



# LIFT OFF Data Project

<b>Host Institution(s)/Partner(s):</b>	LIFT OFF (SHEP/NSP) Abertay University
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## Introduction

[LIFT OFF](#) aims to increase progression rates to higher education by targeting young people in state secondary schools in Fife and Tayside who may experience barriers to learning. The programme supports high quality learning and teaching through access to learning, success in learning and progression from learning.

LIFT OFF targets support to those who:

- Have potential to achieve HE entry, but are at risk of not achieving this potential; or
- Are achieving but don't recognise their potential for progression to higher education; and
- Are facing barriers to learning

The aim of the project is to increase the numbers of young people facing barriers to learning, from socio-economic or personal circumstances, entering Higher Education at SCQF Level 7.

The project aims to achieve this by delivering a programme of activity that:

- Brings together partners to deliver a collaborative programme that offers parity of esteem between higher education at college and university.
- Has tangible outcomes that could, over time, form the basis of progression agreements with partners.
- Supports attainment and transition in the senior phase of Curriculum for Excellence.
- Takes a learner centred approach to delivery that recognises the importance of developing and maintaining individual relationships with pupils and provides impartial guidance and support consistently throughout the programme.

As an SFC funded widening access programme, LIFT OFF reports yearly to the SFC to track activity against its set aims and objectives. This report is reviewed by LIFT OFF's programme management group prior to formal submission. One impact measure of the programme is demonstrated via School Leaver Destination Return data (SLDR) and Higher Education Progression Rate (HEPR) data, whereby the number of LIFT OFF core pupils transitioning into Higher Education (HE) after school versus the virtual comparator (VC) is viewed as a measure of success. Due to the pupil destination data requirements, LIFT OFF reports to the SFC retrospectively.

The overall aim of this data project is to evaluate the programme in its entirety against the objective of supporting our learners transition into Higher Education after school. It also ties into the 2016 Blueprint for Fairness report (2016) that indicated that the sector needs to "... prioritise the development of a more substantial evidence base on the issues most pertinent to fair access...." by adding strength to the data we use to evidence our impact.



<h2>Methodology</h2>
What sort of data did your evaluation involve? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Quantitative <input type="checkbox"/> Qualitative <input type="checkbox"/> Mixed methods
Which methods did you use? <input type="checkbox"/> Questionnaires <input type="checkbox"/> Validated Scales <input type="checkbox"/> Interviews <input type="checkbox"/> Focus Group(s) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Analysis of existing data from your intervention e.g. monitoring data routinely collected <input type="checkbox"/> Analysis of externally sourced data, e.g. bespoke, institutional or publicly available <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Which software package(s) if any did you use to assist with your evaluation? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excel <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SPSS <input type="checkbox"/> NVivo <input type="checkbox"/> Tableau or PowerBI <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Did your project involve the usage of any statistical methods? <input type="checkbox"/> Distribution <input type="checkbox"/> Mean <input type="checkbox"/> Median <input type="checkbox"/> Mode <input type="checkbox"/> Range <input type="checkbox"/> Standard Deviation <input type="checkbox"/> Variance <input type="checkbox"/> Interquartile Range <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Paired samples <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Did you use a theoretical framework for your evaluation? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Theory of Change <input type="checkbox"/> Existing framework <input type="checkbox"/> Theory from literature

## Methodology:

One of the biggest obstacles we face in determining the impact of interventions is the lack of a control group. Our pupils are selected using a pupil selection criterion (Fig. 1) and we are ethically bound to offer all programme interventions and support to all. However, as all LIFT OFF interventions are optional and some have limited places requiring a separate application cycle, some pupils will engage with more activities than others. With this knowledge, we determined that using levels of engagement with the programme could act as its own “control group” whereby we determine if the number of engagements a pupil has completed with the programme has an impact on their destination after school.

In order to enhance research expertise in the team, we tied into an existing student placement module with our host institution Abertay University that comprises part of their fourth-year undergraduate Psychology work placement module, PSY420 Work Based Learning. This module is designed to provide students with the opportunity to link work experience with their academic study, by undertaking a “psychology-relevant” work placement, the module requires a minimum of 30 hours of work completed by the student placement which can be split amongst practical delivery-based experience and completing a reflective report, the latter in which we embedded our data project. The student placement was allocated a supervisor for the duration of the placement to offer support and guidance throughout their time on the module.

Utilising a historical SLDR data set (AY 2019\_20) combined with an internal LIFT OFF data set comprising the number of engagements participated in during their time on the LIFT OFF programme and their first destination after school, the student placement was given free rein to analyse the data to conclude if there was a significant impact of sustained programme engagement and destination after school.

## Data set:

The data set we used was created using a historical data set obtained via our data sharing agreement with Skills Development Scotland detailing pupil post school destinations, combined with internal LIFT OFF programme data hosted on our Cognisoft database that captures the number of engagements pupils participated in. The choice to use a historical data set was chosen to remove any potentially identifiable information from recent school leavers. This MS Excel data set included the following:

- Individual pupils (names anonymised for GDPR considerations).
- The school that they attended when part of the LIFT OFF programme, including the region.
- The number of individual engagements that each pupil engaged with during their time on the programme presented as a numerical value.

- Their initial post-school destination status as either “Higher Education”; “Further Education”; “Modern Apprenticeship”; “Full time employment”; “Part time employment”; “Null/Unknown”<sup>1</sup>.

Due to the size of the data set and limited time available within the constraints of the module placement, we chose not to incorporate an element of qualitative data at this stage. This could be incorporated into future cycles creating a mixed method approach to add important context to the quantitative data evaluation outcomes.

**Initial hypothesis:**

“Higher levels of engagement with the LIFT OFF programme will result in higher levels of progression into Higher Education after school.”

**Method:**

The student placement analysed the descriptive statistics to determine if there was a correlation between the number of engagements taken part in with the destination chosen after school. This was followed by parametric testing (independent samples t-test) to determine the significance.

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<sup>1</sup> Null and unknown returns are as a result of SDS being unable to identify pupil destinations after school.

## Discussion/ Reflections

### Summary results and outcomes:

Below is a summary of the outcomes from our student placement reflective reporting cycle -

*“An independent samples t-test was carried out and revealed a significant difference between engagement levels for those who pursued higher education ( $t(89) = 2.42, p < .05$ ).*

*The main findings from the result of the study indicates that a higher level of engagement does result in a higher number of pupils pursuing Higher Education. The hypothesis of the study has been supported by the results that those who engaged more with LIFT OFF’s events and resources did in fact end up attending Higher Education.”*

### Obstacles and successes:

One of the bigger obstacles we had to navigate was the lack of supervisory support available to the student placement due to illness absence on the supervisor’s part. This was unavoidable and whilst there was additional staff allocated to support the student, they had little prior information or knowledge about the project, which left our student in the position where much of the analysis had to be done independently and without academic support. Timeframes near the beginning of the project were also impacted by the need to satisfy ethical and GDPR considerations of student access to the data, despite anonymising the information and removing and sensitive data that could have resulted in a breach. This was dealt with in real time where we allowed our student placement to have more office/schools based experience whilst the data access was granted.

In terms of the successes, the relationship built with the School of Psychology and Forensic Science at our host institution Abertay University is a hugely beneficial one that will allow continued access to researcher knowledge and input for future project proposals. As our student placement was a former core pupil with the programme, this also gave us the opportunity to continue a relationship beyond our usual parameters which we consider a success. The findings of the data project have also created the framework for a new, more detailed student placement data project that has been undertaken with another undergraduate from our host HEI.

### Demonstrating impact:

Whilst there are some positive trends in the data with regard to our original hypothesis, due to the limited supervisor support during the analysis stage and potential alternative parametric testing options available suggested by the original supervisor post-placement, we cannot rely on the validity of the data analysis to fully determine our impact. However, this has allowed us to shape the future direction and scope of the LIFT OFF impact reporting cycle and has resulted in the creation of a second placement opportunity where we hope that the limitations and obstacles faced during this project can be addressed.

## Limitations

### **The data set:**

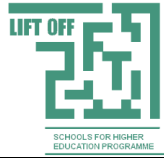
There were instances of incomplete data whereby SDS was unable to provide information about former pupils' destinations after school. This can be for a variety of reasons such as individuals moving outwith the area or a change in contact details. For the purpose of our analysis, we omitted these from the sample, therefore reducing the cohort size which resulted in an arguably incomplete picture. In addition to this, the data only provides a one-year post-school destination snapshot, there may be movement of these pupils from year one of a chosen HE or FE route, into another destination, particularly pertinent for those in a university where it is suggested that dropout rates are higher in the first year in comparison to other years (Kadar-Sadat & Ianelli, 2016). There is also the obstacle of not knowing what other initiatives, WA or otherwise, pupils were involved with during their period of engagement with the LIFT OFF programme.

### **The collaborative approach:**

Whilst collaborating with a pre-existing work placement module allowed us to access expertise and support for the project data analysis, this did mean that we were bound by the time constraints of the module submission deadlines and therefore had a predetermined timeframe in which to complete this project. If this deadline did not exist, the argument could be made that more time could be dedicated to the analysis and to the project overall. There was also a time cost to the wider LIFT OFF programme where staff time was dedicated to hosting the student placement for practical work-based experience.

### **Quantitative only approach:**

Whilst our approach satisfied the need for arguably more robust data that can be incorporated into impact reporting cycles, it did not include any qualitative data to fully capture the pupil experiences, particularly with regard to whether their sustained engagement with the programme lead to them choosing a Higher Education route after school. A mixed methods approach would allow for more context to be applied and future similar evaluation cycles should consider incorporating the "pupil voice" via a qualitative element such as focus groups or free form questionnaire content.



## Lessons Learned/ Future Work

### **Importance of contingency timeframes and back up support:**

There were unplanned delays in allowing student access to the data set. Whilst the data was largely anonymised and removed any identifying or sensitive information e.g. names, SIMD, pupil criteria met, there were still ethical considerations from the view of our host institution with who should have access to this data, requiring a consultation period with the academic school's ethics committee and data compliance officer to ensure full GDPR compliance. This was an unexpected delay and impacted the amount of time our student placement could dedicate to analysis of the data. Therefore, in future cycles, the step-by-step processes surrounding this should be built in from the beginning with set timeframes.

There were also delays caused when the primary student placement supervisor was off sick during a significant proportion of the placement duration. Whilst responsibility of the supervision was handed to another member of staff, this member of staff did not have the capacity or knowledge of the data project to offer the same level of support as the original supervisor. Whilst this situation was unavoidable and difficult to predict, in future cycles, it would be recommended that a second level of sub-supervisor be allocated to the placement and receive a baseline level of information surrounding the project.

### **Detail of the data set:**

The decision to include the number of engagements as a numerical value as opposed to named individual engagements allowed for less targeted analysis of which interventions had potentially the greatest impact on pupil's post-school choices. Whilst this allowed for an overall picture of sustained engagement and the impact of this on outcomes, future cycles should indicate which interventions pupils participated in to allow for more in-depth analysis of the specific impact of interventions. The adaptation of the data set to include this information in the future would allow for standalone engagements e.g. our SCQF accredited Learning Skills course, to be analysed in isolation in terms of impact on destination. We would also have the capacity to add in further detail with regard to the other interventions that pupils are working with prior to moving into their post-school destinations as this is now information that we collect at multiple stages of the programme.

## Additional Content

### Images

Fig 1. An outline of the core pupil selection criteria used by LIFT OFF:

<b>Care Experienced</b>	<b>20/40 SIMD</b> (Quintile 1-2 Decile 1-4)	<b>Free School Meals</b>
<b>ASN- Additional Support Needs</b>	<b>ESOL-English as a Second Language</b>	<b>Young Carers</b>
<b>Asylum Seekers / Refugees</b>	<b>Adverse Family Circumstance</b>	<b>Rural Isolation</b>
<b>Subject to Negative peer / community influence</b>		<b>Little / no family experience of Higher Education</b>

Fig 2. Offered individual engagements:

<b>TIER 1</b>	
<b>Level of support</b>	<b>No. of Engagements</b>
Full programme (S3 – S6) to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• S3 in-school events</li> <li>• How to get the most out of LIFT OFF</li> <li>• S4 external events</li> <li>• LIFT OFF 2 Success Residential (LO2S)</li> <li>• LIFT OFF Learning Skills (LOLS)(SCQF credit rated)</li> <li>• 1:1 meetings for S4 &amp; S5 pupils</li> <li>• Senior HE researching workshop</li> <li>• Personal statement writing and editing workshops</li> <li>• Individual personal statement support</li> <li>• What to do after receiving HE offers workshop</li> <li>• Year group specific online resources</li> <li>• Parent/carer engagement</li> <li>• Teacher CPD</li> </ul>	S3 – 2  S4 - 5  S5 – 8  S6 - 6
<b>TIER 2</b>	
S5 – S6 support to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to get the most out of LIFT OFF</li> <li>• LIFT OFF Learning Skills (LOLS)(SCQF credit rated)</li> <li>• 1:1 meeting (S5)</li> </ul>	S5 – 8  S6 - 6





<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior HE researching workshop</li> <li>• Personal statement writing and editing workshops</li> <li>• Individual personal statement support</li> <li>• What to do after receiving HE offers workshop</li> <li>• Year group specific online resources</li> <li>• Individual distance support for both pupils and parent/carers</li> <li>• Teacher CPD</li> </ul>		
<b>TIER 3</b>		
<p>Senior Support to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior HE researching workshop</li> <li>• Personal statement writing and editing workshops</li> <li>• Individual personal statement support</li> <li>• What to do after receiving HE offers workshop</li> <li>• Year group specific online resources</li> <li>• Individual distance support for both pupils and parent/carers</li> <li>• Teacher CPD</li> </ul>	S5/S6 - 6	
URLs		
<p><b>Referenced works:</b></p> <p>Blueprint for Fairness (2016) -  <a href="https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/progress-report/2016/03/blueprint-fairness-final-report-commission-widening-access/documents/00496619-pdf/00496619-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00496619.pdf">https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/progress-report/2016/03/blueprint-fairness-final-report-commission-widening-access/documents/00496619-pdf/00496619-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00496619.pdf</a></p> <p>Gitit Kadar-Satat and Cristina Iannelli (2016) Beyond access to HE: widening participation initiatives and student retention in Scotland -  <a href="https://www.research.aqmen.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/27/2017/07/Beyond-Access-to-HE-Final.pdf">https://www.research.aqmen.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/27/2017/07/Beyond-Access-to-HE-Final.pdf</a></p>		