Seren Network Evaluation

Final Report

Seren Network Evaluation

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Glossary

Acronym/Key word	Definition
BMAT	BioMedical Admissions Test
CL	Community Learning
CIA	Counterfactual Impact Analysis
EAS	Education Achievement Service
FSM	Free School Meals
FE	Further Education
FEI	Further Education Institution
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HEAT	Higher Education Access Tracker
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEIs or HEPs	Higher Education Institution or Provider
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
LLWR	Lifelong Learning Wales Record
LNAT	National Admissions Test for Law
NPD	National Pupil Database
PSM	Propensity Score Matching
PLASC	Pupil Level Annual School Census
SHELL	Skills, Higher Education and Lifelong Learning
SEN	Special Educational Needs
STEMM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework
UCAS	University and Colleges Admissions Service
WISERD	Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods
WED	Welsh Examinations Database
WBL	Work Based Learning

1. Introduction

1.1 In July 2017, the Welsh Government appointed OB3 Research, in conjun

ction with the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD) of Cardiff University, to undertake an evaluation of the Seren Network.

1.2   The aim of the evaluation is to undertake a formative and process evaluation of the Seren Network to inform decisions about the criteria for young people's participation and the design and delivery of the programme at national and local levels. The evaluation consists of three key elements:

- a formative evaluation,
- a process evaluation,
- preparation for the final impact evaluation.

1.3   The overall objectives of the evaluation are to:

- Assess how each Seren hub is operating to include consideration of engagement criteria, programme costs, participation levels and programme of provision
- Identify the barriers and enablers to delivery for Seren hubs and participants
- Assess the extent to which hub activities contribute to the Seren Network objectives
- Design a methodology and make recommendations for undertaking a final impact evaluation of the programme.

1.4   The methodology adopted included interviews with Welsh Government officials and representatives from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) as well as a package of fieldwork with a range of contributors at each of the 11 Seren hubs. It also involved surveying participants, parents and representatives from schools and Further Education Institutions (FEIs) engaged with Seren.

Structure of this report

1.5   This report is presented in 12 chapters as follows:

- chapter one: this introduction to the report

- chapter two: an outline of the evaluation methodology and the profile of those surveyed

- chapter three: an introduction to the Seren Network including the policy and strategic context in place, the programme's aims and the delivery model

- chapter four: a review of published data setting out current trends in terms of A level attainment and top university applications and enrolments

- chapter five: findings from the fieldwork in relation to the design and underlying rationale for the Seren Network and the evidence of need in place for intervention

- chapter six: findings from the fieldwork in terms of the delivery models and management arrangements in place

- chapter seven: findings from the fieldwork regarding levels of awareness, hub recruitment and engagement with participants, parents and educational settings

- chapter eight: findings in relation to the characteristics of each hub's programme provision and views on how local hubs are working

- chapter nine: findings from the fieldwork in terms of how the Seren Network has engaged with HEIs

- chapter ten: difference made by participating within the Seren Network to participants and educational settings

- chapter eleven: consideration for possible approaches to adopt when undertaking a final impact evaluation of the Seren network

- chapter twelve: our conclusions and recommendations for this evaluation.

2. Evaluation Methodology

2.1 This chapter sets out the method deployed for undertaking the evaluation and offers a view about the strength and limitations of the approach adopted. The chapter also provides a profile of surveyed participants, parents and school/FEI representatives who responded to the three web surveys.

Method

2.2 The evaluation, which was undertaken between July and November 2017, encompassed the following elements of work:

- an inception stage to include attendance at an inception meeting with the study Steering Group, attending a Seren hub co-ordinators meeting in July 2017, accessing relevant information and documentation in relation to the Seren hubs and preparing an evaluation inception document

- desk based research to include a detailed literature review of Welsh Government policy and strategy documents and programme operational documentation

- a review of published sources of data covering current trends in terms of A level attainment, top university applications, enrolments and first year retention of Welsh students

- preparing research instruments to include semi-structured discussion guides for use with a range of contributors and three web based surveys to be deployed with Seren participants, their parents and representatives from schools and FEIs involved with the initiative. The surveys for participants and parents were designed to accommodate feedback from those currently and previously engaged with Seren, although were primarily promoted to those who were currently engaged with the programme

- conducting face to face interviews with ten policy and strategic stakeholders (seven Welsh Government representatives and three representatives from across the two contracted delivery agents, the Brilliant Club and Golley Slater)

- conducting telephone interviews with a total of 15 representatives from 13 HEIs. Of these four representatives were based within Welsh HEIs and 12 were from Russell Group/Sutton Trust institutions[1]. Representatives primarily held recruitment, outreach or admission responsibilities

- undertaking a package of qualitative fieldwork across the 11 hubs. The fieldwork included:

  - Interviews with 11 hub co-ordinators (and any support staff where appropriate)

  - Interviews with seven senior representatives from the host organisation or the hub network. These included Chairs of the Seren hub Strategy Group and/or the co-ordinator's line manager

  - Interviewing a total of 77 participants. Of these 14 were Year 12 students, 60 were Year 13 students and three were former participants

  - Interviewing 34 representatives from schools and FEIs engaged with the Seren hub which included a facilitated focus group with representatives of one Seren hub Management Group

  - Observing delivery at five events.

- deploying three bilingual web based surveys which were approved by the Welsh Government and piloted with a small number of respondents before they were fully launched. A link to each survey was distributed via Seren's Twitter page and by hub co-ordinators to schools and colleges, who were also asked to distribute the surveys to participants and parents. Responses were received from 168 participants, 35 parents and 23 FEI/school representatives.

- interviewing five parents either during our visits to the hubs or via a follow up discussion (parents were asked if they were prepared to contribute further as part of the web based survey)

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[1] One representative fell into both groups in that they were from a Welsh HEI and a Russell Group/Sutton Trust institution.

- considering possible approaches for undertaking a final impact evaluation of the Seren network, to include possible Counterfactual Impact Analysis approaches, and setting out recommendations on a possible methodology to adopt.

Methodological considerations

2.3 It was not possible for the research team to distribute the three web surveys directly to participants, parents or school and FEI representatives as the appropriate contact data could not be made available due to the fact that Seren hubs do not consistently collect contact data (and gain the necessary permission to share such data) for participants and their parents. The evaluation was therefore reliant upon hub co-ordinators to distribute the web links to schools and FEIs as well as via social media methods. An acceptable level of response was secured to the participant survey whilst the response to the other two surveys was lower than desired. As a result, the school/FEI and parental survey data should to be interpreted with some caution. Despite this, qualitative feedback was secured from representatives from schools and FEIs during the hub visits so as to provide a robust sample for the evaluation findings. Care must be taken when interpreting the views of parents gathered as part of this evaluation, given the low sample who contributed.

2.4 This report is not intended to offer an assessment of the impact achieved by the Seren Network in terms of the difference made to the number of applications, offers and enrolments made by Welsh domiciled students at leading universities but rather to offer evidence for how the Seren hubs are operating from the perspective of the co-ordinators, schools and FEIs, participants and their parents. Any impact assessment of the initiative would require an analysis of robust counterfactual data and this has not been included within the scope of this evaluation.

Profile of survey respondents

2.5 Three web surveys were deployed between 18 September 2017 and 15 November 2017. Survey responses were received from:

- 168 participants. Of these the majority were studying A levels in Year 13 at a school (110 or 66 per cent) whilst 18 (11 per cent) were studying A levels at an FE college or sixth form school and 31 (19 per cent) were studying A levels in Year 12 at a school

- 35 parents. Of these, the majority had a child studying A levels in Year 13 (23) or Year 12 (nine) at a school whilst three had a child at university

- 23 school and FEI representatives. Of these, all but one were based at a school setting.

2.6 Surveyed participants and parents had been involved with all 11 Seren hubs although the number of responses for the hubs covering Lliw-Tawe, Neath Port Talbot/Powys/Bridgend and the five counties[2] serviced by the Education Achievement Service (EAS) was very low – no more than six responses for each area. Surveyed school/FEI representatives covered nine of the 11 Seren hubs (not Neath Port Talbot/Powys/Bridgend or EAS) although in three hub areas only one response was received in each case.

2.7 The majority of surveyed participants (139 or 83 per cent), surveyed parents (28) and surveyed representatives from schools and FEIs (16) completed the survey in English. A third (59 or 35 per cent) of surveyed participants considered themselves to be fluent in Welsh whilst a further 16 per cent (26 respondents) could speak a fair amount of Welsh.

2.8 Two-thirds (108 or 64 per cent) of surveyed participants were female and a third (54 or 32 per cent) were male. A handful preferred either not to say or identified themselves in another way.

2.9 The majority of surveyed parents reported that they were the child's mother (31) and four reported that they were the child's father.

2.10 The majority (101 or 60 per cent) of surveyed participants stated that they had a parent or guardian who had a degree or higher qualification whilst 26 surveyed parents stated that they had this level of qualification. The majority of these surveyed parents (17 of the 26) had studied at a Welsh HEI whilst

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[2] Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Torfaen, Monmouthshire and Newport

eight had studied at an institution outside of Wales[3]. Only one of these had studied at an Oxbridge institution.

2.11 Table 2.1 presents the type of school which surveyed participants had attended and shows that responses were secured from a cross-section of schools.

Table 2.1: Type of school attended

	Surveyed Participants
Welsh medium	39 (23%)
Bilingual	28 (17%)
English medium with significant Welsh	29 (17%)
English medium	70 (42%)
Don't know / No answer	2 (1%)
Total	168 (100%)

Source: OB3 web survey (Base=168 participants)

2.12 The majority (66 per cent or 110) of surveyed participants were studying A levels in Year 13 at a school and the same proportion (23) of surveyed parents reported that their child was studying A levels in Year 13 at a school. A smaller proportion of surveyed participants were studying A levels in Year 12 at a school (31 or 19 per cent) or at an FE college or sixth form school (18 or 11 per cent). A small number (eight or 5 per cent) of surveyed participants were already studying at a university as was also the case for surveyed parents (three had a child studying at a university). Of these eight participants already at university three were studying at a Wales based university and five were studying outside of Wales.

2.13 The most commonly cited A level subjects studied by surveyed participants were Mathematics (97 or 58 per cent), Chemistry (77 or 46 per cent), Biological Sciences (68 or 41 per cent), History (52 or 31 per cent), Physics (50 or 30 per cent) and English (38 or 23 per cent).

2.14 In terms of previous qualifications, the survey asked participants to note the number of A* and A grades achieved at GCSE. Of the 167 surveyed participants who provided data:

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[3] Two had studied at both a Welsh and UK institution

- 69 per cent (116 participants) had secured at least 10 A* or A grades at GCSE

- 90 per cent (150 participants had secured at least 8 A* or A grades at GCSE

- 10 per cent (17 participants) had achieved 7 A* or A grades or less at GCSE, with three of these having achieved fewer than 5 A grades.

- On average, each surveyed participant had achieved just over 6 A* and just under 4 A grades at GCSE

2.15   In terms of the profile of those surveyed from school and FEI settings (23 in all), all but one were based within a school. Ten were working within an English medium school and four were based in Welsh medium schools. The majority (15) were Head of sixth forms whilst other survey respondents held positions of Deputy/assistant heads or a More Able and Talented (MAT) co-ordinator. The size of their respective institution varied from 500 to 2,000 pupils (excluding the college) and the number of Year 13 Seren participants ranged from three to 75, averaging 15 participants.

3.   Introduction to the Seren Network

3.1   This chapter sets out an introduction to the Seren Network. It considers:

- The policy and strategic context in place when the programme was developed

- The HEI context within which it operates

- The programme's aims and objectives

- The programme's structure and delivery model

- Its key deliverables to date.

Policy context

3.2   The Seren Network has been designed and is being delivered within the context of a Welsh Government policy which focuses on raising the global profile of Higher Education in Wales[4], improving the proportion of graduates who stay in Wales[5] and widening access to and participation in higher education more generally.

3.3   One of the fundamental objectives set out in the Welsh Government's 'Learning Country: Vision into Action' is to 'tackle poverty of educational opportunity and raise standards in schools'[6]. Of relevance to the Seren Network are the Welsh Government's plans for raising the level of attainment at GCSE and to narrow the gap in performance across schools. The action plan also sets out the Welsh Government's commitment to supporting the 'needs of Welsh students and enable them to participate in higher education'[7]. It acknowledges that Higher Education participation rates amongst young people from disadvantaged communities is too low and that

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[4] Welsh Assembly Government (2008) The Learning County: Vision into Action. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government

[5] Welsh Government (2013) Policy Statement on Higher Education. Cardiff: Welsh Government

[6] Welsh Assembly Government (2008) The Learning County: Vision into Action. Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government p.10

[7] Ibid., p.27

action should be taken to 'improve the percentage of students who after graduation stay in Wales to work'[8].

3.4   In its Policy Statement on Higher Education (2013) the Welsh Government sets out its vision and future priorities for the sector. One of the key objectives relates to widening access to Higher Education so that 'all those with the potential to benefit regardless of age, gender, model and level of study, country of origin and background'[9] are able to participate. The policy statement also states that 'universities in Wales should aspire to become the designation of first choice for students from Wales, the UK and across the works'[10].

3.5   We take the view that Seren Network has the potential to make a contribution towards Welsh Government policies of widening access to and participation in Higher Education. However the initiative, which has been designed to select and support the most academically able students in order to provide them with additional enrichment activities to improve their chances of going to prestigious universities, could be considered to be taking Welsh Government policy in a slightly different direction to existing policies which are primarily focused on widening access to Higher Education amongst disadvantaged students and supporting Higher Education institutions in Wales to become the first choice for students from Wales and beyond. It is also noteworthy that no direct reference is made to the Seren Network within any mainstream Welsh Government educational or Higher Education policies reviewed as part of this evaluation.

More able and talented (MAT) policy

3.6   In 2008, the Welsh Government set out guidance and advice[11] for schools and local authorities in Wales on meeting the educational needs of MAT learners. The guidance circular reinforces the Welsh Government's commitment to fostering high levels of achievement for all students

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[8] Ibid., p.27

[9] Welsh Government (2013) Policy Statement on Higher Education. Cardiff: Welsh Government p. 15

[10] Ibid., p.15

[11] Meeting the Challenge - Quality Standards in Education for More Able and Talented Pupils

3.7   In 2010 further advice was provided to schools and local authorities via the Welsh Government's 'A curriculum for all learners'[12]. This guidance circular sets out materials for teachers of learners with a range of additional learning needs.

Student finance and higher education funding

3.8   The Seren Network is being delivered within the context of a changing student support climate which could have a bearing upon young people's decisions to progress into Higher Education and possibly their university selection.

3.9   The Welsh Government commissioned Professor Sir Ian Diamond to lead an independent review of higher education funding and student finance arrangements in Wales. The findings of the review were published in September 2016[13]. The review recommended that the student support package be re-worked so that 'a simple system that recognises the holistic costs of higher education study to students' be adopted. The Welsh Government accepted this recommendation and agreed that 'the focus of undergraduate support should move towards improved maintenance support for full-time and part-time students'[14].

3.10   The Welsh Government also accepted the review's recommendation that Welsh-domiciled students who would begin their HE courses from the start of the 2018/19 academic year would be eligible for subsidised loans to meet the full costs of university fees regardless of where they decided to study in the UK. In its response the Welsh Government reported that:

'The Welsh Government agrees that it has a responsibility to Welsh-domiciled students, wherever they choose to study, and we accept the

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[12] A curriculum for all learners; Guidance to support teachers of learners with additional learning needs (Welsh Government, March 2010)

[13] http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/highereducation/reviews/review-of-he-funding-and-student-finance-arrangements/?lang=en

[14] Welsh Government response to the recommendations from the Review of Student Support and Higher Education Funding in Wales p.3 http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/161117-response-to-recommendations-en-v2.pdf

recommendation that student support should be portable and available to Welsh-domiciled students who choose to study anywhere in the UK'[15].

3.11   This statement has important implications for the Seren Network in that participants will continue to be able to select their preferred university without being financially restricted by student finance arrangements.

The HEI context

3.12   Leading UK universities have traditionally been defined as those included within the Russell Group or the Sutton Trust 30. The Russell Group represents 24 self-selected member universities[16] who are considered leading research universities across the UK. One university member is based within Wales. The Sutton Trust is a charitable foundation established in 1997 to improve access for young people from low and moderate income backgrounds to top universities. In 2011, the Sutton Trust identified the 30 most highly selective UK universities for the purposes of supporting students to access. Of the 24 Russell Group universities, 22 are also included within the Sutton Trust 30 and only Queen Mary University of London and Queen's University Belfast are not. Eight universities appear within the Sutton Trust 30 but are not Russell Group member universities[17].

3.13   Various university league tables also play a part in defining leading UK universities – with each one adopting different methodologies for generating university rankings. They include the Complete University Guide compiled by Mayfield University Consultants, the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) university rankings and the Guardian's league table.

3.14   In addition, the recently introduced Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) which assesses the quality of undergraduate teaching across HEIs offers

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[15] Ibid., p.10

[16] University of Birmingham, University of Bristol, University of Cambridge, Cardiff University, Durham University, University of Edinburgh, University of Exeter, University of Glasgow, Imperial College London, King's College London, University of Leeds, University of Liverpool, London School of Economics and Political Science, University of Manchester, Newcastle University, University of Nottingham, University of Oxford, Queen Mary University of London, Queen's University Belfast, University of Sheffield, University of Southampton, University College London, University of Warwick and the University of York

[17] University of Bath, University of Lancaster, University of Leicester, University of Reading, Royal Holloway, University of London, University of St Andrews, University of Strathclyde and the University of Surrey

another mechanism for defining leading universities. Each HEI who participated in the assessment was awarded a gold, silver, bronze or provisional award[18]. Having been piloted in 2016 it is likely that more universities will participate in the TEF award scheme in future years.

The Oxbridge Ambassador Research

3.15   The Seren Network was established in direct response to the need to halt the decline in the number of successful applications being made by students in Wales to attend Oxford and Cambridge Universities. During 2013, Paul Murphy MP, the former Secretary of State for Wales, was appointed the Welsh Government's Oxbridge Ambassador and was tasked with undertaking research to understand the factors which accounted for the decline and to put forward a series of recommendations to address the issues. The review found that Wales did not benefit from having a small number of schools which supplied a large number of applicants to Oxford and Cambridge as was the case in other UK regions. To address these fundamental issues, in his final report[19] the Oxbridge Ambassador recommended that 'a national network of partnership hubs should be established to ensure that schools and colleges can learn from each other, and share resources to support their most academically able students'[20]. This recommendation effectively laid the foundations for the establishment of the Seren Network.

Seren Network's aims and objectives

3.16   The Seren Network is focused on supporting the academically brightest A level students to achieve higher grades and attainment and progress to the UK's leading universities, frequently referred to as those in the Russell Group/Sutton Trust 30. The initiative's aims were initially defined by the Welsh Government as:

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[18] http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/tef/data/

[19] Welsh Government (June 2014) Final Report of the Oxbridge Ambassador for Wales

[20] Ibid., p.11

'The Seren network aims to raise aspirations and provide support to students and teachers to ensure more able and talented young people achieve their potential and progress to the UK's top universities'[21].

3.17 The programme seeks to achieve a number of objectives, including:

- Challenging students to extend their knowledge beyond the A level curriculum by attending subject specific workshops

- Offering practical support and advice regarding UCAS applications, university interviews and assessments

- Linking students with leading UK universities, providing information on courses, summer schools and workshops

- Supporting schools and teachers in providing information, advice and activities for high achieving students[22].

3.18 As shown in Figure 2.1, the Seren Network consists of 11 geographically bound hubs covering Wales. Three pilot hubs were launched by the Minister for Education and Skills in January 2015[23] for the areas of Flintshire/ Wrexham, Swansea and Rhondda Cynon Taf/Merthyr Tydfil. These areas were selected as pilot areas on the basis that they already demonstrated good practice in terms of supporting students to apply for Oxford and Cambridge Universities. In the case of the Swansea hub for instance, the network built upon an existing HE+ initiative[24].

3.19 The remaining nine hubs were established over the course of 2015/16, with the last to be established in November 2016. Most hubs were fully operational for the 2016/17 academic year and it was reported that more

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[21] National Assembly for Wales Research Service 'Reach for the stars: The Seren network and Welsh Oxbridge applications' p.4

[22] Ibid. p.4

[23] http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/learningproviders/Seren/oxbridge-project/news-and-events/Seren-supporting-wales-brightest/?lang=en

[24] The HE+ initiative is a collaborative project between the University of Cambridge and its Colleges, working with schools and colleges in 14 regions of the UK, with the objective of encouraging and preparing more academically-able students to make competitive applications to top universities, including the University of Cambridge.

than 2,000 students had engaged with Seren during 2016/17[25]. A full academic programme of provision will be delivered by all 11 hubs for the first time during the 2017/18 academic year.

3.20   The geographical boundaries of the hubs vary. Of the 11 hubs, four are focused on a single local authority area, five cover two local authority areas and one covers five local authority areas. The host organisations for each Seren hub constitute nine local authorities, one regional educational consortium and an FE college.

3.21   As emphasised within the Minister for Education and Skills' speech during the launch event, one of the intentions of Seren was to establish a 'long term, sustainable answer to a complex and difficult challenge'. The Minister also announced that 'the hubs will create a system where all our schools and colleges learn from each other and share resources to support their most academically able students'[26].

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[25] National Assembly for Wales Research Service (2017), 'Reach for the stars: The Seren network and Welsh Oxbridge applications' p.2 https://seneddresearch.blog/2017/07/06/reach-for-the-stars-the-seren-network-and-welsh-oxbridge-applications/

[26] Minister for Education and Silks: Speech for the Launch of the Oxbridge Ambassador Report (unpublished)

Figure 3.1: Location of the 11 Seren hubs

The Seren Network hubs

1. Flintshire & Wrexham
2. Swansea
3. Rhondda Cynon Taff & Merthyr Tydfil
4. Pembrokeshire & Carmarthenshire
5. EAS Consortia (Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Newport, Torfaen & Monmouthshire)
6. Cardiff
7. Neath Port Talbot, Powys & Bridgend
8. Conwy & Denbighshire
9. Anglesey & Gwynedd
10. Ceredigion
11. Vale of Glamorgan

Structure and delivery model

3.22   Each Seren hub comprises a partnership of schools and Further Education colleges who draw upon the inputs of leading universities. Each hub receives an equal amount of funding from the Welsh Government and have been awarded a total of £50k each for the initial two-year delivery period (i.e. £25k per annum).

3.23   The Welsh Government issued guidance to each hub as they set out to establish their structures and provision, in the form of a 'Memorandum of Understanding'. This guidance covered aspects such as governance, funding responsibilities, communication and participant selection. It did not however set out to guide hubs on the content of provision.

3.24   The guidance suggested that each hub could consider adopting three levels of governance arrangements, although warranted flexibility to each hub to organise this as appropriate:

- Management level – a project board consisting of senior managers from a representative selection of institutions which would meet twice a year to provide high level steer and oversight

- Steering level – a steering group comprising of a small number of practitioners who would develop plans for hub activities

- Partner level – where all practitioner partners would meet regularly, possibly termly, to keep up to date with progress from the steering group, to be consulted on proposal and suggest areas of work for the steering group.

3.25   The Welsh Government guidance also requested that each hub establish its own funding authorisation policies and defined some of the communication requirements it ought to adopt in terms of communicating with students, parents and schools/colleges. The guidance also stated that hubs were expected to make their own arrangements for identifying and selecting students to participate and could set their own thresholds in terms of eligible academic achievements. Furthermore, the guidance suggested that hubs may wish to make attendance compulsory for an initial number of sessions

so as to ensure students would be making active choices about further participation.

3.26   The Welsh Government has commissioned additional resources to support the delivery of the Seren Network over its lifetime. Golley Slater was contracted from the outset to provide communication and PR services to the initiative and their role has included providing support with hub launch events, preparing promotional material and case studies as well as delivering a media and social media communications campaign. In addition, the Brilliant Club was contracted to provide additional support services and their work has included developing two National Conference programmes (March 2017 and December 2017[27]) and supporting the work of hubs (e.g. sourcing guest speakers from HEIs).

Participant engagement

3.27   The number of participants engaged with the Seren hubs increased from 1,529 during 2015/16 to 2,059 during 2016/17. As shown in Table 3.1, the number of participants engaged at the hub level varies from around 100 to nearly 300 students.

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[27] In conjunction with Cazbah

Table 3.1: Number of Participants by Seren hub

Hub	First Year - Year 12 Cohort (2015/16)	Second Year - Year 12 Cohort (2016/17)
Flintshire / Wrexham	82	107
Lliw-Tawe	291	286
Rhondda Cynon Taf / Merthyr Tydfil	135	120
Pembrokeshire / Carmarthenshire	304	295
EAS	258	252
Cardiff	/	174
Neath Port Talbot, Powys and Bridgend	240	247
Conwy / Denbighshire	127	122
Anglesey / Gwynedd	92	125
Ceredigion	/	109
Vale of Glamorgan	/	202
TOTAL	1,529	2,059

Source: Welsh Government (August 2017)

4.   Published Data

4.1   This chapter provides an overview of the trends in terms of top A-level attainment, top university applications and offers, top university enrolments and first year retention for pupils from Wales over the past few years. It is intended to set out and explore the evidence available for the underlying rationale for intervention and to present the context within which the Seren Network operates. This chapter offers an overview of recent historical trends in terms of top university applications, offers and enrolments made by Welsh domiciled students. None of the changes or observations discussed within this chapter can be attributed to the work of the Seren Network due to the fact that the initiative has only become fully operational during the 2017/18 academic year.

Top A Level attainment

4.2   Over one fifth of 17 year old students studying at a maintained school in Wales achieve a top A level grade although there has been a gradual fall in the proportion of students achieving an A or A* grade at A level since peaking at 25 per cent in 2009 to a low of 22 per cent in 2016, as shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: A level results (pupils aged 17 only) by grade

A level attainment	A* grade	A grade	Both A* and A
2008/09	n/a	25%	25%
2009/10	6%	18%	24%
2010/11	6%	18%	24%
2011/12	6%	18%	24%
2012/13	6%	17%	23%
2013/14	7%	17%	24%
2014/15	7%	16%	23%
2015/16	6%	16%	22%

Source: Welsh Government Stats Wales[28]

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[28] https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Schools-and-Teachers/Examinations-and-Assessments/Advanced-Level-and-Equivalent/alevelentriesandresultspupilsaged17only-by-subjectgroup-gender accessed 20 November 2017

4.3   Published data show that the proportion of Welsh students achieving top A level attainment is lower than England (at 26 per cent[29]) and this gap has increased over time.

Oxbridge applications, offers and enrolments

4.4   During the 2015/16 academic year, a total of 426 applications were made by Welsh domiciled applicants to study at the University of Oxford[30] for courses starting in October 2016. This accounted for 3.5 per cent of all applications made to the institution during that year[31]. In all, 101 offers were made (an offer rate of 23.7 per cent) and 86 final acceptances were recorded[32] (an overall acceptance rate against applications made of 20.2 per cent). The institution calculates that the potential applicant pool for 2015/16 from Wales was 1,320[33] thus the proportion of 'eligible' students applying to the university stood at 32.3 per cent whilst the proportion of 'eligible students' receiving an offer was 7.7 per cent.

4.5   Compared to other regions of the UK, the offer rate for Welsh domiciled applicants at the University of Oxford during 2015/16 was lower than six of the nine English regions and the acceptance rate was lower than five of the nine English regions as shown in Table 4.2.

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[29] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/guide-to-as-and-a-level-results-for-england-2017 accessed 2 February 2018

[30]
https://public.tableau.com/views/UoO_UG_Admissions/UKRegion?%3Aembed=y&%3Adisplay_count=yes&%3AshowTabs=y&%3AshowVizHome=no

[31] 12,193 applications were made in all from UK domiciled students

[32] An offer refers to applicants who received an offer to study from the university and would include applicants who subsequently declined the offer, went to a different institution, failed to meet their offer conditions when they received their examination results and were rejected, declined a changed offer, or who withdrew from the admissions process after receiving an offer

[33] Those achieving AAA+ at A-level

Table 4.2: Welsh domiciled offer and acceptance rates during 2015/16 at University of Oxford compared with other UK regions

	Offer Rate (%)	Acceptance Rate (%)
Eastern	27.3%	24.9%
South East	26.1%	26.6%
South West	25.6%	22.3%
Greater London	24.4%	20.9%
Yorkshire and the Humber	24.1%	20.5%
North East	23.8%	20.1%
Wales	23.7%	20.2%
North West	23.5%	20.6%
East Midlands	21.9%	19.6%
West Midlands	21.4%	18.7%
Northern Ireland	18.9%	16.8%
Scotland	18.6%	17.8%

Source: University of Oxford (2017)[34]

4.6 Between 2006/07 and 2012/13, the number of applications made by Welsh domiciled applicants to study at the University of Oxford dropped but has since increased, as shown in Table 4.3. A similar pattern can be observed for the number of Welsh domiciled applicants receiving an offer over this time period. Since 2012/13, the number of applications, offers and final acceptances made to Welsh domiciled students at the institution has varied.

Table 4.3: Welsh domiciled applicants and acceptances at University of Oxford

	Applications	Offers	Offer Rate (%)	Final Acceptances	Acceptance Rate (%)
2006/07	446	91	20.4%	83	18.6%
2007/08	401	92	22.9%	84	20.9%
2008/09	486	85	17.6%	78	16.0%
2009/10	436	79	18.1%	74	17.0%
2010/11	476	83	17.4%	74	15.5%
2011/12	425	80	18.8%	75	17.6%
2012/13	384	59	15.4%	55	14.3%
2013/14	411	86	20.9%	80	19.5%
2014/15	394	90	22.8%	77	19.5%
2015/16	426	101	23.7%	86	20.2%

Source: University of Oxford (2017)[35]

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[34]https://public.tableau.com/views/UoO_UG_Admissions/UKRegion?%3Aembed=y&%3Adisplay_count=yes&%3AshowTabs=y&%3AshowVizHome=no [accessed 18 December 2017]

4.7   During the 2015/16 academic year, 276 applications were made by Welsh domiciled students to study at the University of Cambridge for courses starting in October 2016 or by deferred entry to courses starting in October 2017. These accounted for 1.6 per cent of all applications made to the institution. In all, 71 offers were made (an offer rate of 25.7 per cent and representing 1.6 per cent of all offers made by the institution). A total of 57 students accepted a place to study at the institution (an acceptance rate of 20.7 per cent) which was in line the institution's average of 20.6 per cent for the UK (including Scotland and Northern Ireland) but lower than all English regions acceptance rates. This proportion is also much lower than the average of 22.6 per cent over the 2008 -2012 period covered by the Murphy report.

4.8   When exploring the data over time between the academic years or 2010/11 and 205/16 no obvious pattern emerges in terms of number of applications, other than it peaking during 2015/16. The success rate has similarly varied over the six year period shown in Table 4.4, having peaked during 2013/14 at 26 per cent and dropped to 20.7 per cent by 2015/16.

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[35]https://public.tableau.com/views/UoO_UG_Admissions/UKRegion?%3Aembed=y&%3Adisplay_count=yes&%3AshowTabs=y&%3AshowVizHome=no [accessed 20 November 2017]

Table 4.4: Welsh domiciled applicants, offers and acceptances to University of Cambridge

	Applications		Offers		Acceptances and Success rates		
	Number	As % of all applications made to Cambridge	Number	As % of all offer made by Cambridge	Number	As % of all acceptances at Cambridge	Success rate[36] %
2010/11	247	1.6	n/a	n/a	57	1.7	23.1
2011/12	269	1.7	n/a	n/a	60	1.7	22.3
2012/13	255	1.6	n/a	n/a	50	1.5	19.6
2013/14	269	1.6	83	2.0	70	2.0	26.0
2014/15	257	1.6	76	1.8	63	1.8	24.5
2015/16	276	1.6	71	1.6	57	1.6	20.7

Source: University of Cambridge[37]

Other top university applications, offers and enrolments

4.9   Using University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) data the evidence gathered as part of the Oxbridge Ambassador for Wales' study[38] showed that some 78.8 per cent of top achieving Welsh students (i.e. those achieving AAA or above at A level) between 2008 and 2013 went on to attend a Russell Group university. Overall 23.2 per cent of these high achievers went to Cardiff University, 55.6 per cent went to a non-Wales based Russell Group university, 6.2 per cent went to another university in Wales and 15 per cent went to another UK university.

4.10   Recent media coverage[39] suggests that there has been a drop in the number of Welsh domiciled students who study at a Russell Group university over the last three years. In all, 6,900 first year students enrolled at a Russell Group university during 2012/13 but this had dropped to 6,260 first year

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[36] Welsh domiciled acceptances as a proportion of all applications made by Welsh domiciled applicants

[37] http://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/apply/statistics [accessed 20 November 2017]

[38] Oxbridge Ambassador for Wales 'Analysis of Higher Education destinations of Welsh high achievers between 2008-13' S Gallagher (June 2014) p.4

[39] http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-41097647

students during 2015/16 – a drop of 640 students or 10 per cent[40]. However, this decline should be considered within the context of a similar drop of 10 per cent in the number of Welsh domiciled students who enrolled on Higher Education courses more generally during this time. Furthermore, the drop should also be considered within the context of declining Russell Group university performance across national league tables – of those Russell Group universities, excluding Oxbridge, in England that are geographically proximate to Wales, very few now regularly appear within the top cohort of universities in national league tables[41].

Welsh domiciled students at UK HEIs

4.11   In 2015/16 there were 35,525 Welsh domiciled students enrolled on Higher Education undergraduate courses across UK HEIs. Of these, 18,800 were studying full-time first degrees. Whilst there has been a gradual drop in the number of Welsh domiciled students enrolled on HE undergraduate courses since 2008/09 (from 42,245) the number of Welsh domiciled students enrolled on full-time first degrees has remained comparable (17,570 in 2008/09)[42].

4.12   In terms of where they chose to study, WISERD reported that there had been a decline in the number and proportion of Welsh-domiciled undergraduate entrants studying in Wales: 75 per cent of all Wales-domiciled undergraduate entrants in 2007/08 (31,320) to 69 per cent in 2012/13 (27,589)[43]. For the 2015/16 academic year, the Welsh Government reported that two fifths of Welsh domiciled undergraduates studied in England[44].

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[40] HESA Student Record data

[41] E.g. https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/league-tables/rankings; https://www.theguardian.com/education/ng-interactive/2016/may/23/university-league-tables-2017

[42] https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Post-16-Education-and-Training/Higher-Education/Students/Welsh-Domicile-Enrolments-at-UK-HEIs/firstyearenrolmentsduringtheyearatukheis-by-level-modeofstudy-yearofstudy accessed 31 October 2017

[43] WISERD (2015) Access to Higher Education in Wales, Report to HEFCW, Cardiff: WISERD p.10

[44] http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/students-higher-education-institutions/?lang=en accessed 31 October 2017

4.13   Data available for Welsh domiciled students[45] who enrolled at a UK HEI over the three-year period between 2014/15 and 2016/17 show that 34,740 students enrolled at one of Wales's HEI's (with University of South Wales (8,185), Cardiff (5,855) and Swansea (5,430) Universities attracting the highest number of students during this period). For HEIs outside of Wales, the universities of Chester (1,395), Liverpool John Moores (1,330), Liverpool (855), Manchester Metropolitan (765), Manchester (695), Exeter (700), Bristol (695), Birmingham (590), Plymouth (570) and Bath (540) attracted the largest number of Welsh domiciled students.

UCAS Applicant Data

4.14   Published data by UCAS[46] on the number of applications made during the 2017/18 academic year for courses with an October 2017 deadline and starting in autumn 2018 (i.e. most Medicine/Dentistry/Veterinary courses and courses at Oxford and Cambridge universities) show a gradual decline between 2013/14 and 2016/17 in the number of Welsh domiciled student applicants, as shown in Table 4.5. An increase in the number of Welsh domiciled student applicants was reported for these courses for 2017/2018, compared with the previous year, and this annual increase of six per cent was in line with a similar increase at the UK level[47].

4.15   The vast majority (99 per cent) of the 2017/18 Welsh domiciled applicants applied to at least one provider in England (1,420) whilst 32 per cent (460) applied to at least one provider in Wales and 8 per cent (110) applied to at least one provider in Scotland.

Table 4.5: Welsh domiciled student applicants during 2017/18 courses with October 2017 deadline

	Number
2013/2014	1,480
2014/2015	1,400
2015/2016	1,370
2016/2017	1,360
2017/2018	1,440

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[45] HESA data accessed by the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol and shared with the research team

[46] https://www.ucas.com/file/130736/download?token=EDhCX9xV accessed 20 November 2017.

[47] At the UK level an increase of 6 per cent from 39,440 during 2016/17 to 41,970 during 2017/18 was reported.

4.16   When considering the data for Medicine courses only, a similar downward trend in applicant numbers was observed between 2013/14 and 2016/17, with a very small increase of 2 per cent between 2016/17 and 2017/18 compared with an 8 per cent increase across the UK overall[49], as illustrated in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Welsh domiciled student applicants during 2017/18 for medicine courses with October 2017 deadline

	Number
2013/14	710
2014/15	660
2015/16	570
2016/17	570
2017/18	580

Source: UCAS[50]

Conclusions

4.17   The evidence suggests that there is a clear rationale for intervention targeted at increasing the number of Welsh domiciled students applying to, and securing, a study place at an Oxbridge institution given Wales' under performance compared to other UK regions. In terms of the baseline position during 2015/16, 702 students applied to study at Oxbridge and 143 students accepted a place. Over the three-year period between 2013/14 and 2015/16, 435 students accepted a place to study at Oxbridge.

4.18   The evidence for intervention is less conclusive for supporting students into other top universities, given that three-quarters of top achieving students already enrol at a Russell Group university although the downward trend in the number of Welsh domiciled applicants studying for Medicine would suggest that there may be a need for targeted intervention to support students applying for specific, competitive university degree places.

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[48] https://www.ucas.com/file/130736/download?token=EDhCX9xV accessed 20 November 2017.

[49] At the UK level an increase of 8 per cent from 14,450 during 2016/17 to 15,620 during 2017/18 was reported.

[50] https://www.ucas.com/file/130741/download?token=g_2adVK0 accessed 20 November 2017

5.   Design, Rationale and Evidence of Need

5.1   This chapter considers:

- The aims and objectives of the Seren Network, their appropriateness and how these have changed over time

- Contributors' views on the design and rationale of the initiative

- The extent to which the programme has complemented existing interventions.

Aims and Objectives

5.2   Most contributors to this evaluation (particularly Welsh Government officials, Hub co-ordinators and school/FEI representatives) commonly observed that one of Seren's fundamental aims was to encourage participants to aim higher, raise their aspirations and equip them with the confidence to feel 'good enough' to apply to study at prestigious universities. It was also commonly suggested that Seren was about 'expanding the horizons' of young people, which in some cases involved getting them to consider applying to a wider range and more competitive institutions than would otherwise have been the case. For some hubs this meant 'opening students' eyes' to other institutions than those located locally to them.

5.3   It was commonly accepted by all types of contributors to the evaluation including participants and parents that Seren was focused on supporting high academic achievers, as assessed by their GCSE grades. However, a small number of HEI representatives did not necessarily accept this objective, suggesting that Seren set out to support those from 'disadvantaged backgrounds' to study in higher education. Most Welsh Government officials, Hub Co-ordinators and school/FEI representatives were in agreement that the target audience for Seren was appropriate although a small number did question whether the initiative ought to adopt criteria to only selected those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Furthermore, several contributors (particularly schools and participants) thought that Seren provision would be equally as helpful to other A level students who, in their opinion, were less likely to make the transition into HE than Seren

participants. Indeed, several school, FEI and participants argued that many students who had achieved GCSE results just below the threshold set locally for their hub were considering applying for Russell Group or Sutton Trust universities and could benefit from the support available.

5.4   The fieldwork revealed a lack of consensus amongst those consulted from across Welsh Government, HEIs, hub co-ordinators and their line managers, schools and FEI representatives and some ambiguity around the initiative's aims and objectives in terms of the 'end game' for participants. To some extent it was suggested that greater clarity was being established over time but some Welsh Government officials, HEIs and school/FEI representatives still had concerns and doubts over the target universities which Seren was focused upon.

5.5   All types of contributors (including participants, parents, hub co-ordinators, schools and FEI representatives) also commonly stressed that an underlying objective for Seren was to provide super-curricular experiences to participants which would stand them in a stronger position to apply for and study Higher Education, thereby addressing some of the fundamental 'gaps' which were perceived to exist within the current educational curriculum. In this respect it was widely acknowledged across school and FEI representatives that Seren would be focussed on adding value to the existing provision which was already available for More Able and Talented (MAT) students.

5.6   Welsh Government officials, schools and FEI representatives as well as those involved in the delivery of local hubs also recognised that a critical aspect of Seren was about developing the capacity and knowledge of educational practitioners to be able to better support pupils within their own institutions.

5.7   A more mixed opinion was expressed by all contributors as to whether Seren could be expected to make a difference to the A level attainment of participants, with many co-ordinators, schools and FEI representatives taking the view that this was an unrealistic objective for the initiative whilst others argued that it had never been an objective in the first place.

Design and Rationale

5.8   Feedback from stakeholders suggested that Seren was established in response to a political drive as opposed to being an initiative which stemmed from Welsh Government policy. In this respect it was noted that Seren represented a somewhat interesting and different policy direction to that outlined via published Welsh Government education and widening access policies at the time of its inception.

5.9   Since its establishment, responsibility for Seren has moved from the Education Department to the Skills, Higher Education and Lifelong Learning (SHELL) Department within the Welsh Government and some stakeholders questioned whether this had been appropriate. A few stakeholders suggested that the initiative was still a 'floating policy area' and not adequately embedded within current Welsh Government policies. Some stakeholders regarded this a strength in that it had offered the initiative significant flexibility to 'find its feet' during the establishment period but it was generally accepted that Seren could be better reflected within mainstream Welsh Government policies going forward and its linkages with MAT policies clarified.

5.10   In terms of its underlying rationale, most contributors from Welsh Government, schools, FEIs and those involved in the delivery of the Seren hub referred to the fact that the need for Seren had largely been based upon Oxbridge data and the drop in the number of Welsh students applying to study at these institutions in recent years, as demonstrated in the Murphy report. At a more local level, the fieldwork did suggest that the need for Seren varied geographically and by school/FEI provider characteristics. For instance, co-ordinators and school/FEI representatives across the valleys based hubs were more likely than others to stress that participants had lower aspirations for Higher Education whilst the same type of contributors from south west based hubs were more likely to point out that students were less likely to be prepared to travel far to attend HE, preferring instead to opt for HEIs along the M4 corridor.

5.11   It was commonly noted that Seren had evolved quickly during its design and establishment phase to encapsulate a much broader agenda than only

increasing the number of students enrolling at Oxbridge institutions, not least because a programme of delivery focused only on Oxbridge was considered too elitist and too specialist. Indeed, it was suggested by several stakeholders that the agenda had been broadened prior to publishing the Murphy report and that the initiative's delivery focus had always included Russell Group and Sutton Trust HEIs.

5.12   The fieldwork with those involved with local hubs suggested that whilst the original Seren concept may have been upon Russell Group/Sutton Trust institutions the delivery focus had always been about 'getting participants into the best course for them'. The fieldwork also found that there was a common consensus that Seren was about 'directing students towards higher end universities' although it was accepted that defining a 'high tariff, or 'selective' or 'leading' institution and courses was much more subjective. More recently it was observed that the target HEIs had also come to include high tariff institutions outside of the UK e.g. Ivy League institutions[51].

5.13   Feedback from contributors involved in delivering Seren hubs reinforced this mixed picture. A fundamental priority for Seren was considered to be about getting more students to study at Oxbridge institutions but that supporting pupils to other high tariff universities or courses was equally a prominent objective for those involved in delivering hub's activities.

5.14   The growing acceptance amongst Welsh Government officials and those involved in the delivery of Seren hubs that Seren was about supporting the brightest academic pupils to secure a place at leading institutions and/or high-tariff courses was thought to have major implications in terms of the approach that could be adopted to evaluate the true impact of Seren given that defining these outcomes will be challenging. Indeed, it was frequently argued that as defining leading institutions was highly subjective the original criteria adopted to select Russell Group and Sutton Trust universities was by now 'possibly outdated'. It was suggested that other methods, such as the Teaching Excellence Framework (the TEF[52]) introduced recently by the

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[51] Eight Higher Education institutions from the Northeastern United Sates.

[52] http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/tef/

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), should also be considered for the future as the framework becomes better acknowledged and utilised.

5.15   Most contributors from Welsh Government, schools/FEIs and those involved in the management and delivery of Seren hub provision discussed whether Welsh HEIs[53] ought to be involved with Seren and considered the possible conflicting tension which arose as a result of their inclusion. Indeed, it was observed that their participation could potentially dilute the success of Seren, if the initiative's success were to be measured against the number of Welsh students studying at Russell Group or Sutton Trust universities.

5.16   The fieldwork found that Seren hubs are very dependent upon Welsh HEIs to support their provision at a local level and feedback suggests that their involvement supports, rather than hinders, the Seren Network to achieve its objectives. Whilst interviewed Welsh HEIs were not particularly comfortable with Seren's design of being focused on Russell Group/Sutton Trust universities their concerns had reduced over time by being able to engage with local hubs. A few contributors argued that it had 'probably been right' that Welsh HEIs had been able to engage with Seren, despite them not necessarily reflecting the initiative's objectives or identified as intended beneficiaries of intervention.

5.17   Another area of tension in relation to Seren's design which was raised during the fieldwork related to the appropriateness of the initiative's objective of encouraging Welsh students to study outside Wales. This concept did not rest comfortably with some school, FEI and HEI interviewees and has created challenges for some local hubs whose partner organisations are torn between the need to raise student aspirations on one hand and trying to retain students to study and work locally on the other.

Complementarity of provision

5.18   The fieldwork revealed that in the main, Seren hub provision was thought to complement and add value to existing intervention which was already available across schools and colleges, although it was observed that a

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[53] Excluding Cardiff University which is a Russell Group university

minority of schools and colleges were already offering similar experiences to their students.

5.19   Contributors involved in the delivery of provision across hubs argued that Seren has been instrumental in adding value to existing provision, with the greatest level of added value being in place for schools which did not have a particularly strong record or offer in place for supporting students to apply to Oxbridge institutions. This was perhaps at its most evident in the Vale of Glamorgan where a few schools were considered to have very strong previous connections with Oxbridge and Russell Group institutions and the main value added was thought to be for those schools who didn't. It was suggested by those involved with the local network, including school representatives, as well as HEIs which had been involved with the hub, that Seren had created a 'level playing field' between schools and colleges in this respect.

5.20   School and FEI representatives suggested that some elements of Seren's provision (such as academic masterclasses and access to HEI representatives) added the greatest value to their schools and colleges, as they provided very little of this themselves. It was thought that Seren's approach of bringing pupils from different schools together also added value, particularly in terms of the way in which this could offer opportunities for more 'isolated' pupils to network and help overcome what was perceived to be inconsistent expertise and capacity across the school and college support network. Furthermore, it was emphasised that Seren had brought about a clear and consistent structure for provision, for instance:

'there wasn't anything concrete before. We did some work at our school, but Seren has reinforced it, widening the scope and expanded it'.

5.21   The main area of duplication was thought to be in relation to advice on applying to HEIs, including advice on completing personal statements, given that some schools and colleges who contributed to the evaluation observed that they were already providing this type of support to all pupils who were interested in progressing to Higher Education. It was also observed that there was a danger for Seren provision to potentially duplicate other

provisions already available such as the regional UCAS Higher Education exhibitions. In a couple of cases, hub partner organisations had taken a decision not to focus on student finance issues as this was considered to be adequately covered already by schools and colleges.

5.22   Most school and college representatives who contributed to this evaluation welcomed the additional offer that their pupils were able to tap into given that the requirements upon them, usually as Head of Sixth Forms, to support pupils was onerous and time consuming. They also recognised that they as teachers did not always have the appropriate knowledge or expertise to advise pupils, particularly if very few or none of their students had previously applied to Oxbridge institutions. Overall, only a couple of school representatives interviewed thought that Seren offered very little added value to what they already provided – these tended to be cases where schools considered that they already had a healthy number of students progressing into good universities or schools with no students considering applying to Oxbridge.

5.23   The school/FEI representative survey findings echo these views:

- Nineteen respondents agreed that the Seren provision made available via their local hub complemented and added value to what their school or college made available

- Seven respondents thought that Seren had replaced provision which was available previously. It was suggested that in these cases schools would have previously provided the provision in house themselves

- Seven respondents thought that Seren duplicated provision already available to pupils at their school or college. In this respect it was suggested that Seren provision offered 'additional opportunities' for pupils who already accessed support with 'interview practice and personal statement support' at the school.

5.24   Across the three hub areas where there had been some previous similar provision it was argued that the introduction of Seren had enabled partners to expand the provision (typically to more schools or colleges) and enabled

them to strengthen and expand their links with a broader number of HEIs, not just Oxbridge institutions.

6.   Delivery model and management

6.1   This chapter considers the delivery model adopted across the Seren hubs including their boundaries, use of funding, governance arrangements and collaboration. It also considers the national arrangements put in place to manage Seren including the role of the Welsh Government, monitoring and reporting arrangements, the co-ordinators Network and the use of contracted providers.

Hub Boundaries

6.2   In the majority of cases the wide range of contributors to this evaluation thought that the geographical boundaries established for the 11 hubs had been appropriate and that the arrangements adopted seemed to be working from the perspective of schools, colleges and participants. Overall, the fieldwork revealed that there was no clear message as to whether those hubs focused on a single local authority or those covering two or more local authority areas performed any better than the other in terms of meeting participant and school/FEI needs although their characteristics and governance arrangements vary.

6.3   The survey of school/FEI representatives suggested that (17 respondents) considered the geographical boundaries set for their local hub to be appropriate. Only one disagreed and five had no opinion either way. The main issues raised in relation to geographical boundaries related to lengthy travelling times and distances, which created issues for those schools who were not located centrally within the defined hub.

6.4   The only real exception was the case of the Neath Port Talbot/Bridgend/Powys hub which was not considered by those interviewed to be appropriate or working as effectively as the others. The lack of survey data from participants, parents or school/FEI representatives involved with this hub makes it difficult to verify this view but is perhaps testament in itself that this hub has not matured to the same extent as others. It was conceded that this model had been developed to align with one FEI's boundaries, which straddle Powys and Neath Port Talbot, as opposed to any other strategic rationale. The hub was considered to have faced significant

challenges in establishing provision, with several locally based contributors pointing to initial uncertainties about what the hub should be providing. Whilst it was suggested that progress had improved in recent months, it was still challenging to offer a seamless provision across the whole area. Generally, it was commonly accepted that the hub's boundary was geographically too vast and would benefit from being reviewed.

6.5   Stakeholders observed that the challenges faced by the Neath Port Talbot/Bridgend/Powys hub should not result in the discarding of a 'regional' hub concept as the experiences across the EAS hub in South East Wales were considered to be much more positive in contrast. The main factors accounting for the success of one 'regional' model over the other were thought to be a more coherent regional boundary which was aligned to that of the lead institution and the replication of the same programme of provision at several locations across the area.

6.6   Other than in the case of EAS who are the host organisation for their Seren hub, the involvement of other educational consortia was considered to be fairly limited and therefore contributors involved in the delivery of their local hub did not consider the co-terminosity of educational consortia boundaries to have had any significant bearing upon Seren's provision.

Collaboration between hubs

6.7   The fieldwork revealed some evidence of collaboration across the Seren hubs and this was most evident across the three north Wales settings. In this region co-ordinators from the three hubs meet regularly to discuss their planned provision, develop common processes (e.g. a common participant consent form) and allow participants from neighbouring hubs to attend hub events. Other examples included collaboration between Rhondda Cynon Taf/Merthyr Tydfil and Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan hubs.

6.8   To date collaborative working has been instigated by hub co-ordinators and it has focused on offering opportunities to participants from neighbouring hubs to attend a hub event. In a few cases longer-standing hub co-ordinators have provided advice and support to newer hubs during their establishment phase.

6.9   It was generally accepted that whilst collaboration between hubs had been a fairly recent development it was a priority for Seren in the immediate future. It was suggested that greater efforts could be deployed to plan provision on a joint basis and to disseminate information about hub events in a more organised manner e.g. information about all hub events accessible via a single Seren website.

6.10   Feedback from interviewed participants and parents generally did not point to much evidence of them having been able to access any Seren provision from neighbouring hubs with the exception of one parent with a child studying in Rhondda Cynon Taf who reported that her daughter had been able to join an event held at a Cardiff school as a result of being a Seren participant. Indeed, interviewed participants who lived near the boundary of their hub occasionally commented that it would have been more convenient for them to have attended events held in their neighbouring hub, but had not had the opportunity to do so.

Seren Funding

6.11   The fieldwork found that Welsh Government funding is used by local hubs for a variety of purposes:

- All hubs use funding to cover the travel costs associated with transporting participants to local events

- All hubs use funding to cover the costs associated with hosting events (e.g. in some cases this involved paying for a venue whereas in other areas it covered the costs of catering)

- In at least five cases, funding is used to either employ or contract for the services of a dedicated co-ordinator

- Most hubs reported that they use funding to cover the costs associated with transporting participants to University days, residential courses and the national Seren Conference held in mid Wales

- In at least two hubs, the lead organisation has allocated funding to source administrative support for the dedicated Co-ordinator. Typically, these individuals allocate a small number of hours per week to Seren

- In at least two hubs, funding had been used to purchase resources for participants e.g. the purchasing of the publication 'Oxford: A very short introduction'

- In at least two cases, funding had been used to cover the fees and/or travel costs incurred by guest speakers attending hub events

- In one case, funding was allocated to commission teacher training provision which involved making available twelve training sessions for teaching staff on learning tools and exam preparation.

6.12   Significant in-kind investment is provided by host organisations and other partners such as schools and FEIs to 'boost' the resources available at individual hub level. Although it proved impossible for this study to be able to gather monetary data on the value of this in-kind investment in most hubs the in-kind contribution from schools and FEIs included:

- attending and contributing to Seren management and strategic group meetings

- co-ordinating and communicating with participants and parents on behalf of the hub co-ordinator

- contributing towards the successful delivery of events, including transporting participants to events and on occasion contributing to the events themselves

- making available premises to host events free of charge.

6.13   In addition, HEIs dedicate a substantial amount of in-kind support to the Seren initiative in terms of attending launch events as well as delivering masterclasses and other information and guidance sessions. It could be argued that some of this commitment would have previously been made available to individual schools as part of HEI's outreach and recruitment work. However, feedback from interviewed HEIs suggest that Seren has resulted in an increase in the resources that leading HEIs now allocate to Wales, primarily via their outreach and recruitment efforts.

6.14   Contributors involved in the co-ordination of local hubs regarded the initial Welsh Government financial investment as having been instrumental in

'getting the hub off the ground' not least as it enabled them to overcome any financial restrictions which schools and colleges may have faced in getting involved. It was generally recognised that the level of funding provided over the two-year period was modest but nonetheless adequate for most hubs. Indeed, in some cases stakeholders referred to instances of under-spending by a small number of hubs who were not reliant upon the funds to cover co-ordinator or venue costs.

6.15 The two other main funding themes raised during the evaluation related to the amount of funding allocated per hub area and long-term funding requirements. It was observed that whilst the simplistic approach currently adopted to award hubs with equal funds had been appropriate at the outset it was suggested by a few Welsh Government officials and those involved in the running of local hubs that there was a need to refine this for the future to take into account factors such as the number of participants supported across each hub and the additional costs of delivering provision across a large, rural area. In terms of future funding requirements, contributors involved with local hubs offered a strong argument that a further round of financial support would be required to ensure the long term continuity of Seren provision, particularly in those areas where the hub had only been operational for a year or so. Some concern was expressed that hub activity could disappear in the event of funding being withdrawn at too early a stage in their formation.

Role of co-ordinator

6.16 In two hubs, the role of the co-ordinator is undertaken on a joint basis by more than one person as provision is delivered across more than one local authority area. In one of these cases, the role is undertaken by four individuals with one acting as a lead co-ordinator. In all other cases the role of the co-ordinator is undertaken by one individual, either on an employed or contracted basis.

6.17 Overall, stakeholders argued that the expertise and commitment of the co-ordinator had been instrumental to the success or otherwise of a local hub, and that this had had greater bearing than other factors, such as the type of

host organisation in place. At least two co-ordinators were Oxbridge graduates themselves and stakeholders considered this to have been beneficial. More generally, one contributor observed that:

'the strength and personality of the hub coordinator is key, they need to exude enthusiasm'.

6.18   The main restriction upon the role of the co-ordinator was considered to be the amount of time that an individual could dedicate to the role. It was frequently the case that Seren related duties formed one of many responsibilities undertaken by co-ordinators. As a result, the fieldwork revealed that the time commitment allocated by each co-ordinator to Seren varied.

Governance

6.19   The vast majority of contributors who were interviewed during the hub visits thought that appropriate and effective governance arrangements had been put in place to manage local hub provision. Several such contributors had welcomed the Welsh Government's guidance on these matters during the establishment phase. It was also suggested that memoranda of understanding adopted at the outset by partner organisations had helped confirm partner roles and responsibilities.

6.20   In all but one hub where the lead organisation took responsibility for planning provision, it was reported that partner schools and colleges met on a regular basis to jointly plan provision and this was considered to work well in most hubs. In the one hub where joint planning did not take place to the same extent it was suggested that the lead organisation had not fully embraced the principles set out in Welsh Government guidance for the Seren Network. In another hub, it was observed that the large geographical boundary made it difficult for partners to attend steering group meetings and that it was not well attended by members from across all local authority areas as a result.

Role of the Welsh Government

6.21   The vast majority of contributors from across the Seren hubs applauded the Welsh Government's decision to establish the Seren Network and

complimented the initial preparation work undertaken to help establish local hubs. In many cases this was thought to have included invaluable support to help arrange hub launch events and to secure commitment and buy-in from various partner and host organisations. Many contributors considered the approach taken by the Welsh Government to award significant discretion to local hubs to develop their own approach and programme of provision as a strength.

6.22 Despite this, a fair number of contributors involved in the delivery of local Hubs were critical of the lack of operational and delivery direction and guidance which had since been offered to local hubs, with some attributing this to a lack of staffing capacity within the Welsh Government team.

6.23 It was commonly accepted that there was a role for the Welsh Government to set out a common operating framework for the Seren Network going forward, provided that this would not be to the detriment of being able to deliver a flexible programme of provision which would meet the needs of participants at a local level. It was suggested that this operating framework could include setting and agreeing upon minimum participation requirements e.g. the number of events or hours which participants would be expected to attend in order to achieve an attendance certificate, and a common monitoring and reporting framework.

Seren Network co-ordinators meeting

6.24 Most, but not all hub co-ordinators attend the Seren Network co-ordinators meetings which are held on a monthly basis in mid Wales. Most co-ordinators who had attended the meetings considered them to be valuable whilst a small number considered them to be less useful. In the main, meetings were considered helpful for sharing experiences, particularly with the most experienced co-ordinators sharing ideas with those with less experience. A few observed that the group was working more effectively over time:

'We've now begun to gel as a group and share our hopes and fears more widely'.

6.25   In terms of extending the usefulness of meetings it was suggested that co-ordinators would value greater opportunities to network informally with each other. It was also suggested that the agenda could be more focused on addressing specific issues e.g. gathering participant monitoring data, collaboration opportunities as well as identifying good practice. Furthermore, it was suggested that there may be scope for using video-conferencing at some meetings to reduce the travelling requirements for co-ordinators.

Data collection and reporting

6.26   A major weakness across the Seren Network was thought to be the lack of common processes to collect participant data and information to allow any meaningful interrogation of participant datasets. At a hub level, participant data (e.g. GCSE achievements, attendance at Seren events and HEI applications) are often held by different partners across a range of different sources and is not usually collated into one dataset managed by the co-ordinator. Generally, hubs do not have processes in place to allow for the tracking of a participant's journey once their involvement has finished.

6.27   In the absence of any common processes individual hubs have attempted to deploy a range of approaches, including:

- A few hubs have recently asked participants to complete registration forms at their first Seren event and collect pupil and parent details and the hub co-ordinator will maintain this data

- Most hubs attempt to keep a record of how many participants attend various events and in some cases collect information on who had attended (this information is collected by the schools/colleges in some cases and by the co-ordinator in other cases – it is not always shared)

- A few hubs have attempted to create a database of Seren participants with the intention of populating it over the course of the year, but in one case it was reported that the database was 'incomplete'

- In some cases, hub co-ordinators have to rely upon the receipt of anonymised, aggregated data from schools and colleges whereas others are able to access identifiable data in order to gather evidence about the

performance of the hub and the difference that it is having. In one case the hub co-ordinator reported that they had recently accessed comprehensive databases from all schools and colleges on participant AS level attainment

- A number of hubs reported that they had processes in place to capture feedback from participants about the quality and relevance of events which they had attended and used this intelligence to improve provision.

6.28   In terms of the type of data which was available to the evaluators it was found that some hubs were able to share information on the number of participants who had attended various events whilst in other cases hub co-ordinators held a central database detailing the names of participants and the events which they had attended. At the time of our fieldwork, most hubs were also able to share data on the number of Seren participants who had just applied to study for Oxbridge institutions and medical, dentistry and veterinary courses (and some could provide comparative figures for the previous academic year applications and enrolments).

6.29   One hub area had undertaken a detailed analysis of their first cohort of Seren participants which showed that for those enrolling within Higher Education, 4 per cent had gained a place at an Oxbridge institution and 63 per cent had gained a place at one of the Sutton Trust 30 universities. The remaining participants had secured a place at another Welsh university (20 per cent) or at another English or Scottish non-Sutton Trust university (17 per cent).

6.30   The most recently established hubs did not have any data on HE offers or enrolments as their first cohort was currently in Year 13 and would not be enrolling at university until autumn 2018. Furthermore, there was very little data available across the hubs on the retention of participants within Higher Education. Where they did, the evidence was very anecdotal.

6.31   Two reasons were provided for the current lack of data collection and reporting. First, representatives from local hubs noted that the Welsh Government had never requested that hubs adopt any common data collection processes or share any participant data with them as funders. As a

result, each hub has approached the work in different ways and with varying degrees of priority. A few observed that they had responded to ad-hoc information requests from the Welsh Government e.g. data on the number of applications to Oxbridge institutions. A few co-ordinators were aware that the Welsh Government, in conjunction with a few of the hubs, was currently reviewing data collection processes for the initiative and welcomed a common approach for the future.

6.32   Second, it was reported that some institutions were reluctant to share data with the Seren host organisation. In one such hub, the co-ordinator was unable to access participant data from partner schools due to their reluctance to share data. It was suggested that these challenges could be overcome if the Welsh Government were to provide stricter guidance on the participant data which has to be collected and shared with the hub co-ordinator.

Brilliant Club[54]

6.33   The extent to which local hubs have engaged the services and support of the Brilliant Club has varied, with newer hubs generally more engaged than well-established ones. Feedback suggests that representatives from the Brilliant Club have attended a number of hub launch events and facilitated workshops at these as well as shared resources with the Seren Network.

6.34   Some hubs have effectively drawn upon the inputs of the Brilliant Club for local events such as an event on the Cornell note taking method to participants whilst others have questioned the added value that the provider could offer them. Indeed these hub representatives suggested that they prefer to draw upon their own HEI contacts and internal resources to deliver events, as opposed to those available via the Brilliant Club.

6.35   Where hubs have engaged the Brilliant Club, the feedback has been positive and most contributors (including Welsh Government officials, HEIs and co-ordinators) thought that they had provided a good service for Seren. For instance, two hubs mentioned how they valued the HEI contacts shared with

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[54] The Brilliant Club was founded in 2011 as a charity to support pupils from under-represented groups to progress to highly selective universities. See http://www.thebrilliantclub.org/

them whilst another hub commented positively upon the engagement work which they undertook with years 9 and 10 in their area. A few contributors commented positively upon the conference programme which they had arranged and facilitated at the March 2017 National Conference, with one summing up their contribution as:

'they are very professional and slick – they've done wonders for Seren. Their people are so passionate'.

6.36   The main criticism voiced by those consulted related to the provider's lack of understanding of Wales and the lack of any Welsh language provision made available. One such contributor expressed:

'dydyn nhw ddim yn deall y gofynion o gwbl o ran natur yr ardal a'r naws ieithyddol … mae popeth yn uniaith Saesneg gyda nhw [they don't understand the requirements of the area and the linguistic nuances ... everything they do is in English only]'.

Promotion and Communications

6.37   Over the course of the evaluation, some feedback was gathered about the national promotional and communications efforts deployed by the Welsh Government via its contracted provider, Golley Slater. There was a fairly good level of awareness amongst co-ordinators of the efforts deployed to promote the initiative via the media and social media, although schools, colleges, parents and participants had less of an insight into these efforts, possibly due to low levels of awareness and usage.

6.38   It was suggested that the initiative had been able to establish a positive brand identity during its initial delivery period but that it would take some time for this to become better recognised amongst target audiences. Some suggested that it would be helpful if all hubs adopted the 'Seren' brand, observing that one continued to deploy its previous identity as a HE+ initiative[55].

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[55] https://www.gcs.ac.uk/news/college-launches-he-new-academic-year [accessed 14 November 2017]

6.39   Where they felt able to comment, Welsh Government officials and those involved with the delivery of hub provision took a positive view of the work undertaken by the contracted provider:

'Golley Slater really care about it and they've led on the communications side of the programme'.

6.40   Despite this, a few contributors were highly aware that even despite the initiative's wide ranging communication efforts, the media focus continued to be upon the number of Welsh students applying to and enrolling at Oxbridge institutions.

7.   Awareness, recruitment and engagement

7.1   This chapter presents the findings of the fieldwork in terms of participants' reasons for engaging with Seren and how they were identified and recruited, the selection criteria adopted across the Seren hubs and attendance at events. The chapter also explores themes such as Seren hub communication and levels of awareness amongst various groups such as schools, FEIs, participants and parents.

7.2   The chapter draws heavily upon the findings of the three web surveys. Survey responses were received from 168 participants, 35 parents and 23 school/FEI respondents.

Reasons for engagement

7.3   As shown in Table 7.1 nearly a third of surveyed participants who were currently studying in a school or FE setting had ambitions to study at an Oxbridge university whilst over half had ambitions to study at another leading university (i.e. a Russell Group or a Sutton Trust 30 university)[56]. Surveyed parental views about their child's aspirations were proportionally very similar.

Table 7.1: Surveyed participants and parents' university ambitions

	Surveyed Participants	Surveyed Parents
Study at an Oxbridge university	47 (30%)	10
Study at another leading university	94 (59%)	19
Study at another university	14 (9%)	2
Do something else	3 (2%)	1

Source: OB3 web survey (Base=159 participants currently in school/college and 32 parents with a child in school/college)

7.4   As shown in Figure 7.1, surveyed participants hoped that participation within the Seren Network would help them to gain more knowledge about leading universities and to access support in order to apply to these institutions. Around a third of surveyed participants had expectations that the Seren Network would help them to apply for and/or secure a place to study at Oxbridge. Surveyed parents had similar expectations of Seren as surveyed participants although they had greater expectations than participants that the

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[56] Surveyed participants and parents were asked to select a single response.

initiative would help their child to find out more about future career options, with two-thirds of surveyed parents (23) identifying this as an expectation.

Figure 7.1: Expectations of the Seren Network
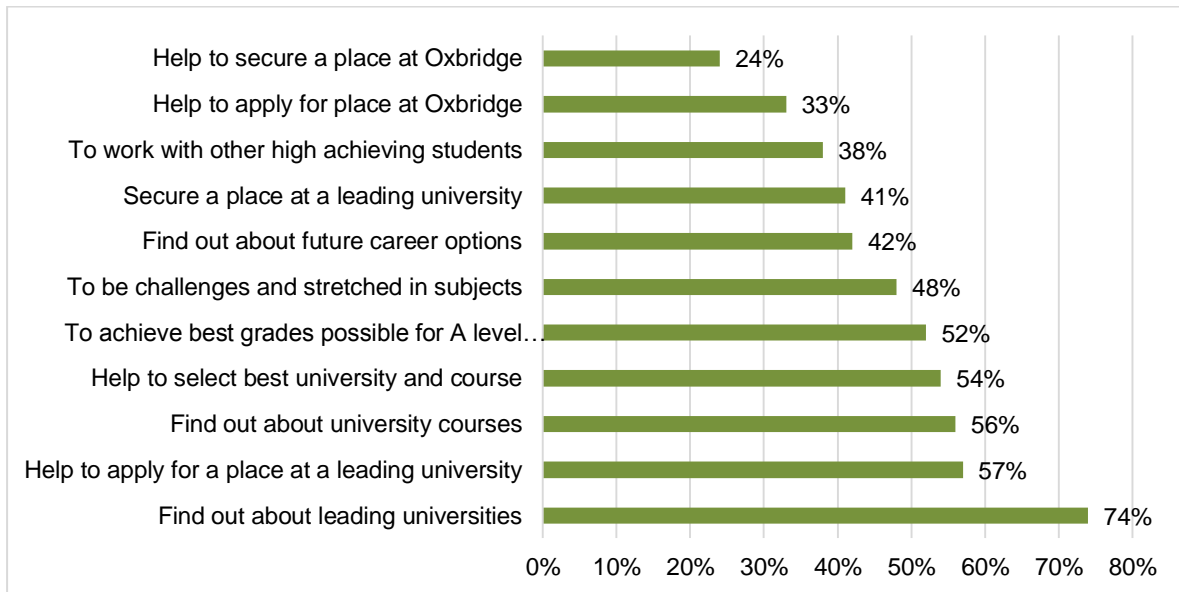
Source: OB3 web survey (Base=168 participants)

7.5   The qualitative fieldwork reinforced the survey findings that participants had engaged with Seren for a variety of reasons. The most commonly cited reasons highlighted within focus group discussions were:

- wanting to find out more about good universities and how to go about applying to them

- what makes a good personal statement and

- to access support to apply for a high tariff university.

Selection criteria

7.6   All hubs recruit participants at the outset of Year 12 and the criteria adopted is based on top GCSE academic achievement locally. In one hub (EAS) quotas for participants are awarded to each school and college and so as a result the selection criteria varied substantially from one setting to another. Schools and colleges play a vital role in collating and providing the necessary data to allow for participants to be selected. This can often be a challenge for colleges who tend to deal with a greater number of late transfers and enrolments at their institutions: 'the early deadline can hinder enrolment at the college. It's easier for schools'.

7.7   The fieldwork found that the methods deployed across Seren hubs to identify and select participants varies greatly:

- In EAS students with 6A* GCSE ware guaranteed access to Seren, with some flexibility then awarded to those who are considered to be 'brilliant in a particular area or subject' and some discretion if spaces would allow it for those achieving 5 A*/A at GCSE.

- In the Vale of Glamorgan eligibility is set at achieving 7 A or 5 A* grades (or a combination of both) at GCSE.

- In Cardiff the criteria set is 5A* (including core subjects) at GCSE.

- In Flintshire/Wrexham the criteria set is 5A* at GCSE.

- In Swansea, participants are expected to achieve 7As or more at GCSE.

- In Ceredigion students are required to achieve 5 B or better at GCSE, including A or A* grades for those subjects being studied at A level.

- In Carmarthenshire/Pembrokeshire students are awarded points for each GCSE grade achieved (3 points for A*, 2 points for A and 1 point for a B grade) and the total points needed to join the Seren hub depends upon the subject pathway students wish to follow. Participants require:

  - 20 points, including A or A* in a Science or Mathematical subject, to join the STEM pathway which is focused on Mathematics, Medicine, Veterinary, Architectural, Computing and Life Sciences.

  - 16 points, including A or A* in English, Welsh first language or mathematical subject, to join the Humanities or Business pathway. The Humanities pathway is focused on History, Geography, Modern Foreign Languages and Welsh language whilst the Business, Culture and Administration Pathway is focused on Business, IT, Social Sciences, Law and Economics.

  - an individual merit of achievement such as at least a Grade 8 for Musicians or a portfolio of evidence to follow the Creative and Physical Activities pathway.

- In Conwy/Denbighshire participants are selected if they achieve at least 5A* or higher GCSE grades or achieve an average Alps score of 7.5 when

taking all GCSE results into consideration. The Alps score[57] is based on a points system where an A* grade is awarded 8 points, an A grade is awarded 7 points etc. For 2017/18 the hub has lowered the eligibility criteria to an average Alps score of 7 on the basis that GCSE Maths and English results were lower than in previous years. This broad approach was thought to allow the inclusion of high potential learners who may not have achieved their expected grades at GCSE.

- In NPT/Bridgend/Powys participants are required to have achieved a total of 20 points from across their eight best GCSE grades (with an A*=3 points, A= 2 points and a B = 1 point). On average this would equate to a student requiring a 4A* and 4A grades to be achieved.

- In RCT/Merthyr the threshold for selection was set at 4A* GCSE grades although this was reduced to 3 A* grades for the 2017/18 intake due to lower achievements at GCSE generally.

- In Gwynedd/Anglesey the threshold was 7 As (of which at least 4 are A*). However, there was some flexibility to offer places to a few students with results slightly lower than this threshold if schools/colleges requested this.

7.8   The level of discretion awarded to teachers to identify 'wild card' participants varies – across some hubs there is not much flexibility whereas in others it was suggested that too much freedom and flexibility was now awarded to schools to 'add and select' participants. It would seem that schools in particular were eager to include some participants who would be regarded as 'brilliant' in their chosen A Level subjects having achieved A* grades at GCSE in these subjects but had failed to meet the threshold criteria set across other GCSE subjects.

7.9   In one hub the fieldwork found that students are given the opportunity of joining the network for the first time during Year 13, on the basis of good Year 12 AS examination results. In this case an additional 39 participants joined the programme for the first time in Year 13 having achieved good AS grades. In other hubs, this was approached in a more flexible manner with an opportunity for schools and colleges to bring on board pupils who appeared

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[57] https://alps-va.co.uk/paper/calculate-average-gcse-with-a-mixture/

to 'shine' during their A levels. In one case, the hub offered opportunities for latecomers to join the Network as any original participants dropped out.

7.10   Most contributors (particularly those operating within hubs) thought that it was appropriate that the selection criteria be determined at a local level, as this enabled hubs to consider the wider contextual and socio-economic circumstances within which they were operating. However, some stakeholders questioned the fundamental principle of having different eligibility criteria, adding that this did not offer equal opportunity for students at a pan-Wales level. It was also suggested, particularly by HEIs, that greater clarity and transparency was required about the minimum joining requirements for Seren.

7.11   Whilst there was a common understanding that Seren selected the best pupils based on their GCSE attainment it was suggested that this was not always reflected on the ground, largely due to the discretion offered to schools but also because each school and college in one hub had quotas to fill. In at least two hub areas participants pointed to other pupils who had achieved better academic results at GCSE level:

'I only have 1 A* and I'm on the scheme. It's the same for most of us from our school – I think we must have had lower boundaries set. Everyone else at Seren seem to have a lot more stars than us.'

'I know my grades are not as strong as certain people who are also here. I don't know why I got an opportunity, and others didn't.'

Joining Seren

7.12   Across all hubs, participants receive a formal invitation by letter to join the Seren Network and this would set out details for the Year 12 launch event held in the autumn term. At the time of our fieldwork, only a few hubs asked participants to provide registration data on joining the programme e.g. by completing an opt-in registration and disclaimer form, although we understand that plans have since been deployed to implement a common registration form for the initiative for this purpose.

7.13   The majority of surveyed participants (145 or 86 per cent) and parents (22) noted that they had come to hear about the Seren Network via their school or

college whilst over a quarter of surveyed participants (49 or 29 per cent)[58] and over a third of surveyed parents (13) noted that they had heard of it having received a letter inviting them to attend the network. Very few had heard of Seren directly from the hub co-ordinator or other methods such as friends or family. Feedback from interviewed participants and parents echoed this view and generally they had no or very little awareness of Seren prior to being approached to be involved at the outset of Year 12. The vast majority of those interviewed had first come to hear about it having been invited to join and attend the launch event.

Attendance

7.14   Hub co-ordinators painted a mixed picture in terms of attendance at hub events. The level of take up was considered to be excellent at the outset of Year 12 although at least four hub co-ordinators expressed concern about levels of dis-engagement thereafter. Those who were concerned about attendance levels generally pointed to a pattern of high attendance at the start of the academic year but with levels of attendance dropping thereafter as other priorities took over. There was some suggestion that non-attendance (and indeed drop-out) was more prominent amongst FEI based participants. A few interviewed school representatives also made the point that participants had been selected to attend Seren, as opposed to having decided to participate of their own accord, and that this would have a bearing upon their attendance at events. Interviewed participants who acknowledged that they were poor attenders suggested that this was mainly due to not knowing about events taking place or that planned events either did not appeal or that they could not see the benefit of attending.

7.15   Interviews with participants and parents reinforced this picture to some extent in that they could recall having attended the Year 12 launch event but that their levels of engagements thereafter did vary. A small number of those interviewed had made significant efforts to attend all events whilst others observed either that the opportunities to attend events which was of

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[58] Respondents could select more than one option

relevance to them had been minimal or that they did not appear to be relevant. A small number also noted that some sessions had been cancelled.

7.16   The findings from the web surveys suggest that nearly a third of participants have been poor attendees of Seren events. Whilst a fifth of surveyed participants (33 or 20 per cent) have been able to attend all events and two-fifths have been able to attend most of them (71 participants or 42 per cent) some 30 per cent (50 participants) admitted to only having attended some or none. Surveyed participants and parents alike offered many practical suggestions which would have made it easier for them to attend their local Seren events, with the most commonly cited being:

- Greater advance notification of planned events

- Improving communication from school/the hub to participant and parent

- Reducing the number of events being postponed or cancelled

- Providing transport arrangements for participants e.g. in one area attendance improved as a result of the hub arranging taxis for participants to attend

- Holding events outside of school hours (and with adequate time built in to allow for travel)

- Holding events on different days of the week

- Arranging events closer to home or schools/colleges.

7.17   As discussed in Chapter 6 some, but not all, hub co-ordinators keep a log of those attending events in order to be able to monitor attendance levels – in at least one case this was used to remove non-attending participants from the initiative. In at least two hubs certificates are awarded to participants to reward their engagement and attendance at Seren – in the case of one hub this is awarded to participants who secure 100 per cent attendance record. It was suggested that the introduction of the attendance certificate had resulted in a significant improvement to attendance numbers and 'barely a drop-off at all' over the course of the academic year. Aligned to this some contributors (particularly HEIs) suggested that there was a need for the Seren Network to adopt a 'minimum set of requirements' for its participants which could include

attendance at a minimum number of events or participation in at least a minimum number of hours per year.

7.18   More generally, hubs were fairly unsighted about the retention rates of Seren participants on the scheme – possibly due to the fact that several hubs did not operate a formal policy of unselecting participants or allowing them to formally withdraw from the scheme. Only one hub could provide data on their retention rates and in this case it was reported that 95 per cent of participants who started during 2016/17 completed a full year.

7.19   The survey of school and FEI representatives suggested that 11 respondents believed that 90 per cent or more of their pupils were still engaged with the initiative at the end of their Year 12 academic year whilst a further 8 respondents noted the retention rate was between 75 and 89 per cent.

Awareness and understanding

7.20   In terms of awareness of the Seren Network amongst post-16 providers, contributors involved in the delivery of the hub at a local level thought that this was generally good and had certainly improved with time as the initiative gathered momentum and identity. In most hubs it was observed that the vast majority, if not all, post-16 providers were now engaged with the hub although the extent to which they did so varied and largely depended upon the enthusiasm and commitment of the sixth form co-ordinator.

7.21   Two main barriers which restricted schools and colleges from engaging with Seren were identified: it was suggested that some institutions were reluctant to arrange for students to attend events during school hours whilst others had concerns as to whether Seren offered any added value for its students.

7.22   There was some evidence that colleges and schools had begun to recognise the value of being involved in Seren in attracting and retaining A level students to their institution. In some cases Seren was promoted by colleges as an unique selling point to attract students – indeed one interviewed participant explained that the college's extensive Seren programme had been a major factor in her decision to enrol at the institution.

7.23   In terms of awareness amongst potential participants and parents the fieldwork revealed fairly low levels of awareness prior to becoming involved

with their hub. Perhaps this is not surprising given the fact that many hubs had only been fully operational for a year at the time of fieldwork and also because they have only recently started to promote Seren to Year 9 and 10 students. More broadly, the fieldwork suggested that there is greater awareness of Seren amongst school pupils, as demonstrated within one focus group discussion:

'There are about twenty out of eighty of us [Year 13 school students] in Seren … you notice when we're gone [to Seren events] … the others are very aware that they're not involved in it'.

'You don't notice that here [in the college] … students come and go all the time … others don't have a clue that we're attending Seren events.'

7.24   Surveyed participants and parents alike felt that they had been adequately informed at the outset about why they or their child had been selected to participate in the Seren Network and were also fairly clear about the purpose of the network and the benefits of being involved. As illustrated in Figure 7.2, surveyed participants (as were surveyed parents) were less informed about the time commitment it would involve or the nature of the provision which would be available to them suggesting that local hubs need to better communicate information about these aspects of the programme at the outset.

Figure 7.2: Participants' understanding of the Seren Network
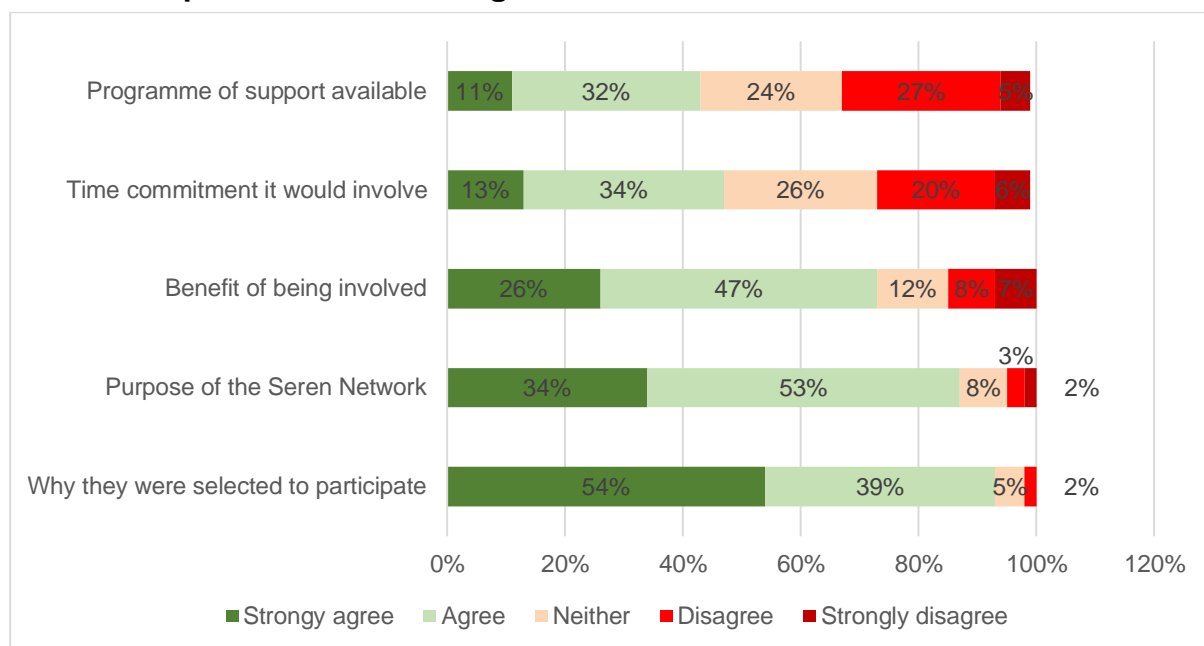
Source: OB3 web survey (Base=168 participants)

7.25   Indeed, the qualitative interviews revealed that on joining Seren parents, and participants to some extent, had very high expectations of the programme. One such contributor observed that they had been 'blown away' by the calibre of universities which would be involved with the programme.

7.26   A wide range of contributors, including Welsh Government officials and hub co-ordinators, suggested that it was still early days in terms of the hubs' engagement efforts to target pupils in Years 9 to 11 but that this represented a very important aspect of the initiative for the future, not least as it informed potential participants of the importance of achieving good GCSE grades in order to be considered for selection but also because GCSE subject choices made could preclude participants from being able to apply for certain courses.

7.27   Several contributors (particularly school representatives and several participants) suggested that the promotion of Seren could be made much more visible to younger students across secondary schools be that via letters to parents or during events such as parent's evenings or GCSE/A level course information events e.g. use of pop up stands, links to websites and promotional material. Given that a few co-ordinators highlighted the lack of capacity on their behalf to undertake this area of work it may be appropriate

to consider more cost-effective methods of disseminating information about Seren to parents and potential participants in Years 9 to 11.

Communication

7.28   Issues and challenges relating to local communication between hubs, schools, participants and parents was a common theme to emerge during the fieldwork although it was acknowledged that some improvements had been experienced in some areas e.g. in one case a hub had seen an improvement in communication as a result of Heads of Sixth Form rather than the MAT lead becoming the main point of contact for the co-ordinator.

7.29   The main criticism voiced by schools, colleges, participants and parents was that information about local hub events was being issued at very short notice. One such parent for instance noted that they had been informed about the Seren event 'a couple of days' before the event took place which made it challenging to attend. Hub co-ordinators hoped that the number of late notifications issued to participants would reduce during the current academic year as more hubs had agreed upon a schedule of events and shared this with participants and parents during the initial launch event.

7.30   School/FEI representatives criticised the additional burden of having to adapt the form of wording provided by their co-ordinator in order to distribute it onwards to participants and the unrealistic timescales set by co-ordinators to provide confirmation of how many would be attending events.

7.31   Participants and parents were also likely to cite that they had not been adequately informed about the content of planned sessions and did not know in advance what to expect from them. This had led to some participants not sure which sessions they ought to be attending e.g. having indicated at the start of their involvement with the Seren hub that they were interested in specific subject areas they were then unsure whether to only attend events focused on these or not.

7.32   The feedback from those surveyed reinforced the point that this was one area which could be improved, with 17 parents taking the view that the communication with parents or carers was not good. Several practical

suggestions were offered for improving communication, and these tended to focus on improving the information shared about events and courses:

'I received no communication at all! I would expect a list of courses at the very least!'

'Access to info about events and specific opportunities via Seren - only saw very general statements which told me little'.

7.33   Despite these issues and the additional workload entailed, it would seem that most schools/FEIs would prefer to remain as the point of contact between hub co-ordinators and participants, rather than adopting a model whereby direct contact is made with participants. However, participants and parents expressed a preference for the latter, to complement the communication which was already been provided via schools and FEIs.

8. Programme of provision and how local hubs are working

8.1   This chapter considers the nature, quality and usefulness of provision made available via Seren hubs and at a national level. It also considers some of the findings of the evaluation in relation to accessibility, frequency and timing of provision.

Nature of Provision

8.2   The programme of provision made available across local hubs varies. This was considered by most contributors to have been a strength of the approach taken in that hubs have had the flexibility to design a programme which addresses local needs. However, it was also considered a disadvantage, particularly from the perspective of HEIs but also by participants, in that participants' experience of the programme is not consistent from one area to another.

8.3   The type of provision offered by each hub has included:

- Presentations from HEI representatives on making applications to competitive universities

- Super curricular provision such as subject based academic masterclasses

- Taster days and open day visits to HEIs

- Summer schools

- Arrangements to attend UCAS fairs e.g. Liberty Stadium

- Preparation for university admissions tests (e.g. the National Admissions Test for Law (LNAT) and BioMedical Admissions Test (BMAT))

- Information and guidance on preparing personal statements

- Interview guidance and mock interviews.

8.4   The focus of a number of hubs' programmes has been upon encouraging and supporting participants to apply for Oxbridge institutions. Over the course of the evaluation, events delivered by Dr Jonathan Padley of Cambridge University were observed which were, in our opinion, delivered to

a very high standard. Attendance at these events was mixed (with one being very well attended and the other considered to have been very disappointing in terms of number of participants) although the feedback from those present about the quality of the session was positive. In the same manner the feedback gathered from school/FEI representatives and hub co-ordinators about events delivered by representatives from the University of Oxford were equally as positive.

8.5 The fieldwork also found that a number of hubs concentrate their provision upon STEMM pathways, with one hub having exclusively focused upon the delivery of weekly medicine sessions. Feedback suggests that the sessions were of value to those wishing to pursue a medical career but of not much relevance to others.

8.6 To some extent it was argued that the decision to concentrate provision upon a small number of subjects, typically science, medicine, dentistry and veterinary studies, had been influenced by local demand and participant needs. Some of the smaller hubs however argued that they did not have an adequate number of participants to be able to provide this type of specialist provision.

8.7 It was evident that hubs try to respond to participants' subject related needs as best as possible although on occasion this resulted in hosting events attended by very few attendees. Perhaps a case in point was a drama masterclass event arranged for students in one hub which was attended by only one student. The fieldwork did find examples where this tailored approached worked well however. For example in one hub, participants were allocated to subject groups which took into account their A level subjects as well as intended degree subjects. It was reported that the composition of the groups changes from one year to the next e.g. during the last year the hub witnessed an increased interest in music and computer science subjects and a decrease in geography so a specific group was introduced for computer sciences and a broader group focused on social sciences introduced to replace geography.

8.8   When asked about the type of provision which they had accessed, surveyed participants and parents were far more likely to cite that they (or their child) had received a presentation from an academic at a leading university (cited by 58 per cent or 97 participants and 24 parents), with fewer selecting other options such as receiving support in relation to university application, interviewing and admissions tests as shown in Figure 8.1.

Figure 8.1: Involvement with Seren activities

Bar chart showing:
- Other activities: 14%
- Attended university summer school or workshop: 11%
- Attended Seren Network conference: 15%
- Information on extended reading materials: 16%
- Attended a masterclass on relevant university course: 16%
- Received support to prepare for admissions test: 18%
- Attended a masterclass on A level subject studies: 23%
- Presentation from somebody within industry: 24%
- Visited leading university: 26%
- Received information on student finance: 27%
- Received support to prepare for interview: 27%
- Received support to apply for university: 30%
- Presentation from academic at leading university: 58%

Source: OB3 web survey (Base=168 participants)

Quality of Provision

8.9   From the perspective of interviewed parents and participants the strength of provision was considered to be the in-depth provision which some had been able to access across the subject areas of science, medicine, dentistry and veterinary studies. A number also referred to the support which they had received in preparing personal statements whilst a few identified the national conference and summer school as highlights of Seren.

8.10   As illustrated in Figure 8.2, surveyed participants generally rated the quality and range of guest speakers who had attended various events as excellent or good. Surveyed participants (as were those who were interviewed) were fairly critical of the range of universities with whom they had been able to contact (with 35 per cent or 59 respondents rating this as poor) and generally would have welcomed a wider range of academic subjects to be discussed at events. Whilst the feedback from surveyed parents echoed the views of

participants, parents were generally less informed to be able to express an opinion.

Figure 8.2: Surveyed participants view of various aspects of Seren provision
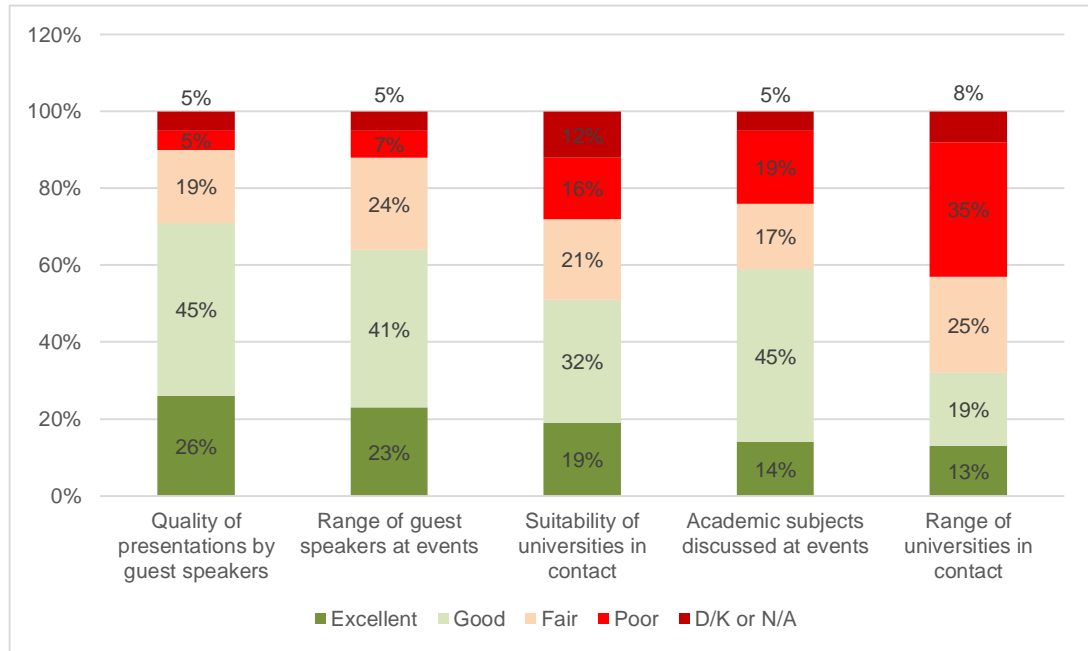
8.11   Surveyed participants painted a mixed picture in terms of their opinions about other aspects of support accessed through the Seren Network, as shown in Figure 8.3 below. It is important to note that data is highly influenced by the fact that a fair minority of those who responded had either not accessed these types of provision or did not have an opinion. Surveyed participants considered the support that they had received to prepare their UCAS application as being the best quality element and were most critical (as indeed were surveyed parents) of the learning resources or extended reading materials accessed (32 per cent of surveyed participants and 16 surveyed parents rated this as poor).

Figure 8.3: Quality of Seren provision

	Support to prepare UCAS application	Support to prepare for university interview	Academic masterclasses	Extended learning or reading resources	Support to prepare for admissions test	Information on student finance
Excellent	17%	11%	10%	8%	8%	7%
Good	24%	19%	21%	17%	14%	22%
Fair	21%	14%	13%	16%	13%	20%
Poor	21%	26%	21%	32%	29%	26%
D/K or N/A	17%	30%	35%	27%	38%	25%
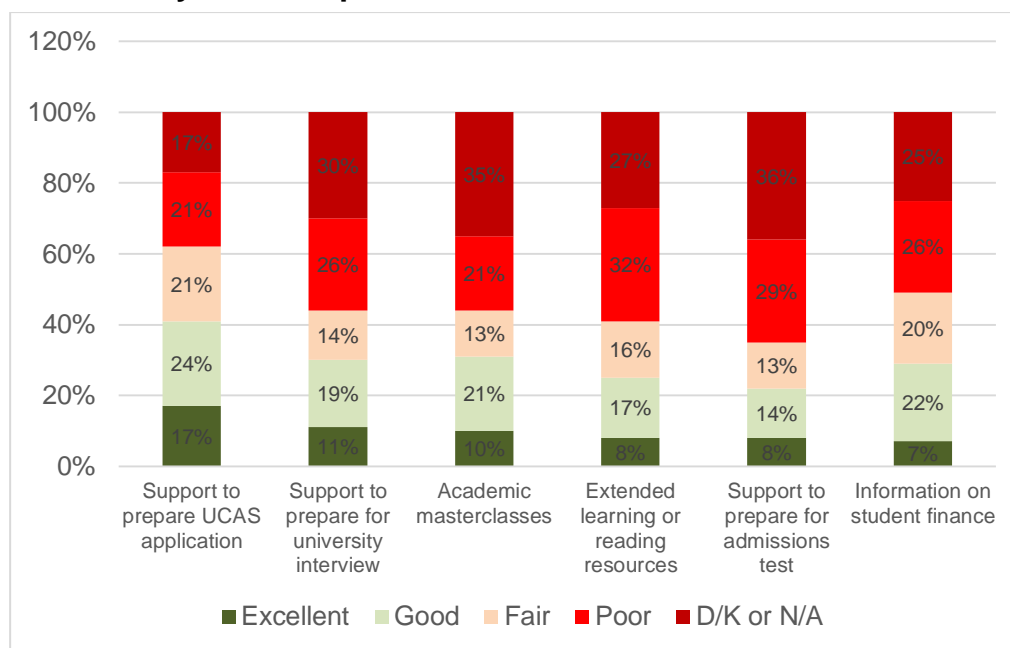
Areas for improvement

8.12 A number of common themes were raised by both surveyed and interviewed participants and parents on what could be improved about Seren provision. These primarily focused upon:

- Extending the range of subject focused events: in several cases it was argued that the provision had overly focused on medicine and science subjects e.g. 'a wider range of subject specific courses could have been made available as it only really seemed to benefit medicine students' and 'almost all of the SEREN events available to me were centred around medicine or science, which are subjects that I am not interested in studying further.'

- Extending the focus to other leading universities, rather than solely on Oxford and Cambridge universities. Many surveyed and interviewed participants thought that they would have benefited from having had contact with a wider range of HEIs and in some cases were put off attending hub events due to the emphasis placed upon Oxbridge. This view was also reinforced by interviewed HEIs.

- Developing a 'core' and more consistent provision across the hubs so that all hubs offer 'more' of the expected activities generally. Some

surveyed participants noted that they would have welcomed support already available in other areas: 'I believe that we should have been offered more sessions. I have noticed boxes in sections on this survey for help with admission tests, help with my A levels and a chance to visit universities through the Seren Network. None of this was offered to us.'

- Improving the forward planning of Seren hub events and improving communication with participants and parents about these activities

- Revisiting the rationale of limiting Seren to those who had done well at GCSE. One surveyed parent noted 'This should be open to many more students. Late developers, who may not have done as well in their GCSEs but then have the potential to gain good A level grades, miss out by not being offered the opportunities of the Seren system. I think that this is inherently unfair and divisive.'

Timings of Provision

8.13   The timing of local hub events varies. In nine areas events are held mostly during the late afternoon/early evening after the end of the school day. In two areas, events are held during the school day.

8.14   This was reinforced by survey findings. The majority of surveyed participants (112 or 67 per cent) and surveyed parents (22) noted that they usually attended local Seren events after school hours, with most of the remaining respondents attending during school hours (74 participants or 44 per cent for instance). As would be expected, responses varied across the hubs – all of those surveyed from Ceredigion attended events during school hours whilst those from Rhondda Cynon Taf/Merthyr Tydfil, Gwynedd/Anglesey and Conwy/Denbighshire were more likely to attend events after school.

8.15   Participants were broadly satisfied with the timings of their local Seren events, although a small number would prefer to attend sessions out of school hours so as not to miss lessons. Some two-thirds of those surveyed (109 participants or 65 per cent and 25 parents) thought that these events were being held at a time which was convenient to them.

Location and accessibility

8.16   Some hubs reported that their events were peripatetic and made maximum use of school and FEI premises in order to reduce costs. Others tended to use a single, central venue which was in some cases a paid for venue or in others provided free of charge by a FE partner. The fieldwork revealed no consistent view as to whether either of these approaches worked better than the other. It was observed that in a small number of areas schools had been reluctant to attend events held at FE venues, fearing that they could possibly lose pupils to those institutions. However, a few Welsh Government officials and partner schools/FEIs observed that Seren had helped to overcome issues of non-collaboration between schools and colleges.

8.17   In response to participant feedback and lower than ideal attendance at initial 'central' events, one hub reported that events were now being held simultaneously at three different locations and that attendance had improved as a result of reduced travelling time for participants. Similarly, getting participants to cross local authority boundaries has been an issue within two hubs and in both cases the hubs are now arranging two separate events.

8.18   In at least six areas, transport arrangements are provided for participants and this was deemed to be critical in ensuring good attendance at events. In other areas transport arrangements are only provided for university visits and participants are expected to make their own way to attend local events. Many schools reported that they use their own mini buses to transport students thereby making it viable for a smaller number of students to be involved.

8.19   Broadly, surveyed participants and parents were satisfied with the travelling time expected of them to attend local Seren activities with 128 participants (76 per cent) and 30 parents taking this view.

8.20   It was not uncommon for participants to report having to travel up to an hour, or more in a few cases, to attend regular events and the fieldwork gathered suggested that this amount of travelling was at the 'upper limit' if not 'too far' if done on a regular basis. Indeed, the qualitative interviews found that whilst participants were less enthusiastic about travelling to regular events which were held some distance away they were prepared to travel to 'one-off'

events further afield if it meant that they could access specialist subject sessions.

Frequency of provision

8.21   The frequency of local hub events has varied – in one case they have been held weekly, in others they have been held on a monthly basis and in the remaining areas they have been delivered less frequently, typically every half term or every academic term although in these cases other 'generic' events such as the initial launch of HEI presentations would be considered additional activities.

8.22   This variation is echoed, as shown in Figure 8.4, across surveyed participants' frequency of involvement with Seren. A third could be considered to have had regular involvement with the initiative whilst over a third would only be in contact with their local hub once every term. Surveyed parents conveyed a similar pattern, although a higher proportion (15 respondents) thought that their child had been involved with Seren on a less frequent basis than once every two months. Surveyed participants across the Conwy and Denbighshire hub were the most likely to cite that they had attended on a weekly or fortnightly basis, those from RCT/Merthyr were the most likely to cite their involvement was on a monthly basis whilst those from Cardiff and Ceredigion were most likely to cite that their involvement was less frequent.

Figure 8.4: Frequency of attendance at local Seren events

- Usually up to once a fortnight
- Usually once a month
- Usually once every two months
- Less frequent than once every two months

8% 27% 17% 38% 5%
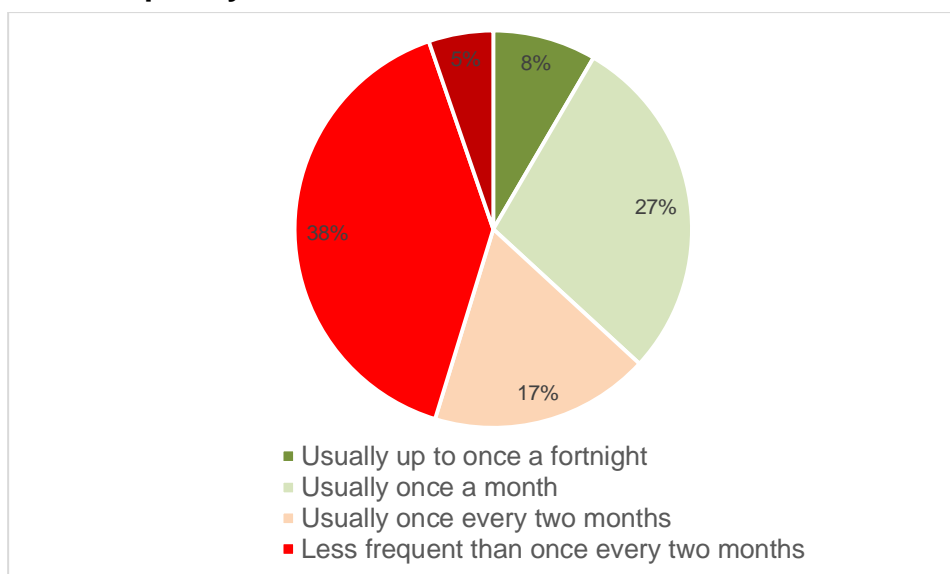
Source: OB3 web survey (Base=168 participants)

Views on hub management

8.23   The majority of surveyed participants and parents considered their local Seren hub to be managed either very well (37 participants of 22 per cent) or fairly well (82 participants or 39 per cent)[59]. However, a minority did not think this to be the case with 22 per cent (37) of surveyed participants and 12 surveyed parents were of the opinion that the hub was not well managed. The main reported reasons as to why those surveyed did not think the hubs were well managed echoed earlier comments made on why participants had been unable to attend sessions and included the lack of prior information about events, late notifications of arranged events, events being cancelled (with this information not relayed to participants in some cases) and events being unorganised and starting late.

8.24   Parents and participants embarking on their journey with Seren highlighted that they were unaware of what provision they could expect and what the programme offer would involve. It would appear that expectations have been raised across several hub areas but that these have not been consistently met. A number of surveyed parents observed that they had been disappointed with the number of activities which had been made available:

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[59] The proportion of surveyed parents were similar: 6 thought the hub were managed very well and 13 thought they were fairly well managed.

'*Dim hanner digon o weithgareddau o'i gymharu a'r hyn a addawyd ar y dechrau* [not half as much activities compared to what was originally promised at the outset]'.

'*Wedi cael rhestr o'r holl weithgareddau oedd y rhwydwaith yn gobeithio ei gynnig ar ddechrau'r flwyddyn, ond wnaeth bron iawn ddim un o'r gweithgareddau yma gymryd lle: hynny neu ges i ddim gwâdd* [Having received a list of activities the network was hoping to offer at the start of the year, but hardly any of them took place: either that or I was not invited.'

8.25   The feedback from one interviewed parent also illustrates this point:

A parent whose daughter had aspirations to study Law at a Russell Group university had mixed feelings about the support received. They both attended the launch event which 'promised a great deal and raised our expectations'. However the only Law event planned was cancelled at the last minute leaving both disappointed with the programme. The parent also felt that their daughter had not been able to access the support which had been promised in terms of helping to identify the best Russell Group university to attend and preparing a personal statement.

Usefulness of provision

8.26   The main aspect of the Seren Network provision deemed to have been of greatest use to both surveyed participants and parents was presentations delivered by guest speakers at events (with 72 per cent of surveyed participants and 17 surveyed parents taking the view that they had been useful). The least useful aspects were considered to be the support available to prepare for admissions tests and the provision of extended learning resources, as illustrated in Figure 8.5.

Figure 8.5: Usefulness of Seren provision

Provision	Useful	Not useful	Don't know
Support to prepare for admissions test	33%	27%	40%
Extended learning or reading resources	33%	29%	38%
Visits to leading universities	38%	17%	45%
Academic masterclasses	38%	23%	39%
Support to prepare for interview	39%	23%	38%
Information on student finance	43%	23%	34%
Working with other high achieving students	50%	29%	21%
Support to apply to university	51%	24%	25%
Guest speaker presentations	72%	18%	10%

Source: OB3 web survey (Base=168 participants)

8.27   One of the recurring themes across interviews with stakeholders, co-ordinators and school/college representatives was that the Seren hub offered an excellent opportunity for participants to meet with 'like-minded' participants. This was considered to be particularly valuable for those participants coming from schools where very few of their peers were considering applying to HEIs or where a school did not have a record of supporting pupils to Oxbridge institutions. Whilst this may have been the case in some hubs, many interviewed participants at several focus groups did not think that these opportunities had materialised to the extent to which they had expected. Rather, the opportunity to be part of the local network had resulted in some becoming more aware of the competition for HEI places which had spurred them on to be more determined to succeed.

8.28   Where they had been able to access such support, interviewed participants expressed very good feedback about the support and advice which they had received in relation to preparing their personal statements and how to prepare stronger applications for HEIs. More mixed feedback was expressed by interviewed participants about the value of masterclasses – whilst interesting these were not considered to be the most useful aspect of events

for many interviewed participants mostly as they could not yet visualise how the learning would be of use to them but also due to the fact that they considered the themes of the masterclasses to be of little relevance to their academic areas of interest.

8.29 At least seven interviewed participants had participated in Seren's summer schools at Oxbridge universities. The feedback provided about these events was exceptionally positive and was considered to have been extremely useful in helping students to decide whether they wished to pursue with an application to the institution. In a few cases, it had helped participants decide that Oxbridge was not for them.

Welsh language

8.30 Whilst national level provision such as events, publications and communication is provided bilingually from the outset, the evaluation found that the level of consideration given to the Welsh language at a local level varies significantly. In the natural Welsh language heartlands it was suggested that hub activities had a natural bilingual culture. In one area for instance it was reported that all resources were produced bilingually and in two areas a number of events were held specifically in Welsh e.g. a Welsh language masterclass or a Welsh language HEI speaker. A number of hubs give very little focus to Welsh language issues however with events in at least eight hubs being held primarily in English.

8.31 Mixed views were conveyed about the importance of making hub provision available in Welsh in light of Seren's aim to equip participants to study outside Wales. Indeed, several contributors argued that it was important for Seren to offer the opportunity for Welsh speaking participants from Welsh medium schools in particular to converse in their subject area in English, as this would benefit them when it came to adjusting to studying through the medium of English at university. Others considered it important for Seren hubs to give due recognition to the needs of Welsh speakers. Interviewed participants from Welsh medium schools in at least three hub areas would have welcomed greater prominence to the 'Welsh language' at local events e.g. communication relating to events should be bilingual, welcome and

introductions at events could be bilingual and that all resources produced be available in both languages. It would appear that the main restrictions for hubs to meet these requirements were financial in nature (e.g. the costs associated with paying for a translator) and that hub co-ordinators in nine areas were not themselves Welsh speakers.

8.32   In one area it was observed that greater efforts had been made by the hub to accommodate the needs of Welsh speakers following feedback from a Welsh medium school about the lack of such provision. However, contributors from this hub noted their disappointment that despite arranging a specific Welsh medium workshop it had been poorly attended, thereby raising questions about the demand.

8.33   Reflecting the language profile of those surveyed, it is perhaps not unexpected that just under half of surveyed participants (81 or 48 per cent) did not wish to participate in Welsh in the Seren Network. Of those who did, 32 surveyed participants (19 per cent) were able to participate in Welsh either always or most of the time whilst 30 (18 per cent) were able to do so either occasionally or never. Very mixed views were expressed about the extent to which Seren had been able to meet the Welsh language requirements of surveyed participants with half (51 per cent or 42 of respondents) taking the view that it had done so whilst 18 per cent (15 respondents) disagreed.

8.34   Very mixed views were expressed by those surveyed when asked to elaborate further on the use of the Welsh language within the Seren Network:

'Hardly any of the guest speakers could present in Welsh.'

'It has made Welsh language requirements, however if the main aim is to get more Welsh students into Oxbridge and Russell Group then these universities do not operate in Welsh.'

'*Nid oedd yr un sesiwn rhwydwaith Seren wnes i fynychu ar gael yn Gymraeg* [none of the Seren Network events I attended were available in Welsh]'.

National Conference

8.35   Two National Conferences have been held by the Seren Network to date, in March and December 2017. Mixed views were conveyed by those interviewed about the National Conference event which had been held in March 2017. Not all hubs had engaged with this event but interviewed participants and teachers who had done so rated the conference highly. One such teacher argued that they had benefited significantly from the event due to their lack of previous experience of working with MAT students, having only recently taken this role on board within their school.

8.36   Contributors' main concerns about the March National Conference related to:

- the conference's timing having been held in March which was considered an exceptionally busy time in the academic year for students who were in the middle of their revision period. The moving of the event to December during the current academic year was generally welcomed, although a few still had misgivings about its timing

- the fact that the conference was a pan-Wales event resulted in lengthy travelling for most of those attending. Several contributors would prefer two regional conferences instead so as to ease the travel burden for schools and participants

- schools, colleges and participants not having been given adequate advance warning for the event

- the conference's content duplicating local hub provision to some extent (e.g. preparing UCAS applications and university admissions test).

8.37   Findings from the December 2017 National Conference evaluation[60] points to the event having been successful. In total 950 students from across all 11 hubs attended the conference and 664 students completed an evaluation questionnaire. The findings suggest that the vast majority rated the conference as being excellent or good and that the most valuable aspect of the event had been gaining access to leading universities. Feedback from 30 teachers, lecturers and hub co-ordinators also points to a positive experience

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[60] Seren Network National Conference 6-7th December 2017 Evaluation Report (unpublished)

of the event with the most valued element of the conference considered to be the opportunity to meet representatives from UK leading universities.

9. Engagement with HEIs

9.1 This chapter explores the nature of Seren hubs' engagement with HEIs and draws upon the feedback of interviewed HEIs. The chapter also considers the views of Welsh Government officials, hub co-ordinators, school and FEI representatives, participants and parents as to how Seren should engage with HEIs in the future.

Nature of engagement

9.2 The number of HEIs which have engaged with Seren hubs to date has varied from a minimum of four to a maximum of eight. It was not unusual for hubs to have contact with a couple of English based universities as well as a couple of Welsh institutions. HEI's role has included attendance at launch events, delivering subject specific sessions, offering advice on preparing personal statements and delivering presentations on making an application to universities.

9.3 Cambridge University, followed by Oxford University, were the most commonly cited of HEIs to have been engaged by local hubs. As would be expected given their geographical proximity, hubs based in north Wales were more likely to cite that they had engaged HEIs based over the border (Manchester and Liverpool) whilst those based in the south-east Wales had stronger links with HEIs based in the south west of England (e.g. Bath and Bristol).

9.4 From the perspective of HEIs, Oxbridge institutions argued that they had invested heavily in the Seren Network with one representative estimating that their involvement with the network amounted to fortnightly contact on average. At another south-west university it was estimated that the institution typically attended a Seren event once every couple of months.

9.5 As has already been discussed, interviewed participants and partner school/FEIs were critical of the fact that there had been too much focus on engaging Oxbridge institutions as the expense of others during the first year or so of activity. These contributors would welcome greater engagement with a broader range of HEIs in future. In their defence, hub co-ordinators suggested that they had on occasion faced difficulties engaging a greater

number of HEIs on the basis that the HEIs did not consider Wales to be an area of interest to them. One such hub who had only been able to engage with a few HEIs was mindful that other hubs were also 'competing' for the same speakers.

9.6   All hubs had drawn upon the inputs of representatives from some HEIs based locally to them within Wales and their inputs were considered to have been instrumental in enabling local hubs to deliver a full programme of provision to participants. In all, some six Welsh HEIs were thought to have been engaged with the Seren Network to date.

Feedback from HEIs

9.7   The feedback from interviewed HEIs who were already involved with Seren was overall very positive in that they recognised the value of engaging with the Seren Network and had, in several cases, 'very heavily invested in Seren'. One such contributor observed that Seren:

'… chimes with our aims too. I think highly of the network, and it helps us, as it brings together our target audience'.

9.8   Indeed, interviewed HEIs recognised the potential benefits that engaging with Seren offered their institution, particularly within the context of the competitive marketplace within which they operated and the need for them to demonstrate that they were delivering effective outreach to disadvantaged socio-economic groups (although the Seren Network is not focused on this particular group).

9.9   Broadly, HEIs suggested their contribution to the Seren Network included delivering presentations at launch events, providing information and advice sessions on applying to university, and arranging for academic staff to deliver subject specific sessions. Some HEIs have also made alumni students available to speak at events.

9.10   HEI representatives made a number of observations about their involvement with the Seren Network summarised as:

- a divergence in how well different hubs are organised and the experience that participants receive e.g. in some hubs it was thought that participants 'get more treatment, and a better experience than others'

- some hubs being easier to collaborate with than others with the common characteristics being: 'great leadership from the hub co-ordinator, well-established networks, and well-attended events'

- a couple of hubs were not considered to be working as well from their perspective having experienced 'some teething problems, and it can be difficult to get sustained contact with the leaders'

- a divergence in the attendance numbers at events with some being very well attended by some 250 students and others being very poorly attended (e.g. in one case an event attended by the HEI representative had only been attended by some six participants and another recalled an event attended by only two participants). In these cases, HEI representatives highlighted the difficulties of re-engaging the same academic lecturer to deliver further Seren events and questioned the need to consider making attendance a compulsory requirement for participants.

- a view that co-ordinators had largely been working in isolation from each other in terms of their collaboration with HEIs but that there were more recent signs that they were now sharing contacts and learning with each other

- A view that hub co-ordinators had improved the way in which they conveyed what specific support their hub required from HEIs although there were still some instances where possible events had not materialised whilst others had been postponed or cancelled

- difficulties for HEIs to deal with last minute requests from hubs to source speakers for events

- some concerns that not all schools in some hubs were engaged with Seren.

9.11   Initial feedback suggests that by being involved with the Seren Network, HEIs have allocated more resources and time to outreach across Wales generally. In one case for instance, the HEI admitted that they did not previously engage with any individual schools or FEIs across Wales and the outreach activity delivered via Seren was considered to be completely additional provision.

9.12   Despite some of the mixed messages about individual hubs, it would appear that the Seren Network is regarded by most HEIs as an efficient model to engage the very best pupils and in doing so, allow them to able to reach a greater number of students and to do so on a more regular basis. Furthermore, HEIs pointed to evidence that the Seren Network has allowed them to extend their geographical reach, often away from just those schools and colleges located along the M4 corridor and target more rural areas.

9.13   This viewpoint was not held by all interviewed HEIs however. In one case the HEI had decided 'not to branch out to more hubs' as they were 'not seeing the value added of being involved' with one of the Seren hubs due to low participant numbers at the events which they had delivered.

Feedback from non-engaged HEIs

9.14   At least three interviewed HEIs had not been involved with Seren and one of these contributors was completely unsighted about the initiative. The other two questioned the initiative's remit, suggesting that there had been a lack of co-ordinated campaign targeting all Russell Group/Sutton Trust HEIs to communicate the purpose of Seren. One thought that the purpose of Seren was to help disadvantaged pupils in rural areas of Wales to access courses and universities and to think about their career options whilst another commented:

'I'm not even sure of their remit. No one has ever talked about its remit, it's as though I'm expected to know … [is it] just to encourage children and young people into Higher Education – I'm really not sure''.

9.15   HEIs who had not been involved with Seren also suggested that they were hesitant about 'stepping upon other HEI's territories' who were geographically closer to the marketplace.

9.16   One interviewed academic who had delivered a masterclass session at one Seren hub observed that the initiative's purpose was 'a bit of a mystery' to him and that he had assumed that the focus was on encouraging disadvantaged students to apply for University. Whilst his experience had been comparable with other similar outreach projects it was noted that other outreach projects usually offered payment to academics for their time.

The way forward to engaging HEIs

9.17   One important message to be conveyed by HEI representatives, particularly those not currently engaged, was that the Seren Network needed to adopt a more strategic approach to communicate the aims and objectives of the programme to senior leaders across HEIs, to ensure that strategic commitment from target institutions is secured from the outset. One such contributor argued:

'the agenda of getting Welsh students to Russell Group universities would be of interest to the University in general, not just [this faculty]. This needs to be developed and presented on a much more strategic level here. The institution needs an overview and should plan its involvement in the network much more strategically, and that should then filter down to people like me in each faculty'.

9.18   Furthermore, a fairly common view to emerge across interviewed HEIs was that more could be done to adopt a co-ordinated operational approach across the Seren Network when engaging HEIs. In one case a HEI representative was concerned that different hubs were contacting different members of staff whilst another was similarly concerned by the prospect of having to liaise with several hub co-ordinators across Wales, given that they were currently only collaborating with one. In terms of replicating the good practice which was already in place at one HEI it was suggested that the appointment of Seren Champions within HEIs could be explored. This model had already been successfully adopted within one HEI and hub co-ordinators now had a single point of contact within that institution.

9.19   HEIs would welcome feedback and data from Seren hubs on who from their area applied to study at their institution. This information would help them

'close the loop' and measure the effectiveness of their involvement as well as to be able to identify Seren participants applying and enrolling to study. One such contributor said that it would be useful to receive a list of participant names from those hubs which it visits (and who attends their sessions) so that it could be cross-matched with university application and enrolment data. It was also suggested that some HEIs give consideration to those applicants who demonstrate that they have been involved in widening participation activities such as Seren and so it would be in the student's interest for HEIs to have this data to inform the offer process.

9.20   Some contributors suggested that the Seren Network could explore developing formal memoranda of understanding with HEIs which could set out appropriate processes and roles for hubs and institutions, covering many of the suggestions made in preceding paragraphs.

10.   Difference Made

10.1   This chapter explores the difference which the Seren Network has achieved for those participants involved. It draws primarily upon the views of participants and parents but also considers the feedback from school and college representatives. It is important to note that many factors will have a bearing upon participants' decisions regarding Higher Education and that attributing changes to the Seren Network only is problematic due to the impact of other externalities such as achievement at A level, competition for HEI academic places and personal circumstances and preferences.

Positive effects

10.2   Surveyed and interviewed participants alike suggested that Seren had made a positive contribution to raising aspirations, boosting their confidence and encouraging them to think more ambitiously about their university choices, particularly in the context of Oxbridge institutions. It was observed that the initiative had 'given some pupils the extra push' that they needed to apply for a leading university. One interviewed participant observed:

'One of the best things about Seren is that you get the realisation that you should aim high. I know that it is a bit cheesy when they say to you 'you are all stars' but it does give you a boost.'

10.3   In particular our fieldwork encountered a number of students who had been encouraged to apply for Oxbridge as a result of Seren, as illustrated below:

'I don't think I would have applied to Oxford without Seren. Seren just lets you know that you are a little bit better than you thought.'

'I'd never have applied for Oxbridge as I didn't understand the prospects.'

10.4   Likewise, surveyed schools were starting to see the positive effects of the Seren initiative, as illustrated via one example:

'In year 13 with 30 students we have just submitted 10 applications to UCAS for early entry (2 Cambridge, 3 Oxford, 2 Dentistry, 5 Medicine) which is a record for us so clearly Seren is working.'

10.5 A small number of participants noted that the network had played an important role in providing a safe environment for them to consider and discuss applying for Oxbridge institutions. In two of these cases interviewed participants reflected that this supportive environment contrasted with that of negative peer attitudes within individual school settings where pupils applying to Oxbridge were considered 'arrogant', 'laughed at' or 'not good enough to go'.

10.6 In one hub where past participants had been interviewed, the evaluation captured evidence that Seren was perceived as having been able to improve participants' chances of entering Oxbridge institutions. One such previous interviewed participant commented that:

'I don't think I'd have gone there without Seren … it instilled a broader knowledge which helped in interview'.

10.7 The evaluation also found that Seren had been of value in helping participants make better informed decisions about their preferred university course – possibly reducing the risk of dropping out of university or changing courses at a later date. In some of these cases this had meant participants deciding against applying to study at an Oxbridge institution or indeed, in very few cases, deciding not to apply for Higher Education at all and pursuing another route:

'I really enjoyed and valued the summer school [at Oxford University] but it made me realise it wasn't for me, I didn't want to study medicine.'

'Seren made me change my mind completely about what I wanted to do – I'm now thinking about a completely different career'.

10.8 A large number of interviewed participations were already clear about their preferred university destination at the point of engaging with Seren however raising questions about the value added by the initiative. In one hub for instance interviewed participants argued that they were already ambitious about their university choice and in the absence of Seren would have been applying for study places at Russell Group universities anyway. In this group it was suggested that Seren had played a role in reinforcing that their decisions were suitable.

10.9 A further clear message from interviewed participants was that the events had made them realise the importance of reading widely around their subject area in order to better prepare them for applying and performing well at HEI interviews. Two interviewed participants at one hub agreed that their involvement had encouraged them to read more widely around their subject and in one case this was argued to have formed an important part of her personal statement. Indeed, where they had received support in relation to their personal statements most interviewed participants believed that Seren had encouraged them to develop these much sooner than would otherwise have been the case and also helped them develop stronger personal statements. In many cases this was thought to have had a positive knock-on effect within schools in that students were now giving earlier consideration to university applications:

'the whole of my Year 12 is now discussing University choices, it's happening earlier – and that's testament to the scheme.'

10.10 Very little data was available at the time of our evaluation across the Seren hubs to be able to report on the difference that the initiative was having upon the numbers applying to higher tariff institutions generally, due to the fact that 2017/18 represents the first full year of delivery across the Seren Network. It is also worth noting that it would be impossible to be able to assess the initiative's impact in the absence of any robust counterfactual data. In a handful of cases, evidence was shared with the evaluation team to suggest that there had been an increase in the number of Oxbridge applications made across the area during 2017 compared to a 2016 baseline.

10.11 Qualitative interviews did suggest that the Seren Network was beginning to have a positive impact upon developing the knowledge and expertise of the education sector more broadly to better support pupils when applying to universities. It was suggested that the main gains have been amongst those schools who did not have prior strong engagement with universities. In a few cases, the evaluation also found evidence that schools and colleges with previous good engagement with universities were sharing their knowledge, experience and contacts with other school representatives.

Surveyed participants and parents

10.12   Surveyed participants believed that the Seren initiative had been able to make the greatest difference to them in terms of getting them to think more ambitiously about their university choices (with 62 per cent or 104 participants taking this view). Seren was also considered important in terms of making a contribution to raising the aspirations of participants (with 53 per cent or 88 participants thinking that the initiative had done so) and providing an opportunity to work with other high achieving students. As shown in Figure 10.1, participation within the Seren Network was not thought to have led to much in the way of influencing and changing participants' career options.

Figure 10.1: Difference made from participation within Seren Network
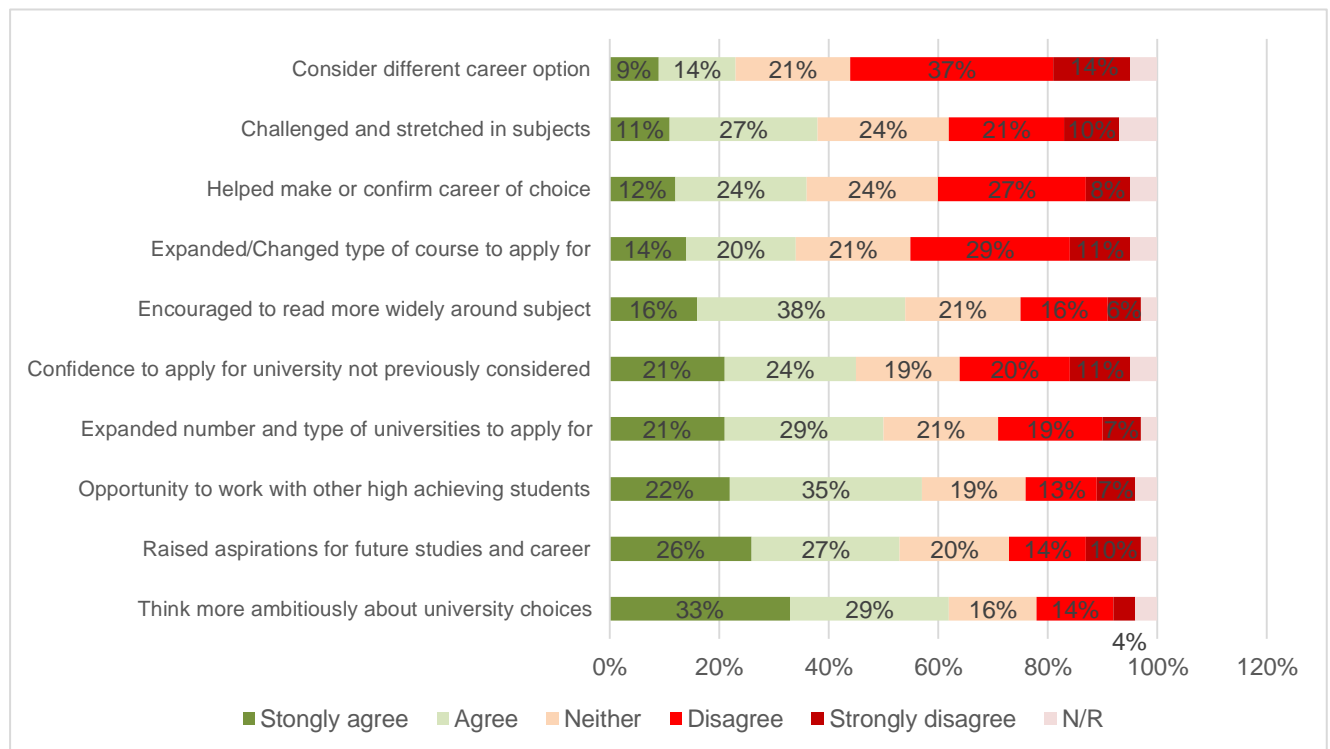
10.13   Surveyed participants and parents were asked whether their participation within the Seren Network was likely to help them make a stronger application to a university. Given the greater response rate from participants, Figure 10.2 presents the data gathered as part of the participant survey although it is worth noting that surveyed parents were slightly more negative overall by comparison e.g. only six and nine parents thought that Seren would help

their child make a stronger application to an Oxbridge university or another university respectively.

10.14 The majority of surveyed participants believed that the Seren Network would help them make a stronger application to universities whilst around a third believed the initiative would have a positive bearing upon their eventual ability to secure an interview or a study place.

Figure 10.2: Views on how participation will help participants
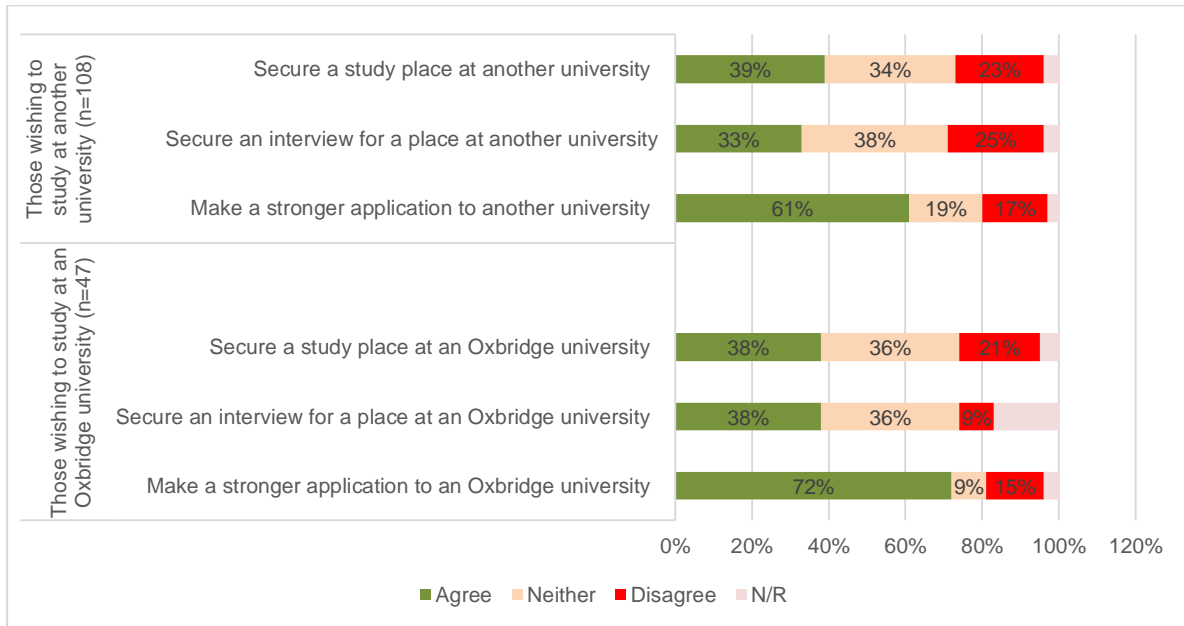
Source: OB3 web survey of participants (Base: 47 wishing to study at an Oxbridge university and 108 wishing to study at another university)

10.15 Surveyed school and FEI representatives thought that participation within the Seren Network would bring about changes to the number of pupils at their school or college who would apply and progress to leading universities. Of those surveyed (23):

- 13 thought that Seren would make a difference to the number of pupils from their school or college applying to an Oxbridge university

- 9 thought that Seren would make a difference to the number of pupils from their school or college receiving an offer from and 8 thought that it would make a difference to the number enrolling at an Oxbridge university

- 14 thought that Seren would make a different to the number of pupils from their school or college applying to , receiving an offer (13) or enrolling (13) at a Russel Group or Sutton Trust 30 university.

10.16   Surveyed participants already at university conveyed mixed views about the extent to which they thought that participation within the Seren Network had helped them. Care must be taken when considering these findings, given that it draws on the feedback of only eight participants and three parents but generally these respondents held very contrasting opinions on whether the initiative had helped them make a strong application to a university and ultimately to secure a study place.

Unintended effects

10.17   Feedback from participants and school representatives from across at least two hub areas suggested that the introduction of the Seren Network had created some tensions between participants and non-participants in a small number of schools, with non-participants viewing participants as a somewhat 'elitist' group. This was not thought to be the case across college settings, largely due to the fact that the 'Seren group' was not as visible or as well identified. In at least two schools, this issue was observed and dealt with in a sensitive manner:

'I know it can be quite embarrassing for them and I tend to deal with them discreetly'.

10.18   In other cases, it was observed that participants would disseminate their knowledge with non-participating peers:

'we go back and tell them what they should and shouldn't be putting in their personal statements. By being in Seren you get to know about these things much earlier.'

11. Final Impact Evaluation

Introduction

11.1   This chapter discusses the feasibility of conducting an impact evaluation of the Seren Network. The chapter describes the data sources and provides an overview of the methodological techniques that could facilitate assessment of the overall effectiveness of the Seren Network. Participation in the Seren programme can be viewed as an intervention whereby the participation of students could favourably affect attendance at the UK's leading universities. Any appraisal of these impacts requires an account of what would have happened to pupils in Seren Networks if they had not participated in the programme – referred to as the counterfactual position. The focus of this chapter is to describe issues associated with the application of statistical techniques that are able to assess the effectiveness of Seren through the application of Counterfactual Impact Analysis (CIA) techniques.

11.2   Since widening access to UK's highly-selective universities is a broad national challenge, it is acknowledged that a number of services have been developed by organisations in the UK that allow for the follow-up of students who have participated in schemes similar to Seren. For example, the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT), helps subscribing Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in England track students that have taken part in outreach activities in schools and colleges, through to their participation in Higher Education. The University and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) also provide analytical services (EXACT[61]) that allow clients to request the construction of standardised and bespoke data-sets and statistical outputs that allow clients to examine the Higher Educational outcomes of pupils. Although valuable to those interested in examining the destinations of students, these services are primarily descriptive and do not facilitate the application of more detailed CIA techniques.

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[61] https://www.ucas.com/corporate/data-and-analysis/analytical-data-services/exact

11.3   Examples of previous evaluations of similar programmes using counterfactual techniques include evaluations of Brilliant Club and Teach First. The Brilliant Club aims to increase the number of pupils from under-represented backgrounds to highly-selective universities through the engagement of PhD researchers in outreach activities within schools (referred to as the Scholars Programme). An evaluation by UCAS suggested the presence of a statistically significant effect of the scholars programme when the progress of participants was compared against a control group with similar characteristics but not going through the scholars programme[62]. Teach First was established as a charity in 2002 to find and develop talented people to teach and lead in schools in low-income areas. The main aim of Teach First is to enhance the school experience of pupils from dis-advantaged backgrounds. Research carried out by the Institute of Education[63] found that schools working with Teach First improved their GCSE scores[64]. Researchers compared the results of pupils in Teach First partner schools to those in otherwise comparable schools. They found that the programme was associated with school-wide gains in GCSE results of around one grade in one of the pupils' best eight subjects. Similarly, the research also estimated departmental gains of over 5 per cent of a subject grade resulting from placing a Teach First participant in a teaching team of six teachers.

11.4   The focus of this chapter is to consider how similar techniques can be applied to the evaluation of Seren. The remainder of this Chapter provides:

- a description of these data sets, outlining their potential contribution to any analysis

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[62] The Brilliant Club. 2017. *Impact Update: UCAS Control Group Evaluation*. Available at: http://www.thebrilliantclub.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/UCAS-Impact-Evaluation-1.pdf

[63] Allen, R. and Allnutt, J. (2017) The impact of Teach First on pupil attainment at age 16, *British Educational Research Journal,* 43(4) 627-646. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/berj.3288

[64] Teach First. 2017. *Teach First Impact Report*. Available at: https://www.teachfirst.org.uk/reports/our-work-and-its-impact

- how these data sets could be configured in order to follow the educational progress of success cohorts of students, including participants in Seren

- an overview of the types of analytical techniques that could be applied to assess the effectiveness of Seren.

Sources of Data to Support the Evaluation of Seren

11.5   The Welsh Government gathers data on different phases of education in Wales. These include: the Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) ,the post-16 pupil collection (Sixth Forms), the Welsh Examinations Database (WED) and the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR). Welsh Government also has access to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Student Record for all students at UK HEIs. Analysed alongside each other these data sets can provide a comprehensive picture of post-16 learner attainment and progression among Welsh students. In addition, the Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) data contains information on students' background, predicted grades and HE course choices. Through the identification of Seren participants within these data sets, this information could provide the basis for analysing the effectiveness of the Seren Network.

11.6   **The Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC)**: The Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC) is a census of pupils taken in January each year. The data contains information on the following categories: school identifiers; school contact details and characteristics; governance details; survey details; classes data; teachers and support staff details; teaching of Welsh; teacher recruitment and retention data and individual pupil data for all enrolled students for the census period. The individual pupil data provides individual level information on the demographic characteristics of pupils (age, ethnicity, gender) and information on Special Educational Needs (distinguishing SEN status according to whether pupils are Action, Action Plus or Statemented[65]).

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[65]http://learning.wales.gov.uk/docs/learningwales/publications/131016-sen-code-of-practice-for-wales-en.pdf

11.7 **The National Pupil Database (NPD)**: The Welsh National Pupil Database (NPD) contains linked individual pupil records for all children in Wales in the state school system. In addition to the information collected from PLASC, it also contains other details relating to the educational progress of pupils, principally assessment and attendance data. Assessment data include GCSE results as well as earlier Key Stage assessments. The GCSE attainment of learners is expressed in terms of their capped GCSE points which relates to the eight best GCSEs achieved by learners. GCSE results are a significant predictor of learners' participation in post-compulsory education[66]. Participants enter the Seren programme prior to any assessments of academic progress that are made during Year 12 (e.g. AS levels). Attainment at GCSE will therefore be a key predictor of applications made to HE and subsequent HE attendance.

11.8 In terms of socio-economic characteristics, information held on the NPD is limited to whether or not pupils are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM). Pupils are eligible for FSM if their parents are in receipt of benefits that are primarily aimed at those out of work, such as Job Seekers Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance[67]. However, it is possible that only a very small proportion of students participating in Seren would have been eligible for FSM during Year 11. Recent estimates for England suggest that only 2 per cent of state school students who are entitled to free school meals (17 per cent of FSM-eligible participants) attend a high status institution (as defined by the quality of research carried out by an institution) at age 19 or 20 compared to 10 per cent of students who are not entitled to free school meals (32 per cent of non FSM-eligible participants)[68]. As such, FSM eligibility does not provide an effective mechanism for differentiating between the varying socio-economic backgrounds of pupils in a way that is sufficiently detailed to support an analysis of the separate and additional effect of Seren on HE participation.

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[66] Chowdry, H., C. Crawford, L. Goodman, L. Deaden, and A. Vignoles. 2013. "Widening Participation in Higher Education: Analysis Using Linked Administrative Data." *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society: Series A Statistics in Society* 176 (2): 431–457.

[67] https://www.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals

[68] See footnote 66.

11.9 **The Post-16 Collection Data:** The post -16 collection is a whole year data collection submitted in the following Autumn for post-16 pupils at maintained secondary and middle schools. Pupils staying on at secondary school with an attached Sixth Form typically study for two years, referred to as Years 12 (Lower Sixth) and 13 (Upper Sixth). The post-16 collection records include information on four broad areas: school identifiers, individual pupil data (e.g. unique pupil/learner numbers, names, dates of birth and gender), pupil status (e.g. enrolment status, part-time indicator, pupil National Curriculum (NC) year groups and pupil post-codes) and learning pathways and activities. Within Sixth Forms, students predominantly undertake Level 3 qualifications; a majority of which are AS/A levels. Nonetheless, even within Sixth Form environments, many students are also engaged in vocational activities such as BTECs or NVQs. Activities being undertaken towards achievement of the post-16 Welsh Baccalaureate are also included. Another group among those attending Sixth Form are those who are undertaking GCSEs.

11.10 **The Welsh Examinations Database (WED):** The Welsh Examinations Database (WED) contains information on the examinations taken by students and the results achieved. The information in WED is complex due to the nature of activities undertaken by the learners at Sixth Forms as described above.

11.11 **The Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR**): The Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) contains individual student records for all post-compulsory learners in Wales enrolled on Further Education (FE), Work-Based Learning (WBL) and Community Learning (CL) programmes funded by Welsh Government. It includes some key information relating to the characteristics of post-compulsory learners and contains detailed educational attainment data, allowing for analysis at both the overall learning programme level, but also at individual award/module level. The LLWR is composed of four main datasets which provide information on the learner, their educational activities, and their attainment data. These datasets are:

- The Learner (LN) dataset, which includes information about the learner such as name, date of birth, ethnic origin, gender and disability status;

- The Learning Programme (LP) dataset, which gives information about the current programme of learning being undertaken by the learner and any characteristics which may change over time

- The Learning Activity (LA) dataset, which collects data on the individual activities or courses undertaken by the learner on his/her programme of learning

- The Award (AW) dataset, which provides information on the awards for which the learner is entered and those achieved.

11.12   In sum, LLWR includes individual learner records, programme, activity, and award records for people who are registered at post-compulsory educational institutions (not including school Sixth Forms or Higher Education).

11.13   The important contribution of LLWR to the analysis of Seren is that it completes the picture of A level study in Wales. Whilst most Welsh students undertaking A-levels will be doing so in school based Sixth Forms, some will be undertaking these qualifications within an FE environment. As with Sixth Form, a majority of students appear in the LLWR data during the year following their completion of Year 11. This is the 'normal' or 'conventional' pathway (i.e. making a linear transition from compulsory schooling on to post-16 education within an FE college). However, some students also join FE College after a gap of one year following their completion of compulsory education. This group may include students who have had to re-sit exams, those who have started at a school Sixth Form but who decided to transfer to FE after their first year, or those who have temporarily gone into employment, but returned to education later.

11.14   **The Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS):** The Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) collects and processes data related to full time undergraduate applications to Higher Education Providers (HEPs) in the UK. UCAS' published data include application and acceptance figures by country, region and constituency, as well as entry and offer rates for individual universities by the sex, age and background of applicants. Specifically, the UCAS dataset contains information on applicants, their applications offers, acceptances and refusals onto courses.

Examples of some of the variables contained within the UCAS data include: age, previous school type, clearing acceptances, subject, predicted A level scores, deadline status, inferred HEPs' response, domiciled country of residence (UK only), ethnicity, gender and socio-economic status.

11.15   UCAS data has been used to help answer a range of research questions regarding application and acceptances and refusals to Higher Education courses in the UK. The demographic information contained within the UCAS data can also be used to monitor Higher Education take up rates for different socio-economic groups which is of particular importance in assessing the effectiveness of Seren. Whilst NPD data holds important information on year 11 pupils' GCSEs which is the crucial starting point to explore the journey of learners through the Higher Education route, information on socio-economic status is limited. The incorporation of UCAS data would therefore facilitate a more rigorous analysis of the effects of socio-economic factors on learners' Higher Education choices than the NPD alone. It must be noted that linking the year 11 NPD data to UCAS data can only analyse the trajectories of the students which appear on the UCAS data. The students appearing on the UCAS may not be the students belonging to disadvantaged backgrounds in the NPD in year 11. However, it is assumed that the purpose of Seren is not primarily to improve participation in HE amongst students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

11.16   **The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA):** The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) collects a wide variety of information about Higher Education in the UK, covering students at university and their destinations once they leave, university staff, finances and estate management. The HESA dataset contains detailed information on individual students on programmes of study for which the level of instruction is above that of level 3 of the National Qualifications Framework. The HESA Student Record has universal coverage and typically contains over two and a quarter million records each year. It is a primary source of data used to explore changes and trends in students that enter and are in Higher Education. It has also been possible to use the dataset to analyse the proportions of young people

not entering Higher Education and use this as an indicator of deprivation in the English, Welsh and Scottish indices of multiple deprivation.

11.17   The dataset includes information on the student's home address, date of birth, ethnicity, qualifications prior to beginning the course, the course studied and the student's major source of funding. The HESA data are of importance to assessing the effectiveness of Seren Network because it captures the actual attendance of students at HEIs. As well as raising the aspirations of students to apply for leading HEIs, many of the activities provided by Seren also focus on developing skills to improve the success of these applications, such as preparation for entrance interviews. The HESA data also contains variables that measure pupils' progression/drop-out instances whilst attending university, thereby facilitating an examination of whether participation in the Seren scheme contributes to progression within HE.

Identifying Seren Participants within Administrative Data

11.18   Table 11.1 shows the potential passage of early cohorts of Seren participants through post-compulsory education and how this relates to the availability of information about them in the data sets described above. The table therefore demonstrates how information on Seren and non- Seren participants within each data set may potentially be drawn. The table is primarily for illustrative purposes and deliberately abstracts from issues of gaining consent from students for their data to be included within any evaluation study (discussed below).

Table 11.1 Overview of data source and cohort details

Hubs	Cohorts	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Operational in 2014 Flintshire/Wrexham RCT/Merthyr Lliw-Tawe	Cohort 1 (C1)	Year 11 (PLASC)-C1 Year 11 (NPD)–C1	Year 12 (PLASC & LLWR)-C1	Year 13 (PLASC & LLWR)-C1 Year 13 (WED & LLWR)-C1 Year 13 (UCAS)-C1 Year 13 (HESA)-C1	Uni 1 (HESA)-C1	Uni 2 (HESA)-C1	Uni 3 (HESA)-C1
	Cohort 2 (C2)	-	Year 11 (PLASC)-C2 Year 11 (NPD)–C2	Year 12 (PLASC & LLWR)-C2	Year 13 (PLASC & LLWR)-2 Year 13 (WED & LLWR)-C2 Year 13 (UCAS)-C2 Year 13 (HESA)-C2	Uni 1 (HESA)-C2	Uni 2 (HESA)-C2
	Cohort 3 (C3)	-	-	Year 11 (PLASC)-C3 Year 11 (NPD)–C3	Year 12 (PLASC & LLWR)-C3	Year 13 (PLASC & LLWR)-C3 Year 13 (WED & LLWR)-C3 Year 13 (UCAS)-C3 Year 13 (HESA)-C3	Uni 1 (HESA)-C3
Operational in 2015 Pembrokeshire/Carmarthenshire EAS Cardiff NPT, Powys, Bridgend Gwynedd and Ynys Mon Conwy/Denbighshire	Cohort 1 (C1)	-	Year 11 (PLASC)-C1 Year 11 (NPD)-C1	Year 12 (PLASC & LLWR)-C1	Year 13 (PLASC & LLWR)-C1 Year 13 (WED & LLWR)-C1 Year 13 (UCAS)-C1 Year 13 (HESA)-C1	Uni 1 (HESA)-C1	Uni 2 (HESA)-C1
	Cohort 2 (C2)	-	-	Year 11 (PLASC)-C2 Year 11 (NPD)-C2	Year 12 (PLASC & LLWR)-C2	Year 13 (PLASC & LLWR)-C2 Year 13 (WED & LLWR)-C2 Year 13 (UCAS)-C2 Year 13 (HESA)-C2	Uni 1 (HESA)-C2
	Cohort 3 (C3)	-	-	-	Year 11 (PLASC)-C3 Year 11 (NPD)-C3	Year 12 (PLASC & LLWR)-C3	Year 13 (PLASC & LLWR)-C3 Year 13 (WED & LLWR)-C3 Year 13 (UCAS)-C3 Year 13 (HESA)-C3
Operational in 2016							

Ceredigion Vale of Glamorgan	Cohort 1 (C1)	-	-	Year 11 (PLASC)-C1 Year 11 (NPD)-C1	Year 12 (PLASC & LLWR)-C1	Year 13 (PLASC & LLWR)-C1 Year 13 (WED & LLWR)-C1 Year 13 (UCAS)-C1 Year 13 (HESA)-C1	Uni 1 (HESA)-C1
	Cohort 2 (C2)	-	-	-	Year 11 (PLASC)-C2 Year 11 (NPD)-C2	Year 12 (PLASC & LLWR)-C2	Year 13 (WED & LLWR)-C2 Year 13 (UCAS)-C2 Year 13 (HESA)-C2
	Cohort 3 (C3)	-	-	-	-	-	-

11.19   The availability of data from different Seren hubs and how that data could contribute to the final impact assessment would depend upon the date they became operational. Three Seren hubs were initially established as pilots (Wrexham/Flintshire, Lliw-Tawe and RCT/Merthyr) and have been in operation since 2014. Other hubs were formed later. The formation of hubs at different time points would also need to be considered as the experience of hub-administrators and their time in service may have some influence on achieving the desired outcomes. The different roles undertaken by each hub Co-ordinator may also have an impact on the performance of particular hubs. In some cases the administrative roles are undertaken by a contracted consultant whereas in other cases the responsibilities have been allocated to existing co-ordinators within the local authority or FE College e.g. MAT or sixth-form co-ordinators. The evaluation will need to take these aspects/differences into account when reviewing programme provision at a local level.

11.20   The utilisation of matched data sets based on PLASC, Post-16 pupil collection, WED, LLWR, UCAS and HESA data are potentially valuable for evaluating the effectiveness of the Seren Network in getting the academically brightest Welsh learners into UK's selective universities. Under the terms of various Fair Processing Notices, learners included in the named datasets have already given their permission to allow access to their learner records (including personal identifiers such as names), for a limited time to certain organisations such as Government Departments, academics or other research organisations acting on behalf of government for the purposes of research, such as the statistical evaluation of the Seren programme. Such bodies have to ensure that any publications/reports based on the statistical analysis and research using the linked data contains anonymised data, and any third party/contractors employed in any part of the research process sign confidentiality agreements in relation to data, and are obligated to destroy their copies of data following conclusion of the project.

11.21   For this data to be used in the evaluation of the Seren programme, it is necessary to be able to 'flag' participants of the Seren programme within these data sets. The best way to achieve this would be to simply identify Seren as a Learning Programme consisting of a series of Learning Activities within these databases like any other. For example, recent research in Wales has similarly considered the effects of the Welsh Baccalaureate in preparing young people for Higher Education[69]. This could be achieved, for example, by requiring Seren hubs to complete a LLWR return like other providers of post compulsory education and training. This way the learners in LLWR would be covered by the LLWR privacy notice and all the statements about their data being used for research. Seren participants attending Sixth Forms could be flagged in PLASC, thereby being covered by the PLASC Fair Processing Agreement. However, this is not essential if the participation of these students in Seren was captured by LLWR. Such an approach would mean that no additional consent would need to be attained from students or their parents for the purposes of the Counterfactual evaluation based upon the analysis of administrative records as use of the data for research would be covered by the LLWR privacy notice.

11.22   It is important to consider the potential downside for seeking informed consent of Seren participants for the purposes of supporting the counterfactual evaluation. The new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which comes in to force in 2018 outlines the strict conditions which have to be met in order to rely upon consent for data processing. These include the maintenance of accurate consent records, the clarity and prominence of consent requests, supporting the ability of participants to easily withdraw consent and avoiding making consent a condition of participation[70]. Reliance upon voluntary consent would result in the loss of important information from Seren participants for whom data was not made available. The personal details of those who chose to opt out of any evaluation of Seren based on administrative data would still be required in

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[69] http://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/130325-relationships-between-welsh-baccalaureate-advanced-diploma-higher-education-en.pdf

[70] https://ico.org.uk/media/about-the-ico/consultations/2013551/draft-gdpr-consent-guidance-for-consultation-201703.pdf

order to remove these students from the databases being used for the evaluation. If this was not done (i.e. the non-consenting students remained in the databases but were not flagged as Seren participants), this could result in the potential effects of the scheme being underestimated if participants are incorrectly allocated to control groups.

11.23   If Seren participants cannot be identified through the classification of Seren as a Learning Programme, the details of Seren participants encompassing their full name, date of birth, gender and address would have to be collected for the purposes of record matching. It is likely that such information is being collected by the SEREN hubs to support the administration of the scheme (e.g. parental contact details). However, if this data is required for the purposes of record linkage, this places greater importance on such information being collected to the highest standards and in a consistent format across the hubs. It is also likely that certain other characteristics about the students may also be required to support the implementation of the scheme such as parents' experience of Higher Education and subject and place of study aspirations. Whilst such information could make a useful contribution to any subsequent evaluation of the scheme, it would be of no value to the counterfactual evaluation which requires consistent information from both participants and non-participants in the scheme. Whilst we propose that consent statements will not be required for the purposes of the counterfactual evaluation based upon the analysis of administrative data, consent from Seren participants will still be required for taking part in future evaluation activities of Seren Network, such as participating in a survey, interviews and/or focus groups.

Assessing the Impact of the Seren Scheme

11.24   There are a number of caveats around preparation for final impact evaluation depending on what may be considered to be the outcome for the Seren Network. As we understand, the Seren Network was initially established in direct response to the need to halt the decline in the number of successful applications being made by students in Wales to attend Oxford and Cambridge Universities. However, the initial aim was later expanded to include support and guidance to the academically brightest A level students

to achieve better levels of A level attainment and progress to the UK's leading universities, namely those in the Russell Group/Sutton Trust 30. The objectives of the Seren network are currently considered to encompass supporting the brightest Welsh students' progression into 'good departments' within universities for Higher Education.

11.25   The ambiguity around what constitute the aim of the Seren Network has ramifications for assessing the effectiveness of the scheme in achieving its purpose effectively. Measuring whether the initiatives delivered by the Seren Network have facilitated progression of students into Oxbridge universities is relatively straightforward. The outcome measure of interest would simply be the change in the likelihood of students making an application to Oxford or Cambridge (as captured by UCAS data) or the change in the likelihood of students actually attending an Oxbridge institution (as captured by HESA data). Such an analysis could be easily extended to examine attendance at Russell Group and Sutton Trust Universities. Subject to data availability, the impact of Seren on reducing rates of withdrawal from elite universities could also be examined. The picture however gets more complicated in terms of examining the effectiveness of the Seren Network of getting students enrolled into a 'good department' due to the subjectivity associated with defining what constitutes a good department.

11.26   Participation in the Seren programme can be viewed as treatment whereby participation (treatment) could, for example, favourably affect attendance at the UK's leading universities. Any appraisal of these impacts requires an account of what would have happened to pupils in Seren Networks if they had not participated in the programme. A worthwhile counterfactual therefore implicitly defines a control group or sample whose experiences accurately reflect the hypothetical, unobserved outcomes for the treatment group. Ideally individuals would be allocated to the control and treatment groups at random before participation in Seren commences. Outside of medical research, this ideal is rarely achieved[71] and so in practice statistical techniques have been developed to provide methods for defining control

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[71] Some recent examples of where trial based designs have been utilised in the evaluation of labour market interventions include Schochet et al. (2008) and Schwerdt et al. (2012).

groups and evaluating treatments in the absence of an initial ideal experimental allocation. Counterfactual analysis provides an alternative approach to assess the effectiveness of the Seren Network from the angle of what would have happened to participants had they not participated. Two methods commonly used for counterfactual analysis are Statistical Matching and Regression Discontinuity Design.

11.27 Statistical matching selects a group of non-participants in a way that makes them resemble the participants in everything, but for the fact of receiving the intervention. This can be achieved through the estimation of a propensity score which is derived from a statistical model that estimates the probability of being a participant of Seren. In terms of implementing this in practice, statistical 'markers' identifying Seren participants would be included in administrative datasets that cover the potential population of Seren participants. Analysis would then be undertaken to estimate what characteristics included about individuals in these databases are associated with an increased likelihood of participation in Seren (as measured by their propensity score). Participants and non-participants of Seren can then be matched on the basis of their propensity score: their estimated probability of being a participant in the Seren programme. If statistical matching is done accurately then the outcome observed for the matched group approximates the counterfactual (i.e. what the participants would have done in the absence of Seren), and the effect of the intervention is straightforwardly estimated as the difference between the average outcomes of the two groups.

11.28 The challenge in using the PSM technique in assessing the effectiveness of Seren Network is to develop a meaningful control group who accurately resemble the characteristics of the academically brightest learners in Wales but who either do not get selected into the Seren Network for some reason or choose not to participate. There are two problems in this respect. Firstly, administrative datasets are often limited in the level of detail that is contained about individuals. As discussed above, FSM eligibility may only provide a poor proxy for the measurement of socio-economic status among the general population. Whilst socio-economic status is potentially measurable (e.g. with the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification), it may not

be available within administrative data sets. Secondly, developing an effective control will also be difficult if participants in Seren differ in ways that are difficult to measure. For example, pupils with the strongest desire to attend a top university will be more likely to participate in the scheme. Similarly, those delivering the scheme may particularly encourage the participation of pupils who they regard as having the aptitude to achieve entry to a top university. Both of these examples highlight that participants in the Seren scheme may differ in terms of characteristics that are difficult to capture. Both of these problems are examples of 'omitted variable bias'. Within such circumstances, the application of statistical matching techniques could result in the effect of the Seren scheme being upwardly biased. Nonetheless, the application of such techniques can still provide a valuable insight as long as it is acknowledged that the effects of the scheme are potentially being over-estimated; i.e. such analyses could be regarded as providing 'upper-bound' estimates of the effectiveness of the scheme.

11.29   A further challenge to the application of PSM techniques could arise if all of the academically brightest students simply get 'passported' on to the Seren scheme. In such circumstances, there would be no students outside of the scheme within the same cohorts of students to act as a meaningful control group. This could occur in situations where a specified entry criteria is applied uniformly across all Seren hubs. Such problems may be alleviated in part if different hubs adopt different criteria for selection, resulting in students with the same grades participating in the scheme in some areas but not others. For example, if hub A adopts a selection criteria of 5 A* at GCSE whilst hub B adopts a selection criteria of 6 A*, then students in hub B with 5 A* at GCSE could conceivably act as a control for students in hub A with the same levels of qualifications who participate in the scheme. However, hub B would not be able to provide a meaningful control group for students with higher levels of attainment as such students in both hub areas would be participating in the scheme.

11.30   Regression Discontinuity Design may be considered as a suitable alternative to statistical matching where there are difficulties in identifying suitable control groups. RD design can be used circumstances such as SEREN

where there is an underlying characteristic such as educational attainment which effects both the outcome of interest (e.g. entry to leading UK universities or departments) and the selection of candidates for receipt of the treatment (e.g. the selection of candidates for participation in the activities of Seren). In the case of Seren, students' academic ability (proxied by GCSE scores) is used to prioritise candidates for that treatment. For example, a cut-off score of 5 A* at GCSE (more or less arbitrarily) could be selected as the assignment criterion for participation in the Seren Network. In its simplest form, RD design fits a linear regression model to data that identifies participants above the cut-off who had received the intervention (Seren) and control participants below the cut-off who have not.

11.31   Figure 11.1 illustrates what might be expected to occur in the presence of Seren treatment. For simplicity, in this illustration we assume that participation in Seren has had a constant effect in raising each enrolled pupil's likelihood of enrolling in the best UK universities. The dashed line in Figure 11.1 shows what the regression line could look like if Seren was found to have a positive effect. In this hypothetical scenario, there is a sharp upward jump at the cut-point in the relationship between chances of university admissions and student GCSEs scores, if Seren is found to be a useful treatment. In practice, it is conceivable that the effect of Seren may vary by educational attainment. For example, the effect of Seren could be larger for those students with the very highest levels of educational attainment and may not be observed among those just above the cut-off score. The underlying relationship between the outcome measure and educational attainment may also not be linear. These types of issues need to be explored during the application of RD design.

Figure 11.1: Regression Discontinuity Design and the Evaluation of Seren

Treatment ○
Control ✻
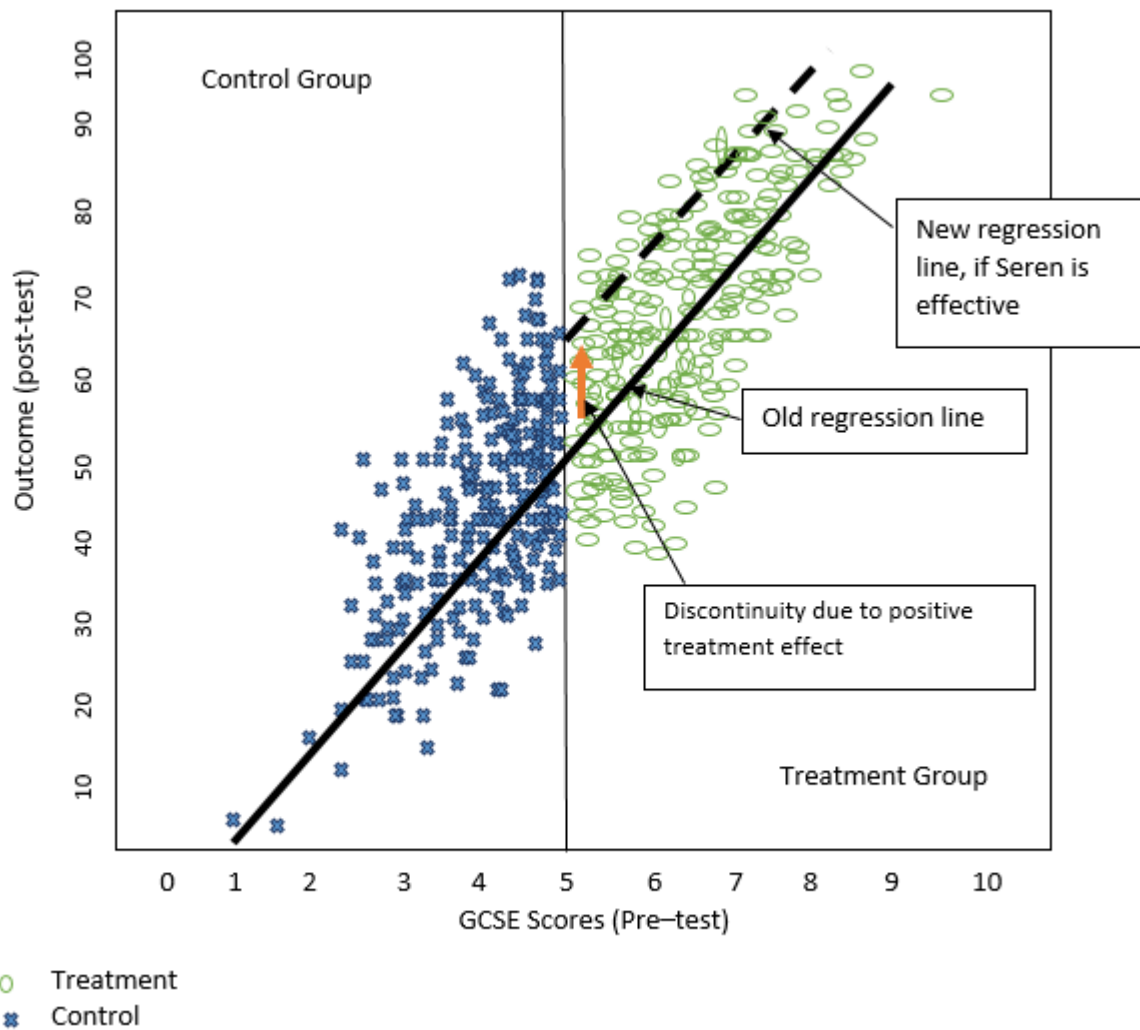
Concluding thoughts

11.32 The application of Counterfactual Impact Assessment (CIA) techniques to previous evaluations of initiatives aimed at increasing the participation of disadvantaged groups within HE suggest that it is entirely feasible to apply similar techniques to the evaluation of Seren. The precision with which such analyses can be conducted is dependent upon the availability of good quality data that accurately tracks the educational progression of successive cohorts of students who participate in the schemes.

11.33 The ability to construct accurate control groups for participants in the Seren schemes is dependent upon good quality data about students. The data sets discussed earlier represent the 'ideal' position and it may be feasible to conduct an evaluation without utilising all of these sources. For example, the

evaluation of the Brilliant Club initiative was undertaken solely on UCAS data. The benefit of including additional data sets is the increased accuracy with which any statistical analysis can control for the characteristics of students. For example, attendance at Year 11 can provide valuable information about the characteristics of students that may not be fully captured by socio-economic background or GCSE results.

11.34   It is not possible to be prescriptive about the methodology that should be utilised by analysts in the future evaluation of Seren. Propensity Score Matching and Regression Discontinuity Design could each be applicable. The preferred approach will become apparent upon investigation of participant data.

12.   Conclusions and Recommendations

12.1   The Seren Network was established as a pilot intervention during 2015/16 with the objective of supporting high achieving students to progress to the UK's leading universities. We conclude that the initiative has been successfully expanded over a relatively short timeframe since then so as to offer a full programme of pan-Wales provision by the start of the 2017/18 academic year. During its establishment phase the initiative has, in our view, adopted an appropriate flexible, bottom-up approach which has allowed local hubs to design a programme of provision to address local contextual circumstances and needs. As a result, we conclude that Seren has been able to add value to existing provision and addressed gaps in existing provision, with the greatest level of added value being in place for schools which did not have a particularly strong track record of supporting students into leading universities. We also conclude that a successful feature of the Seren initiative has been the significant in-kind contribution and goodwill offered by schools, FEIs and HEIs.

12.2   We conclude that the Seren Network has been designed as an intervention which has the potential to make a contribution towards Welsh Government policies of widening access to and participation in Higher Education. However, we also conclude that Seren is taking Welsh Government policy in an interesting and somewhat different direction to existing policies which are primarily focused on widening access to Higher Education amongst disadvantaged students and strengthening Higher Education institutions in Wales. We further conclude that very little reference is made to the Seren Network within any existing Welsh Government educational and Higher Education policies and that this should be addressed in the future.

Recommendation 1

We recommend that the Welsh Government reviews and clarifies the aims and objectives of the Seren Network, particularly in terms of the initiative's target universities. We further recommend that the aims and objectives of the Seren Network be better reflected within mainstream educational and

Higher Education Welsh Government policies in the future.

Should the outcome of this review be that the Seren Network should indeed focus on all leading universities and all types of academic courses, then we would further recommend that all hub provision be aligned to this broad aim, and that provision at a local level is reflective of this.

Related to this, the Seren Network should seek to clarify what constitutes a successful outcome for participants and define and report upon the performance indicators (in terms of the range of university and course applications, offers and acceptances) which are within the initiative's remit. In this respect we would recommend that consideration be given to agreeing a definitive list annually of universities, departments and courses to be included in the Seren Network which could include those universities and courses identified as leading institutions and provision via the TEF framework, in addition to Russell Group and Sutton Trust 30 institutions, as well as including all Higher Education Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary courses.

12.3 We conclude that the evidence which underpins the need for Seren is based upon a recent downward trend in the number of applications and enrolments by Welsh domiciled students at Oxbridge institutions as well as those opting to study Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary courses. Recently published UCAS data points to a recent increase in the number of Welsh domiciled students applying to these institutions and courses during 2017/18. The evaluation found that a large number of hubs have focused their provision on Oxbridge and these courses, yet participant expectations of Seren have been much wider given that they have been recruited on the basis of 'good' GCSE grades rather than their intention to apply for Oxbridge or to study STEMM degree subjects. It is perhaps not surprising therefore that the extent to which Seren has met participant and parental expectations has been mixed.

12.4 The findings of the evaluation point to an inherent tension between the objectives of the Seren Network to actively encourage participants to study outside Wales on the one hand and the broader objectives of the Welsh

Government to support the Higher Education sector in Wales on the other. We conclude that there is currently a lack of clarity around the role which Welsh HEIs should have within the Seren Network although all hubs are very much dependent upon their contribution in order to achieve their local objectives. Aligned to this, we conclude that the participation of Welsh HEIs could potentially dilute the success of Seren, if success is only measured by the number of participants studying at 'high tariff' universities.

Recommendation 2

We recommend that the Welsh Government formally acknowledges the involvement and role of Welsh HEIs as delivery partners within the Seren Network and engage with them to scope out their role in order to alleviate the current tension across the Higher Education sector in Wales.

12.5   We conclude that Seren hubs are making appropriate use of allocated funding and that a fairly modest amount of annual funding per hub (at £25k per year) has resulted in significant in-kind investment from partner organisations to the initiative. Whilst the funding was always intended as initial pump-priming funding the feedback suggests that hubs are not well established enough for this funding to be withdrawn at this stage. In addition, hubs do not yet have HEI entry and enrolment data to be able to make any informed decision about the impact of the initiative upon university applications and enrolments at their local authority level.

Recommendation 3

We recommend that the Welsh Government continues to provide pump-priming funding to local hubs for at least a four-year period until an impact evaluation can offer robust evidence on the difference being achieved by the initiative.

We would further recommend that the funding awarded by Welsh Government to each hub gives due consideration to:

a.   the number of participants supported by each one and

b.   a rural weighting for those hubs which incur greater travel costs.

> For the purposes of calculating funding amounts we would suggest that the number of participants per hub be considered by band size.
>
> We also recommend that Seren hubs implement a common process for capturing the annual value of in-kind contributions made by schools and FEIs to the Seren Network.

12.6   The evaluation found that the criteria set for participants to join their local Seren hub was commonly based upon GCSE attainment although there was significant variation in the grades which participants were required to achieve in order to join. This varied from a low of 5 B grades and four A* GCSE grades to a high of 6A*across the hubs. Two hubs adopted a points based system for calculating eligibility. We accept the viewpoint of those involved in the delivery of local hubs that it has been appropriate for local Seren hubs to establish their eligibility criteria so as to accommodate local contextual issues but we conclude that this has created inconsistent access for students across Wales. Hubs which have set higher academic eligibility criteria have excluded pupils from participation and this should be addressed going forward.

> **Recommendation 4**
>
> We recommend that the Seren Network adopts common minimum eligibility criteria for participants to be able to join the initiative regardless of where they are located. Ideally, this criteria would be based on an agreed points based methodology (as is already adopted by two of the hubs) rather than a method of using a minimum number of A* or A grades.
>
> Having established this criteria, we further recommend that each hub is awarded some degree of flexibility and discretion to increase or decrease their points based threshold to reflect local circumstances and needs.

12.7   The feedback from all contributors to this evaluation points to a very mixed experience for participants from one hub area to another. Whilst we recognise the importance that all hubs are able to respond to their local needs in a flexible manner, we are also of the view that participants deserve to be able to access a minimum 'offer' from Seren and that their committed

engagement with the initiative is formally recognised in some way. We conclude that participant and parent expectations of Seren have been raised at the outset of Year 12 but have not necessarily been met across all hubs.

Recommendation 5

We recommend that the Welsh Government, in conjunction with the Seren hubs, set out a common operating framework for the initiative going forward whilst retaining some of the flexibility and responsiveness of local approaches adopted to date. We recommend that a common operating framework:

- Specify the minimum participation and commitment required on the part of participants
- Set out a minimum offer or core provision which participants could expect to access in terms of content and quantity
- Monitor attendance at local events and adopt common processes for dealing with low attendance and student turnover
- Offer a scheme completion certificate to those participants 'graduating' from Seren.

12.8   It is understandable that each local Seren hub has been focused on establishing its own individual governance arrangements and provision to date. The significant efforts deployed by a wide range of local partners, including schools, FEIs and local authorities in particular to help establish their local hub and make provision available is to be commended. We conclude that effective regional collaborative working across hubs is evident in some cases at present and that there is scope to build upon and replicate this good practice in the future. The fieldwork revealed that there are significant opportunities for many hubs to further their collaborative work, using the Seren co-ordinators meetings as a conduit for doing so.

Recommendation 6

We recommend that the Seren Network, via the Seren co-ordinators meeting, identifies further opportunities for collaboration between hubs. This

would include building upon the initial efforts deployed to develop a co-ordinated programme of provision and promoting provision via social media channels so as to maximise the opportunities that participants have to access events held in neighbouring hubs, particularly subject specific masterclasses.

12.9   Aligned to this, the fieldwork also revealed that there are many other opportunities for the Seren initiative to disseminate its existing resources and provision to a wider audience. Non-Seren participants from Years 12 and 13 as well as younger learners would benefit from being able to access resources and view seminar/event content via a digital platform.

Recommendation 7

We recommend that the Welsh Government and Seren hubs identify which elements of current provision could be made available on an universal basis to a wider audience in order to maximise access to the information provided via the Network. We would recommend as a starting point that a small number of seminars and lectures be offered as webinars, and that lecture capture technology be used and other online resources developed in order to disseminate content via a range of digital platforms, including via Seren's social media channels and via other partners such as Careers Wales and FEI platforms.

12.10   A common message from participants and parents alike would suggest that the focus of a number of Seren hubs has primarily been upon encouraging participants to consider applying to Oxbridge institutions and providing support around a small number of competitive degree subjects, primarily STEMM subjects such as Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary studies. Positive feedback has been gathered by those participants who have been interested in these pathways but clearly not all Seren participants have wanted to pursue these options.

Recommendation 8

We recommend that those hubs who don't currently offer a broad range of

subject specific master classes to their participants explore opportunities for doing so. This could be achieved via a more regional approach to planning and delivering such provision and by collaborating with neighbouring hubs so as to secure an adequate number of attendees at events.

12.11   The evaluation found that HEIs provide considerable resources to the Seren Network. Given that 11 hubs are now in place and are gathering momentum in terms of developing contacts with target HEIs and the fact that this evaluation found that participants want to engage with a broader number of HEIs, it can be expected that the demand upon target HEIs to further their engagement with Seren will increase. We recommend that the liaison with HEIs be carefully managed as a result and that the needs of HEIs to be able to identify Seren students as they apply to their institution be taken into consideration. Accessing this information would, in our view, help ensure HEIs maintain their existing level of commitment to the Seren Network in the future.

Recommendation 9

In terms of engaging with HEIs we would recommend that the Seren Network adopts a more co-ordinated and transparent approach to engaging HEIs with a view to adopting a Memorandum of Understanding with partner HEIs which would outline what each partner would bring to the initiative, including an agreement on the part of Seren to share data with HEIs on those participants with whom HEIs have engaged. We would recommend that as a minimum HEIs be provided with participant level information to enable them to better capture and report upon the effects of Seren internally and to external partners.

12.12   The evaluation found that contributors were broadly satisfied with the boundaries established for the 11 Seren hubs, other than in the case of a very large geographical hub covering the three local authority areas of Neath Port Talbot, Bridgend and Powys. The evaluation found that this hub did not function as effectively as some of the others, largely due to the large area which it served. The evaluation did not however reveal an ideal solution to resolve the challenges faced by this hub.

Recommendation 10

We recommend that the Seren Network reviews the boundaries in place for the Neath Port Talbot, Bridgend and Powys hub. We would suggest that the Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend hub is retained and that new arrangements be put in place for Powys by September 2018.

12.13 Most Seren hubs have been reliant upon schools and FEIs to communicate on their part with participants and parents. As a result it is perhaps not surprising that many issues were raised during the fieldwork in relation to ineffective local communication with participants and parents. We conclude that there is scope to improve the way hubs communicate with their target audiences.

Recommendation 11

We recommend that individual Seren hubs improve the way they communicate with parents and participants and where it is not the case at present, direct communication with participants and parents be adopted. We would further recommend that further efforts be deployed to disseminate information about planned events via existing social media channels.

12.14 Aligned to this we also conclude that there is scope to improve the quality and consistency of the data which Seren hubs capture for participants and the lack of a common process across the Network was noteworthy.

Recommendation 12

We recommend as a priority that the Seren Network implements a data sharing agreement and adopts a common participant data capturing approach and reporting process, to include the adoption of standard paperwork to record participant registration details and outcomes.

12.15 In approaching a final impact assessment of the Seren Network, we conclude that it is entirely feasible that a counterfactual impact assessment be undertaken but acknowledge that constructing an accurate control group

for participants in the Seren scheme is dependent upon accessing good quality data for participants.

Recommendation 13

We therefore recommend that participation in Seren is recorded as a learning programme within LLWR. The advantage of this approach is that the data collected on Seren participants will be covered by the privacy protocols embodied within LLWR[72]. At the time of writing, the LLWR Privacy Notice is being reviewed to ensure that it is in line with the new General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)[73] and will be updated prior to the application of the new legislation in May 2018. It is our contention that in line with Article 6(1) of the new GDPR which outlines the conditions under which data can be processed, Seren hubs are engaged in the performance of a task that is being 'carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in the controller'. By including Seren within LLWR, this will ensure that any protocols implemented for the Seren Programme meet the requirements of the new legislation. We also recommend that the Welsh Government undertakes a review to consider the legal basis upon which data collected from Seren participants can be processed.

12.16   The fieldwork found that whilst national level Seren provision is consistently made available bilingually and complies with the Welsh Government's Welsh Language standards the level of consideration given to the Welsh language varies significantly across the Seren hubs. We do recognise, however, that as it stands, the Seren Network has a role to equip participants to study outside Wales. Nevertheless, we conclude that greater efforts could be deployed by all hubs to better meet the Welsh language requirements of participants.

Recommendation 14

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[72] http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/170510-llwr-privacy-notice-2017-en.pdf#
[73] http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016R0679&from=EN

We recommend that greater efforts be deployed by all Seren hubs to ensure that the Welsh language requirements of participants are consistently met. We would recommend that all hub communication to participants and parents be prepared bilingually and that specific resources be developed by the Seren Network to support students studying through the medium of Welsh for English language entry examinations and interviews.

12.17   We concur with the views of many contributors that there would be benefit in promoting Seren, and what it stands for, to younger students across secondary schools. We acknowledge that this is already being done across some hubs and recommend that future activity in this area be delivered in the most cost-effective manner with the objective of raising aspirations in relation to HE amongst a large number of students and informing them in advance of the Seren Network and how they could become involved with the initiative. We conclude that an important aspect of this work will be to raise aspirations amongst identified MAT learners in particular and to persuade them from an early age of the importance of reading widely around their subject interests and to engage them in additional super curricular activity.

Recommendation 15

We recommend that the Welsh Government, in conjunction with the Seren hubs and other partners such as Careers Wales, explore cost-effective methods of targeting students at Key Stage 3 and 4 with a view to raising aspirations, informing prospective participants about the Seren Network and providing advice to ensure that appropriate GCSE and A level subject choices are made.

Annex A Survey Questionnaires

Participants' Survey

OB3 has been commissioned by the Welsh Government to conduct an evaluation of the Seren Network. In order to undertake this evaluation and to assess the impact of the initiative, we need to collect information from you about your participation within the Seren Network. We kindly ask that you complete this survey - which should take between 10 and 15 minutes of your time - to provide feedback on your experiences. The information collected will be made available to the Welsh Government and in some instances to approved social research organisations who will, on behalf of the Welsh Government, carry out research, analysis or equal opportunities monitoring on the Seren Network. The information shared will not include any personal contact data such as your name or contact details. Your details will not be used for any purposes other than this research.

Your views are important and will help improve the Seren Network provision available to pupils in the future. If you would like to find out more about this evaluation, you can contact us at OB3 on nia@ob3research.co.uk or phone 01558 822922.

Section A: About you

A1. **What is your gender identify?**

❑ *Male*
❑ *Female*
❑ *I identify in another way*
❑ *Prefer not to say*

Please specify

A2. **Would you say that you:**

❑ *Are fluent in Welsh*
❑ *Can speak a fair amount of Welsh*
❑ *Can only speak a little Welsh*
❑ *Can just say a few words*
❑ *Don't know*

A3. **What type of school do/did you attend?**

❑ *Welsh medium school*
❑ *Bilingual school*
❑ *English medium with significant Welsh*
❑ *English medium*
❑ *Don't know*

A4. **What was the highest education level that your parent or guardian achieved?**

- ❑ *Degree level or degree equivalent or above*
- ❑ *Qualifications below degree level*
- ❑ *No qualifications*
- ❑ *Don't know*

A5. **How many A or A* grades did you achieve at GCSE?**

Number of A* grades   _____
Number of A grades   _____

A6. **What are you currently doing?**

- ❑ *Studying A levels in Year 12 at a school*
- ❑ *Studying A levels in Year 13 at a school*
- ❑ *Studying A levels at an FE college or sixth form school*
- ❑ *Studying at a university*
- ❑ *Studying something else at an FE college*
- ❑ *Taking a year out*
- ❑ *Working*
- ❑ *On an apprenticeship scheme*
- ❑ *Volunteering*
- ❑ *Doing something else*

Please specify

A7. **Which A level subjects are you studying/did you study?**

- ❑ *Mathematics*
- ❑ *English*
- ❑ *Welsh*
- ❑ *Biological sciences*
- ❑ *Chemistry*
- ❑ *Physics*
- ❑ *Geography*
- ❑ *History*
- ❑ *Psychology*
- ❑ *Sociology*
- ❑ *Religious Studies*
- ❑ *French*
- ❑ *Business Studies*
- ❑ *Economics*
- ❑ *Other*

Please specify these other subjects:

A8. **[IF A6=4] At which university are you currently studying?**

A9. **[IF A6=4] What degree subject are you currently studying?**

A10. **[IF A6=1,2,3] What would you like to do after completing your A Levels?**

❑ *Study at an Oxbridge university*
❑ *Study at another leading university (i.e. a Russell Group or a Sutton Trust 30 university)*
❑ *Study at another university*
❑ *Do something else*

Section B: Involvement with the Seren Network

B1. **Which Seren Hub have you been involved with?**

❑ *Flintshire and Wrexham*
❑ *Conwy and Denbighshire*
❑ *Gwynedd and Ynys Mon*
❑ *Ceredigion*
❑ *Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire*
❑ *Lliw-Tawe (Swansea)*
❑ *Neath Port Talbot, Powys and Bridgend*
❑ *Rhondda Cynon Taf / Merthyr Tydfil*
❑ *EAS (Blaenau Gwent, Monmouthshire, Torfaen, Newport and Caerphilly)*
❑ *Vale of Glamorgan*
❑ *Cardiff*
❑ *Don't know*

B2. **How did you first hear about the Seren Network?**

[Select all that apply]

❑ *Via the school or college*
❑ *Via the hub co-ordinator*
❑ *Via a letter inviting you to attend the network*
❑ *From friends*
❑ *From parents/carers*
❑ *Via another way*

Please state below how you first heard about the Seren Network?

B3. **To what extent do you agree that you were adequately informed at the outset about:**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The purpose of the Seren Network	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Why you had been selected to participate	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
What it would involve in terms of time commitment	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
The programme of support available	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
How you could potentially benefit from being involved	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏

B4. **What did you hope to achieve by participating in the Seren Network?**

[Select all that apply]

❏ *To get the best possible grades in your chosen A/AS level subjects*
❏ *To be challenged and stretched in the subjects that you enjoy*
❏ *To work with other high achieving students*
❏ *To find out more about leading universities where you could study*
❏ *To find out more about university courses which you could study*
❏ *To get help to select the best university and course for you*
❏ *To find out more about future career options*
❏ *To get help to apply for a place at an Oxbridge university*
❏ *To get help to secure a place at an Oxbridge university*
❏ *To get help to apply for a place at another leading university*
❏ *To get help to secure a place at another leading university*
❏ *You had nothing specific that you wanted to achieve*
❏ *Unsure*
❏ *Something else*

Please specify

B5. **Which of the following Seren Network activities have you been involved with?**

[Select all that apply]

❏ *Attended a masterclass on A level subjects which you've been studying*
❏ *Attended a masterclass on a university course which you'd like to study*
❏ *Received information on extended reading based on your A level subjects*
❏ *Visited a leading university*
❏ *Attended a university summer school or workshop*
❏ *Received a presentation from an academic at a leading university*
❏ *Received a presentation from somebody working within industry*
❏ *Received support to apply for a university study place*
❏ *Received support to prepare for a university admissions test*
❏ *Received support to prepare for a university interview*
❏ *Received information on student finance*
❏ *Attended the national Seren Network conference (held in March 2017 in mid Wales)*
❏ *Other activities*

Section C: Attendance at your local Seren events

C1. **Thinking back to the activities which you attended, how frequently did you attend your local Seren events?**

- ❑ *Usually once a week*
- ❑ *Usually once a fortnight*
- ❑ *Usually once a month*
- ❑ *Usually once every two months*
- ❑ *Less frequent than once every two months*
- ❑ *Can't remember*

C2. **When did you usually attend these local Seren events?**

[Select all that apply]

- ❑ *During school hours*
- ❑ *After school hours*
- ❑ *During school holidays*
- ❑ *On the weekend*
- ❑ *Can't remember*

C3. **Would you say that these local Seren events were held at a time which was convenient for you?**

- ❑ *Yes*
- ❑ *No*
- ❑ *Can't remember*

C4. **Would you say that the travelling time expected of you to attend your local Seren activities was acceptable?**

- ❑ *Yes*
- ❑ *No*
- ❑ *Can't remember*

C5. **Of the Seren events which you were invited to, were you able to attend**

- ❑ *All of them*
- ❑ *Most of them*
- ❑ *Some of them*
- ❑ *None of them*
- ❑ *Don't know*

C6. **What, if anything, would have made it easier for you to attend your local Seren events?**

C7. **Overall, how well managed have the local Seren hub activities been?**

- ❑ *Very well*
- ❑ *Fairly well*
- ❑ *Not particularly well*

❏ *Not well at all*
❏ *Don't know*

C8. **[IF C7=3,4] Why do you think the local Seren Hub activities were not well managed?**

C9. **Were you able to participate in the Seren Network in Welsh if you wanted to?**

❏ *Always*
❏ *Most of the time*
❏ *Occasionally*
❏ *Never*
❏ *I did not want to participate in Welsh*
❏ *Don't know*

C10. **[ASK IF C9=NOT 5] To what extent would you agree that the Seren Network met your Welsh language requirements?**

❏ *Strongly agree*
❏ *Agree*
❏ *Neither agree or disagree*
❏ *Disagree*
❏ *Strongly disagree*

C11. **Please use the space below to make any further comments on the use of the Welsh language within the Seren Network events:**

Section D: The value of the Seren Network

D1. **How would you rate the following aspects of the Seren Network?**

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't know
The range of guest speakers at events	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
The quality of presentations given by guest speakers at events	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
The appropriateness of the academic subjects discussed during events	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
The range of universities with whom you've had contact	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
The suitability of the universities with whom you've had contact	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏

D2. **How would you rate the overall quality of the following aspects of provision made available via the Seren Network?**

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't know
Academic masterclasses relating to the subject you wish to study at university	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Learning resources or extended reading materials relating to your studies	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Support to prepare your UCAS application	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Support to prepare for a university admissions test	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Support to prepare for a university interview	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Information and advice on student finance	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

D3. **How useful were the following aspects of the Seren Network provision to you?**

	Very useful	Fairly useful	Not particularly useful	Not at all useful	Don't know
Presentations given by guest speakers at events	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Visits to leading universities	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Academic masterclasses relating to the subject you wish/wished to study at university	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Learning resources or extended reading materials relating to your studies	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Support to apply for a university study place	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Support to prepare for a university admissions test	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Support to prepare for a university interview	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Information and advice on student finance	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Working with other high achieving students	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

D4. **What would you say has been the best aspect of the Seren Network?**

D5. **What would you say could have been improved or done differently within the Seren Network?**

D6. **What additional support, if anything, would you have welcomed as part of the Seren Network?**

D7. **To what extent do you agree that your participation within the Seren Network:**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Encouraged you to think more ambitiously about your university choices	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Expanded the number and type of universities you're considering / did consider applying to	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Expanded or changed the type of university courses you're considering / did consider applying to	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Made you consider a different career option	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Helped you make or confirm your career of choice	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Encouraged you to read/study more widely around an A level subject	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Challenged and stretched you in the subjects you enjoy	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Given/Gave you the opportunity to work with other high achieving students	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Given/Gave you the confidence to apply for a university you might not have previously considered	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Raised your aspirations about your future studies and career	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

D8. **[A10=2,3] To what extent do you agree that your participation within the Seren Network will help you:**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Achieve the best possible grades in your chosen A/AS level subjects	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Make a stronger application to a university	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Secure an interview for a place at a university	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Secure a study place at a university	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

D9. **[A10=1] To what extent do you agree that your participation within the Seren Network will help you:**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Achieve the best possible grades in your chosen A/AS level subjects	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Make a stronger application to an Oxbridge university	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Secure an interview for a place at an Oxbridge university	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Secure a study place at an Oxbridge university	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

D10. **[A6=4] To what extent do you agree that your participation within the Seren Network helped you:**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Achieve the best possible grades in your chosen A/AS level subjects	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Make a stronger application to a university	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Secure an interview for a place at a university	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Secure a place at a university	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

D11. **To what extent would you agree that the Seren network met your expectations?**

- ❑ *Strongly agree*
- ❑ *Agree*
- ❑ *Neither agree nor disagree*
- ❑ *Disagree*
- ❑ *Strongly disagree*

D12. **Finally, do you wish to make any other comment on the Seren Network?**

Thank you for completing this survey.

The Welsh Government would like to re-contact you in the future in order to invite you to participate in research to understand the impact which the Seren Network may have upon your higher education experiences and future career path. You will be under no obligation to agree to that invitation, and may choose not to participate in the research. Your responses to this survey will not be used in conjunction with any contact data you provide to us.

E1. **Please indicate if you are prepared to be re-contacted again in the future as part of future Seren Network research and evaluation activities:**

- ❑ *Yes*
- ❑ *No*

E2. **Thank you. Please provide the following contact details:**

Your name

Parental / home address

Parental / home telephone number

Your e-mail address

Your mobile telephone number

An alternative telephone number

Parents' Survey

OB3 has been commissioned by the Welsh Government to conduct an evaluation of the Seren Network. As a parent of a Seren participant we kindly ask that you complete this survey - which should take no more than 15 minutes - to provide feedback on the scheme. Your views are important and will help improve the provision which the Seren Network makes available to pupils in the future. If you would like to find out more about this evaluation, you can contact us at OB3 on nia@ob3research.co.uk or phone 01558 822922.

Section A: About you and your child

A1. **What is your child currently doing?**

- ❏ *Studying A levels in Year 12 at a school*
- ❏ *Studying A levels in Year 13 at a school*
- ❏ *Studying A levels at an FE college or sixth form school*
- ❏ *Studying at a university*
- ❏ *Studying something else at an FE college*
- ❏ *Taking a year out*
- ❏ *Working*
- ❏ *Volunteering*
- ❏ *Doing something else*

Please specify

A2. **[IF A1=4] At which university are they currently studying?**

A3. **[IF A1=4] What degree subject are they currently studying?**

A4. **[IF A1=1,2,3] What would your child like to do in terms of higher education after completing their A levels?**

- ❏ *Study at an Oxbridge university*
- ❏ *Study at another leading university (i.e. a Russell Group or a Sutton Trust 30 university)*
- ❏ *Study at another university*
- ❏ *Do something else*

A5. **What is your relationship to the child?**

- ❏ *Mother*
- ❏ *Father*

- ❏ *Male guardian*
- ❏ *Female guardian*
- ❏ *Other*

Please specify your relationship to the child:

A6. **What is the highest education level that you've personally achieved?**

- ❏ *Degree level or degree equivalent or above*
- ❏ *Qualifications below degree level*
- ❏ *No qualifications*
- ❏ *Don't know*

A7. **Have you participated in higher education yourself?**

- ❏ *Yes*
- ❏ *No*

A8. **Which higher education institution or university did you attend?**

Section B: Involvement with the Seren Network

B1. **Which Seren Hub has your child been involved with?**

- ❏ *Flintshire and Wrexham*
- ❏ *Conwy and Denbighshire*
- ❏ *Gwynedd and Ynys Mon*
- ❏ *Ceredigion*
- ❏ *Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire*
- ❏ *Lliw-Tawe (Swansea)*
- ❏ *Neath Port Talbot, Powys and Bridgend*
- ❏ *Rhondda Cynon Taf / Merthyr Tydfil*
- ❏ *EAS (Blaenau Gwent, Monmouthshire, Torfaen, Newport and Caerphilly)*
- ❏ *Vale of Glamorgan*
- ❏ *Cardiff*
- ❏ *Don't know*

B2. **How did you first hear about the Seren Network?**

[Select all that apply]

- ❏ *Via the school or college*
- ❏ *Via the hub co-ordinator*
- ❏ *Via a letter inviting your child to attend the network*
- ❏ *From other parents/carers*
- ❏ *Other*

Please state how you first heard about the Seren Network:

B3. **To what extent do you agree that you as a parent/carer were adequately informed at the outset about:**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The purpose of the Seren Network	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Why your child had been invited to participate	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
What it would involve for your child in terms of time commitment	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
The programme of support available	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
How your child could potentially benefit from being involved	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

B4. **What did you hope your child would achieve by participating in the Seren Network?**

[Select all that apply]

- ❑ *To get the best possible grades in their chosen A/AS level subjects*
- ❑ *To be challenged and stretched in the subjects that they enjoy*
- ❑ *To have the opportunity to work with other high achieving students*
- ❑ *To find out more about leading universities where they could study*
- ❑ *To find out more about university courses which they could study*
- ❑ *To get help to select the best university and course*
- ❑ *To find out more about future career options*
- ❑ *To get help to apply for a place at an Oxbridge university*
- ❑ *To get help to secure a place at an Oxbridge university*
- ❑ *To get help to apply for a place at another leading university*
- ❑ *To get help to secure a place at another leading university*
- ❑ *I had no specific expectations*
- ❑ *Unsure*
- ❑ *Something else*

Please specify

B5. **Which of the following Seren Network activities has your child been involved with?**

[Select all that apply]

- ❑ *Attended a masterclass on A level subjects which they'd been studying*
- ❑ *Attended a masterclass on a university course which they'd like to study*
- ❑ *Received information on extended reading based on their A level subjects*
- ❑ *Visited a leading university*
- ❑ *Attended a university summer school or workshop*
- ❑ *Received a presentation from an academic at a leading university*
- ❑ *Received a presentation from somebody working within industry*
- ❑ *Received support to apply for a university study place*
- ❑ *Received support to prepare for a university admissions test*
- ❑ *Received support to prepare for a university interview*
- ❑ *Received information on student finance*
- ❑ *Attended the national Seren Network conference (held in March 2017 in mid Wales)*
- ❑ *Other activities*
- ❑ *Don't know*

Section C: Attendance at local Seren events

C1. **Thinking back to the activities which your child attended, how frequently would you say they attended their local Seren events?**

- ❑ *Usually once a week*
- ❑ *Usually once a fortnight*
- ❑ *Usually once a month*
- ❑ *Usually once every two months*
- ❑ *Less frequent than once every two months*
- ❑ *Can't remember*

C2. **When did they usually attend these local Seren events?**

[Select all that apply]

- ❑ *During school hours*
- ❑ *After school hours*
- ❑ *During school holidays*
- ❑ *On the weekend*
- ❑ *Can't remember*

C3. **Would you say that these local Seren events were held at a time which was convenient for:**

	Yes	No	Can't remember
You?	❑	❑	❑
Your child?	❑	❑	❑

C4. **Would you say that the travelling time expected of your child to attend their local Seren activities was acceptable?**

- ❑ *Yes*
- ❑ *No*
- ❑ *Can't remember*

C5. **Of the Seren events which your child was invited to, were they able to attend:**

- ❑ *All of them*
- ❑ *Most of them*
- ❑ *Some of them*
- ❑ *None of them*
- ❑ *Don't know*

C6. **What, if anything, would have made it easier for your child to attend your local Seren events?**

C7. **Overall, how well managed have the local Seren hub activities been?**

- ❑ *Very well*

- ❏ *Fairly well*
- ❏ *Not particularly well*
- ❏ *Not well at all*
- ❏ *Don't know*

C8. **Why do you think the local Seren hub activities have not been well managed?**

C9. **Was your child able to participate in the Seren Network in Welsh if they wanted to?**

- ❏ *Always*
- ❏ *Most of the time*
- ❏ *Occasionally*
- ❏ *Never*
- ❏ *They did not want to participate in Welsh*
- ❏ *Don't know*

C10. **Please use the space below to make any further comments on the use of the Welsh language within the Seren Network events:**

C11. **Overall, how would you rate the communication between the local Seren hub and you as parents or carers?**

- ❏ *Very good*
- ❏ *Fairly good*
- ❏ *Not particularly good*
- ❏ *Not good at all*
- ❏ *Don't know*

C12. **[If C11=1,2] What worked well in terms of the communication between the local Seren hub and you as parents or carers?**

C13. **[If C11=3,4] What, if anything, could have been improved about the communication between the local Seren hub and you as parents or carers?**

Section D: The value of the Seren Network

D1. **Overall, how would you rate the following aspects of the Seren Network?**

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't know
The range of quest speakers at events	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
The quality of presentations given by guest speakers at events	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
The appropriateness of the academic subjects discussed during events	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
The range of universities with whom your child has had contact	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
The suitability of the universities with whom your child has had contact	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏

D2. How would you rate the overall quality of the following aspects of provision your child received via the Seren Network?

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't know
Visits to leading universities	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Learning resources or extended reading materials relating to their studies	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Support to prepare their UCAS application	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Support to prepare for a university admissions test	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Support to prepare for a university interview	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Information and advice on student finance	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

D3. How useful would you say the following aspects of the Seren Network provision were to your child?

	Very useful	Fairly useful	Not particularly useful	Not at all useful	Don't know
Presentations given by guest speakers at events	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Visits to leading universities	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Academic masterclasses relating to the subject your child wishes/wished to study at university	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Learning resources or extended reading materials relating to your child's studies	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Support to apply for an university study place	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Support to prepare for a university admissions test	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Support to prepare for a university interview	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Information and advice on student finance	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
The opportunity to work with other high achieving students	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

D4. What would you say has been the best aspect of the Seren Network?

D5. What would you say could have been improved or done differently within the Seren Network?

D6. What additional support, if anything, would you/your child have welcomed as part of the Seren Network?

D7. **To what extent do you agree that your child's participation within the Seren Network:**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Encouraged them to think more ambitiously about their university choices	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Expanded the number and type of universities your child [has] considered applying to	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Expanded or changed the type of university courses your child is considering / did consider applying to	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Made your child consider a different career option	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Helped your child make or confirm their career of choice	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Encouraged your child to read/study more widely around an A level subject	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Challenged and stretched your child in the subjects they enjoy	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Given your child the confidence to apply for a university they might not have previously considered	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Raised your child's aspirations about their future studies and career	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

D8. **[A4=2,3] To what extent do you agree that your child's participation within the Seren Network will help them:**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Achieve the best possible grades in their chosen A/AS level subjects	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Make a stronger application to a university	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Secure an interview for a place at a university	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Secure a place at a university	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

D9. **[A4=1] To what extent do you agree that your child's participation within the Seren Network will help them:**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Achieve the best possible grades in their chosen A/AS level subjects	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Make a stronger application to an Oxbridge university	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Secure an interview for a place at an Oxbridge university	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Secure a place at an Oxbridge university	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

D10. **[A1=4] To what extent do you agree that your child's participation within the Seren Network helped them:**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Achieve the best possible grades in their chosen A/AS level subjects	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
Make a stronger application to a university	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

Secure an interview for a place at a university	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
To secure a place at a university	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

D11. **To what extent do you agree that the Seren Network met your expectations as a parent of a participating pupil?**

- ❑ *Strongly agree*
- ❑ *Agree*
- ❑ *Neither agree nor disagree*
- ❑ *Disagree*
- ❑ *Strongly disagree*

D12. **Finally, do you wish to make any other comment on the Seren Network?**

D13. **As part of this evaluation we would like to talk to a small number of parents in further detail about their experiences of the Seren Network. Would you be prepared to contribute further?**

Any information you share will be treated confidentially and you won't be identifiable in any reports. The information you provide will not be passed on to anyone outside of this research study or used for any purposes other than this research.

This would involve a telephone conversation with one of our researchers and would not take more than 20 minutes of your time.

- ❑ *Yes*
- ❑ *No*

D14. **In order for us to contact you please provide:**

Your name

A contact telephone number

A contact e-mail address

An indication of when would be the best time for us to contact you e.g. evenings, daytime

School and FEI Representatives' Survey

OB3 has been commissioned by the Welsh Government to conduct an evaluation of the Seren Network. As a representative of a school or college we kindly ask that you complete this survey which should not take more than 15 minutes to complete to provide feedback on your experiences. Your views are important and will help improve the provision which the Seren Network makes available to pupils in the future. If you would like to find out more about this evaluation, you can contact us at OB3 on nia@ob3research.co.uk or phone 01558 822922.

Section A: About you and your institution

A1. **Are you based at a**

- ❏ *School*
- ❏ *College*
- ❏ *Another institution*

Please specify:

A2. **What type of school are you based at?**

- ❏ *Welsh medium school*
- ❏ *Bilingual school*
- ❏ *English medium with significant Welsh*
- ❏ *English medium*
- ❏ *Other*

A3. **What is your role?**

- ❏ *Head of school or college*
- ❏ *Deputy or assistant head of school or college*
- ❏ *Head of sixth form*
- ❏ *MAT co-ordinator*
- ❏ *Teacher*
- ❏ *Lecturer*
- ❏ *Other*

Please specify

A4. **Approximately how many pupils:**

Are registered overall at your school or college

Are studying A levels at your school or college

A5. **Approximately, how many Year 12 pupils from within your school or college participated in the Seren Network during the 2016/17 academic year?**

[these pupils would currently be in Year 13]

A6. **What difficulties, if any, does your school or college face in recording and reporting upon the number of pupils from your institution who participate in the Seren Network?**

Section B: Involvement with the Seren Network

B1. **Which Seren Hub have you been involved with?**

- ❏ *Flintshire and Wrexham*
- ❏ *Conwy and Denbighshire*
- ❏ *Gwynedd and Ynys Mon*
- ❏ *Ceredigion*
- ❏ *Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire*
- ❏ *Lliw-Tawe (Swansea)*
- ❏ *Neath Port Talbot, Powys and Bridgend*
- ❏ *Rhondda Cynon Taf / Merthyr Tydfil*
- ❏ *EAS (Blaenau Gwent, Monmouthshire, Torfaen, Newport and Caerphilly)*
- ❏ *Vale of Glamorgan*
- ❏ *Cardiff*
- ❏ *Don't know*

B2. **What do you understand to be the purpose of the Seren Network?**

[Select all that apply]

- ❏ *To provide additional support for the most academically able pupils within your school*
- ❏ *To support pupils to get the best possible grades in their chosen A/AS level subjects*
- ❏ *To challenge and stretch pupils in the subjects that they enjoy*
- ❏ *To give pupils the opportunity to work with other high achieving students*
- ❏ *To provide information to pupils about leading universities where they could study*
- ❏ *To provide information to pupils about university courses which they could study*
- ❏ *To support pupils to select the best university and course for them*
- ❏ *To support pupils to think about their future career options*
- ❏ *To support pupils to apply for a place at an Oxbridge university*
- ❏ *To support pupils to secure a place at an Oxbridge university*
- ❏ *To support pupils to apply for a place at another leading university*
- ❏ *To support pupils to secure a place at another leading university*
- ❏ *Other*

What other purpose does the Seren Network have?

B3. **Which of the following would you say are the main impacts which the Seren Network should seek to achieve?**

[Select all that apply]

- ❏ *To increase the number of students obtaining A or A* grades at A Level*
- ❏ *To increase the number of applications made by pupils at your institution to Oxbridge universities*
- ❏ *To increase the number of applications made by pupils at your institution to universities within the Russell Group or Sutton Trust 30*
- ❏ *To increase the number of applications made by pupils at your institution to leading departments across universities*
- ❏ *To improve pupils' performance at university admissions tests*
- ❏ *To improve pupils' performance at university interviews*
- ❏ *To increase the number of offers made by Oxbridge universities to pupils at your institution*
- ❏ *To increase the number of enrolments at Oxbridge universities by pupils from your institution*
- ❏ *To increase the number of offers made by Russell Group or Sutton Trust 30 universities to pupils at your institution*
- ❏ *To increase the number of enrolments at Russell Group or Sutton Trust 30 universities by pupils from your institution*
- ❏ *Other impacts*

Please note what these other impacts should be:

B4. **To what extent do you agree that your school/college was adequately informed at the outset about:**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
The purpose of the Seren Network	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
What it would involve for your school or college in terms of time commitment	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
The programme of support available	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
How pupils at your school or college could potentially benefit from being involved	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏

B5. **To what extent do you agree that the following elements of the Seren Network are appropriate:**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
The general criteria for selecting pupils to participate in the Seren Network	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
The level of discretion awarded to your school or college for selecting pupils to participate in the Seren Network	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏

B6. **What has worked well in terms of identifying and selecting pupils to participate in the Seren Network locally?**

B7. In what way, if at all, would you wish to see the criteria or process for selecting pupils to participate in the Seren Network changed or improved?

B8. To what extent do you agree that the geographical boundary set for your local Seren Hub is appropriate?

- ❏ *Strongly agree*
- ❏ *Agree*
- ❏ *Neither agree nor disagree*
- ❏ *Disagree*
- ❏ *Strongly disagree*

B9. What changes, if any, would you wish to see being made to the geographical boundary set for your local Seren Hub?

B10. To what extent do you agree that the provision made available via the local Seren Hub:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Complements and adds value to what your school or college makes available	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Has replaced provision which was available previously	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Duplicates provision which is available to pupils at your school or college	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏

B11. [IF B10b=1 or 2] In what way has Seren Hub provision replaced provision which was available previously?

B12. [IF B10c=1 or 2] In what way does Seren Hub provision duplicate other provisions which is available to pupils at your school or college?

Section C: Participation within local Seren events

C1. To what extent do you agree that the travelling time expected of pupils at your school or college to attend their local Seren activities is acceptable?

- ❏ *Strongly agree*
- ❏ *Agree*
- ❏ *Neither agree nor disagree*
- ❏ *Disagree*
- ❏ *Strongly disagree*
- ❏ *Don't know*

C2. **How easy or difficult is it for pupils from your school or college to attend their local Seren events?**

- ❑ *Very easy*
- ❑ *Fairly easy*
- ❑ *Fairy difficult*
- ❑ *Very difficult*
- ❑ *It depends upon the pupil*
- ❑ *Don't know*

C3. **[IF C2=3,4] What difficulties are pupils facing in attending the local Seren events?**

C4. **How well attended by pupils from your school or college are local Seren events?**

- ❑ *Very well attended*
- ❑ *Fairly well attended*
- ❑ *Not particularly well attended*
- ❑ *Not at all well attended*
- ❑ *Don't know*

C5. **[IF C4=3,4] Why are local Seren events not well attended?**

C6. **Broadly, how would you describe pupil retention rates on the Seren Network over the last year?**

[by this we want to find out what proportion of pupils from your own school or college who were initially selected at the start of year 12 during 2016/17 were still engaged with the initiative at the end of the academic year]

- ❑ *90% or above*
- ❑ *75% - 89%*
- ❑ *50% - 74%*
- ❑ *25% - 49%*
- ❑ *Less than 25%*
- ❑ *Don't know*

C7. **Overall, how well managed are the local Seren hub activities?**

- ❑ *Very well*
- ❑ *Fairly well*
- ❑ *Not particularly well*
- ❑ *Not well at all*
- ❑ *Don't know*

C8. **[If C7=1,2] In what way are local Seren hub activities managed well?**

C9. **[If C7=3,4] Why are local Seren hub activities not managed well?**

C10. **How would you rate the communication between the local Seren hub and your institution?**

- ❏ *Very good*
- ❏ *Fairly good*
- ❏ *Not particularly good*
- ❏ *Not good at all*
- ❏ *Don't know*

C11. **[If C10=1,2] What works well in terms of the communication between the local Seren hub and your institution?**

C12. **[If C10=2,3,4] What, if anything, could be improved in relation to the communication between the local Seren hub and your institution?**

C13. **What role has your institution played within the local Seren hub?**

[Select all that apply]

- ❏ *Staff have delivered presentations at Seren events*
- ❏ *Staff have attended local Seren Hub management meetings*
- ❏ *The school has communicated with pupils on behalf of the Seren Hub*
- ❏ *The school has communicated with parents on behalf of the Seren Hub*
- ❏ *Another role*

Please specify this other role:

C14. **What, if anything, has made it difficult for your institution to engage with the Seren Network?**

C15. **To what extent are pupils able to participate in the Seren Network in Welsh if they want to?**

- ❏ *Always*
- ❏ *Most of the time*
- ❏ *Occasionally*
- ❏ *Never*
- ❏ *Pupils do not want to participate in Welsh*
- ❏ *Don't know*

C16. **[IF C15=NOT 5] To what extent would you agree that the Seren Network meets pupils' Welsh language requirements?**

- ❏ *Strongly agree*

❏ *Agree*
❏ *Neither agree nor disagree*
❏ *Disagree*
❏ *Strongly disagree*

C17. **Please use the space below to make any further comments on the use of the Welsh language within the Seren Network events:**

Section D: The value of the Seren Network

D1. **Overall, how would you rate the provision which the Seren Network has made available to school and college staff in terms of?**

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't know
The range of guest speakers who have presented at events	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
The range of universities with whom schools and colleges have had contact	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
The relevance of the provision to staff at your institution	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
The quality of any visits to universities	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Learning or other resources made available to schools and colleges	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏

D2. **How would you rate the quality of the following support made available via the Seren Network to pupils at your institution?**

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't know
Support to prepare UCAS application	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Support to prepare for a university admissions test	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Support to prepare for a university interview	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Information and advice on student finance	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Academic masterclasses for pupils	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Learning resources or extended reading materials for pupils	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
The opportunity to work with other high achieving students	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏

D3. **To what extent do you agree that the Seren Network has led to any of the following changes amongst participants at your school or college?**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Encouraged pupils to think more ambitiously about their university choices	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Expanded the number and type of universities which pupils have considered applying for	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Expanded or changed the type of university courses which pupils are considering applying for	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏

Extended the careers which pupils are considering	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Challenged and stretched pupils in the subjects they enjoy	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏

D4. **To what extent do you agree that participation within the Seren Network is likely to make a difference to the number of pupils at your school or college:**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Getting better grades in their chosen A/AS level subjects	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Applying to an Oxbridge university	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Receiving an offer from an Oxbridge university	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Enrolling at an Oxbridge university	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Applying to universities within the Russell Group or Sutton Trust 30	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Receiving an offer from a Russell Group or Sutton Trust 30 university	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏
Enrolling at a Russell Group or Sutton Trust 30 university	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏	❏

D5. **To what extent do you agree that the Seren network meets your expectations as a school or college?**

- ❏ *Strongly agree*
- ❏ *Agree*
- ❏ *Neither agree nor disagree*
- ❏ *Disagree*
- ❏ *Strongly disagree*

D6. **What would you say is the best aspect of the Seren Network?**

D7. **What would you say could be improved or done differently within the Seren Network?**

D8. **What additional support, if anything, would your school or college welcome as part of the Seren Network?**

D9. **Finally, do you wish to make any other comment on the Seren Network?**

Annex B Data sources

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Annex C HEIs interviewed

Bangor University

Bath University (3)

Bristol University

Cambridge University (2)

Cardiff University

Exeter University

Imperial College London

Kings College London

Liverpool University

Manchester University

Newcastle University

Oxford University

Swansea University