

Widening Access Student Transitions

An investigation of issues facing undergraduate Widening Access students within the History department at the University of Strathclyde (2016).

Background

WA - strategic priority for Strathclyde, SG, and whole HE sector.

Strathclyde keen to gauge students' opinions and develop further support.

ET focus on 'transitions'.

Student-led internship created

"Disadvantage can follow you like a shadow down the years, affecting the degree you end up with and your ensuing postgraduate study or search for a job."
- Les Ebdon, Director of OFFA, 2014

Widening Access Indicators

For the purposes of this research, a student was regarded as 'Widening Access' if they met one or more of the following criteria:

- ⇒ First generation of their immediate family to go to university
- ⇒ Attended a low progression to Higher Education school
- ⇒ Attended a SHEP (Schools for Higher Education Programme) school
- ⇒ Had a home postcode at point of application which was classed as Quintile 1 or Quintile 2 according to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)
- ⇒ Had spent any time in local authority care
- ⇒ Were a mature student (aged 21 or over on the first day of their course at the University of Strathclyde)

Literature Review

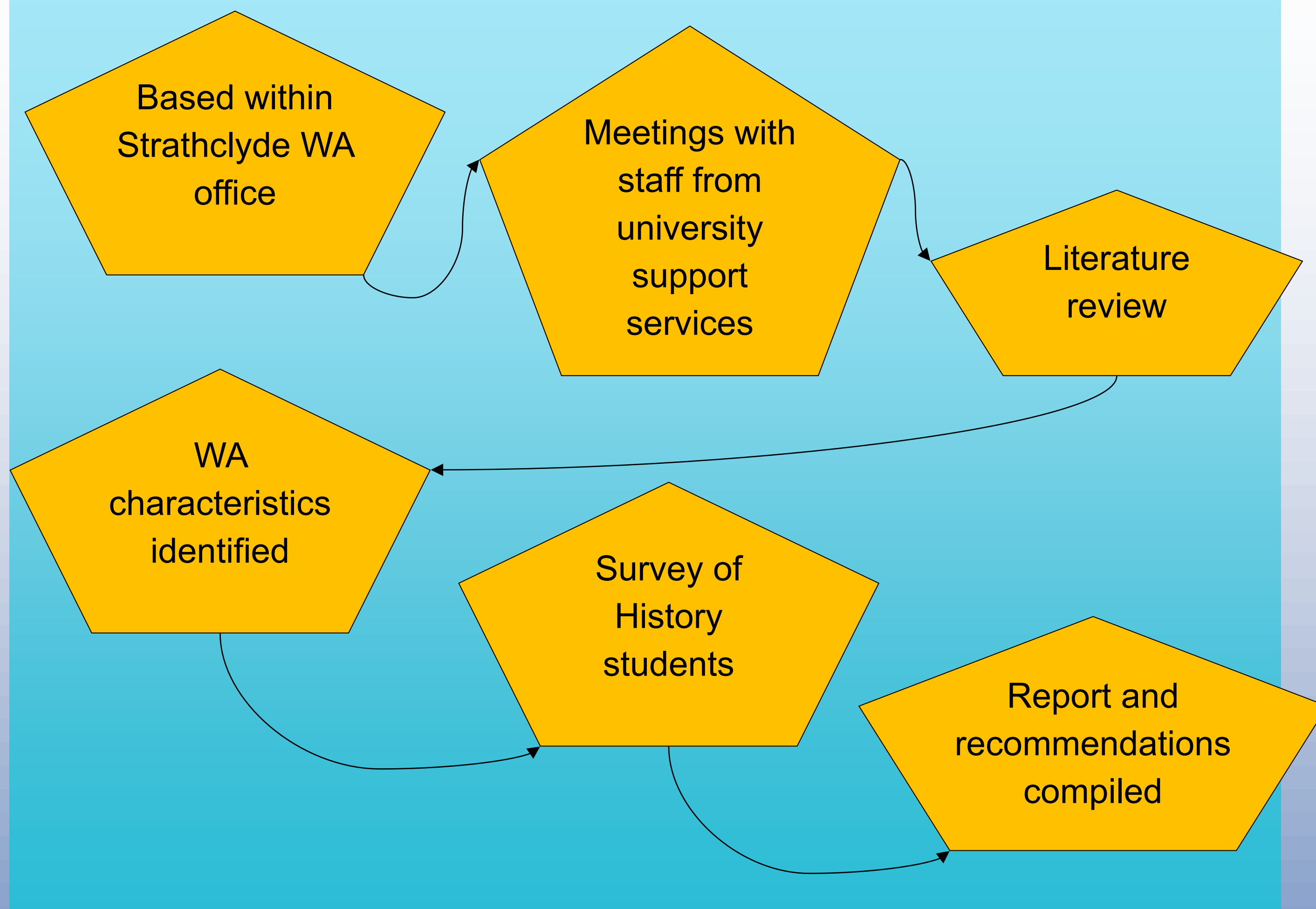
"need to acknowledge dimensions of cultural capital"
- Ng et al. (2015)

"university [is] a time of heightened distress"
- Bewick et al. (2010)

"[success is] unlikely to be accomplished by a single initiative"
- Chester et al. (2013)

"I come from a family of academics and Uni was always going to happen...it's just in the family that we all go. [sic]"
- Participant in a study referenced by Maunder et al. (2013)

Methodology



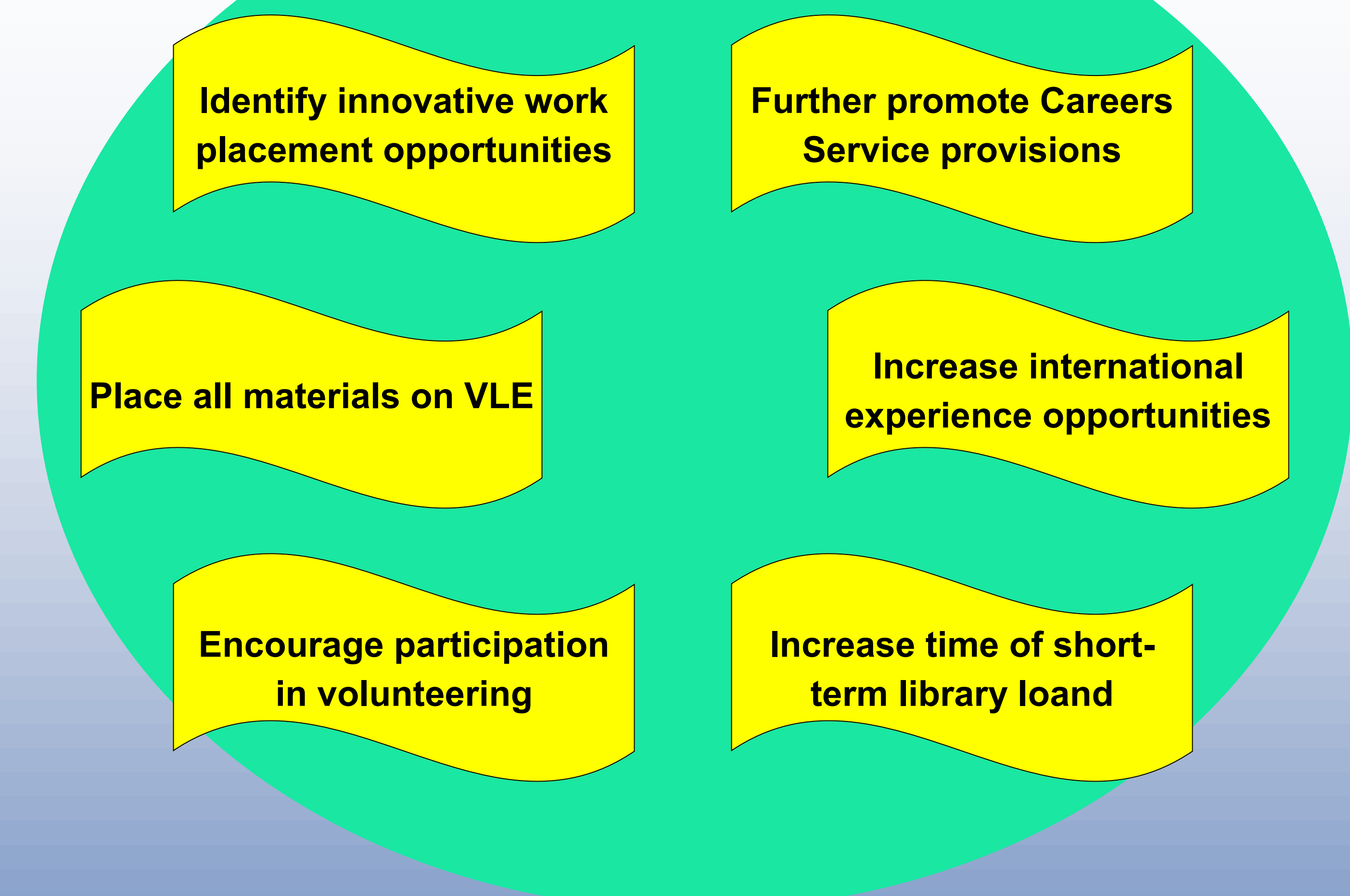
Key Messages

- Key Message:** The Careers Service is under-utilised by History students in general, but those who do use it respond positively.
- Key Message:** The benefits of an international exchange are well known, but there are three clear barriers for WA students: finance, confidence, and family commitments. The University should recognise these distinct barriers and develop measures to address them.
- Key Message:** The literacy, numeracy, and IT standards of students cause no immediate concern.
- Key Message:** Students may not be able to identify future career paths, but they can identify which skills their degree has developed. Work should be undertaken to help these students view these skills as applicable to identifiable careers.
- Key Message:** As may be expected, WA students are more likely to experience financial difficulty. Students should be channelled to the Student Financial Support Team for advice on available scholarships and bursaries, and also for tailored money management advice.
- Key Message:** Familial experience of HE is a definite advantage and staff should be aware of this. Not all of their students will have this privilege.
- Key Message:** Degree staff should work together across modules to reduce 'assignment bunching'. Deadlines should be spread out to reduce anxiety.
- Key Message:** Finance is a key barrier to international study for WA students. However, there is a variety of funding available. The History department should work with RIO to raise the profile of this support from early in students' degrees.
- Key Message:** Time-bound services, such as short-term library loans, could disproportionately negatively affect students with longer commute times.
- Key Message:** Employers note communication as a key skill - work is required to improve WA students' confidence in this area.

Non-WA students worry more about assignments whereas WA students are more likely to worry about their finances:

	What among the following causes you the most stress?					
	Assignments	Exams	Family	Finances	Friends at uni	No response
WA	19%	32%	7%	21%	2%	19%
Non-WA	36%	34%	2%	10%	0%	18%
Total	25%	32%	6%	17%	1%	19%

Recommendations



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 Full report available on request from wideningaccess@strath.ac.uk

References:
 Ng, F., Shirley, D., Willis, K., Lewis, S., & Lincoln, M. (2015) The E12 experience: Students' perceptions of a widening participation scheme, *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education*, 6(1), pp. 35-47.
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