galvanised to strengthen their commitment to opening up access to postgraduate master's, including in a few cases sponsoring significant numbers of scholarships from their own resources. In many other cases, however, PSS2 has not led to substantial change in policy or practice. In our judgement, though, most institutions are committed to this agenda in principle, but need both incentives and some structured obligations (such as through Office for Fair Access access agreements) for this commitment to be more fully realised. The anticipated emphasis on progression from, as well as access to, undergraduate study within the remit of the Office for Students' Director of Fair Access and Participation should provide an opportunity to realise these commitments.

1 CONTEXT FOR THE POSTGRADUATE SUPPORT SCHEME[2]

Background

1.1 The Postgraduate Support Scheme 2015/16 (henceforth PSS2) represented the second of two phases of support for taught postgraduate students announced by the Government in 2013. The investment of £75M in taught postgraduate funding, comprised £25M in the first phase (2014/15 – henceforth PSS1)[3] and £50M in PSS2. The funding had been repurposed from the previous National Scholarship Programme, aimed at undergraduate students. In autumn 2014 the Government announced its intention to introduce a loan scheme for taught postgraduate master's students from 2016/17, with PSS2 filling the gap in funding until that point for those students who would graduate in 2015, having entered university under the higher fee regime introduced in England in 2012.

1.2 Both PSS1 and PSS2 were intended to address concerns expressed in many quarters about the effect of increased undergraduate debt on the capacity and willingness of graduates to enter postgraduate programmes. PSS2 was also intended as a bridge to the implementation of the loans for master's students from 2016/17 onwards. Particular concerns were expressed about graduates from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds given the limited funding available for pursuing taught postgraduate study. Bodies representing higher education institutions (HEIs) and students respectively had called for the introduction of student funding for taught postgraduates.[4]

Format of PSS2

1.3 Unlike PSS1, which was based on a process of competitive bidding for project funding, PSS2 was formula driven, with institutions allocated set unit funding per student. In December 2014, the Government announced a total of 10,000 PSS2 awards each worth £10,000, comprising a 50% state contribution and 50% from institutional match funding.[5]

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[2] We wish to thank all respondents to our institutional survey and particularly staff and students at our ten site visit institutions for their time and engagement with the evaluation. Collation, preparation and initial analysis of student data was undertaken by Rebecca Finlayson (HEFCE Analytical Services Directorate). We also wish to thank Grace Simpson (HEFCE Student Opportunity team) for her support during the project.

[3] For an evaluation of the Postgraduate Support Scheme 2014/15, see Wakeling, P. (2015) *Programme Analysis of HEFCE's Postgraduate Support Scheme: Final Report to ESRC and HEFCE*. Bristol: HEFCE.

[4] E.g. Universities UK (2014) *Postgraduate Taught Education: the Funding Challenge*. London: UUK; National Union of Students (2012*) Steps toward a fairer system of postgraduate taught funding in England*. London: NUS.

[5] A detailed timetable for PSS2 is given in Appendix 1.

Awards were tenable on taught postgraduate (PGT) master's programmes. These awards were allocated to HEIs in England by HEFCE using a formula which took into account the size of each institution's UK-domiciled taught postgraduate population and the past success of the institution in recruiting students from selected disadvantaged groups.[6] HEFCE held back 1,000 of the 10,000 awards from the initial allocation to act as a contingency.

Allocations and adjustments

1.4 The number of allocations per institution varied between 1 and 276, with a mean of 67 and a standard deviation of 62.[7] Following the allocation, institutions were asked to indicate whether they intended to take up the awards. There was a range of responses to this request. Twelve institutions declined the funding entirely; some accepted a proportion of the awards but 'returned' the remainder; some accepted their full allocation, among which some sought to increase their number of awards. Naturally, many more institutions received funding under PSS2 (110) than under PSS1 (20 projects involving 40 institutions).

1.5 HEFCE followed an iterative process of adjustment over the course of December 2014 to August 2015, viring awards between institutions to promote maximum utilisation of the funding and to reflect changes in demand reported by institutions. All awards which were declined/returned were re-allocated to other institutions. In total, 41 institutions returned all or some of their awards (ranging from a high of 155 awards to a low of 1, with a mean of 35); 17 institutions did not alter their award numbers; and 73 increased their allocation (ranging from 1 to 103 extra awards, with a mean of 20). Only nine of the 1,000 contingency awards were allocated, making a grand total of 9,009 awards under PSS2. The final number of awards actually taken up by students was just under 7,300.

[6] Full details of the allocation formula and procedures are given in HEFCE Circular 32/2014.
[7] The median was 59, with an interquartile range of 13 to 107.

2 EVALUATION METHOD

2.1 The research design for evaluation of PSS2 consisted of the following four elements:

i. An online survey distributed to all 131 PSS2-eligible institutions
ii. Site visits to a subset of ten institutions for face-to-face interviews with key staff involved in PGT education and PSS2 (and PSS1 if applicable)
iii. Interviews with PSS2 award holders (at site visit institutions)
iv. Review of findings from quantitative analysis undertaken by HEFCE Analytical Services Directorate

Each component related to several of the research questions, as set out in Table 2.1, below. Approval from the Education Ethics Committee of the research team's institution was obtained before data collection commenced.

Question	**Component**			
	i	**ii**	**iii**	**iv**
Which groups of students were targeted for PSS2 awards?	✓	✓		✓
How were these groups identified as being under-represented?	✓	✓		
How well did PSS2 meet its aims and objectives?	✓	✓	✓	✓
What impact (direct and indirect) did PSS2 funding have on students?			✓	✓
Did PSS2 meet institutions' and students' expectations?	✓	✓	✓	
Did institutions achieve their aims in widening participation at PGT level?	✓	✓		✓
What effect did PSS2 have on the retention and completion of students on PGT courses?				✓
Has PSS2 changed institutions' approaches to recruiting and supporting PGT students?	✓	✓		
Has PSS2 had an impact on student choice regarding PGT study?	✓	✓	✓	✓
How has PSS2 contributed to widening participation, fair access and social mobility?		✓	✓	✓
How might HEFCE have approached the PSS2 differently?	✓	✓	✓	
How did PSS1 compare to PSS2 in terms of outcomes?	✓	✓		✓

Table 2.1 Research questions and data collection

Online survey to institutions

2.2 The online survey was distributed to all 131 institutions eligible for funding under PSS2 (including those institutions which decided not to participate in the scheme). This

component of the research design aimed to generate a comprehensive overview of institutional reactions to PSS2, the development and implementation of scheme criteria, recruitment onto the scheme, lessons learnt, and changes to practice.

2.3 The survey design was informed by existing information provided to the research team by HEFCE, including institutions' initial award allocations and subsequent adjustments to this. Prior to launching, the survey was reviewed by colleagues at HEFCE and university colleagues responsible for the administration and management of student data.

2.4 HEFCE provided a list of key contacts to ensure that the survey was appropriately directed at each institution. These individuals received advance notice of the survey, which was live for four weeks in October 2016. The survey achieved a response rate of 90%.[8]

2.5 The survey comprised mostly closed questions and featured branching logic in order to customise questions to each institution's circumstance (for example, the under- or over-recruitment of scholars, participation in PSS1). Institutions that declined to participate in PSS2 were asked about the reasons informing this decision. For the majority of institutions, the structure of the survey was as follows:

- The **nature of the scheme**(s) implemented (criteria and rationale)
- The **organisation of the scheme**(s) implemented: single or multiple, devolved or centralised, location with the institution's management structure
- **Evidence on demand** from different kinds of PGT students, measured through application numbers for the scheme(s) and in general in comparison to previous years
- Indication of any **'spill-over' effects** (either in-year or subsequently), both quantitative (e.g. increased recruitment) and qualitative (change to practice). Where applicable this included a comparison with PSS1.
- Identification of particular **issues or successes** with the scheme(s) as implemented and PSS as a whole (including a comparison with PSS1 where relevant)

Site visits

2.6 Ten site visits were conducted during November 2016 (see Table 2.2). Through face-to-face meetings with key staff at site visit institutions, this component of the research design provided additional insight into emergent findings from the online survey, and allowed for further exploration of decision-making processes concerning, for example, the

[8] Large providers which did not respond to the survey were subsequently contacted by HEFCE for their views on PSS2 via monitoring reports. The responses received to this exercise repeated and confirmed key points arising from the analysis of responses to the institutional survey.

development of criteria and the scale of institutional schemes. Institutions were selected in consultation with HEFCE, with the sampling aiming to provide 'maximum variation' across the following considerations:

- Institutions funded/not funded under PSS1
- Institutions which increased/reduced/declined their PSS2 allocation
- A variety of institutional contexts, including size of 'home' PGT body, geographical location, and tariff (i.e. high, medium, low, specialist)

2.7 All ten institutions identified for the sample agreed to participate in the site visits. Institutions were also asked to identify 2015/16 award holders whom the researchers could also interview during the site visit.[9] The number of student interviews varied at each institution, since many former award holders were no longer living locally. A semi-structured interview approach was used for the meetings with staff and students.

Institution	Location	PSS1	PSS2 Awards	Student interviews	Tariff
1	South East	Yes	Fewer than allocated	3	High
2	South West	No	Exceeded allocation	0	High
3	London	Yes	Did not participate	N/A	High
4	Yorkshire & Humber	Yes	Fewer than allocated	3	High
5	North West	No	Exceeded allocation	2	Low
6	London	No	Fewer than allocated	0	Specialist
7	South East	Yes	Fewer than allocated	1	Specialist
8	North East	No	Exceeded allocation	3	Medium
9	Midlands	No	Fewer than allocated	2	High
10	Midlands	Yes	Fewer than allocated	0	Low

Table 2.2 Site visit institutions and interviews

2.8 Qualitative data collected at the site visits were transcribed and analysed using NVivo software. Deductive and inductive coding principles informed the analysis of these data. An initial framework for the analysis developed from the research and interview questions. Responses to all interview questions were analysed. Codes (and code names)

[9] The purpose of these interviews was to include award holder views and experiences. They were not intended to be representative. Obtaining a more comprehensive, valid and reliable overview of student opinion would have required a large-scale survey of PSS2 award holders *and unfunded comparators.* This was not feasible within the project and in any case would have encountered significant difficulties of *post hoc* rationalisation on the part of respondents and in accessing the sample.

were however not predetermined and instead developed to best match interviewees' responses.

Review of quantitative analysis undertaken by HEFCE Analytical Services Directorate

2.9 A quantitative analysis was undertaken by HEFCE, based upon successive years of Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Student Record data (2013/14 – 2014/15; and 2014/15 – 2015/16). This component of the research design aimed to capture the academic and background characteristics of PSS award holders, and to explore differences in these between PSS Phases 1 and 2.

2.10 Unfortunately, the number of PSS2 award holders included in this analysis is somewhat lower than the total number of recorded awards (6,435 of 7,276, or, 88.4%). This appears to result from a misunderstanding of the requirement to flag PSS awards in HESA reporting. Initial numbers reported were lower than this; a *post hoc* reconciliation exercise conducted by HEFCE increased the volume of reported awards considerably. Almost all of the initial error was due to many (57) institutions not reporting any award holders through their HESA Student Record, while a small number (≈100) were missing due to institutions reporting some, but not all, award holders.

2.11 Data from all identified award holders (i.e. 6,435) are included in the analysis of the characteristics of award holders and the comparison of characteristics between 2014/15 and 2015/16. Award holders with incomplete undergraduate and postgraduate entrant and/or qualifier records were removed from the analysis of the 'eligible' student population.

2.12 It should be noted that the number of missing cases places some limits on the extent to which generalisations can be made, about both the population of PSS2 award holders (i.e. of academic and background characteristics, and whether these differ from 2014/15 award holders) and in terms of patterns of participation and choice across the population of eligible students (i.e. comparing these students from 2014/15 and 2015/16). However, there did not appear to be any systematic pattern to institutions' likelihood of returning data. Furthermore, there was barely any change in the substantive findings between the original analysis, which used 3,710 award holders, and the updated analysis after the reconciliation exercise, which used 6,435.

Characteristics of the evaluation

2.13 The combination of different sources of evidence from students, institutions and enrolment data provide a rounded view of PSS2. However, the nature of the evidence, especially given HESA data quality issues and variation in institutional schemes' design, size and operation, means it is not possible to identify cause and effect with any certainty.

Although PSS2 represents an improvement over PSS1 in this regard, it remains the case that significantly greater attention to evaluation considerations at the design stage of such funding initiatives would greatly enhance the capacity to draw conclusions about their effectiveness. However there are competing priorities in policy formulation which need to be balanced and (as in this case) a constrained timetable for operation.

2.14 A more explicit acknowledgement of the overall purpose of schemes could help here. If the emphasis were on generating robust, generalisable evidence of effectiveness, then tighter criteria and less delegation of design to institutions would be required. Alternatively, the priority may be to allow flexibility in criteria to address issues local to certain institutions or subjects in context. In effect, PSS2 emphasised the latter – flexibility. While this comes at the expense of unequivocal signals of cause and effect, flexibility drew strong support from institutions in their responses (see paragraph 3.12 below). Whichever approach is adopted, our view is that there needs to be considerable improvement in monitoring and collection of data about taught postgraduate students to underpin effective practice.

3 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Organisation of this section

3.1 The evaluation generated a large amount of data and insights about PSS2. In order to ensure this is analysed most effectively, we have arranged our discussion around the questions posed by HEFCE in procuring the evaluation. In part 4 of the report, we reflect on findings, drawing conclusions and making recommendations. The two more general evaluation questions, 'How has PSS contributed to widening participation, fair access and social mobility?' and 'How well did PSS meet its aims and objectives?' are addressed in part 4. Before considering the main evaluation questions, we first briefly consider allocations and take-up of the awards by institutions and some basic details of award-holder characteristics.

Allocation and take-up of awards

3.2 The allocations data provided to us by HEFCE[10] reveals a few noteworthy patterns (see Figure 3.1). Looking at each institution's position in the sector measured using HEFCE's entry-tariff-based typology, 45% of original allocations went to 'high-tariff' institutions and 25% to 'medium-tariff', with the remainder divided between 'low-tariff' (18%), specialist institutions (12%), and a handful (19) of awards to further education colleges. Following the adjustment rounds described in paragraphs 1.4 – 1.5 above, medium- and low-tariff institutions increased their awards slightly and specialist institutions reduced their allocations. There was no correlation ($r = 0.02$) between the size of an institution's undergraduate population and its final allocation numbers in August 2015.

Voluntary full or partial reduction of awards

3.3 Twelve institutions responding to the survey declined their awards entirely. We asked these institutions specifically why they had chosen not to proceed. Perhaps surprisingly, only one institution indicated difficulties in meeting match-funding requirements as the main reason. Of the rest some felt that their allocation was too small to justify the effort required (eight of the twelve had fewer than ten awards in total); whereas others judged that they would be very unlikely to recruit sufficient students who met the basic criteria for PSS. This was mainly related to the typical pattern of entry to existing master's courses (e.g. those which recruited experienced professionals rather than new graduates) and/or where the institution had few or no undergraduates likely to be eligible for the awards. One large, research-intensive university rejected the awards on the grounds

[10] This data was originally collected by HEFCE in 2015 as part of their Annual Monitoring Statement.

that increasing home student entry to taught postgraduate programmes did not fit with its strategy (or common pathways for its graduates) which focused instead on research degrees.

3.4 Twenty-nine institutions partially reduced their allocation. Again, difficulties in match funding were not salient with only two institutions mentioning this as a reason. The remainder reported difficulties in recruiting sufficient eligible students.

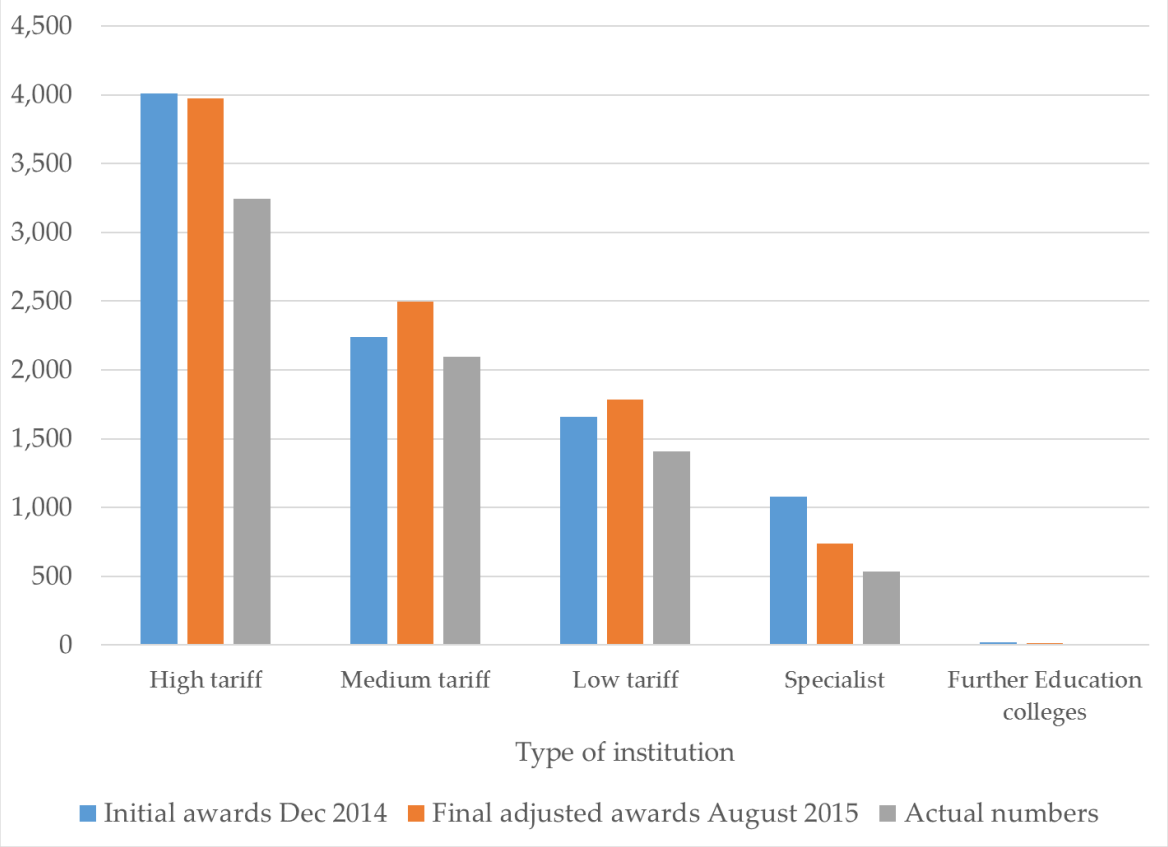

Figure 3.1 Allocation and take-up of PSS2 awards by institution type
Source: HEFCE Annual Monitoring Statement

Scheme launch dates

3.5 Most institutions (65%) launched their scheme between January and March 2015, with a large majority (82%) having launched by May 2015. There appeared not to be any obvious connection between the timing of institutional launches and their overall success in awarding PSS funding to students.

Overall out-turn

3.6 Overall, based on indications from HEFCE's Annual Monitoring Statement, we note that 9,009 awards were allocated under PSS2, of which just under 7,300 were taken up by students. Comparing awards to institutions' revised targets at March 2015:

- 50 institutions allocated at least 90% of their awards
- 69 institutions allocated fewer than 90% of their awards
- 12 institutions had declined their awards altogether

3.7 We did not notice any substantial differences in success rate across institutions in different tariff bands, except that success rates were typically much lower in further education colleges. However, these institutions represented only a very small proportion of the overall allocation: seven institutions, three of which declined all awards, with the other four accepting no more than five awards each.

3.8 The success rate was higher in the North East than other regions, with a success rate over 90% across the five universities in the region combined (with none below 80%). We can speculate that this might reflect a combination of relative affordability (cost of living, fees) compared to other regions and a high proportion of students with targeted characteristics in the region, but we have no firm basis on which to make this claim.

Socio-demographic characteristics of PSS award holders

3.9 Table 3.1 sets out the socio-demographic characteristics of PSS2 award holders, with PSS1 students included for comparison purposes. This information is taken from award holders' undergraduate qualifier record; as noted above there were some records missing from the PSS2 HESA data. For 2015/16:

- More women than men received awards (56.2 to 43.7%)
- Two-thirds of award holders were White (67.4%), with the next two largest categories being Asian (12.0%) and Black (11.1%)
- The majority of award holders were aged between 21 and 25 (80.9%)
- Around one-third of award holders originated from the two lowest POLAR3 quintiles (35.8%)
- Over half of recipients had no parental experience of HE (57.6%)
- Almost half of the recipients originated from National Statistics Socio-economic Classification groups (NS-SEC) 4-8 (44.6%), and;
- Around one-fifth of award holders originated from London (18.1%; the largest single group).

We compare the characteristics of PSS2 award holders to the overall population of in-principle eligible postgraduates later on in the report (see sections 3.47 – 3.51 and tables 3.5 and 3.6).

	PSS1 2014/15		PSS2 2015/16	
	n	%	*n*	%
Gender				
Female	830	54.7	3,620	56.2
Male	685	45.3	2,815	43.7
Ethnicity				
Asian	170	11.2	775	12.0
Black	165	11.0	715	11.1
Chinese	-	-	70	1.1
White	1,030	68.1	4,340	67.4
Mixed/Other	100	6.7	475	7.4
Unknown	30	2.0	60	0.9
Age				
20 and under	55	3.6	35	0.6
21 to 25	935	61.7	5205	80.9
26 to 30	205	13.6	455	7.1
31 to 35	125	8.2	265	4.1
36 to 40	70	4.8	165	2.6
41 to 45	65	4.2	155	2.4
46 to 50	30	2.0	85	1.3
51 and over	30	1.9	70	1.1
POLAR3				
Quintile 1	65	16.8	670	15.7
Quintile 2	75	19.2	855	20.1
Quintile 3	80	20.5	875	20.6
Quintile 4	80	20.5	915	21.5
Quintile 5	85	22.9	940	22.1
Self-reported disability				
Disability specified	260	17.2	1215	18.9
No disability specified	1255	82.8	5220	81.1
Parental higher education				
No	470	54.5	3075	57.6
Yes	395	45.5	2265	42.4
Social class of household (NS-SEC)				
Higher managerial & professional	115	18.8	660	14.8
Lower managerial & professional	85	25.7	585	27.5
Intermediate occupations	160	13.3	1225	13.1
Small employers & own account workers	50	8.3	410	9.2
Lower supervisory & technical	35	5.6	230	5.1
Semi-routine	110	17.8	875	19.6
Routine	55	9.1	415	9.3
Never worked & long-term unemployed	-	-	65	1.4

Table 3.1 Socio-demographic characteristics of PSS1 and PSS2 award holders
Source: HESA Student Record

Which groups of students were targeted for PSS2 awards?

3.10 HEFCE's guidance for PSS2 included a set of basic eligibility criteria which award holders were required to meet, as well as guidance to institutions about additional criteria for targeting. Details are provided in the PSS2 circular (see footnote 3, p. 6), but essentially these stated that eligible students were:

i. Progressing from an undergraduate course for which they were charged the higher tuition fee applying since 2012-13
ii. Undertaking taught postgraduate master's courses in any subject
iii. Studying full-time or part-time for a maximum of two years
iv. Domiciled in the UK or EU
v. From a group that is evidentially under-represented among the institution's taught master's population.

Only criterion (v) gave institutions any discretion in how they would target their awards, and we focus on this in our analysis.

One scheme or many?

3.11 A key finding from the evaluation of PSS1 was that simple, singular schemes had fared somewhat better than more complex or multiple schemes in the pilot projects. This message seems to have been heeded to some extent by participants in PSS2, since 89% of survey respondents reported their institution had adopted a singular scheme. Of the remainder, some had run multiple schemes across the whole institution, whereas some had run different schemes in different faculties. Given this skew in the representation of scheme design, it is difficult to compare across the singular and multiple groups with any certainty. However, it is worth noting that only three of the 13 multiple schemes recruited students to 90%+ of their allotted awards, compared to 44 of the 98 singular schemes.

3.12 While we were not able directly to measure this given the nature of our evaluation exercise, there is a strong possibility that a national singular scheme would have been more successful than the devolved, differential schemes in PSS2. Effectively there were as many different schemes as there were participating institutions, which would have had the effect of atomising the overall PSS2 message. However, institutions themselves were not supportive of a centralised scheme: over half stated that they did not wish to see such arrangements when asked directly in the survey. From site visit discussions, it would seem this is due to a wish to tailor support for the specific needs of the institution in question and its local context, taking into account location, student demographic, mission and subject mix. Since institutions were match-funding 50% of the value of awards, this is a justifiable stance. In a wholly publicly-funded scheme however, local specifics may be considered secondary

to a focus on efficacious achievement of policy objectives. Our judgement is that a singular scheme, while potentially insensitive to local context, presents greater potential for achieving a measurable effect.

3.13 Research on undergraduate funding schemes suggests that there is little evidence that complex individual institutional schemes are effective in their objectives.[11] While a single postgraduate scheme might not have benefitted each individual institution, overall it arguably enhances the visibility of the scheme to students and would be expected more effectively to target underrepresented students. Anecdotally, site visits suggested the master's loan scheme has achieved this simplicity and consistency of message. However, as noted in paragraphs 2.13 – 2.14, contextual flexibility may be preferable, particularly at present where work continues on conceptualising and measuring underrepresentation at postgraduate level. The key message is that it is not possible to have both a clear signal of effectiveness and a complex devolved scheme. The choice of which to emphasise is a decision for policymakers. We reflect on this choice in paragraph 4.20 below.

How were groups of students identified as being underrepresented?

Criteria adopted

3.14 We collected, through the survey, details of the criteria used by institutions to allocate awards to underrepresented students (Figure 3.2). Most institutions adopted multiple criteria, with only 20 reporting using a single criterion for allocation (most commonly low household residual income [HRI], reported by seven). These patterns matched our site visit institutions, where financial circumstances were the most frequently applied criterion (and only one did not include financial circumstances). Approaches to this varied; most institutions sought evidence of a full undergraduate maintenance award or bursary, while two institutions considered current household income. One of these independently audited 20% of the sample of award holders to verify self-reported circumstances. A different institution used only 'low income' in their targeting, justified as an attempt to recruit as many applicants as possible. All other site visit institutions included additional targeting criteria, with the prevalence of criteria matching the patterns seen in the survey.

Rationale for criteria

[11] Nursaw Associates (2015) *What do we know about the impact of financial support on access and student success?* Available at: https://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Literature-review-PDF.pdf (accessed 2 March 2017).

3.15 There was no over-riding pattern of how criteria were determined. In the survey, institutions reported drawing on advice from HEFCE, using existing undergraduate criteria and/or identifying underrepresented groups from their existing data (about half of respondents mentioned each approach). Around one-third drew on expert advice from within their own institution, with the same proportion referring to PSS1, including 19 institutions which did not take part that year.

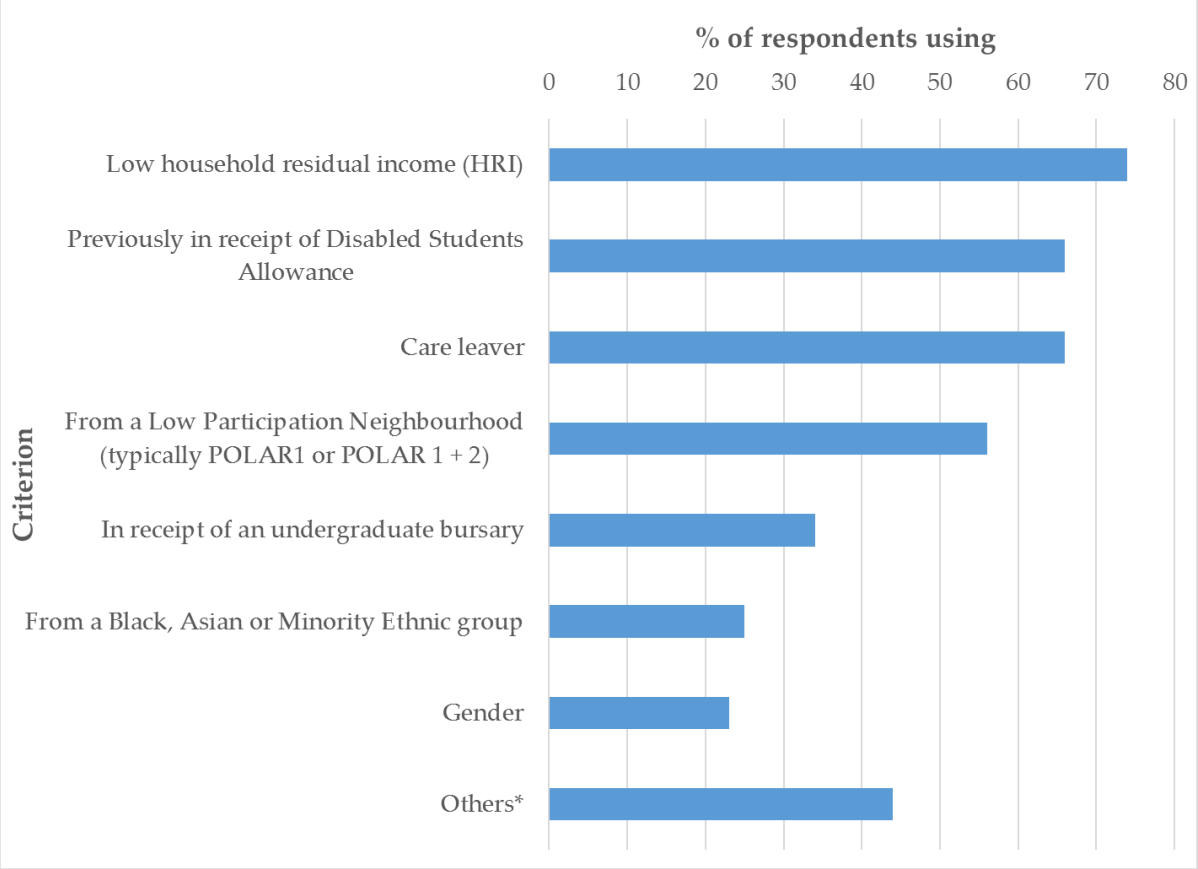

Figure 3.2 Popularity of criteria used by institutions participating in PSS2

Note: categories not mutually exclusive

Source: online survey

* Others includes first-generation HE, subject discipline, care giver (and further categories)

3.16 Our site visits allowed us to explore the process of criteria-setting in more depth. Four of our cases appeared to have a clear sense of which groups of students are currently under-represented in their taught postgraduate courses, evidenced through routine collection and analysis of data on their undergraduate and postgraduate populations. One institution had carried out considerable work during PSS1 in order to identify under-represented groups and develop appropriate criteria.

> PSS1 resulted from broad consultation across the university (with a six-month lead-in time); the same resources could not be duplicated in the circumstances of PSS2.

Another similarly reported having undertaken significant work over the past five years in terms of expansion and widening participation (WP) for both undergraduate and taught postgraduate courses. It was thus felt that PSS2 "arrived just at the right time in the evolution of [the university]'s scholarship offer", since two merit-based postgraduate scholarship schemes were already in place. Criteria chosen for PSS2 were consistent with an undergraduate WP scholarship (which targets first-in-family and low-income students) and the awards were explained as an 'enhancement' for eligible students applying to one of the two existing institutional schemes (i.e. PSS2 awards were not advertised as a separate scholarship).

3.17 Conversely, four site visit institutions reported holding no WP background data for taught postgraduates. One took guidance from HEFCE but admitted to being "pretty much in the dark" in terms of their 'Widening participation in STEM' scholarship scheme (although the gender imbalance within business and technology courses was known, prompting their second scheme). Others made inferences from their undergraduate populations in the development of their criteria. One, for example, has a high number of students from low-income backgrounds – one-third of undergraduates are NS-SEC 4-7 and in receipt of a full maintenance grant – hence the decision to focus solely on low-income applicants and offer PSS2 in a form that complemented the institution's Office for Fair Access (OFFA) agreement.

3.18 Of those institutions funded under both rounds, eight reported widening their criteria to expand the reach of their scheme, but conversely five narrowed their criteria in order to target underrepresented groups more effectively. In the site visits, all institutions explained their criteria in terms of reaching under-represented groups of students, but rationales varied in relation to expected demand. One institution, which experienced high demand for PSS1, devised a points-based system, meaning that applicants had to meet multiple criteria in order to be eligible. Furthermore, not all criteria carried equal weighting – such that applicants from POLAR quintile 1 or 2 areas had to meet several other criteria in order to be eligible. Similarly, another institution prioritised applicants who met multiple criteria. Institutions that doubted from the outset that they would achieve their allocation opted to keep their scheme as open as possible beyond the criteria set by HEFCE, specifying the need to meet only one of the additional criteria. No institution reported having to alter or broaden their criteria during the recruitment cycle. While this variation in approaches runs the risk that an applicant rejected from one scheme would have been accepted elsewhere, we did not see such an issue arise in practice through our site visits.

What impact (direct and indirect) did PSS2 funding have on students?

Overall impact

3.19 The 14 students interviewed offered mostly positive comments about PSS2 and were extremely thankful to have received the funding. There is little evidence from the interviews that PSS funding directly shaped decision-making. Most students stated they had first seriously considered postgraduate study midway through their undergraduate degree and only learnt about PSS2 once they had applied for their course.

3.20 Three students we interviewed believed that they would not have been able to accept their postgraduate place without the addition of PSS funding. The others suggested they would have made up the difference by seeking parental support, alternative funding, or part-time employment. Seven students interviewed undertook paid part-time employment while studying; four did not. Those who did not work instead supported themselves through existing savings, while one student took out a loan from a finance company which runs a scheme through their university. Students who worked were aware that they were at a disadvantage in their studies compared to those students with access to independent sources of funding (e.g. parents). Only a few of the students we interviewed were able to secure part-time work in areas related to their field of study. They felt that this meant they had less time to devote to their studies compared to others and that they had less opportunity to secure relevant experience which would be useful in securing future employment.

Loan or grant?

3.21 When asked whether they would have would have taken up an equivalent loan to finance postgraduate study, four tentatively said yes – "as a last resort" – and three said no. Several of the students interviewed had since embarked on doctoral studies, with funding. We also asked institutions for their views on this topic through the survey, eliciting a mixed reaction. Roughly equal numbers of respondents – around one fifth of the total – thought that loans definitely could, or definitely could not have stood in for PSS2. The large majority were somewhere between these two extremes. The popularity of the 2016/17 master's loan scheme was noted in open comments but some pointed out that it is far from certain that the increases are from the same kinds of students targeted by PSS2. Many respondents suggested debt is a barrier, although no systematic evidence was presented to substantiate this view. A few respondents noted the intuitive continuity of the new loan scheme with undergraduate arrangements.

Did the form of the award have an impact?

3.22 Only a few institutions raised the amount of the award as an issue or thought it was insufficient, with the general view from site visits being that £10,000 was 'about right'. Three of the site visit institutions considered the award amount as too low, as they estimated annual living costs for students on their postgraduate courses of £15,000+. One survey respondent suggested it would have been possible to assist more students with a lower award, since it had evidence from PSS1 that underrepresented graduates could be attracted with much smaller financial inducements.

3.23 Most survey respondents offered their PSS awards as a mix of tuition fee waiver and bursary. Where we have specific details, including from site visits, it appears that most institutions opted to waive tuition fees up to the maximum value and then pay any remaining funds to the student in instalments. Six institutions offered fee waivers only and eight a cash payment only (with the student remaining liable for their fees). It is worth noting that tuition fees for taught postgraduate master's programmes vary considerably. In some institutions, students would have several thousand pounds remaining in cash after the fee waiver was deducted; whereas in a small number of others (mainly in London), the PSS2 award was not sufficient to cover the whole tuition fees.[12]

3.24 Few institutions (about one in five) reported having evidence that their approach to the form of the award would be more effective. Our impression from the survey and site visits is that arrangements were mainly made on the basis of administrative convenience (which is arguably justifiable given the unexpected transaction costs of running PSS2). The students we spoke to were very positive about the form in which their awards were disbursed and emphasised the benefits of continuity with undergraduate payment arrangements (e.g. termly) in helping them to budget and factor in paid part-time employment. Further, we did not notice any relationship between the form of disbursement and institutions' level of success in PSS2.

3.25 These reported views from institutions and students provide important context for evaluating the effectiveness of PSS2. Our view though is that greater weight needs to be given to HESA data on actual changes in the taught postgraduate student body between 2014/15 and 2015/16, which we discuss below.

Has PSS had an impact on student choice regarding PGT study?

[12] More detailed investigation of the impact of tuition fee levels on take-up of PSS2 awards by students from low HRI backgrounds would require primary data collection of PGT masters fees and some means of identifying low HRI students in HESA data. This is outside of the scope of this evaluation.

Institutional views

3.26 Although data on enrolments from HESA will be helpful in determining changes in student behaviour, data on levels of application and enquiry are only collected by institutions. When we asked for their views on changes in student demand and choice in the survey, 55% reported no changes in choice and 41% noted no changes in demand overall. There were some notable responses however. Around one in ten noted an overall increase in master's applications and about one quarter noted more applications from specific groups, especially their own undergraduates. Institutions in the 'low-tariff' group were most likely to have experienced rising demand. On the face of it, this seems a quite modest effect. We should recall however that there had been concerns about students graduating under the new higher undergraduate fee arrangements from 2015, especially those from more disadvantaged backgrounds, being dissuaded from postgraduate study because of higher debt. A plausible conclusion is that PSS2 helped to mitigate any such outcome.

3.27 Unfortunately, many institutions were unable to make direct comparisons since they did not keep records on postgraduate applicant characteristics in previous years. One institution which did, in relation to its own more modest postgraduate WP scholarship scheme, saw a 150% rise in such students in PSS2.

3.28 Since many institutions in the site visit sample failed to recruit the allocated number of awards, it follows that they remained unconvinced about the impact of the scheme on student choice and demand. During site visits, several institutions suggested that the timing of the announcement explained this, with the scheme benefiting students who had already applied for a taught postgraduate course. This view was supported in the student interviews, as they were not always aware of the scheme when applying.

> Chose [university] for its reputation for the course and the overall name regarding sport. Applied before the bursary was announced. Had thought about how he might fund the master's, but wasn't sure.

> Applied for an engineering society scholarship to complete PGT Manufacturing at [university] – was unsuccessful in receiving this but was told about PSS.

3.29 This, together with the relatively small number of awards available, led most institutions to conclude the impact on student demand was minimal and difficult to quantify:

> The scheme was announced too late, students not aware about it until they had already applied for PGT, so it was unlikely to influence student behaviour. Deadlines were extended to March, as some courses were open until then, and hadn't been able to fill numbers. There

> may have been some impact on students applying after normal January deadline. But the numbers would be very small so the effect is not notable.

3.30 Institutions which recruited well held more positive views on the impact of the scheme. Three strong recruiters attributed observed growth in postgraduate applications at least in part to the scheme:

> The fact that it was 'free money' was very attractive. We saw an increase in student demand. PSS was part of this – there was increased marketing interest and the scheme was the catalyst.

> There was a step-change with PSS and this has carried forward. Applications are up 79% at the moment (as of November) – we are now looking at the possibility of and need to mitigate over-recruiting, and some courses will have to close early (800% increase in one area). This represents a complete revival – taught postgraduate courses that were almost culled are now strongly back. It also appears to have helped with undergraduate recruitment – postgraduates help on open days, and people want to stay. Undergraduate applications up 64% (sector is down by 9%).

3.31 In summary then, while for many institutions there was no appreciable effect of PSS2 on their UK-domiciled postgraduate population, there were others who did attribute changes to the scheme, in some cases significant. Impressionistically, there was a positive association between institutional engagement with PSS2 and the overall effect. However this was not always the case, and it further appears that the fact of the scheme's existence was not sufficient to ensure engagement in all cases.

Student views

3.32 All of the students we spoke to already aspired to PGT master's study prior to learning about PSS2. The funding thus acted as an 'enabler', rather than a 'persuader'. Most of them had already settled on the course they eventually enrolled on as their preferred option. This is likely to be because of the timing of announcements of the scheme, although we might have expected more reports of late, post-finals decision-making about PGT master's study, as was noted in a previous study.[13] Only a few students we interviewed reported looking at alternative institutions and none mentioned any kind of comparison of different PSS2 schemes to find the best 'fit'. A number of the students had opted to continue studying at their undergraduate institution (see also paragraph 3.37).

Enrolment data

[13] Mellors-Bourne, R. (2015) *Recent graduates' perspectives on access and progression to taught postgraduate.* Cambridge: CRAC. (report to the University of Sheffield)

3.33 Using analysis of HESA Student Record Enrolment data provided by HEFCE, we are able to compare the characteristics of PGT students in the academic years 2014/15 and 2015/16. This sample has been limited to include only students who were in principle eligible for a PSS award (not only PSS1 and PSS2 award holders), using the criteria in paragraph 3.10, except that the 2014/15 postgraduate students are limited to those who had entered a first degree in 2011/12 and the higher fee criterion does not apply to them. The purpose of this analysis is to consider whether there is evidence of increases or decreases in the participation of students with specific characteristics across the two years.

3.34 Table 3.2 sets out the undergraduate and postgraduate subject choices of eligible students across the two years. Here there is little notable change. The distribution of undergraduate subjects remains broadly the same; Biological Sciences, Social Studies, and History and Philosophy are the three largest areas. A similar statement can be made about the distribution of postgraduate subject areas, which changes little from 2014/15 to 2015/16. Here the three largest subject areas are Business and Administration, Social Studies and Biological Sciences. Students' subject choice varies a little on the basis of PSS funding; approximately three-fifths of postgraduates remain in the subject area of their undergraduate degree, with this proportion being higher for PSS award holders (63.9% as against 55.9%). Patterns in terms of subject choice do not vary greatly on the basis of gender, ethnicity, disability or region.

3.35 Analysis of subject choice by NS-SEC suggests some variation across occupational groups. For both PSS-funded and unfunded students there was approximately a 7-8 percentage point difference in the likelihood of changing subject between undergraduate and postgraduate levels, with those from NS-SEC 1-3 most likely to change. Only 30.9% of those from NS-SEC 4-8 with PSS funding changed subject between levels, compared to 39.1% of PSS funded NS-SEC 1-3 students and 42.3% of unfunded NS-SEC 4-8 students. Analysis in terms of POLAR suggests a similar pattern in that more disadvantaged students – those from low participation neighbourhoods – were more likely to continue with their undergraduate subject. Again, for each POLAR quintile, PSS-funded students were more likely to continue with their undergraduate subject than unfunded students. There were also similar patterns for first-generation students.

3.36 PSS awards spanned science, engineering, technology and maths (STEM) and the humanities, arts and social sciences (HASS). In both 2014 and 2015, the majority of awards went to students within HASS subject areas. In 2014, 75.1% of PSS2 award holders were studying HASS subjects; this increased in 2015 (80.5%), and more closely aligned to the profile of taught postgraduate students without PSS funding (81.3% of whom were studying

	Undergraduate				Postgraduate			
	2014/15		2015/16		2014/15		2015/16	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Subject								
Agriculture & related subjects	120	0.7	100	0.6	115	0.7	85	0.5
Architecture, building & planning	290	1.7	250	1.5	475	2.8	390	2.3
Biological sciences	3,490	20.3	3,480	20.3	2,310	13.4	2,325	13.6
Business & administrative studies	1,215	7.1	1,160	6.8	2,045	11.9	2,105	12.3
Combined	90	0.5	85	0.5	50	0.3	45	0.3
Computer science	310	1.8	330	1.9	410	2.4	425	2.5
Creative arts & design	1,100	6.4	1,150	6.7	1,065	6.2	1,070	6.3
Education	140	0.8	230	1.3	570	3.3	580	3.4
Engineering & technology	625	3.6	555	3.2	755	4.4	700	4.1
Historical & philosophical studies	1,600	9.3	1,585	9.2	1,125	6.5	1,105	6.4
Languages	1,260	7.3	1,255	7.3	815	4.7	805	4.7
Law	1,145	6.7	1,180	6.9	1,175	6.8	1,190	7.0
Mass communications & documentation	300	1.8	345	2.0	570	3.3	600	3.5
Mathematical sciences	490	2.9	410	2.4	290	1.7	255	1.5
Medicine & dentistry	370	2.1	385	2.2	1,655	9.6	1,615	9.4
Physical sciences	1,060	6.2	980	5.7	835	4.8	805	4.7
Social studies	2,330	13.5	2,315	13.5	2,090	12.1	2,090	12.2
Subjects allied to medicine	1,265	7.4	1,235	7.2	800	4.7	775	4.5
Veterinary science	-	-	90	0.5	65	0.4	145	0.9

Table 3.2 Undergraduate and postgraduate subjects of PGT students (eligible sample only)

Source: HESA Student Record 2014/15 and 2015/16

HASS in 2015). Around one-fifth of PSS2 awards were dedicated to students in the STEM subject areas (19.5%).

3.37 In general, students in receipt of PSS2 funding were considerably more likely to stay at their undergraduate institution than those without (68.0% compared to 51.2%). These proportions are comparable to 2014/15, when 63.3% of PSS1 scholars remained at their undergraduate institution. Institutional choice was also considered in relation to students' socio-demographic characteristics. For gender, ethnicity and disability, there appears to be little difference from the general trends. Older PSS2 award holders were more likely to remain in the same institution. About three-quarters of over 25s did so, compared to only two-thirds of those aged 25 and under. PSS2 award holders from POLAR quintiles 1 or 2 were more likely to stay at their undergraduate institution (74.7%), which is somewhat higher than students from the same POLAR quintiles who did not receive PSS2 funding (56.4%). PSS2 scholars who reported no parental experience of HE were also more likely to remain at their undergraduate institution than their counterparts without a PSS2 award (70.7% compared to 65.2%).

	Institution tariff score					
POLAR3	**High**		**Medium**		**Low**	
	n	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**
Quintile 1	255	12.5	285	18.1	185	19.6
Quintile 2	325	16.0	360	22.9	230	24.3
Quintile 3	385	18.9	335	21.3	220	23.3
Quintile 4	465	22.9	320	20.3	180	19.0
Quintile 5	605	29.7	275	17.5	130	13.8
Total	2,035	100.0	1,575	100.0	945	100.0

Table 3.3 PSS2 award-holders' undergraduate degree institution tariff by POLAR3 quintile
Source: HESA Student Record 2015/16

3.38 Table 3.3 above presents the undergraduate institutions of PSS2 scholars by tariff group and student POLAR quintile. Firstly, it is clear that more PSS2 scholars originate from neighbourhoods with higher HE participation (n = 1,640 for POLAR quintiles 1 or 2; n = 1,975 for quintiles 4 or 5), and considerably more PSS scholars graduated from a high-tariff institution (n = 2,035, compared to n = 945 from low-tariff HEIs). There are apparent associations between POLAR quintile and tariff group. Just over half of all PSS2 scholars graduating from a high-tariff institution originate from POLAR quintile 4 or 5, compared to around one-quarter from quintiles 1 or 2. These distributions are inverted for low-tariff institutions, with nearly half of PSS scholars graduating from these institutions originating from quintiles 1 or 2, and only one-third originating from a quintile 4 or 5 neighbourhood.

POLAR is an aggregate measure, not an individual one, so it may be that quintile 4 and 5 students were targeted using other criteria (including non-socio-economic).

Table 3.4 below details postgraduate recruitment trends in 2015/16, in relation to recruitment to PSS2 (i.e. actual recruitment as a proportion of the number of available awards). Firstly, it can be observed that institutions were fairly evenly distributed with regard to recruitment change – 33% reported an increase in taught postgraduate numbers of more than ten per cent, 28% reported no change, and 39% reported a decrease of more than ten per cent. For institutions that recruited well (increasing PGT numbers by more than ten per cent), there is no clear evidence to attribute this to PSS2. Institutions within this category were almost evenly split between achieving or missing their PSS allocation target, thereby undermining the notion of a spill-over effect. Conversely, for those institutions that saw taught postgraduate numbers either stagnate or decrease in 2015, a difficulty with recruiting to PSS2 is also clear.

Change in PGT recruitment	**Proportion of PSS award target**	**Institutions (n)**
Increase >10 per cent	>90 per cent of target	21
	<90 per cent of target	17
No change	>90 per cent of target	9
	<90 per cent of target	23
Decrease >10 per cent	>90 per cent of target	13
	<90 per cent of target	32

Table 3.4: Change in overall recruitment of PSS2-eligible PGT master's students 2015/16 by success in meeting PSS2 target

Did PSS2 meet institutions' and students' expectations?

Institutions

3.39 During site visits, institutions reported initial positive reactions to the announcement of PSS2 – the financial barrier to postgraduate study, and the need for scholarships for particular groups of students, were accepted and the announcement complemented many of the institutions' strategies for growing PGT. This positivity was somewhat short-lived; the eligibility criteria together with the timing of the Government's announcement led many institutions to conclude, early on, that they were unlikely to achieve their initial allocation. Three institutions were particularly keen to stress this – but reasoned that there would be little point requesting a lower allocation in subsequent adjustments, since the will to help as many students as possible, with the necessary matched funding, was in place. Moreover, there was no penalty for under-recruitment:

> More awards were requested because we didn't want to turn down potential funding but the number could not be met. There was quite a bit of guesswork along the way and the adopted target number was in fact not far off from our initial estimates. We would not have had a problem fulfilling the number if there had not been the restrictions around higher fees and immediate progression.

3.40 Regarding eligibility, the 'end-on' requirement of the award was criticised by several institutions – indeed, it is at odds with the postgraduate strategies of some, especially where professional experience was a preferred entry requirement. Some (but not all) argued this criterion discriminated against the students PSS2 intended to help (since it was hypothesised that low-income students would be more likely to need to work for several years before embarking on postgraduate study). While some institutions reported that PSS2 helped students progress immediately to PGT master's study when this had not been common previously, in general institutions felt that the 'end-on' criterion limited their success in allocating awards.

3.41 In evaluating their own activities against expectation, with hindsight one-third of survey respondents would not have done anything differently. A further third would have promoted their scheme sooner, whereas a smaller number would have amended their criteria or advertised more widely.

Students

3.42 Several students we interviewed commented that they found the application process straightforward and simple. No problems were reported with receiving the award. Only one student reported difficulty in terms of interpreting the eligibility criteria – this student was first told they were ineligible, only to challenge this decision and have it revoked. Broadly speaking, once they had heard about PSS2, the scheme met their expectations. Students interviewed were acutely aware of the cost of living, the need for careful budgeting and part-time employment in order to bridge the gap between their award and their total costs (tuition fees and maintenance).

Did institutions achieve their aims in widening participation at PGT level?

Fit between PSS2 aims and institutional strategies

3.43 Most institutions visited stated an intention to increase PGT numbers, particularly those of home students. For most institutions, PGT study was considered a priority area. One large research-intensive university was a clear exception to this view, considering PGT master's courses as a 'minority activity' and mostly attractive to international students.

> Postgraduate study is significantly more international than undergraduate [given the subject specialism of the institution]. Students are fairly young – at the start of their careers. PGT constitutes a minority of the postgraduate population; research degrees are the priority and the majority. Most students progressing to a PhD will have undertaken an integrated master's or an MRes. Those who come to the PhD with a taught master's degree tend to have studied elsewhere.

3.44 Three institutions spoke of institutional commitments to widening postgraduate participation, mostly realised through previous or existing scholarship schemes (PSS1 and institutional schemes). One referred to the need to compete internationally to attract the 'brightest and the best' PGT master's students, and to therefore offer similarly attractive funding as might be found elsewhere (namely the US). In contrast to the previously mentioned institution, this university stressed the importance of the PGT master's for those aspiring towards an academic or research career in the Arts and Humanities subjects (significant subjects institutionally).

> PGT is considered incredibly important as a bridge to postgraduate research; hence PSS2 was considered really worthwhile and attracted the support of the university. PGT support is identified as a gap, and the university has targeted much funding towards this. Philanthropists are receptive to this, they want to help and see it is a worthy cause. It is also a subject specific issue – it adversely hits Arts and Humanities.

Targeting and matching

3.45 Figure 3.3 below shows the eligibility criteria matched by students who took up PSS awards, as reported by participating institutions (top-scoring criteria only listed). About two-thirds of the total awards were made on the basis of a low income. For the other criteria listed, relatively small numbers of awards were made on that basis. This contrasts with the proportion of institutions that included these criteria in their scheme. For instance, around two-thirds of institutions reported including Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) recipients as one of their criteria, but fewer than 10% of awards appear to have been allocated on this basis. This is possibly linked to the way in which scheme rules worked, with certain criteria being prioritised over others, as well as being linked to supply and demand (i.e. how many students there were in the base population with these characteristics). Other than the proportion of awards made to undergraduate bursary holders being higher at high-tariff institutions, there was little variation of note in criteria matching across institutions or regions.

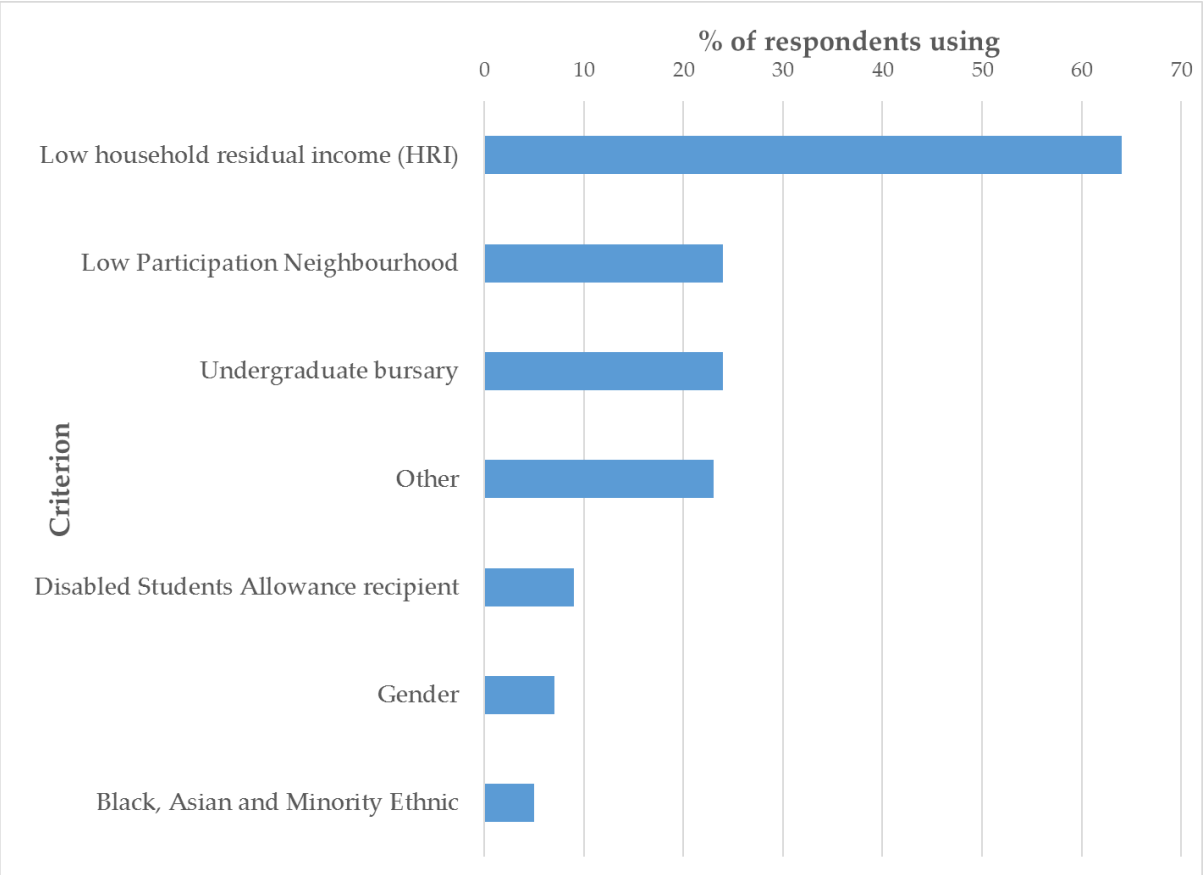

Figure 3.3 Eligibility criteria matched by PSS award holders, 2015/16 (as reported by participating institutions in the evaluation survey)
Note: categories not mutually exclusive
Source: online survey

Were more students from targeted backgrounds recruited?

3.46 No institutions reported a decrease in students from the targeted backgrounds, although 31 of the 110 survey respondents experienced no change. Half had only a marginal increase but one-fifth reported significant increases. In open comments, respondents tended to note a simple increase in applications. Unfortunately, they often also noted that they had no clear evidence that PSS2 was the cause of the increase, or the evidence they did provide was anecdotal. This points to a clear need for any future scheme to include stronger monitoring and evaluation requirements for institutions, something which is likely to be part of broader best practice in widening postgraduate participation (we reflect further on this in paragraphs 4.21 – 4.24 below).

Some institutions did report some systematic data collection on impacts, however. For example:

- One institution surveyed all 200+ of its award holders: 75% reported they would not have been able to enrol on a taught postgraduate course without the PSS2 scholarship.
- Two other institutions with fewer awards overall reported similar findings (80%+ and 71% would not have been able to enrol).
- One institution reported higher proportions of master's students from low income/quintile 1-2 and DSA students compared to the previous year.
- Only 7% of surveyed award holders at another institution would definitely have taken the same course without the PSS2 funding.
- A smaller specialist institution found that only one in eight PSS2 applicants who had not received an award had enrolled anyway.

3.47 HESA Student Record data about postgraduates provide a more comprehensive picture of changes in student enrolment between 2014/15 and 2015/16. Table 3.5 presents socio-demographic data. Within this sample of notionally eligible students, the distributions of gender, age and region of home domicile are similar across both years. However, differences are observed for ethnicity, POLAR, disability, parental HE and NS-SEC – for each of these, the 2015/16 sample of students has higher proportions of traditionally under-represented characteristics than the 2014/15 sample. Increases in participation are observed for each of the following:

- Black and Asian students (from 4.7% to 6.5%; and 11.0% to 12.1% respectively)
- POLAR3 quintile 1 participation (7.7 to 9.5%)
- Students with a self-reported disability (12.1% to 14.2%)
- No parental experience of HE (35.4% to 41.5%)
- NS-SEC 4-7 24.7% to 29.5%)

3.48 Although there are clear differences in some of these targeted characteristics of PGT students between 2014/15 and 2015/16, the absolute size of increases is relatively modest. For instance, there were only around 355 additional notionally eligible PGT students from POLAR quintile 1/2 backgrounds in 2015/16 compared to 2014/15 (despite there being around 7,300 PSS2-funded students). If we see PSS2's principal purpose as negating any potential discouraging effect of higher undergraduate tuition fees then it can claim success; if it is instead seen as a means for considerably increasing the numbers of PGT students from underrepresented groups, then the outcome is more modest.

	2014/15		2015/16	
	n	%	*n*	%
Gender				
Female	9,135	53.1	9,260	54.1
Male	8,080	46.9	7,850	45.9
Ethnicity				
Asian	1,890	11.0	2,065	12.1
Black	800	4.7	1,120	6.5
Chinese	290	1.7	265	1.5
White	13,040	75.7	12,420	72.6
Mixed/Other	975	5.7	1,100	6.4
Unknown	215	1.3	150	0.9
Age				
20 and under	1,140	6.6	1,145	6.7
21 to 25	14,945	86.8	14,560	85.1
26 to 30	485	2.8	565	3.3
31 to 35	235	1.4	310	1.8
36 to 40	155	0.9	200	1.2
41 to 45	125	0.7	160	.9
46 to 50	70	0.4	95	.6
51 and over	65	0.4	85	.5
POLAR3				
Quintile 1	1,020	7.7	1,250	9.5
Quintile 2	1,705	12.9	1,830	13.9
Quintile 3	2,350	17.7	2,470	18.7
Quintile 4	3,125	23.6	3,040	23.0
Quintile 5	5,060	38.2	4,605	34.9
Self-reported disability				
Disability specified	2,080	12.1	2,430	14.2
No disability specified	15,135	87.9	14,685	85.8
Parental higher education				
No	5,290	35.4	6,115	41.5
Yes	9,655	64.6	8,615	58.5
Social class of household (NS-SEC)				
Higher managerial & professional	4,120	32.6	3,580	28.4
Lower managerial & professional	3,795	30.0	3,765	29.8
Intermediate occupations	1,540	12.2	1,460	11.6
Small employers & own account workers	835	6.6	945	7.5
Lower supervisory & technical	455	3.6	515	4.1
Semi-routine	1,270	10.0	1,545	12.2
Routine	575	4.5	720	5.7
Never worked & long-term unemployed	60	0.5	85	0.7

Table 3.5 Socio-demographic characteristics of PGT students (eligible sample only)

Source: HESA Student Record 2014/15 and 2015/16

	Awards		Eligible		% eligible with award
	N	%	*N*	%	
Gender					
Female	3,620	56.2	9,260	54.1	39.1
Male	2,815	43.7	7,850	45.9	35.9
Ethnicity					
Asian	775	12.0	2,065	12.1	37.5
Black	715	11.1	1,120	6.5	63.8
Chinese	70	1.1	265	1.5	26.4
White	4,340	68.1	12,420	72.6	34.9
Mixed/Other	475	7.4	1,100	6.4	43.2
Unknown	60	0.9	150	0.9	40.0
POLAR3					
Quintile 1	670	15.7	1,250	9.5	53.6
Quintile 2	855	20.1	1,830	13.9	46.7
Quintile 3	875	20.6	2,470	18.7	35.4
Quintile 4	915	21.4	3,040	23.0	30.1
Quintile 5	940	22.1	4,605	34.9	20.4
Self-reported disability					
Disability specified	1,215	18.9	2,430	14.2	50.0
No disability specified	5,220	81.1	14,685	85.8	35.5
Parental higher education					
No	3,075	57.6	6,115	41.5	50.3
Yes	2,265	42.4	8,615	58.5	26.3
Social class of household (NS-SEC)					
Higher managerial & professional	660	14.8	3,580	28.4	18.4
Lower managerial & professional	1,225	27.5	3,765	29.8	32.5
Intermediate occupations	585	13.1	1,460	11.6	40.1
Small employers & own account workers	410	9.2	945	7.5	43.4
Lower supervisory & technical	230	5.1	515	4.1	44.7
Semi-routine	875	19.6	1,545	12.2	56.6
Routine	415	9.3	720	5.7	57.6
Never worked & long-term unemployed	65	1.4	85	0.7	76.5

Table 3.6 Comparison of socio-demographic characteristics of PSS award holders with eligible sample (2015/16 only)
Source: HESA Student Record 2014/15 and 2015/16

3.49 We noticed no substantial changes in the undergraduate academic characteristics of eligible students across the two years. The distribution of first-degree results and the region of undergraduate institution do not differ markedly across the two years.

3.50 Additionally, we compared the characteristics of the 6,435 PSS2 award holders who were identified as such in the HESA Student Record with the overall population of

notionally eligible PGT student population in 2015/16 (Table 3.6). For the characteristics reported we can see that there are clear differences between the two groups. The PSS2 award holders are more likely to be female, from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic group, from a low participation neighbourhood and to be a 'first generation' graduate. However, the magnitude of some of the differences is relatively modest. For example, one-quarter of the notionally eligible PGT students was from POLAR quintiles 1 and 2, compared to one-third among PSS2 award holders. This means that two-thirds of PSS2 students were not from lower participation neighbourhoods. We should note of course that this does not necessarily mean that the selected individuals were not from a disadvantaged or underrepresented group, since POLAR is a measure of the characteristics of a student's area of residence, not of the individual or their household. Using the NS-SEC measure as an alternative gives a more positive picture, although again PSS2 students in groups 4 – 8 remain the minority. We also compared the field of study of PSS2 and eligible students (not reported in Table 3.6) but there were no notable differences.

3.51 Table 3.6 also shows what percentage of postgraduates who were in-principle eligible for a PSS2 award were reported as having one. Assuming that there is no relationship between the characteristics listed and whether or not an award holder's data was reported, there are some notable differences across categories. In some groups, half or more of postgraduates who met the PSS2 requirements in principle (see para. 3.10) held a PSS2 award. This included students whose parents did not have a HE qualification, students of Black ethnicity, those from POLAR quintile 1, those with a specified disability, and those from NS-SEC groups 6-8.

Reasons for non-acceptance of awards

3.52 Institutions were asked whether they had evidence for why some students did not take up an award. There was no clear single answer to this question, with several reasons identified. There had been demand from students who were not eligible for PSS2 (e.g. they met institutions' WP criteria, but had not paid higher undergraduate fees). Timing was inopportune for some students, who had already made other arrangements. Some institutions felt that, as a new and temporary scheme, PSS2 was not sufficiently visible to graduates.

3.53 We asked institutions which had not managed to award 90% or more of their awards why that was the case. The large majority had experienced insufficient demand. For several institutions, this was because the cohort of students progressing immediately from a three-year first degree did not fit with their postgraduate provision or because they have a high proportion of students on four-year degree programmes who found themselves outside the scope of PSS2. In answering this question, some institutions seem to have been under the impression that they could only recruit their own first-degree graduates under PSS2.

Has PSS2 changed institutions' approaches to recruiting and supporting PGT students?

Change/continuity in practice

3.54 We asked institutions about changes which had followed as a result of PSS2, and about existing activities which were continued which were relevant to the scheme. A third reported no impact of PSS2 in 2016/17. Of those which reported changes, many of these were modest. Twenty institutions reported continuing some form of scholarship scheme, but of reduced volume and value. Nevertheless, we are aware of some relatively large schemes continuing to operate for 2017 entry.[14] Many of these institutions had also been involved in PSS1. Other continuities included adding PGT programmes to access agreements, increased fundraising for postgraduates and enhanced careers provision for PGT students.

3.55 Some institutions claimed that PSS2 had raised the issue of postgraduate WP. Unfortunately though, our impression was that for a substantial number of institutions, PSS2 was seen as a one-off initiative which, given a series of other competing demands, was not strategically embedded. Some institutions showed a strong prior commitment to widening postgraduate participation and saw PSS2 (and PSS1) as a vehicle for realising their intentions in this area, but for many others motivations were largely extrinsic. This suggests to us that adding some more directive approaches to enabling initiatives like PSS2 may be required to achieve policy goals in this area. HEFCE continues to provide core funding for PGT programmes which may offer an opportunity for direction through funding memoranda. Access strategies which will be required by the forthcoming Office for Students may represent another possibility.

Institutional buy-in

3.56 Every institutional scheme on which we have evidence involved several individuals and services across the respective institutions. This covered academic staff, admissions, marketing, IT, careers, finance, student services and registry functions. Over 70% of survey respondents reported senior management involvement.

3.57 In practical terms, some of the most productive institutional involvement was through connecting marketing, recruitment and WP functions with academic units to promote the awards to final-year undergraduates. Here, direct, targeted contact to students

[14] These included a scheme offering 100+ awards of £10,000; another offering 100 awards of £5,000; and a third offering 40 awards of £5,000. All of these used WP criteria, in whole or in part, and were offered by high-tariff institutions previously funded through both PSS1 and PSS2.

and applicants through email, as well as contact through academic staff, were reportedly effective.

3.58 We found no evidence of institutions working together on PSS2. This contrasts with arrangements for widening undergraduate participation. Pooling efforts to promote access to PGT master's programmes achieved benefits in PSS1.

Data monitoring

3.59 An important precondition for evaluating the impact of the PSS2 awards on the PGT population is the existence of baseline data on postgraduates' characteristics. As already noted, many institutions did not have such data available. In the survey, 30 respondents indicated that they are still not monitoring this data, but 23 reported now doing so. Some 57 respondents claimed to have monitoring data already, although this does not tally with the difficulties experienced in providing evidence on changes nor with the problems experienced in identifying PSS2-funded students through HESA.

How might HEFCE have approached PSS2 differently?

Timing

3.60 Institutions' responses to this question threw up few surprises and we anticipate that they will accord closely with informal feedback received by HEFCE during the operation of PSS2. From both the site visits and survey there was almost unanimous dissatisfaction with the timescale on which PSS2 operated. It was argued that this led to difficulties in securing match funding, given that budgets for the year were already allocated (particularly difficult for smaller institutions with less financial 'wriggle room'), and that it severely limited the capacity for institutions to sufficiently promote their schemes. Similar concerns were raised previously about PSS1. It should be noted here that timing of the announcement was largely outside HEFCE's control: funding was announced in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement on 3 December 2014, with HEFCE guidance and allocations to HEIs following on 15 December 2014. Clearly however the timing of the scheme impacted on its success.

Match funding/costs

3.61 Several suggestions were raised around costs and match-funding requirements. Two site visit institutions suggested a smaller institutional commitment could have made the awards go further, whereas others wanted the flexibility to offer a higher amount. Students interviewed supported this view – as noted, several undertook paid employment to supplement their PSS award, while one commented that 10k is 'not enough for most people

who don't have other funds'. The lack of a continued scholarship scheme was lamented by some institutional respondents.

Criteria

3.62 The criteria – notably the 'end-on' specification – were mentioned second most frequently, and perceived to create difficulties for half of the site visit institutions and a number of survey respondents. While some recognised the rationale for this element of PSS2, nevertheless they were clear that fewer restrictions would have led to better targeting of disadvantaged potential postgraduates.

Other comments

3.63 Of the 49 survey respondents who answered our question about what HEFCE might have done differently, 38 were positive about the scheme in general. This matched the view of site visit institutions. Some pointed to the transaction costs associated with a one-off scheme, which may partially account for the approach to PSS2 adopted by some, as noted in paragraph 3.55 above.

3.64 There was no systematic pattern to responses from students about potential changes to the scheme.

How did PSS1 compare to PSS2 in terms of outcomes?

Comparing the HESA Student Record data

3.65 Comparing 2014/15 and 2015/16 award holders (refer back to Table 3.1, p. 14), some differences are evident. The distribution of award holders' ages changes most notably – although this is not surprising given the 'end-on' requirement of the 2015/16 eligibility criteria. The proportion of award holders aged 26-35 is almost halved across the two schemes (from 21.8% to 11.2%); while the distribution of older groups changes less, suggesting that these individuals were most affected by the changes to eligibility. Home domicile region also changes across the two schemes, owing to the considerable decrease in the number of EU domiciled award holders (from 14.3% to 4.9%). The proportion of award holders from the North West, South West and South East each rise in 2015/16.

3.66 The proportion of female award holders has increased (from 54.7% to 56.2%). The proportion of award holders reporting a disability rises slightly (from 17.2% to 18.9%), as do the proportions originating from NS-SEC 4-7 (40.8% to 43.2%), or with neither parent holding a HE qualification (from 54.5% to 57.6%). In terms of ethnicity and POLAR, the composition of award holders changes little.

3.67 Comparing the distribution of award holders across subjects, for PSS2, first degree holders in Biological Sciences, Historical and Philosophical Studies, and Social Studies constitute the largest groups (19.3%, 10.5%, and 14.8% respectively). There is some evidence of change from PSS1; Biological Science graduates have increased (from 14.9% to 19.3%), while the proportions of Engineering and Mathematics graduates have decreased (from 9.6% to 2.8%, and 5.0% to 2.3%), probably because several PSS1 projects targeted this group specifically.

3.68 The postgraduate subjects for PSS2 largely mirror undergraduate subject choices. Biological Sciences constitutes the largest single subject (14.8% of award holders), closely followed by Business and Administrative Studies (14.7%) and Social studies (14.1%). A notable change from PSS1 is the increase in the proportion of award holders studying Creative Arts and Design (from 2.9% to 8.3%).

Institutional views

3.69 Through both the site visits and survey, we asked institutions involved in both PSS1 and PSS2 to compare and contrast the outcomes. A small number of institutions did not realise they had been involved in PSS1, although this was where they had been a minor partner in a larger scheme rather than a lead partner.

3.70 There was no clear message from this comparison and several institutions suggested that the differing nature of the schemes rendered such an exercise problematic in any case. Half of the respondents did not feel that one scheme was more successful than the other. The rest were equally split between favouring PSS1 and PSS2. It does seem that few had made any systematic comparison across the two schemes of their own accord however.

4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 In this section we summarise the findings from our evaluation, draw overall conclusions and make recommendations to HEFCE based on our judgement of the evidence collected.

Did PSS2 meet its objectives?

4.2 In general there was a positive reaction to the scheme by institutions and, with some adjustments, a reasonable commitment to the awards allocated, with match funding agreed. However not all of the 10,000 available awards were allocated.

4.3 PSS2 succeeded in supporting a large number of graduates (just fewer than 7,300) to pursue PGT master's study. This was disappointingly short of the total number of awards advertised by institutions (9,009). There was variation in the rate of success across institutions.

4.4 There is little robust evidence to confirm that PSS2 shaped student choice or decision-making. Institutions reported modest effects on demand. Signs that PSS2 acted as a positive enabler for entry to postgraduate courses were mainly anecdotal, but there were clear, consistent and widespread reports of students stating they would not have been able to attend without the PSS2 award. A small number of institutions were able to provide more systematic indications through surveys of all their award holders and came to the same conclusion. There were conversely some students who indicated that they would have enrolled without PSS2, although they reported that their award had improved their experience as a postgraduate student.

4.5 Institutions considered participation in PSS2 to have raised awareness of the issue of WP at PGT level, but only a few institutions reported a lasting change to practice.

How has PSS2 contributed to widening participation, fair access and social mobility?

4.6 It is not possible to determine the effect of PSS2 on social mobility, since doing so requires information about the longer-term post-study destinations of supported students. It is possible though to comment on whether the scheme supported widening of postgraduate participation.

4.7 There were more students from the targeted underrepresented groups from the notionally eligible population in 2015/16 than in the previous year. The absolute number and proportional representation of students from Low Participation Neighbourhoods, NS-SEC

groups 4 – 8, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups, disabled students and 'first generation' students all showed increases. Given the nature of the data available to us, we cannot say with certainty that these changes were caused by PSS2.

4.8 While the proportion of first-generation graduates showed a substantial increase, for other categories growth was more modest. It is possible that rather than support strong growth in PGT master's study among the targeted groups, PSS2 instead mitigated any possible retraction in numbers as a result of changes to undergraduate student funding (i.e. higher fees).

4.9 In the institutional schemes, the most popular criterion used to determine underrepresentation was coming from a low income household, as measured by HRI. This is a valid measure of need given the known financial barriers to take-up of PGT master's study. In the measures available for evaluation we only have other socio-economic indicators, which are imperfect proxies for HRI.

4.10 PSS2 seems to have had some positive effect in widening the distribution of PGT master's students across the sector (at least as far as students funded under the scheme are concerned). Figure 3.1 shows there were more PSS2 awards taken up by students at medium- and low-tariff institutions than at high-tariff institutions. Graduates with many of the characteristics targeted by PSS2 (e.g Minority Ethnic group, Low Participation Neighbourhood) are more likely to be found in medium- and low-tariff institutions and to progress in the same institution. Enabling progression within the same institution may be an effective means of widening postgraduate participation more generally, especially as PSS2 award holders from disadvantaged backgrounds appeared more likely to remain at their undergraduate institution for PGT master's study.

Reflections on the design and implementation of PSS2

4.11 Many elements of PSS2 functioned well and the scheme was well-received in general terms by the large majority of institutions and by all the funded students we interviewed. Only a few institutions declined to participate altogether.

4.12 Despite the scheme being announced after annual budgets were set, most institutions were able to 50% match-fund awards. However, this was easier for institutions with large financial turnovers. Institutions also felt able to provide match funding on a project basis, but would find recurrent commitment more difficult. A different balance of match-funding may be optimal. Some, mainly larger high-tariff universities, were able to attract donor contributions to match funding. This did not comprise a significant element of the total.

4.13 Institutions identified several specific issues with the design of PSS2. The most prominent was timing. Evidence from PSS2 (and PSS1) suggest that advanced notice, aligning scheme timing to the PGT master's planning and recruitment cycle, would significantly improve effectiveness.

4.14 While the rationale for the 'end-on' eligibility criteria was understood, institutions were clear that greater flexibility in the 'core' criteria would have allowed them to recruit more students in the target categories, in particular by opening the awards to graduates of longer standing (who may face more acute difficulties than newer graduates).

4.15 The award amount may be insufficient for the most disadvantaged. This sentiment was expressed most strongly at institutions in London and the South East where both tuition fee levels and the cost of living tend to be higher. Conversely there were a small number of institutions who felt smaller awards could be effective, potentially benefitting more students.

4.16 The postgraduate loan scheme is welcomed but this does not necessarily negate the case for non-repayable scholarships. Several institutions wish to see a mixed system of scholarships and loans, with higher awards for the most disadvantaged. Anecdotally institutions reported substantial take-up of PGT master's loans, but it should not be assumed that this includes students from the groups targeted by PSS2.

4.17 Our judgement is that PSS2 was most effective where it was aligned with pre-existing institutional prioritisation of and commitment to PGT provision and WP; was supported by co-ordinated and effective marketing efforts which went beyond the scholarships alone; and where institutions' own graduates matched the core criteria for the scheme. However, commitment to widening postgraduate participation is uneven across the sector and in the absence of external monitoring, some institutions appear to have allocated it low priority. Here, we see the merger of HEFCE and OFFA into the Office for Students as an opportunity to combine regulatory powers in relation to fair access and widening participation with expertise in PGT master's education to meet the objectives that PSS2 addressed. This might include measures to foster collaboration between institutions as appropriate, following the model of the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP). It should also include strong encouragement of initiatives to promote progression to postgraduate study through access agreements as part of the broader push to improve graduate outcomes for undergraduates from underrepresented groups.

4.18 Students with some of the characteristics targeted in PSS2 schemes tended to graduate from low- and medium-tariff HEI. For instance, most of those from lower participation neighbourhoods funded through PSS2 had graduated from a low- or medium-tariff HEI. This suggests to us that policies to widen postgraduate participation need to

account for the undergraduate location of students in a manner analogous to how undergraduate WP strategies involve working with schools in low participation areas.

4.19 PSS2 was targeted at the final 'hurdle' for becoming a PGT master's student – covering the costs of study. Prior to this point, graduates must aspire to, apply to and be accepted for PGT master's study. These are crucial parts of the process of widening postgraduate participation but outside of the scope of PSS2.

4.20 There seem to us to be two options in designing any future PSS-style scheme. These are between a centralised scheme with a fixed set of rules and criteria which apply everywhere; and a devolved scheme which gives considerable flexibility to institutions to set criteria and priorities. The former approach would provide a clearer signal of overall effectiveness than PSS2 could and would be suitable for acting on very specific postgraduate WP objectives (e.g. targeting students with low HRI only). Greater devolution of criteria has more chance of securing institutional engagement and is more sensitive to context, where the most pressing WP issue varies from institution to institution and subject to subject, but is much more difficult to evaluate. It is important to note that PSS2 was devolved and, in practice, favoured local assessment of underrepresentation and need. This means it cannot be compared directly with the new master's loans system which is a singular national system operating with a much-reduced set of criteria in comparison to PSS2. The strong take-up of master's loans seen in 2016/17, does not necessarily mean that the loan approach is more effective than scholarships, because PSS2 operated in a very different manner and targeted a very specific set of students in comparison (disadvantaged higher-fee 2015 graduates only). The existence of the master's loan scheme means any future PSS-style funding is likely to be more efficacious if treated as augmenting and enhancing, rather than substituting, loan funding.

Reflections on evaluation and monitoring

4.21 Institutional approaches to evaluating and monitoring WP at postgraduate level are not yet commonly established. Only a minority of institutions reported that their targeting criteria had developed from an evidence base. Typically, this constituted knowledge of undergraduate students' characteristics and discussions with HEFCE. Similarly, in only a few cases was there any evaluation of schemes by institutions.

4.22 There is a clear need for better institutional record-keeping and analysis about PGT master's students, especially underrepresented groups. This is evident through the substantial error in non-recording of PSS2 flags in HESA data but also in the absence of baseline data about PGT master's applicants and students, and lack of analysis of such data where it does exist. Our view is that this reflects institutional priorities. Some institutions have prioritised this area, but in the absence of an external directive, many have not.

4.23 Institutions need more direction on defining and measuring underrepresentation at PGT master's level. Institutions which had run relevant projects in PSS1 showed better understanding in this area. Further initiatives are underway in this area, such as the development of a new postgraduate WP indicator by HEFCE. The timing of PSS2 was such that overall conclusions from PSS1 were not available to inform institutional scheme design and there is scope for further dissemination of its findings (which could incorporate key messages from this report too).

4.24 Overall capacity in evaluating educational interventions, and specifically those related to widening participation, has been identified as a sector-wide issue (and priority) by HEFCE and OFFA. HEFCE is already taking steps to address this, such as promoting the evaluation framework recommended in a report it commissioned on the topic and building evaluation requirements into new strategic projects.[15] Continuation and strengthening of this action will help to improve the overall effectiveness and value-for-money of future interventions. We would suggest that this emphasis on evaluation should include two specific objectives. The first is to support the enhancement of evaluation capability within HEIs, especially in the area of WP. Focus has, unsurprisingly, been on delivery within relevant teams. There is a need to both develop evaluation capacity within HEIs' professional service teams, but also to draw on latent capacity (such as academic researchers in this area) and to collaborate to maximise economies of scale. This might be achieved through a dedicated programme led by HEFCE, OFFA and their successor(s). Second, the cost of robust evaluation needs to be recognised in budgets. There is no commonly agreed proportion of a project budget to devote to evaluation, which clearly will depend on the nature of a project. However, the proportion of spend for evaluation in PSS2 was very low relative to the overall cost (<0.1%) and there was no requirement for institutions to plan their own evaluations up-front.

[15] CFE Research (2015) *Student Opportunity outcomes framework research: in-depth study*. Bristol: HEFCE.

Recommendations

4.25 We recommend that HEFCE should:

i. Consider **repurposing an element of its current funding supplement for high-cost PGT provision to create a recurrent postgraduate support scheme** focusing on widening postgraduate participation. This funding, which for 2016/17 was worth £45.7 million,[16] was recently the subject of a consultation by HEFCE, which indicated an intention to repurpose its use in the medium term. Such a scheme would be complementary to the new master's loan scheme.

ii. **Determine the priority for criteria used in any such scheme** (such as targeting a specific form of underrepresentation nationally or devolving criteria setting to institutions to address local context), bearing in mind the fit between patterns of PGT master's applications and scheme eligibility criteria.

iii. **Provide ongoing guidance** on WP criteria at PGT level and disseminate best practice in monitoring and evaluation to institutions.

iv. Explore, with institutions and relevant sector bodies, suitable frameworks for **enabling institutions to collaborate and co-operate in widening postgraduate participation**.

4.26 We recommend that HEFCE, OFFA and their successor(s) should:

i. **Require inclusion of progression to PGT master's programmes in access strategies**. Access strategies are evolving to include consideration of progression from undergraduate to postgraduate study as part of the emphasis on student outcomes. However broader strategies for widening postgraduate access are required which build on lessons from PSS1, PSS2 and other evidence.

ii. **Support institutions in the development of their monitoring and evaluation** of WP to PGT master's programmes, including in outreach, fair admissions and retention, and in the generation of robust evidence in this area. This should involve recommending a minimum proportion of spend on high-quality evaluation as well as helping institutions to develop their evaluation

[16] HEFCE recurrent grants for 2016/17, final allocation (Circular 2016/31 Annex A Table 1).

capacity, perhaps through shared support for a dedicated capability-enhancing programme.

Appendix 1: PSS2 (2015/16) timeline

3 December 2014	Government announced intention to introduce a postgraduate loans scheme for England in 2016/17 (via the Chancellor's Autumn Statement). Also announced bursaries worth £10,000 each and totalling £50 million to be allocated by HEFCE for the 2015-16 academic year.
15 December 2014	HEFCE issued a circular letter (32/2014) to HEIs detailing their initial allocation and rules for PSS2.
8 January 2015	Briefing event on PSS2 for HEIs.
27 January 2015	Deadline for HEIs' initial response to allocations.
20 March 2015	HEIs informed of funding uplifts (where applicable).
From January 2015	HEIs begin to launch PSS2 schemes.
March 2015	Around two-thirds of institutional schemes 'live'.
May 2015	Around four-fifths of institutional schemes 'live'.
August 2015	Final adjustment of allocations agreed between HEFCE and HEIs.
September 2015	First PSS2 funded students commence studies

Appendix 2: List of abbreviations

DSA	Disabled Students' Allowance
EU	European Union
HASS	Arts, humanities and social sciences
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher education institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HRI	Household residual income
NCOP	National Collaborative Outreach Programme
NS-SEC	National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification
OFFA	Office for Fair Access
PGT	Taught postgraduate
POLAR	Participation of local areas
PSS	Postgraduate Support Scheme
PSS1	Postgraduate Support Scheme 2014/15
PSS2	Postgraduate Support Scheme 2015/16
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
WP	Widening participation