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An analysis of widening participation ambassadors: recruitment, training, working practices and evaluation

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Previous work into ambassadors & Rationale for this project

- Ylonen (2010) suggests there are "*underlying tensions and potential sources of conflict within that role* [student ambassadors]"
  - Selection criteria
  - Image of the 'ideal SA'
  - Training
  - Impact

- Research into ambassadors tends to be 'in-house' or case-study (including my own)

- Literature produced is largely 'grey'- used only for internal purposes rather than sharing with other organisations

- Little sector-wide academic research to concurrently compare how multiple institutions use ambassadors

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The questionnaire

- Questionnaire split into five areas of interest:
  1. Organisation of ambassadors (12 items)
  2. Recruitment and selection of ambassadors (9 items)
  3. Training of ambassadors (8 items)
  4. Working practices of ambassadors (11 items)
  5. Evaluation of ambassadors (7 items)
- Pilot questionnaire distributed to colleagues at Bath Spa and University of Suffolk
- Main questionnaire distributed *via* the NERUPI mailing list
- Analysis conducted in SPSS v.26

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Which universities/organisations responded

1. AECC University College
2. Aston University
3. Bath Spa University
4. Brunel University London
5. Cardiff University
6. Durham University
7. Humber Outreach Programme
8. Imperial College London
9. Leeds Trinity University
10. London Metropolitan University
11. North East Collaborative Outreach Partnership
12. Northumbria University
13. Oxford Brookes University
14. Queen Mary University of London
15. Reaching Wider
16. St Mary's University
17. Staffordshire University
18. Swansea University
19. Teeside University
20. The University of Manchester
21. University Centre Weston (UCW)
22. University of East London (UEL)
23. University of East Anglia (UEA)
24. University of Bath
25. University of Bristol
26. University of Derby
27. University of Essex
28. University of Exeter
29. University of Hull
30. University of Reading
31. University of Suffolk
32. University of Sunderland
33. University of Sussex
34. University of Westminster
35. Wessex Inspiration Network
36. York St. John University

- 57.1% of NERUPI member institutions responded
- 30.2% of HEIs in the UK

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Section 1: Organisation of ambassadors

- How many ambassadors?
- How often and how much are ambassadors used?
- Ambassador pay?
  - Other rewards?

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Section 1: Organisation of ambassadors- How many ambassadors?

- Pilot questionnaire showed how organisations tend to have a 'core' ambassador programme and other departments would likely have more *ad hoc* ambassadors throughout their organisation
- Outreach departments have an average of 170 ambassadors (range: 10-650)
- Average number of ambassadors across whole organisation: 282
- Evidently dependent on size of organisation (larger universities tend to have bigger ambassador pools)

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Section 1: Organisation of ambassadors- Ambassador hours?

- Although some universities have large ambassador pools, are they all used? How much work do each of them get?
- Average number of ambassador hours used across organisations per year: 60,794 (n= 8)
- Respondents struggled to answer this question, many skipped it
- Future iterations of questionnaire will need this question re-wording (suggestions welcome!)

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Section 1: Organisation of ambassadors- How much are ambassadors paid?

- One respondent indicated they used unpaid volunteers as ambassadors
- Average hourly rate: £9.90/hour
- Range: £7.89/hour - £12.35/hour
- Some respondents noted a tiered system in their organisation, with a base-pay and higher pay for ‘senior/advanced ambassadors’ with additional training or experience
- Many London respondents indicated they weighted their tended to pay to reflect the cost associated with living in London.

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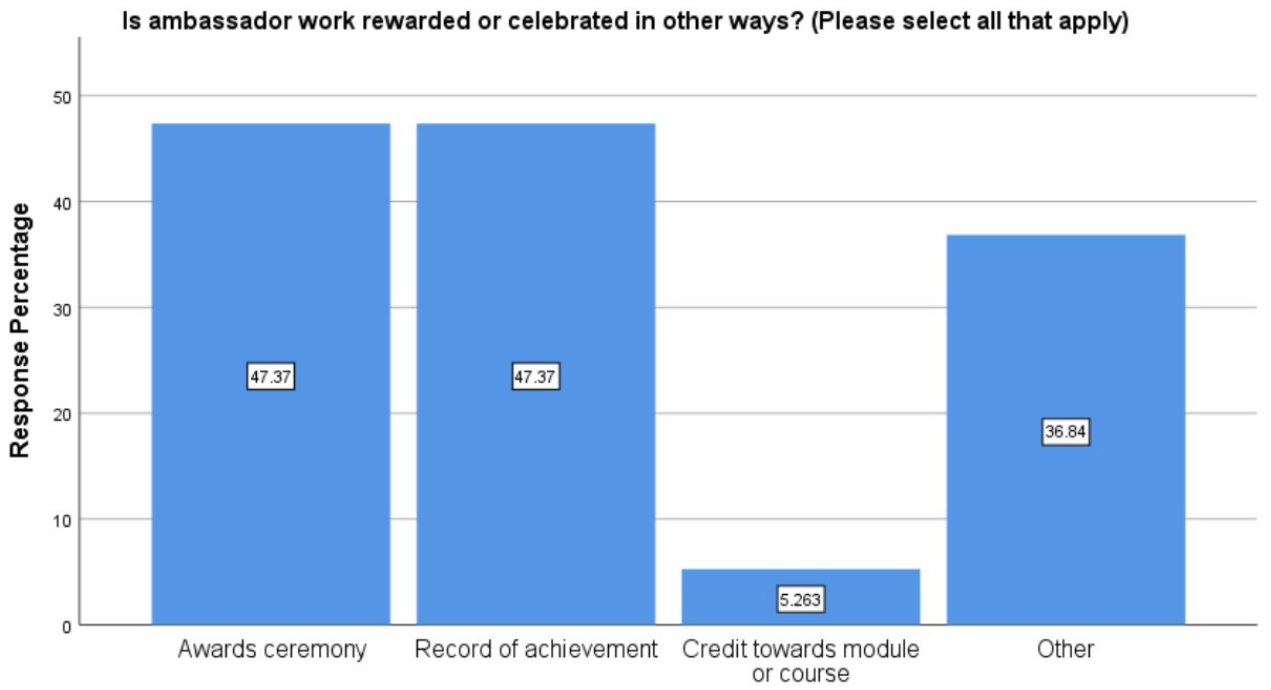
Section 1: Organisation of ambassadors- Other rewards?



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Section 1: Organisation of ambassadors- Other rewards?

Other rewards:

- Personal thanks from the Vice-Chancellor
- Outstanding Student Leader of the Month
- References
- HEAR (Higher Education Achievement Report) transcript
- Points towards university specific awards programmes.

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Section 1: Organisation of ambassadors- How are ambassadors managed?

- All responding organisations have a member of staff who manages ambassadors

- Role varied across organisations:
  - Student Ambassador Manager
  - Student Ambassador Scheme Officer
  - Student Ambassador and Events Officer
  - Student Ambassador Lead Officer
  - Mentoring Officer

  - Access and Participation Officers Careers and Employability Officer
  - Student Recruitment and Outreach Manager
  - Outreach Coordinator
  - Student Recruitment Officer/Student ambassador Coordinator
  - Widening Participation Officer
  - Student Recruitment & Access Manger (overall strategic) day to day line management Student Recruitment & Access Officers or Student Recruitment Officers
  - Events Coordinator
  - Education Liaison Assistant
  - Schools and College Liaison Officer
  - Outreach Officer and Recruitment Events Officer
  - Widening Participation & Recruitment Officer
  - Schools and Colleges Liaison Officer
  - NCOP Project Coordinator
  - Student Recruitment and WP Officer
  - Outreach Manager

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Section 2: Recruitment of ambassadors

- Who are ambassadors?
- What are the recruitment processes?
- What are the selection criteria?

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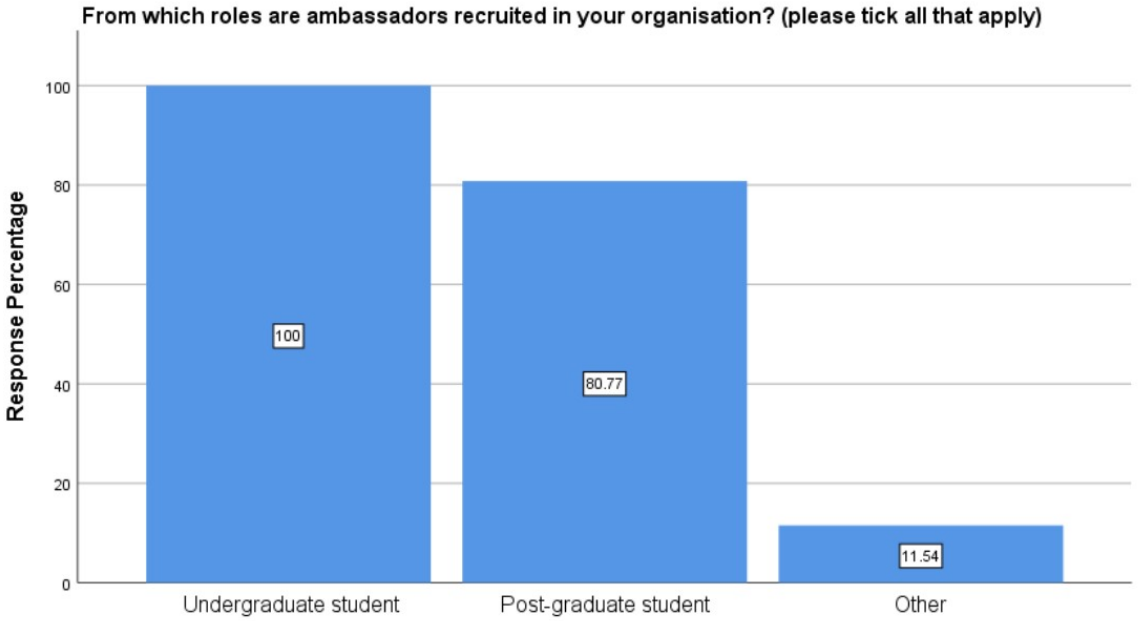
Section 2: Recruitment of ambassadors- From what role ambassadors recruited?



Other recruitment pools:

- Masters students
- Recent alumni
- Foundation/access students

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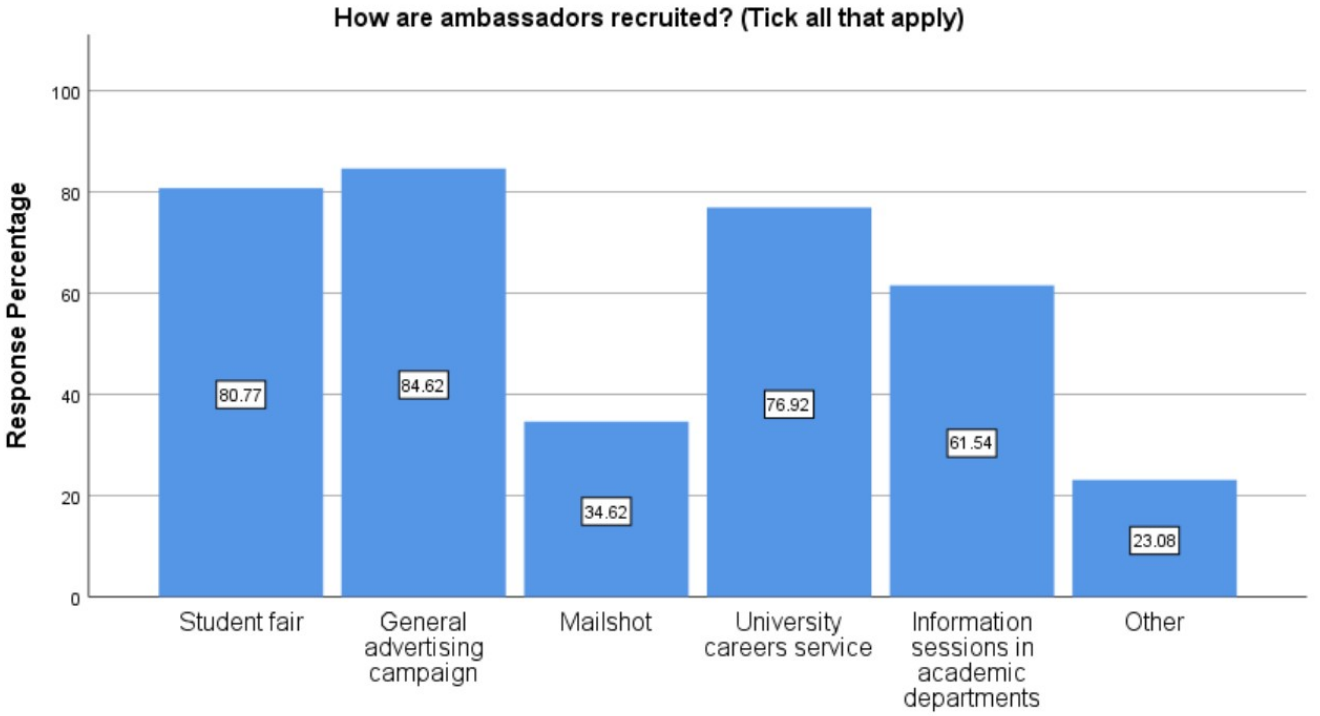
Section 2: Recruitment of ambassadors- How are ambassadors recruited?



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Section 2: Recruitment of ambassadors- How are ambassadors recruited?

Other methods of recruitment used:

- Hand selection
- Information sessions at Careers centre.
- Campus Jobs (all student jobs are advertised through campus)
- Word of mouth
- Promotion at particular events during Freshers week
- Handing out flyers on campus

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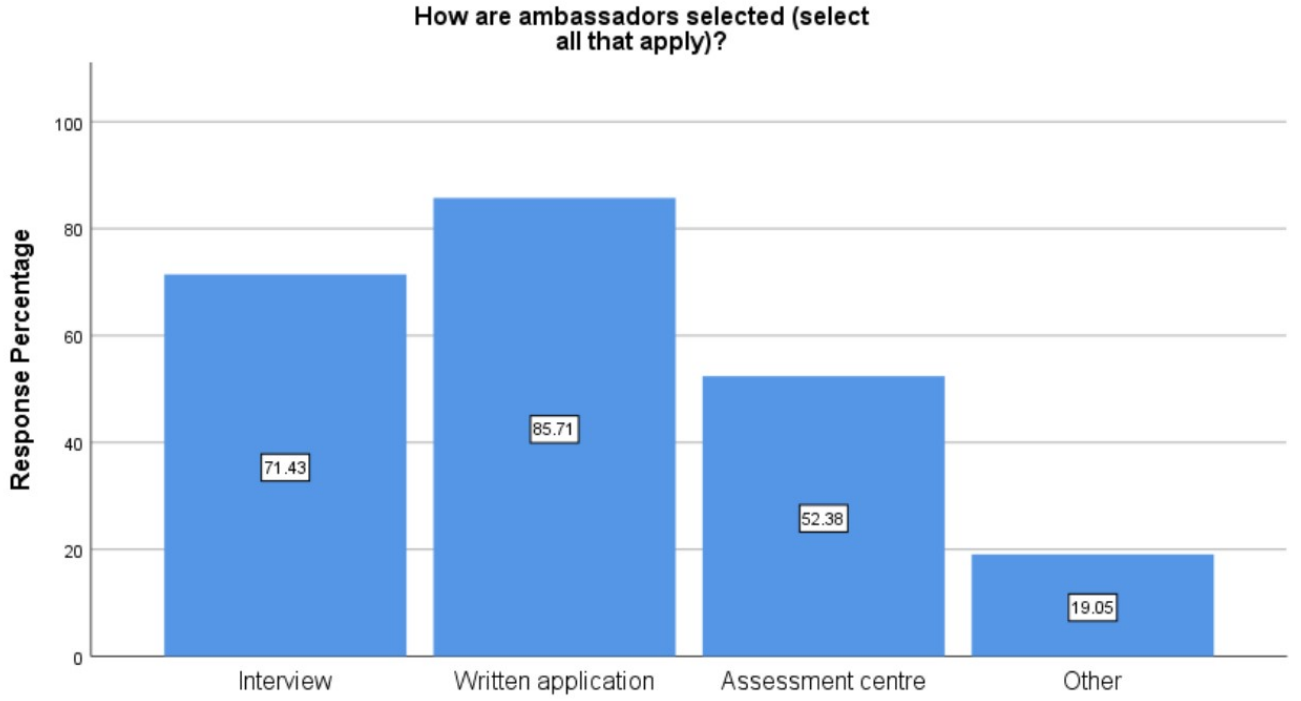
Section 2: Recruitment of ambassadors- How are ambassadors selected?



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Section 2: Recruitment of ambassadors- How are ambassadors selected?

Other methods used during selection:

- Group interview tasks
- Lead a campus tour
- Unprepared presentation
- Scenario questions
- Online Skills Test
- Attendance at Training Day

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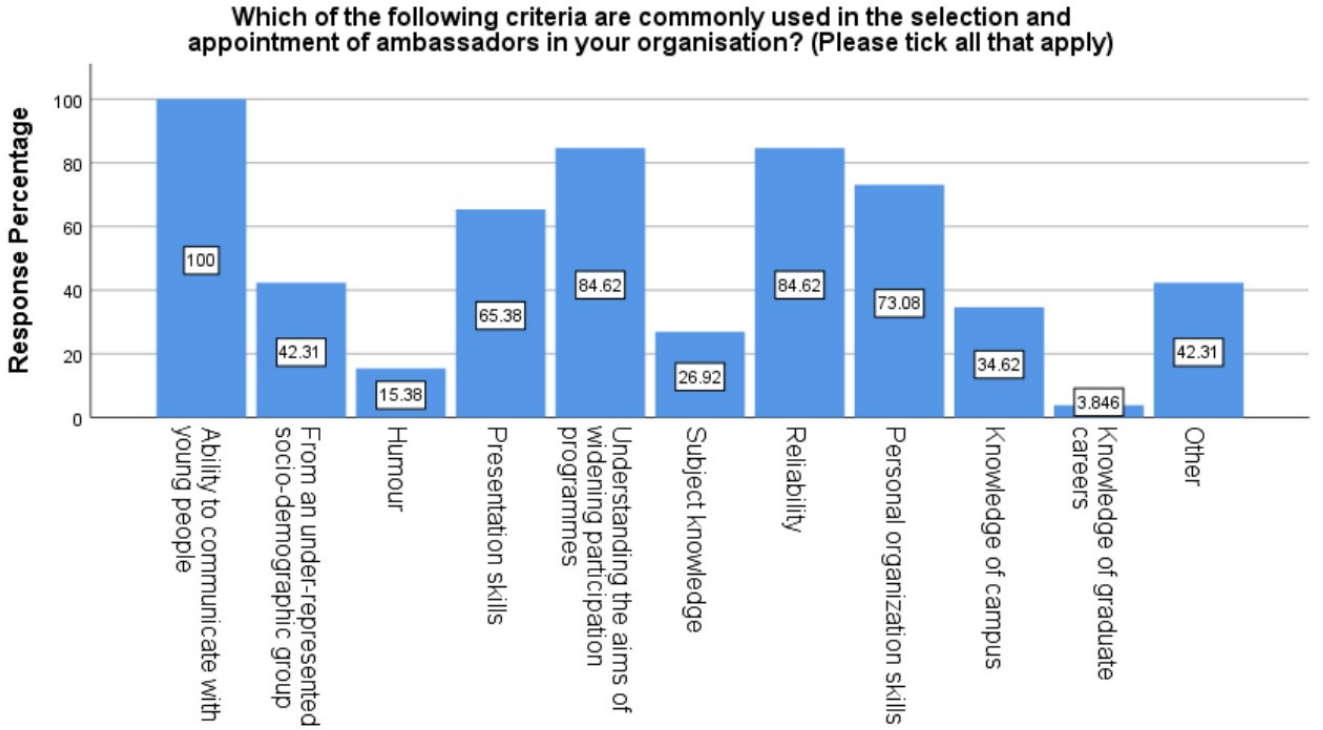
Section 2: Recruitment of ambassadors- What criteria are used to select ambassadors?



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Section 2: Recruitment of ambassadors- What criteria are used to select ambassadors?

Other criteria used in select ambassadors:

- Understanding of university application process
- Experience of working with young people
- General customer service skills
- Relatability
- Ability to emphasize, listen and respond in an appropriate manner
- Inclusivity
- Initiative
- Enthusiasm and approachability
- Team work
- Potential to raise aspirations of others

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Section 3: Training of ambassadors

- What training are ambassadors given?
  - Mandatory
  - Optional
- Who delivers the training?

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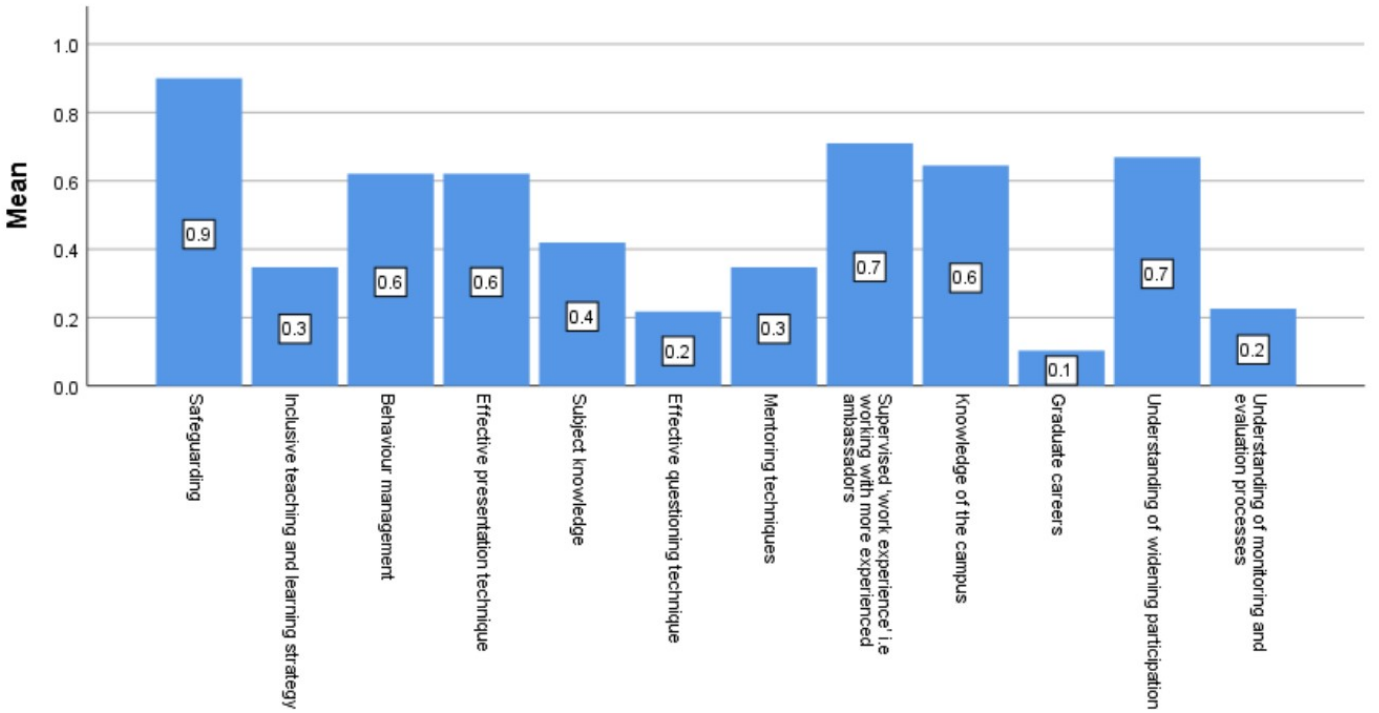
Section 3: Training of ambassadors- Mandatory ambassador training

Typically, in hours, how much time is dedicated to each of the following options during mandatory ambassador training?



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Section 3: Training of ambassadors- Mandatory ambassador training

Other mandatory ambassador training:

- Disability awareness
- LGBTQ+ awareness
- Events team customer service and roles
- SA admin (how to use systems)
- Structure of the event
- GDPR training
- Disciplinary Procedure, Code of Conduct, HEAR & SA Benefits, UCAS HE Fairs, CMA, Manual Handling, HR/Payroll

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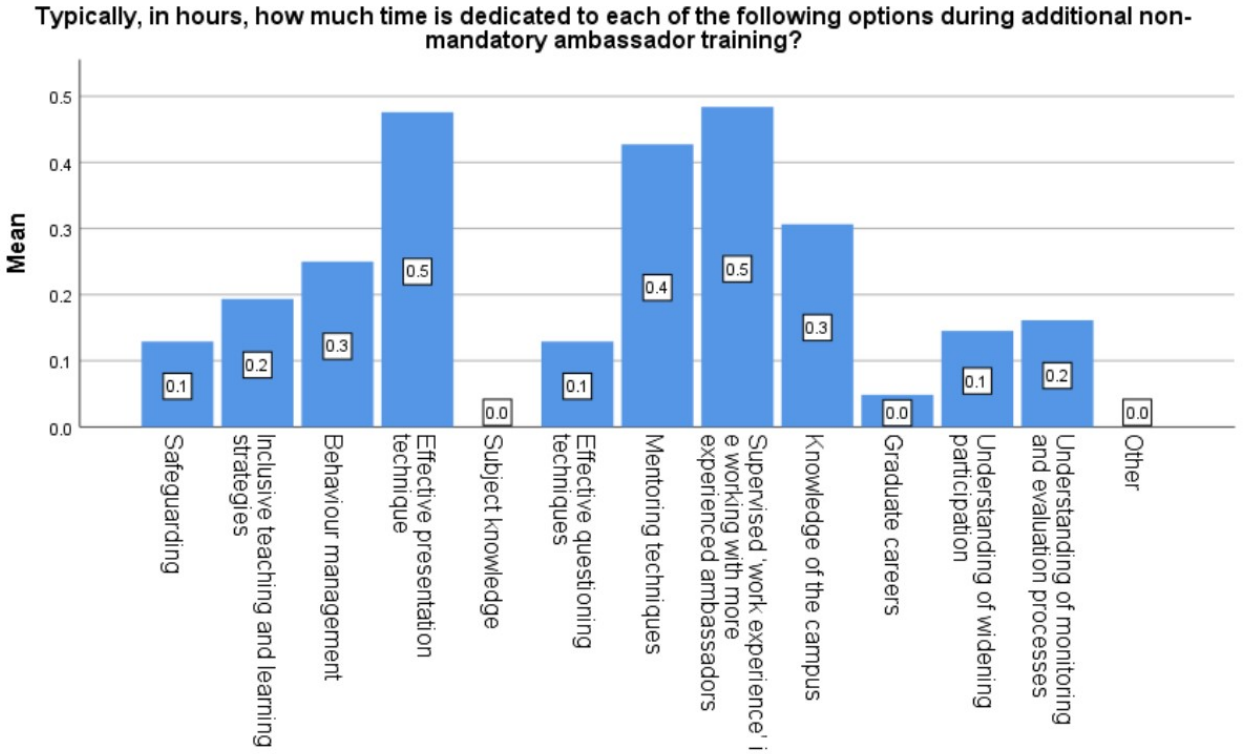
Section 3: Training of ambassadors- Optional ambassador training



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Section 3: Training of ambassadors- Who trains ambassadors?

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Section 3: Training of ambassadors- Who trains ambassadors?

Other ambassador trainers:

- Careers team
- Student Union
- Writing and Learning Centre
- Student Support staff
- School of Art and Design
- Course leaders
- Professional Services staff
- External provider

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Section 4: Working practices

- What do ambassadors do?
  - On campus
  - In schools/colleges
- How is this work organised?
- Who do ambassadors work with?

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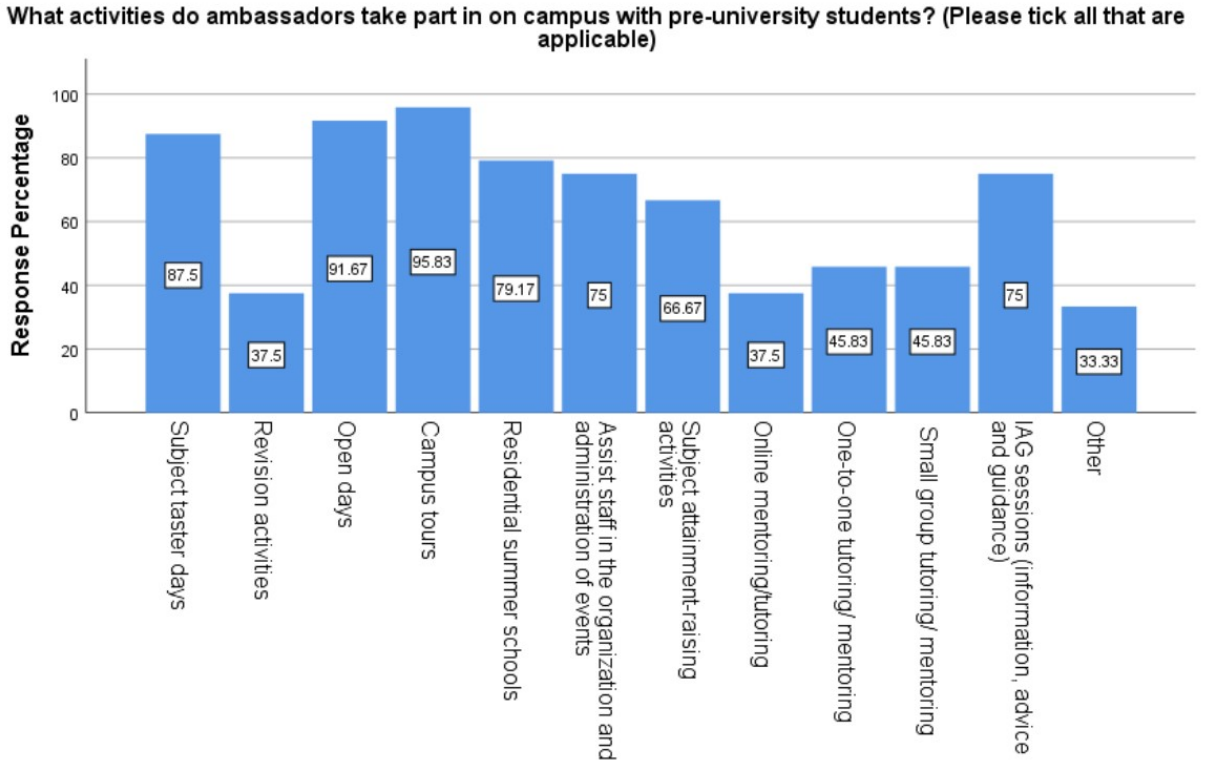
Section 4: Working practices- Activities on campus



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Section 4: Working practices- Activities on campus

Other campus activities:

- Subject tasters
- Open/public lecture series
- Career Fairs
- Non-residential summer schools
- Saturday Clubs
- Interview/admissions days
- Celebration events
- Feature in promotional films, prospectuses and literature

- Data-Inputting
- ‘Clearing’ phonelines

- Acting as role models
- Supporting aspiration
- Raising awareness of higher education
- Imagining future selves

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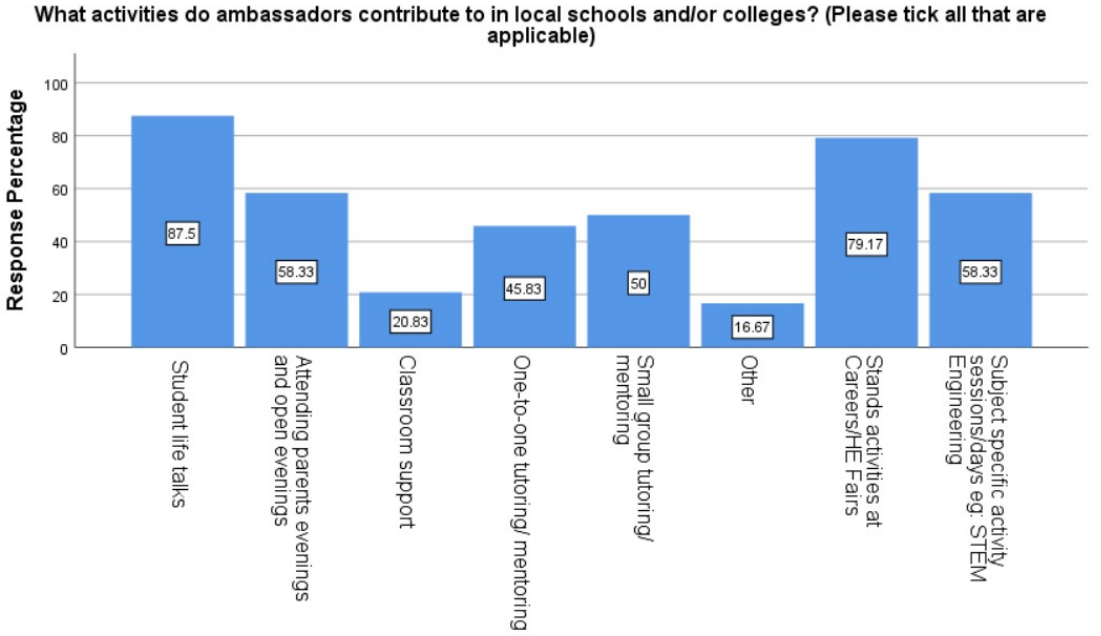
Section 4: Working practices- Activities in local schools and/or colleges



Other school activities:

- Primary reading support,
- School-based Summer Schools

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Section 4: Working practices- Liaising with schools/colleges

- 47% of organisations had a dedicated member of staff in schools/colleges to help organise ambassador work off-site.
- Most often (62%) they were members of school support staff rather than teaching staff

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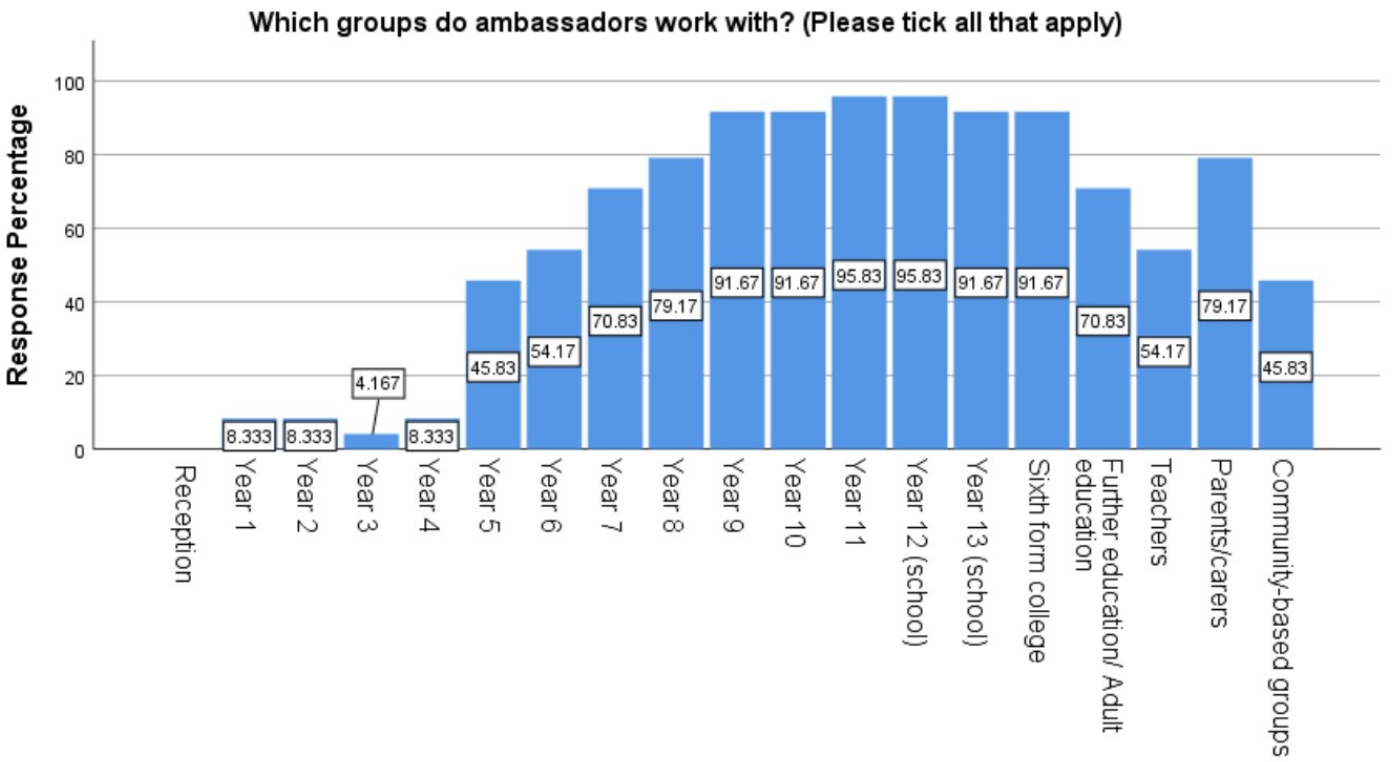
Section 4: Working practices- Who do ambassadors work with?



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Section 4: Evaluation of ambassadors

- How is ambassador work evaluated?
- What NERUPI aim do ambassadors support most?

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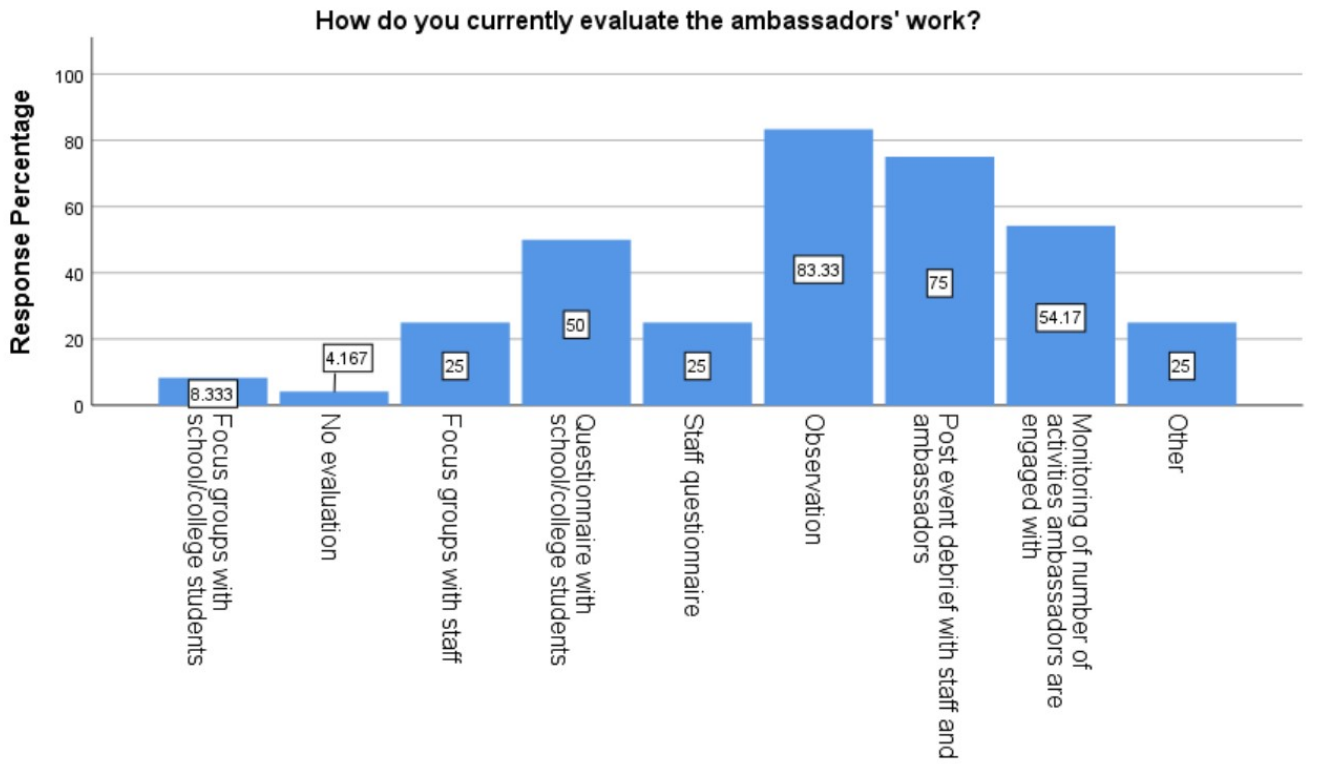
Section 5: Evaluation- How is ambassadors' work evaluated?



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Section 5: Evaluation- How is ambassadors' work evaluated?

Other evaluation:

- Feedback and reflection between outreach staff and ambassadors at end of each session.
- Employability training where ambassadors reflect on what skills they have gained from working on programme.
- Leavers survey for outgoing ambassadors and staff on their experience, training needs, skills gaps etc.
- Yearly review with senior ambassadors
- School staff interviews (teachers/advisors and SLT)

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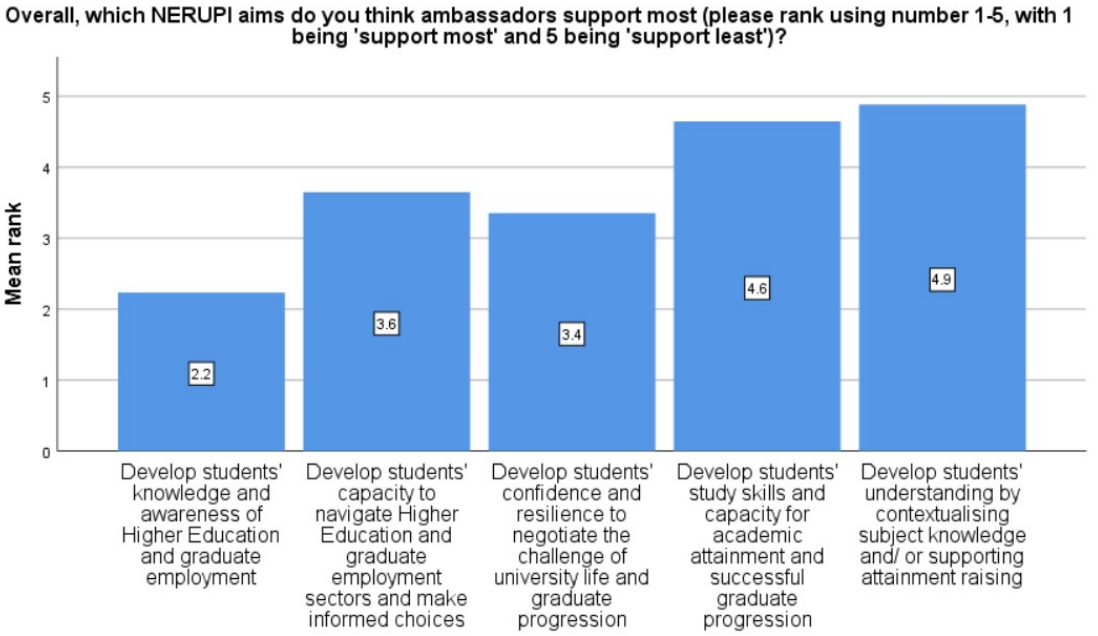
Which NERUPI aims do ambassadors support most?



N.b. lowest mean rank = highest support score

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Concluding thoughts

- Rate of pay is encouraging- organisations appear to value the work of ambassadors and reward them accordingly
- Some universities have large ambassador ‘pools’, but current research does not show how frequently they are used
  - Is having more ambassadors more useful than a few, reliable, highly trained ones?
- Training does not cover pedagogy, despite ambassadors working on various attainment raising programmes (which require effective curriculum delivery)
- This could be remedied by engaging academic staff or teachers who have expertise in teaching & learning

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Concluding thoughts (2)

- Primary schools and FE colleges are not being provisioned (as much)
- Ambassadors are perceived to have the most impact in developing students' knowledge and awareness in HE (NERUPI aim: 'Know')
- Future areas for research
  - Capture **more** of the sector (non-respondents and non-NERUPI members)
  - Analysis of ambassador JDs
  - Analysis of APPs
  - Ongoing tracking- repeat data collection process in future to monitor any changes in working practices
  - Explore the effectiveness of ambassador training further

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Thank you for your attention

Any (further) questions/ comments?