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LINCOLN HIGHER EDUCATION
RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Understanding new students' skills, confidences and anxieties
self-assessment as a means to improve teaching, learning and student support to facilitate 'learning gain' in higher education

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European First Years Engagement Conference June 2018

Introduction

I thought it would be like you learn this in a lecture and then you write an essay on it....It is very independent in the way that you learn things and write essays. I didn't realise it would be like that.

I thought it would be like coming to uni and doing one subject and there are actually so many aspects: it feels like loads of different subjects.

I thought it was going to be a massive party because you see students going out and getting drunk all the time on TV.

Quotes from 2nd and 3rd year psychology students reflecting on their expectations of university

Session outcomes

- What are students' confidences and concerns at registration and how do these change over time?

- How could understanding these issues help improve teaching, learning and student support particular around the issues of retention, progression and equality of outcomes?

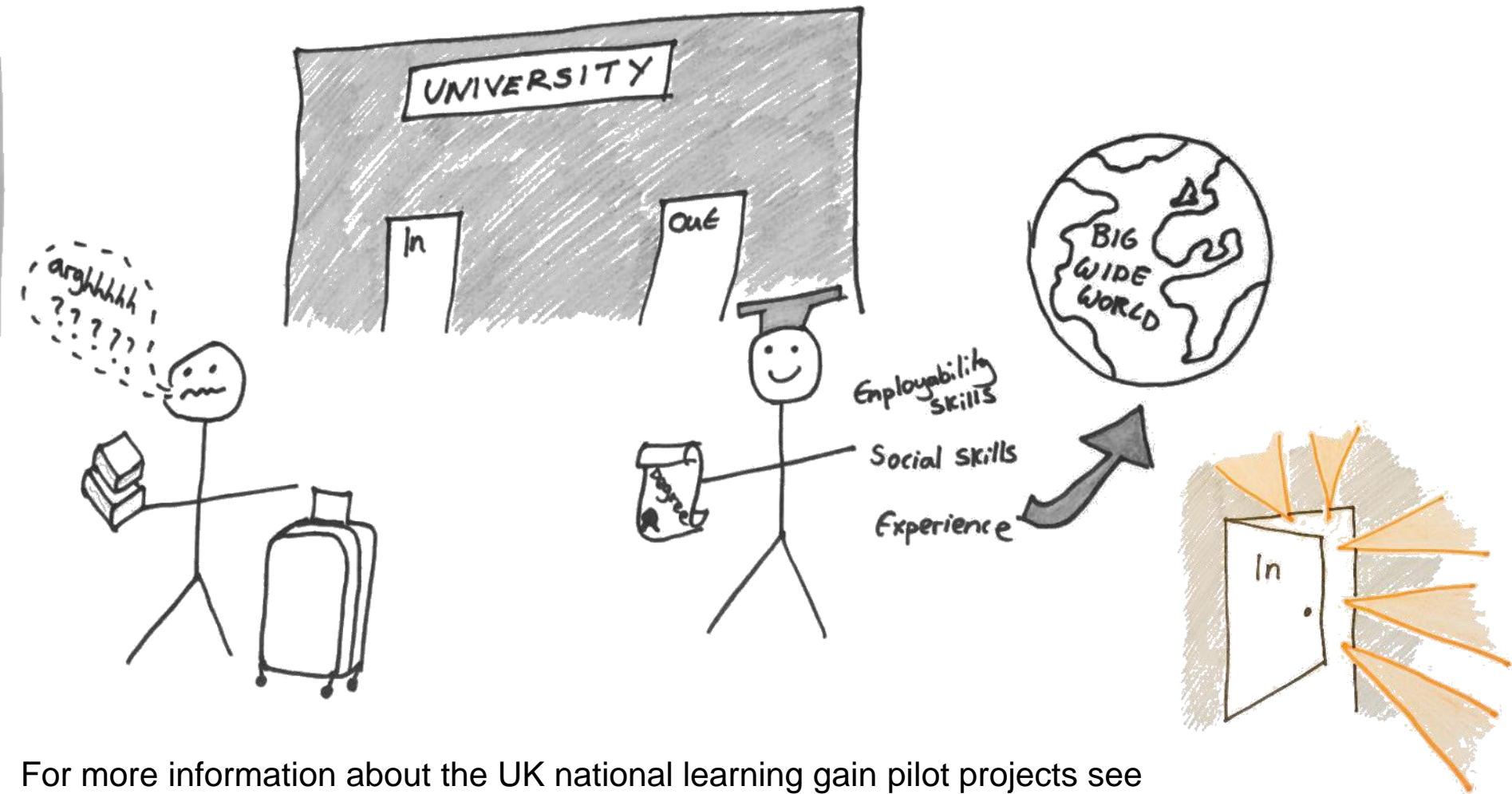- What is the University of Lincoln currently doing to address these issues?

Structure

1. Linda - Learning Gain
   - Student self assessment survey (GetSet)

2. Ben - Intervention for Success
   - Developing resources for personal tutors

3. Project links
   - Significance for the University of Lincoln and more generally
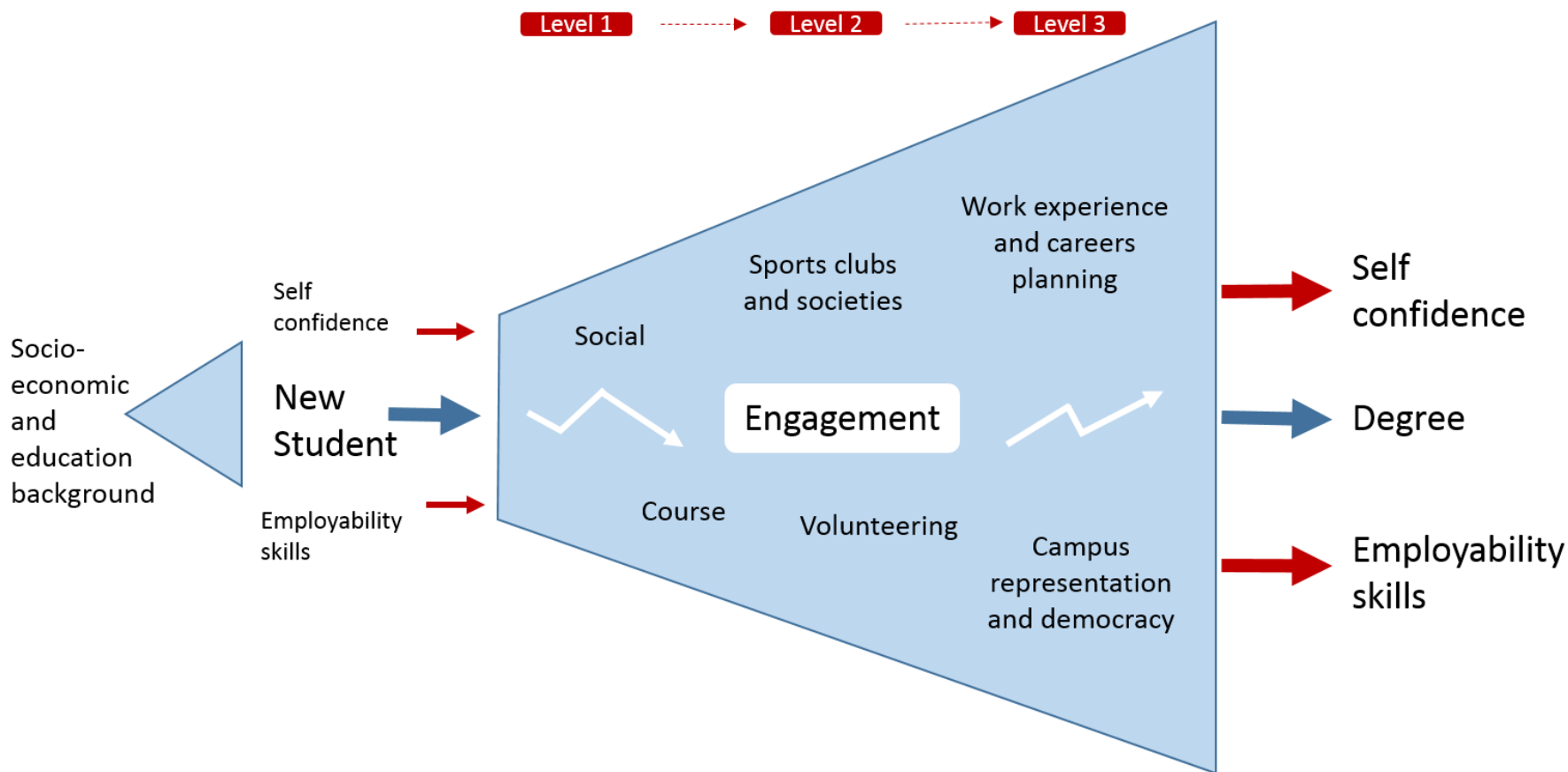
Learning Gain

For more information about the UK national learning gain pilot projects see
https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/teaching/learning-gain/

For more details of the Lincoln Learning Gain project see - Speight *et al* (2018) Towards measures of longitudinal learning gain in UK higher education: the challenge of meaningful engagement. In print in Higher Education Pedagogies (DOI 10.1080/23752696.2018.1476827)

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What is GetSet?

- In house self assessment survey at registration
- Designed to support TEF by establishing Level 1 students' self-perception against a range of skills & competencies
- Informs personal tutoring conversations and supports course design and professional service provision
- 2017 completions were very good ~ 3000 responses, 59% of first years completed it

Time to complete

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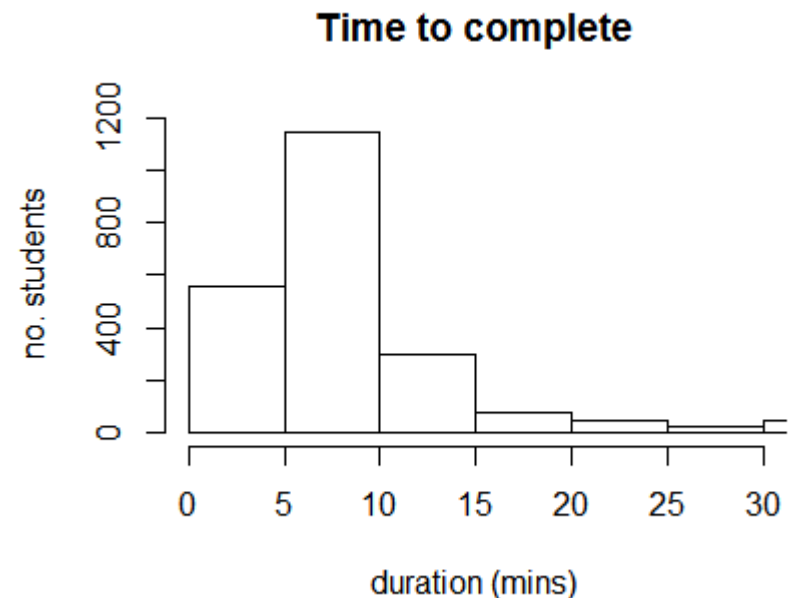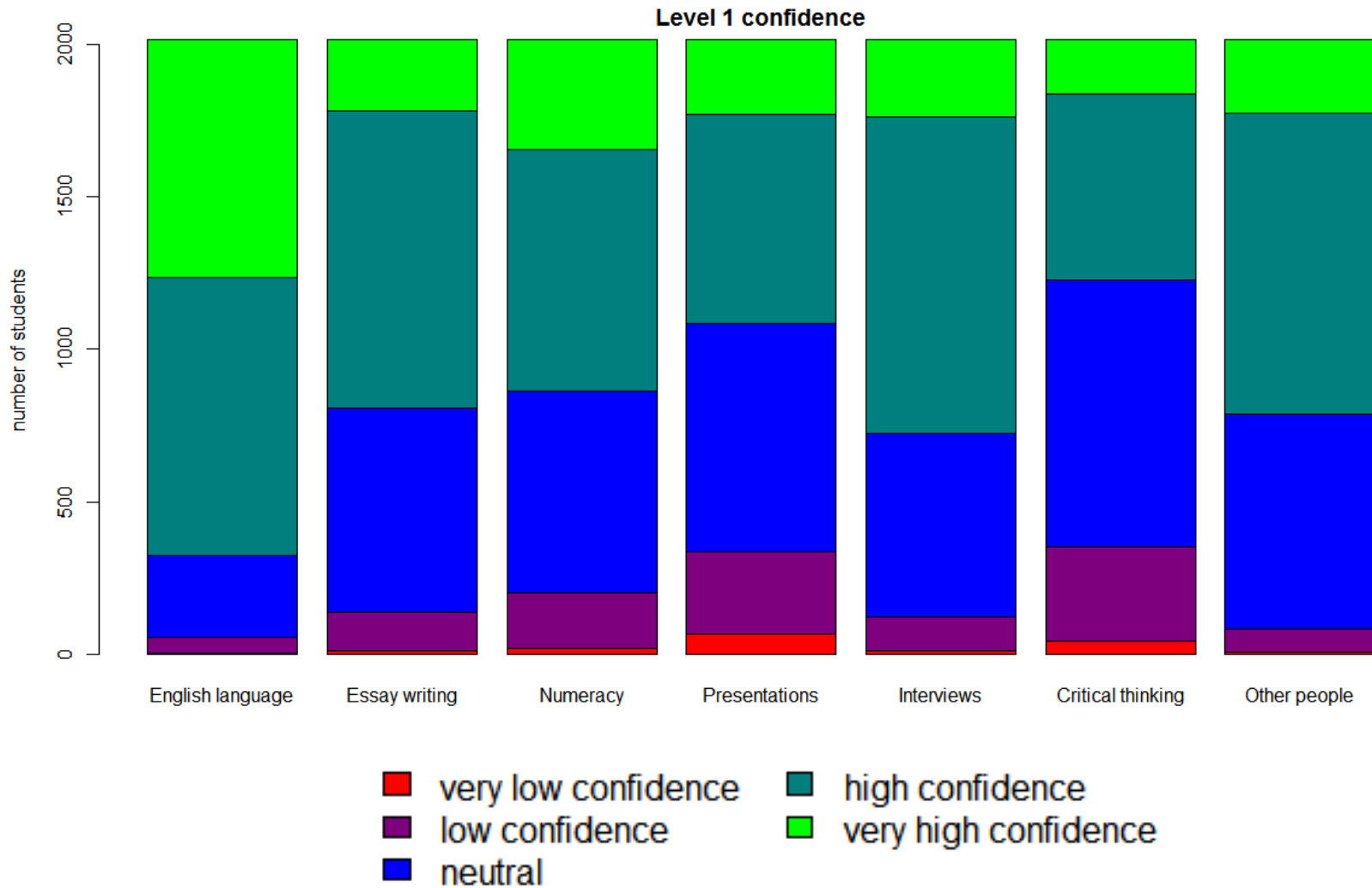
Level 1 Confidence

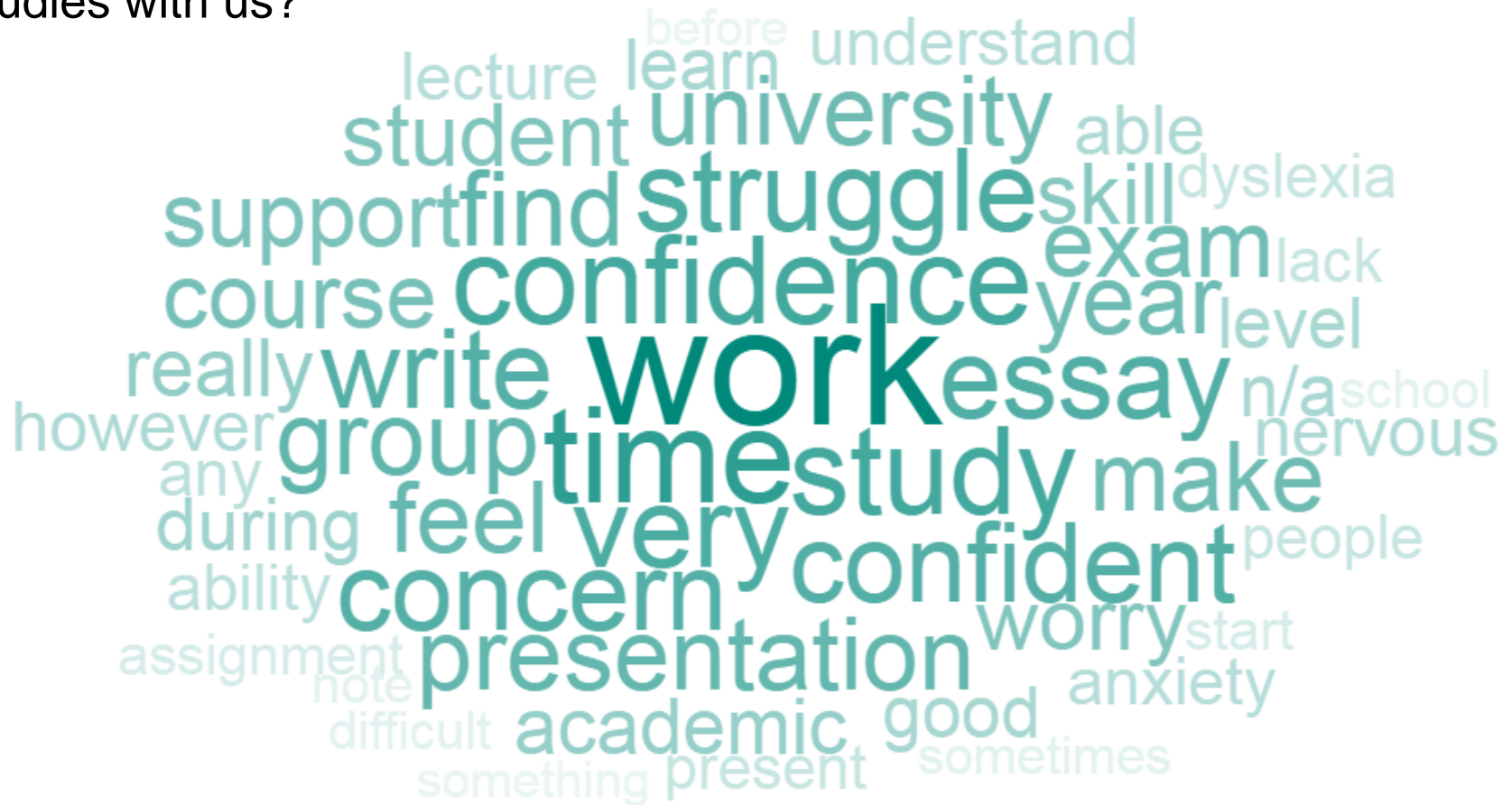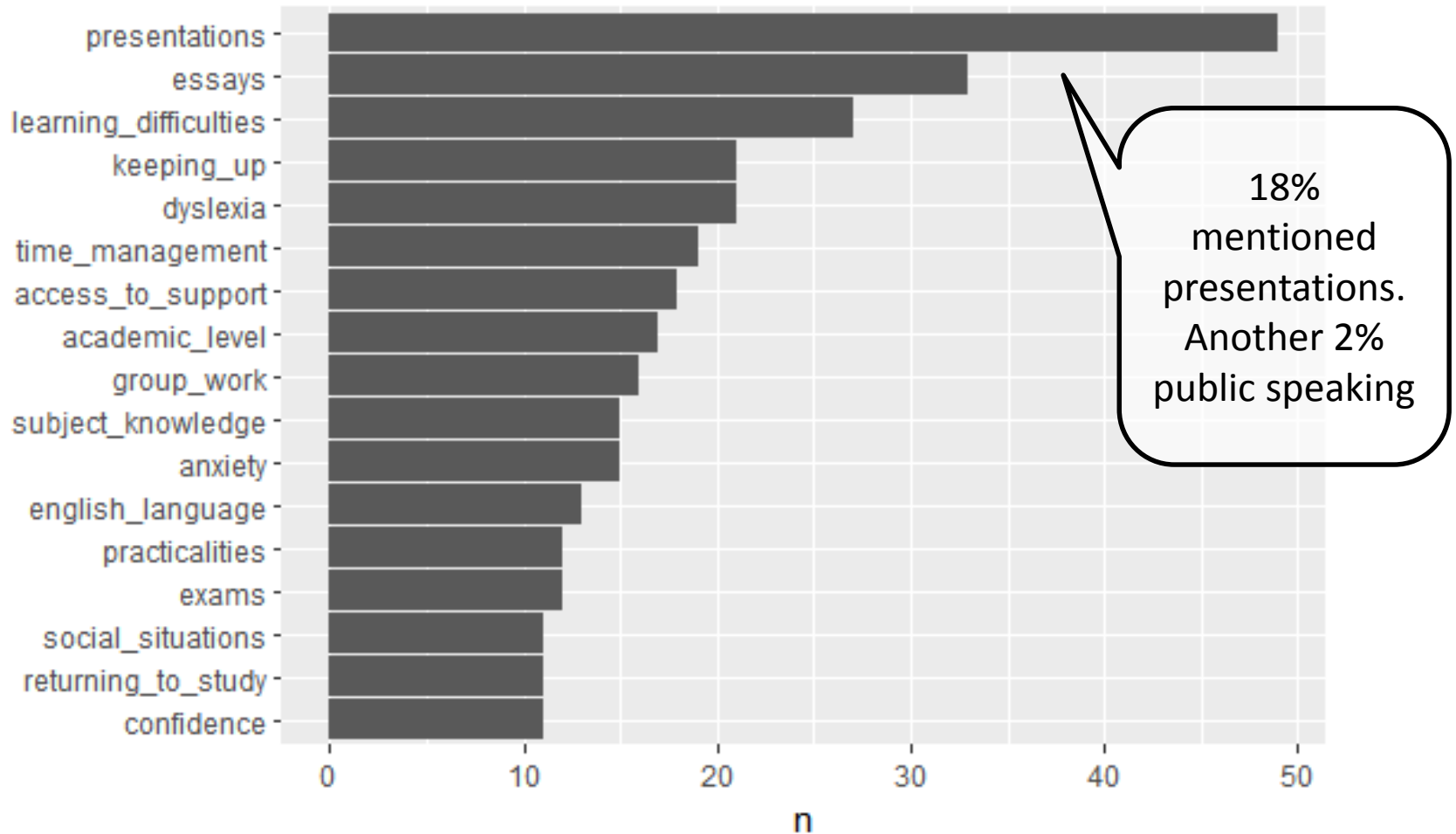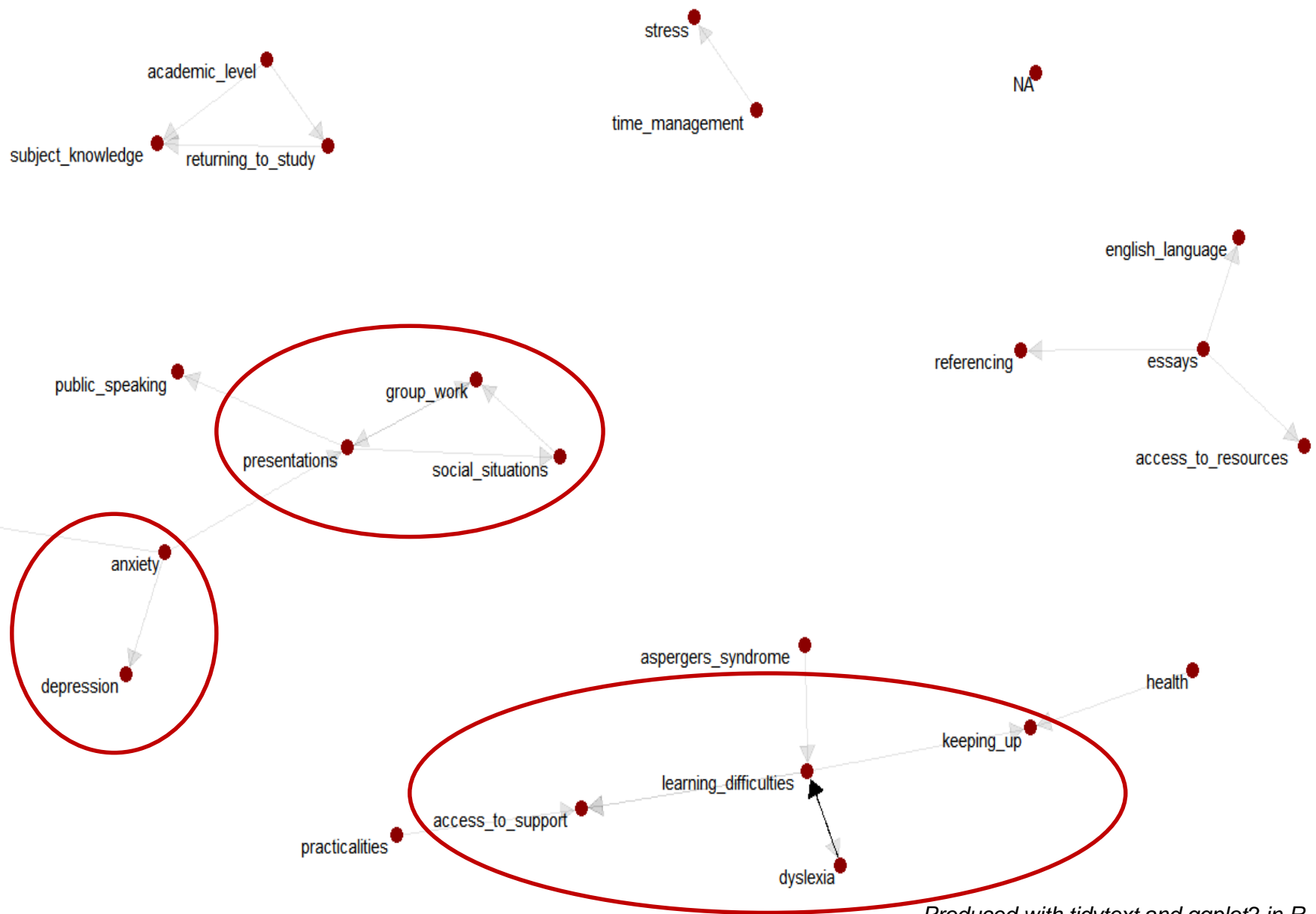# Level 1 Expectations
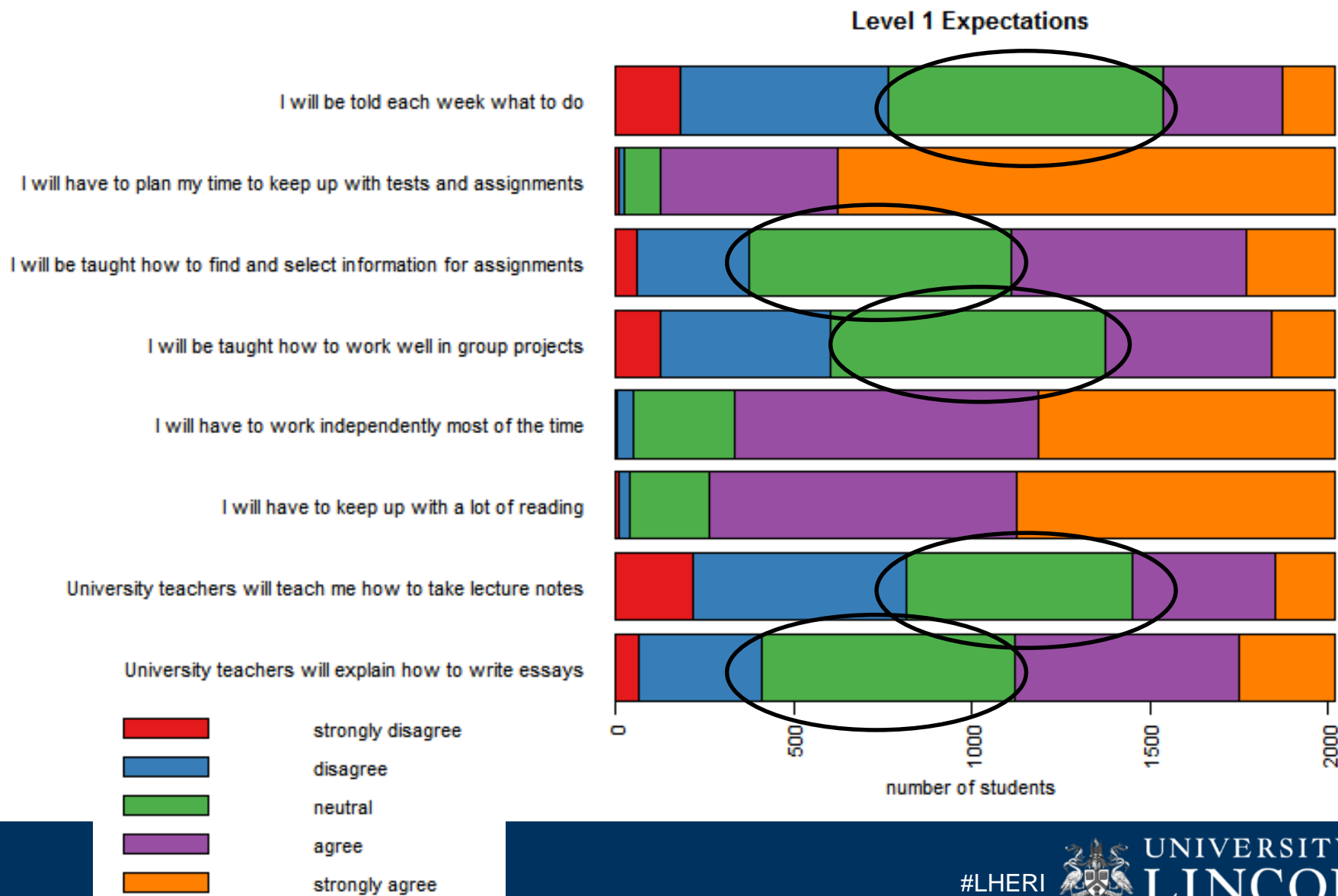
Level 1 Concerns

Q8. Is there anything you would like to raise as a concern about your confidence relating to academic activities before you begin your studies with us?

Common concerns

18% mentioned presentations. Another 2% public speaking

Produced with tidytext and ggplot2 in R

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GetSet in levels 2+

- Repeat participation encourages students to track their own progression and take responsibility for their own skills development

- 63% of respondents in the second year and above were positive that the university had given them enough support

- Presentations and group work highly valued as confidence building activities

Confidence boosting activities

presentations
group_work
course_content
academic_environment
results
societies
social_situations
tutorials
volunteering
independence

0   20   40   60

n

28% highlighted presentations
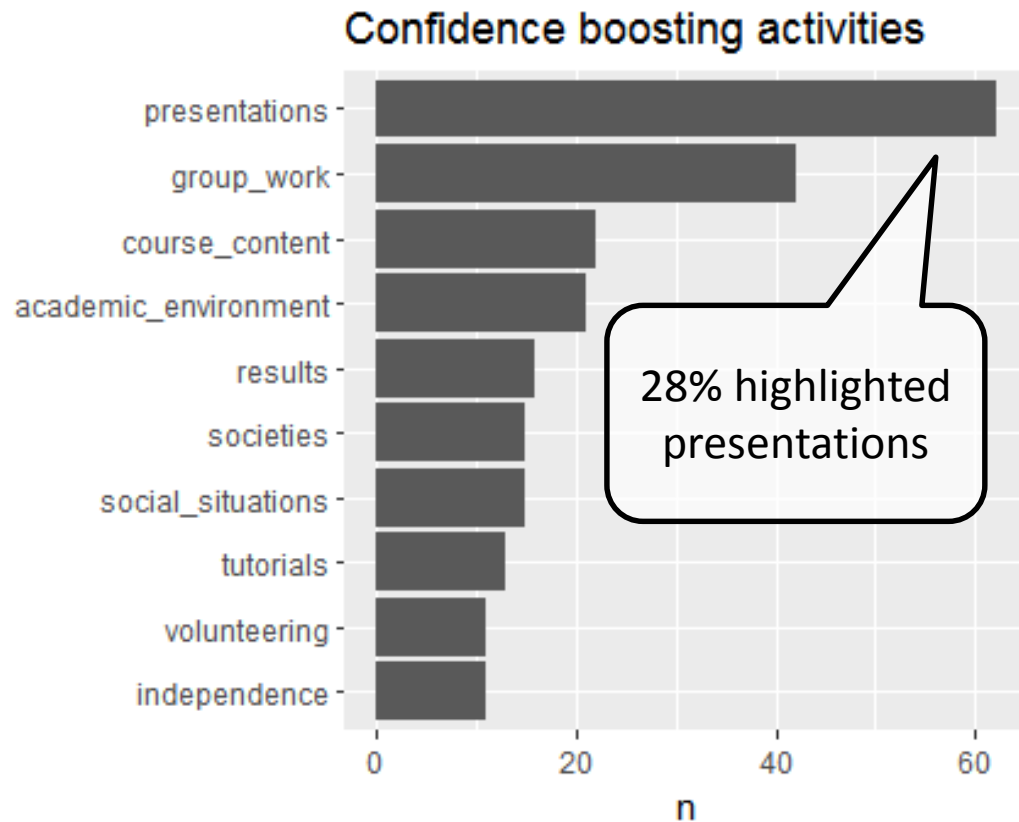
Intervention for Success Project

Why has it come about?

What Works? (Phase 1, 2012)

- *It is the human side of education which comes first – finding friends, feeling confident and above all, feeling a part of your course of study and the institution – that is the necessary starting point for student success*

- At the heart of student retention and success is a strong sense of belonging

- The academic sphere is the most important site for nurturing engagement which creates a sense of belonging. This puts inclusive teaching and learning at the heart of effective student retention and success

Thomas, 2012

Causes of Differences in Student Outcomes (HEFCE, 2015)

- *Engagement* is a critical factor in differential outcomes

- Not all students have the social or cultural capital needed to engage readily or ask for support

Mountford-Zimdars et al, 2015

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Intervention for Success Project
Why has it come about? (contd.)

Further evidence from *What Works? Phases 1 and 2* (2012; 2017)

Tutors can improve student retention and success in the following ways:

- Enabling a student to develop a relationship with an academic member of staff in their discipline or programme area, and feeling more 'connected'
- Providing students with reassurance, guidance and feedback about their academic studies in particular, and working in partnership with professional services
- Academic tutoring is able to contribute to student belonging in many ways but must:
    - be embedded in to the curriculum
    - be proactive (ie not optional)
    - have an holistic approach
    - be made relevant to students and valued by staff
    - be collaborative and develop relationships
    - monitor participation and follow up non-participation

Thomas, 2012; 2017a

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Intervention for Success Project

What is the context?

- Expansion of the HE sector, coupled with widening access = more students and more diversity
- Increased competition in the sector = concern about league tables (influenced by retention)
- Differential outcomes for under-represented groups
- And now the TEF (Teaching Excellence Framework)

Adapted from Thomas, 2017b

The preceding research and contextual developments have led to the increasing importance of the personal tutor role

…and yet, it remains an under-developed and under-researched area

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Intervention for Success Project

The project

- Office for Students (formerly HEFCE) funded

- Collaborative – 4 partner universities

- Focus and metrics
  - Differential achievement and withdrawal
  - Particular focus on 'at risk' groups

- Development of practical resources (available for all)
  - Lincoln – personal tutor resources
  - Huddersfield – induction/resources for commuter students
  - Coventry – subject specific resources
  - Manchester Metropolitan – diagnostic tool

- Potential benefits
  - Students – enhanced consistency of support experience & sense of 'belonging'?
  - Staff – support with supporting (making life easier?); professional development opportunities

What we've found….to follow

Intervention for Success Project

The intervention – resources for personal tutors

http://lncn.eu/ptmaster

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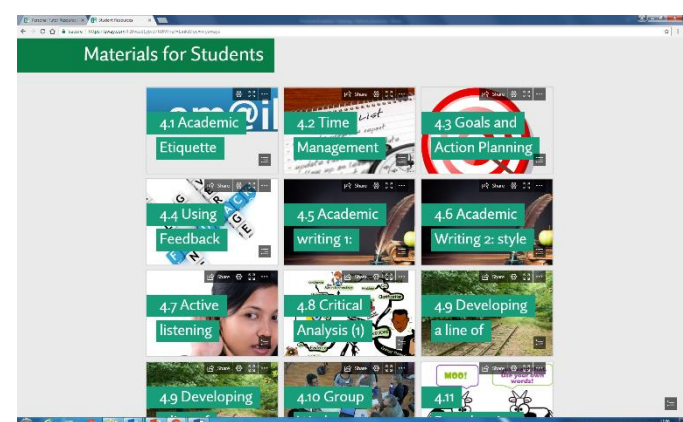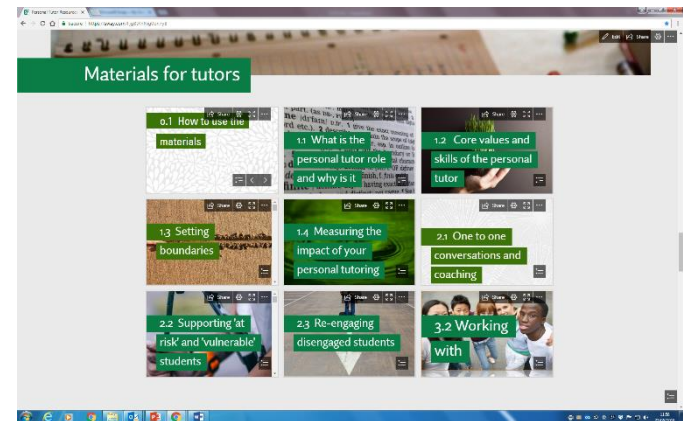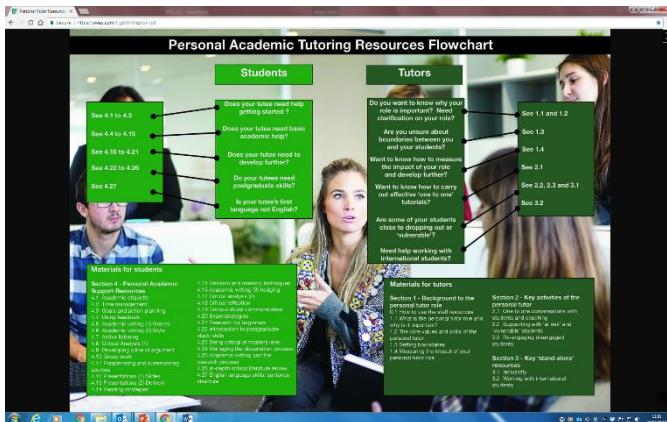
Intervention for Success Project

What we've found so far

- Quantitative data – issues
- Qualitative data
  - how gathered (different forms)
  - Initial findings
    - commonly held notions of effective tutoring in terms of qualities and functions.
    - factors affecting confidence in the role and gaps in training and ongoing support
    - the resources provided were positively welcomed and seen as meeting some of these needs.
    - high level of importance tutors place on the role combined, however, with the difficulty of performing it 'on the ground'

GS identifies high level skills & weaknesses

IFS produces targeted resources

GS gives students opportunity to self assess

IFS provides toolkit to support development

Supporting students through Intervention for Success & GetSet

Both support the development of consistent, cross-discipline personal tutoring

GS identified a key concern was access to support

IFS & personal tutoring provide framework for this support

GS provides large data set to support policy change

e.g. evidencing the need for IFS

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So what?

From Excitement to Expectations to Experiences

- More insight = better support for transition
- But issues around take up/use, engagement and quantitative data

Diversity and Inclusion

- Support of 'at risk' groups – a key goal of IFS
- IFS has provided help
- It represents the start to be built upon

Questions for the audience:

1. How applicable is this to your context?
2. What are your experiences of encouraging better use of data to promote change?

Find out more

- Lincoln Higher Education Research Institute
  - http://heri.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/
  - @UOLHEResearch

- Intervention for Success project
  - http://www.hefce.ac.uk/sas/barriers/projects/huddersfield/

- Learning Gain Project
  - National Learning Gain projects: https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/teaching/learning-gain/learning-gain-pilot-projects/
  - Paper about the Lincoln project: Towards measures of longitudinal learning gain in UK higher education: the challenge of meaningful engagement. Linda Speight, Karin Crawford, Stephen Haddelsey, In print in Higher Education Pedagogies (DOI 10.1080/23752696.2018.1476827)

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