

AccessHE Practitioner Programme

Impact Report
2024-2025

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Introduction & methodology

The AccessHE Practitioner Programme was launched in Autumn 2024 to provide a dedicated space for widening participation professionals across London to **connect, learn, and collaborate** in response to key sector priorities. Designed specifically to address the training needs of practitioners and co-created with an advisory panel of WP professionals, the programme aims to support continued professional development, promote best practice in delivering Access and Participation Plan (APP) targets, facilitate collaboration, and deepen sector understanding of Equality of Opportunity Risk Register (EORR) factors specific to London.

This report reflects on the first year of the programme and looks to assess its value and impact as a **capacity-building tool** for AccessHE's 24 member institutions. The evaluation draws on several sources, including pre- and post-programme survey responses, session-level pulse checks, attendance statistics, ad-hoc qualitative feedback, and case study interviews, to build an early picture of outcomes achieved against the programme's aims in its pilot year.

While this report draws on multiple data sources, it is important to note that survey responses were limited; we received 12 responses to the pre-programme survey and five responses to the post-programme survey, three of which could be matched. 45 pulse-check responses were collected across the year, and we conducted three case study interviews at the end of the year. The figures presented in this report can therefore provide **valuable insights** but are only able to represent a **partial picture** of the programme's overall impact.

“ I found the programme to be very comprehensive and valuable in addressing key areas of widening participation and higher education engagement. I appreciated the variety of topics covered across the different terms, which provided a well-rounded view of innovative approaches to current challenges. ”

Participation & engagement

In its first year, the Practitioner Programme delivered **22 meetings, workshops and events** across three strands:

- 13 *Inform* sessions, providing sector updates on developments in policy and practice
- 5 *Explore* sessions, offering deep dives on specific themes
- 4 *Skills for Success* sessions, focused on upskilling practitioners

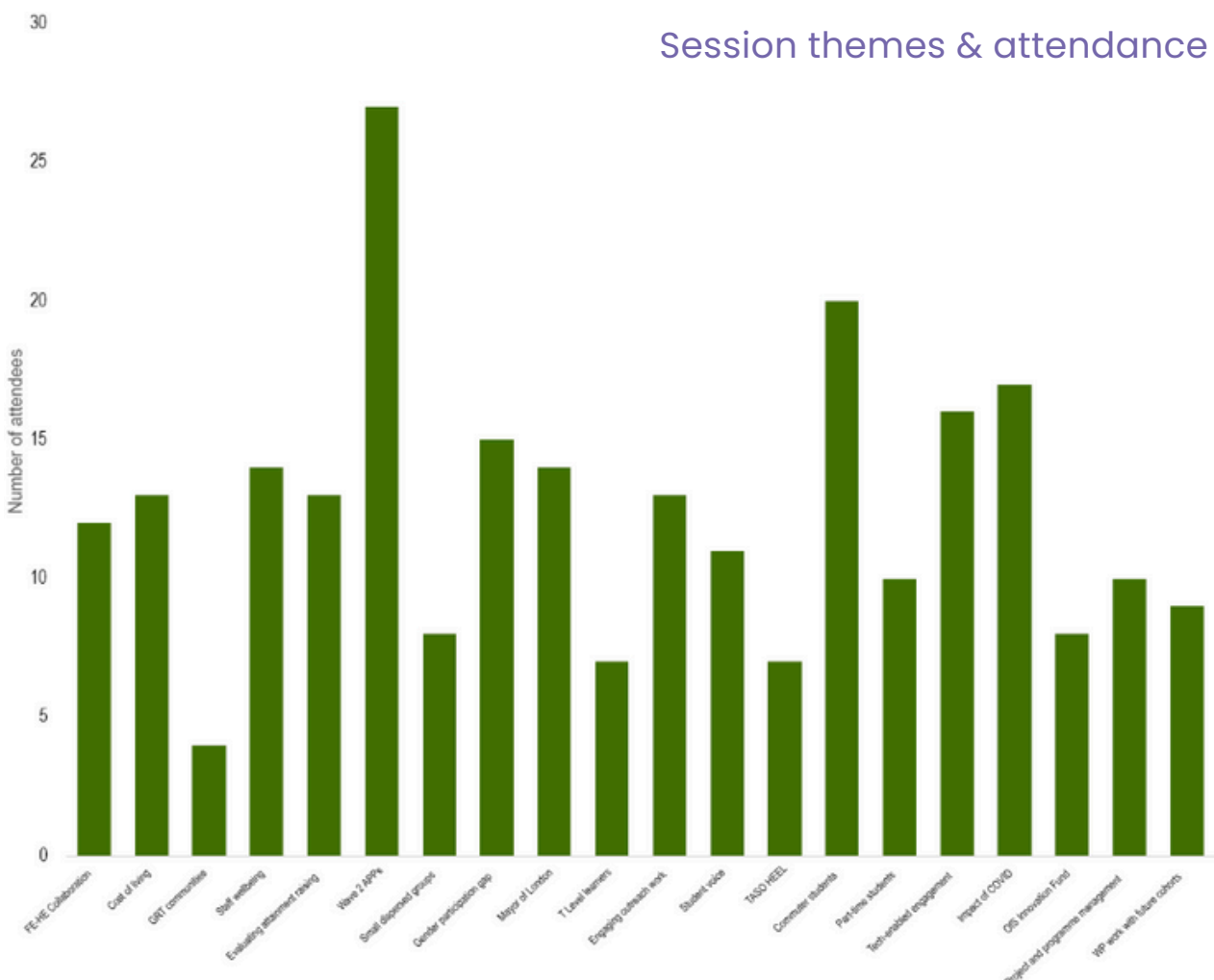
Programme content spanned **ten** equality of opportunity risks and **nine** widening participation groups.

35+

hours of CPD content

40

expert speakers



90

individuals engaged
with the programme

24

London HEIs were
represented amongst
attendees

12

attendees per session
on average

54%

attended two or more
sessions, indicating
sustained engagement

Meeting topics directly reflected priorities identified by members at the start of the year in pre-programme survey responses. This is illustrated by higher attendance at meetings and events focusing on themes that aligned with emerging APP trends, training for staff with outreach roles, and themes addressing specific EORR risk groups.

“ Coming from a small specialist institution where opportunities to engage with the wider landscape can be limited, the Practitioner Programme has been a really helpful way to step outside of the bubble and contextualise some of the wider issues facing London WP. ”

In December, we launched the **Practitioner Programme Resource Hub**, an online repository of materials and papers related to the programme. The Resource Hub supports ongoing engagement by making minutes and presentations from each session available to be accessed and reviewed alongside additional resources related to each topic. In case study interviews, members expressed appreciation for the ability to revisit materials and catch up on sessions flexibly.

Knowledge & confidence

One of the core aims of the Practitioner Programme is to enhance members' understanding of the HE policy and regulatory landscape, and how this influences widening participation work in London.

The programme enabled this by focusing sessions on supporting members to develop strategies to implement APPs and mitigate EORR risks in the London context. While responses to the post-programme survey were limited, data from post-session pulse checks and case study interviews indicates **positive shifts** in knowledge and confidence in these areas.

Among those who responded to both the pre- and post-programme surveys, there was a reported improvement of **1 point** (on a 5-point scale) in confidence around APP delivery, understanding of EORR risks, understanding of sector trends and the HE policy landscape, and awareness of collaboration and partnership opportunities.

Members particularly valued the **balance of policy-level insight with practical strategies**, alongside the programme's **London-specific framing** of sector challenges.

The Skills for Success strand, introduced to address the personal and practical needs of widening participation staff, was particularly well received; sessions on wellbeing, delivering engaging outreach work, and project and programme management attracted strong attendance, positive verbal feedback and high satisfaction scores.

We have produced a number of resources to support staff across our membership. In June, we published a [guide to supporting under-served students through Clearing](#). This resource is particularly aimed at recruitment and admissions staff who may not have specialised expertise in widening participation, but whose work directly shapes the experiences and outcomes of under-served students throughout the clearing process.

“ Having the opportunity to ask questions and being able to offer advice to others has really built my confidence as a practitioner over the last year. ”

4.7

Average **session satisfaction** score, out of 5

89%

of respondents reported **gaining new sector knowledge**

87%

agreed or strongly agreed that the sessions were **directly applicable** to their work

75%

agreed or strongly agreed that the sessions **increased their recognition of strengths and weaknesses** in their widening participation work

“ I found the research, data, and reports presented in the sessions really useful for talking to colleagues both within and outside of my institution about the access and success work we’re doing. I work closely with teachers in our local borough and have passed a lot of the knowledge on to them. Even when the session theme doesn’t seem directly relevant to my work, there’s always something I can take away from the event and present back to the wider team. ”

Collaboration & connection

The programme aimed to create a space for **shared problem-solving** amongst London WP professionals, and to **facilitate opportunities for collaboration** and potential future partnerships. The training and events we delivered were designed to support cross-institutional dialogue on high-priority topics, and member feedback indicates that the programme successfully provided opportunities to connect, share ideas, and begin to shape collaborative initiatives.

In response to feedback from our advisory panel, in summer term we launched **termly 'drop-in' clinics** designed to provide practitioners with a space to bring forward a current challenge or issue they're facing within their institutions, and receive practical advice, insights, and support from peers and colleagues across the London HE sector.

- Throughout the programme, we engaged **29 external speakers** from third sector bodies, grassroots organisations, local and national government, and other groups, providing members with opportunities to make new connections with sector stakeholders relevant to their target groups.
- **63%** of sessions included small group work or interactive workshop elements, supporting community building and allowing members to work with colleagues from institutions they may not otherwise encounter.
- In partnership with Aimhigher London, we delivered *Removing Barriers, Forging Paths: intersectional approaches to supporting students with a disability*, a **SEND CPD conference** hosted by Goldsmiths, University of London and attended by **45** delegates from across London schools, colleges and HEIs.
- We launched a database listing named contacts for care experienced students across the AccessHE membership, to aid join-up between the HE sector and other agencies supporting these young people. This was developed by our Care Experienced and Estranged Students Forum.

“ I had the opportunity to work alongside another HEI on a presentation for the programme, and we agreed to stay in touch and continue that collaboration with projects we're delivering in similar areas next year. ”

“ Through this programme, I met practitioners who are doing similar projects to us, and some who had found solutions to the same challenges we are facing. There are lots of crossover points that I didn't know existed, and that knowledge-sharing is really valuable. ”

Application of learning & impact on practice: case study

Participants in the programme have reported applying learning from the programme in tangible ways within their institutions.

In one case study interview, an AccessHE member shared that attending an in-person event delivered in partnership with TASO on the development of their upcoming Higher Education Evaluation Library was a stepping stone that allowed them to begin developing their evaluation skills.

The participant noted that before the workshop, they had limited knowledge of evaluation processes. However, the session's practical focus and peer discussions gave them the confidence and tools to start evaluating their own work. As a direct result of taking part in the workshop, they began systematically collecting new types of data, created a widening participation dashboard to track activity, and developed new approaches for grouping and comparing data by specific student characteristics. This enabled them to identify gaps in provision and target areas for improvement.

The attendee also used skills picked up in the workshop to compare their borough's data to wider London trends, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how local needs align with or diverge from regional patterns. This richer evidence base is now informing their planning and ensuring outreach and support activities are better targeted to address both borough-specific and regional priorities.

This example illustrates the practical impact the Practitioner Programme was able to have in equipping members with the tools to embed evidence-based practice in their day-to-day widening participation work.

“ I really enjoyed the opportunities to network and discuss challenges in breakout activities throughout the programme. I felt the mixture of both in person and online workshops worked well as we managed our schedules across the year, and it was nice to get a chance to meet in-person. ”

Reflections & recommendations

Members consistently **highlighted the following elements** of the Practitioner Programme as areas that **added value** to their professional practice:

- The provision of a **regular, informal space for peer learning** and knowledge exchange, offering time to step back and reflect
- **Timely and relevant** session content, focused on current sector priorities
- A sustained focus on the **London lens**, addressing the capital's unique challenges and environment
- The opportunity to hear **a range of perspectives**, combining expert speakers with practical insights from peers across the sector
- A diverse training offer with **continued professional development opportunities** in various formats, supporting both personal upskilling and practical delivery

“ I would definitely recommend the Practitioner Programme to a colleague; it's great to have a dedicated space to share challenges with other institutions, try new things together, and pursue interests in areas that may not align with your day to day role but still enhance your practice. ”

While the first year of the programme was well received, with several respondents indicating that they would recommend it to a colleague, feedback from members has also highlighted opportunities to build on this success and further strengthen the value of the programme in Year 2.

To address these priorities, we will take the following **actions to improve the Practitioner Programme** in 2025–26:

1

Introduce **repeat or follow-up sessions** on high-interest topics to build on knowledge and reinforce learning.

2

Expand the Skills for Success strand of the programme, with **tailored CPD for newer practitioners** and those looking to build specific competencies.

3

Enhance and promote use of the Resource Hub, adding further **practical tools and templates** to support day-to-day WP delivery.

4

Continue to facilitate **structured peer collaboration** and provide networking opportunities to enable **sustained community building** beyond the sessions, support deep engagement, and encourage targeted knowledge exchange.

5

Strengthen impact tracking by implementing post-session feedback forms for in-person sessions and including follow-ups throughout the year to capture how learning is being applied.

By implementing these recommendations we hope to ensure that the programme continues to meet evolving sector needs and remains a valuable, responsive space for WP professionals across London.

Appendix I: List of Practitioner Programme meetings, workshops and events 2024–25

Autumn term

- **Successful FE–HE collaboration** (Zoe Dennington, Crafts Council UK; Mark Corbett, London Higher)
- **Addressing cost of living pressures: preparing students for the financial challenges of university** (Stephanie Fitzgerald, The Money Charity; Dr Richard Boffey, AccessHE)
- **Representations of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities** (Phil Regan, The Traveller Movement; Dr Dominic Hingorani, University of East London)
- **Wellbeing workshop: managing the demands of a widening participation role in a turbulent time** (Shanara Hibbert, Shanara Coaching)
- **Working with data in the evaluation of attainment raising programmes** (Nina Jentl, HEAT; James Page, Haringey Education Partnership)
- **Access and Participation Plans: emerging themes from London HEIs in Wave 2** (Chris Wenham & Rebecca Tataryn, Office for Students)

Spring term

- **Effective mechanisms for targeting dispersed numerically small groups in London** (Dr Gabrielle Smallbone, Kingston University; Anna Hetherington, Birkbeck University of London)
- **Addressing the gender participation gap** (Dr Alex Blower, Boys' Impact)
- **Understanding the Mayor of London's role and powers in relation to widening participation** (Beth Wheaton, Greater London Authority; Darren de Souza, London Higher)
- **AccessHE Annual Conference: Equality of opportunity in London HE - 2030 and beyond**
- **Taking your workshops a level up** (Kheron Gilpin, Progress Today)
- **Best practice in engaging young Londoners in widening participation work** (Matthew Walsham, Partnership for Young London; Rhys Barfoot, London Youth; Sam Dangerfield, Kingston University)
- **T Level learners: addressing barriers to success and building pathways to HE** (Jack du Pille, Middlesex University)
- **An introduction to TASO's Higher Education Evaluation Library** (Dr Omar Khan & Tatjana Damjanovic, TASO)

Summer term

- **Improving access and outcomes for commuter students in London** (Dr Emma Maslin, AMOSSHE; Susan Preston, Leeds University)
- **Engaging and supporting part-time students already in work** (Rachel Bennet, Bectu; Mags Bexon, Learning & Work Institute)
- **Webinar: Tech-enabled engagement** (Kheron Gilpin, Progress Today)
- **Addressing the ongoing impact of coronavirus on attainment and access** (Dr Jake Anders, UCL)
- **The OfS Equality in Higher Education Innovation Fund: incentivising collaborative participation work** (Dr Michelle Morgan, University of East London; Dr Peter Kay, TEDI-London)
- **Applying agile principles to widening participation project work** (Jolanta Edwards, London Higher)
- **SEND CPD conference: Removing barriers, forging paths: intersectional approaches to supporting students with a disability**
- **Anticipating widening participation work with future cohorts** (Naomi Green & Andreeanne Orsier, Savanta; Ellie Rowley, UCAS)

London Higher and AccessHE would like to thank all members, speakers, and facilitators who helped deliver the Practitioner Programme this year.

Appendix II: Practitioner Programme Theory of Change

