

Theory of Change for Plymouth Marjon University employability intervention: Student Colleagues (SC) scheme

December 2023

Elpida Acharidou

Professor Jennie Winter

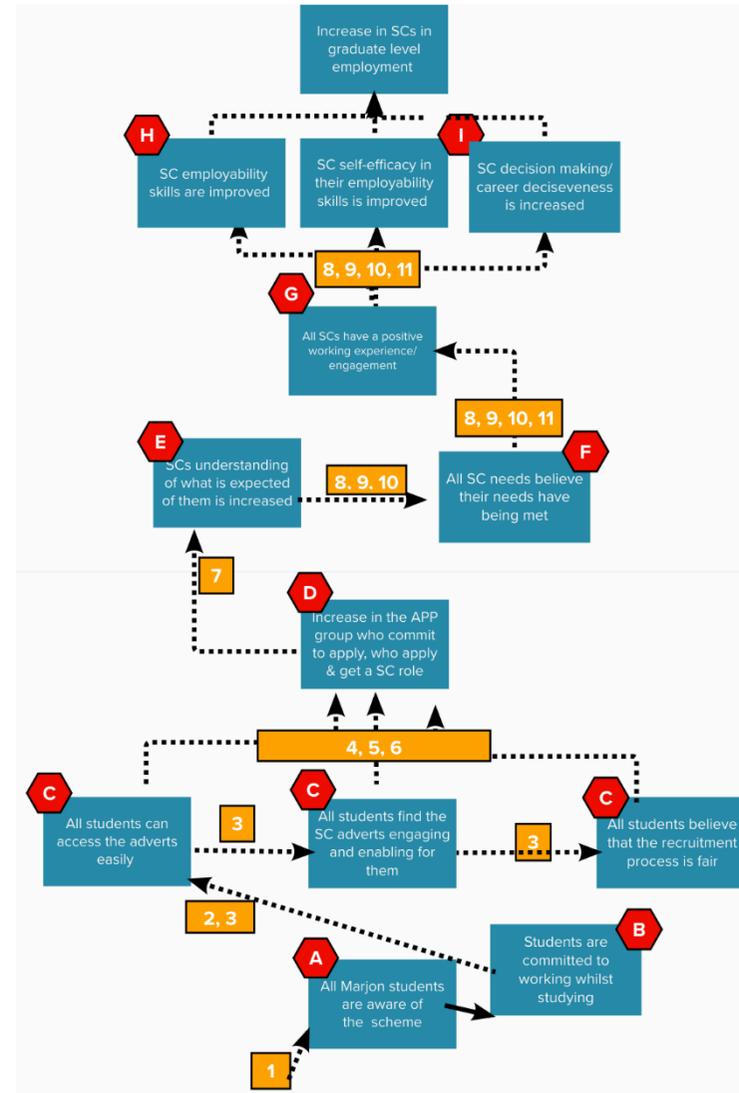
This Theory of Change has been developed by Plymouth Marjon University using resources and templates provided by TASO. The contents of the Theory of Change do not reflect TASO's work or practice.

The Student Colleagues (SC) scheme's Theory of Change (ToC) is provided below. Please note that this ToC is a draft and needs revising so that a final version is created once line manager viewpoints are collected and a review by the SC strategy group and further stakeholder discussions take place. This was not possible within the scope of the SC evaluation study. (There are indications for example that SC attendance to work needs considering as part of the ToC.)

In the ToC figure, the blue boxes indicate the SC outcomes whilst the orange numbers the activities of the scheme, and the red letters mechanisms of change.

Activities	
1	Promotion/marketing of the SC scheme
2	SC roles created & approved
3	SC roles advertised
4	PMU Futures (career and employability service) offers support with application & interview
5	Candidates shortlisted
6	SCs are interviewed
7	SCs are inducted
8	SC resources are available for SCs to use
9	Staff CPD opportunities are available to SCs
10	Skills framework workshops conducted
11	SCs interact with mentor

Mechanisms of change	
A	Promotional/marketing materials target the intended APP group effectively
B	Students have an instrumental or integrative motivation to work whilst studying
C	SC roles created and advertised taking into account all students' needs
D	The recruitment process is fair
E	SCs are inducted as intended
F	Work adjustments made are suitable for all SCs
G	SC and mentor relationship is one of trust/positive
H	SCs have opportunities to apply different skills
I	SCs get feedback on their practice from their mentors



THEORY OF CHANGE UNDERPINNING DOCUMENT

VERSION

30th April 2023

NAME

The Student Colleague (SC) scheme offered at Plymouth Marjon University (PMU).

WHY IS THE INTERVENTION BEING RUN?

The SC scheme was developed in 2019 in the context of the PMU Access and Participation Plan (APP) which identified gaps in student employability outcomes for students when analysed by POLAR4 quintile and/or disability. The scheme posits that having high quality employment experiences to draw on can benefit graduate prospects for all, yet also acknowledges that student's access to quality employability experiences can be limited, particularly in cases of disadvantage or disability. The scheme therefore offers a range of university based, paid graduate level employment opportunities open to student applications.

WHO IS THE INTERVENTION FOR?

The SC scheme is open to all PMU students.

WHAT IS THE INTERVENTION?

Inputs

- **PMU staff time and resources**
- **Budget allocation** for SCs by the PMU department the SCs will be employed by.

Activities

- **SC scheme promotion and marketing** – and the development of SC promotional and operational material for managers and students.
- **SC role creation** – and the:
 - Identification of need for a SC role.
 - Completion of the relevant business forms by managers.
 - Implementation of the People Team SC specific recruitment policy.
- **SC recruitment** – and the
 - Development of the recruitment materials.
 - Approval of role by the Senior Management Team (SMT) Workforce Development Committee (WDC), based on the People Team SC recruitment policy.
 - Advertisement of the role.
 - Support to SCs from Futures, the Marjon careers service.
 - Shortlisting and interviewing of SCs, and offering a position to a SC.
- **SCs' induction and employment, and the use of specific resources and support**, including the:
 - SC skills framework and workbook.
 - Survey to be completed by SCs when they start and when they finish their role.
 - Professional Development (PD) opportunities for PMU staff.

WHO IS DELIVERING THE INTERVENTION?

- *The SC scheme's strategy group*, which leads the SC strategy and uses university resources to develop materials for promoting and implementing the scheme.
- *The People Team*, who produce human resources related policies specifically for the SC scheme and sit on recruitment panels for SC roles.
- *Futures, the PMU career service*, which provides support for students in developing applications and, if shortlisted, with their interviews.
- *Line managers*, who support SCs and upskill themselves to implement the PMU SC skills framework. Members of the strategy group provide training to line managers on the skills framework, who, in turn, mentor the SCs they supervise. Depending on the SC role line managers can be either academic or professional staff.
- *An array of PMU staff employed by the university*, who engage with the SC scheme and SCs at different times, either in an ad hoc or ongoing basis, such as payroll staff and the student ambassador officer.

HOW IS THE INTERVENTION DELIVERED?

SC promotion and marketing

- *Development of SC promotional and operational material for managers and students:*
 - Promotion of the SC scheme to PMU managers aims to raise awareness and encourage them to consider hiring a SC. This is achieved by cascading information to the Professional Managers Group (PMG) and the Research and Knowledge Exchange Office (RKEO), as well as providing managers with access to the SC internal PMU webpages, where all the information related to the SC scheme are held.
 - Promotion and marketing to raise awareness of the scheme to students. A multi-method approach is used to promote the scheme. This process begins prior to students joining PMU and includes promoting the scheme in the PMU undergraduate prospectus, in school recruitment fairs and open days, as well as highlighting it on the PMU website and social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Once students have enrolled to study, internal communications such as the PMU website, email, and student-facing webpages are used to continue promoting the scheme and encourage them to apply for SC positions.

Role creation

- *Identification of need for a SC role and recruitment process.* Creating a SC role involves PMU managers identifying a need for a role that could be filled by a SC.
- *Managers fill in the relevant business case form* and send it to the People Team.
- *People Team SC recruitment policy is in place.* The recruitment policy advises PMU managers to assess whether a role is appropriate for a SC candidate before initiating an open recruitment process. All new business case proposals are evaluated by the People Team, and if a SC candidate is not proposed, but could be appropriate, the team contacts the manager to discuss the possibility of advertising the position as a SC role. If the decision is made to proceed, the SC recruitment process begins.

Role recruitment

- *Development of recruitment materials.* Once the role moves to the recruitment phase, managers refine the job specification and prepare any other documentation required.
- *Approval of role by the Senior Management Team (SMT) Workforce Development Committee (WDC), based on People Team SC recruitment policy.* Once all recruitment materials are in place, the post is discussed by the SMT WDC, responsible for approving any new post. The group operates a high level of support for SC roles, and these are encouraged wherever possible.
- *Advertisement of role.* Once approval for the role is given by the WDC, the SC role is advertised through student focused channels, inviting student only applicants.

- *When the role is advertised, the advert explicitly advises applicants to liaise with Futures, the PMU careers service. Futures offers support for students with their application and, if shortlisted, with their interview.*
- *Shortlisting, interviews, and position offered.* Interviews are held online or on campus, based on need. After shortlisting and interviewing candidates, the position is offered. When an offer of employment is made, the applicant is asked to complete a pre-employment health questionnaire to help the PMU identify any potential adjustments needed.
- PMU identifies reasonable adjustments or support that would assist the individual in undertaking the duties of their employment, including:
 - Any health problems or disabilities that may make the proposed post difficult or unsafe for them or others.
 - Whether any adjustments need to be made to the job to enable them to work, if they have health issues or a disability.

If the applicant answers yes, to any of the above questions, they are sent a further questionnaire from the occupational health services. Depending on the result of this, Occupational Development may request an appointment with the SC to discuss how PMU can appropriately support them in their new role. In these cases, recommendations are sent to the People Team who can work with individual managers to develop bespoke plans to support the SC.

SC induction and employment, and the use of SC specific resources and support, including:

- *The SC skills framework and the SC workbook* are intended to be used by SCs and their line managers. The SC skills framework enables SCs to identify, label, differentiate, and articulate their experiences in the skills included in it. Skills part of the framework include:
 - Communicating and influencing.
 - Delivering excellent service.
 - Team working and leadership.
 - Decision making and using initiative.
 - Analysis and problem solving.
 - Creative and fluent thinking.
 - Self-awareness and resilience.
 - Digital knowledge and confidence.

The workbook provides a reflective template structured on the framework which is intended to be used by SCs to benchmark previous experience, undertake a skills audit and identify skills sets for development, and record progress. Together, these

documents provide the basis for discussing SCs professional experiences, recording achievements and planning future skills development.

Line managers introduce SCs to the framework and the SC workbook as part of the usual PMU employee induction so that they independently use it going forwards. To further support SCs' independent engagement with these resources, in the academic year 2022/23, three online workshops were offered for the first time to all SCs. These focused on the framework and the workbook as SC centred resources.

When SCs are in post, line managers are to act in the role of a mentor, sharing their knowledge, skills and/or experiences with SCs. Such conversations are initiated by line managers or SCs as they see fit and are based on the needs of the role. Similarly, the place of where such conversations take place can be either online or face-to-face based on need.

- *The Career Pulse survey.* Line managers ask SCs to complete the Career Pulse survey when they start and when they finish their role. In the survey, students rate their confidence in eight core employability areas, providing SCs with a record of development in named employability domains. It is currently unclear how results from the Career Pulse survey are used by SCs and individual line managers to support skills development.
- *SC employee Professional Development (PD) opportunities (in plans).* SCs will be able to access PD opportunities similarly to any other PMU staff in the future. This will be a key change in further embedding the scheme structurally and potentially further enhancing SC skills.

SC graduates

- *Developing a support network for SCs (in discussion, tbc).* The SC strategy group is considering the creation of a social network for SC graduates.

Monitoring and evaluation

Part of the scheme is its monitoring and evaluation. Strategy group members reported that feedback from relevant completed activities has been incorporated into the scheme, including.

- *Change Maker survey,* sent to SCs to fill in at the beginning at the end of their role.
- *Informal ad-hoc feedback from line managers:* feeding into PMG and discussions with the strategy group - the strategy group aims to standardise and systematise feedback from SC line managers in the future.
- *Exit survey from the scheme:* sent when SCs leave the university.

An evaluation of the scheme as part of the APP in near completion and will form part of that evidence.

WHERE IS THE INTERVENTION DELIVERED?

The intervention and its activities are delivered online and/or on campus, based on need. Please see previous section for more details.

HOW MANY TIMES WILL THE INTERVENTION BE DELIVERED? OVER HOW LONG?

The SC scheme is a rolling intervention; SC roles are part of PMU promotional and training materials available for use at any time during the year and roles are created, advertised, offered and taken up as and when they come about. SC roles vary in duration depending on the role, departmental needs and funds availability. Training of SCs on the SC skills framework is delivered through three online workshops spread across the academic year and the frequency of reflective conversations between SC and their line manager is set as they see fit.

WILL THE INTERVENTION BE TAILORED?

N/A

WHO ARE THE KEY ACTORS / STAKEHOLDERS?

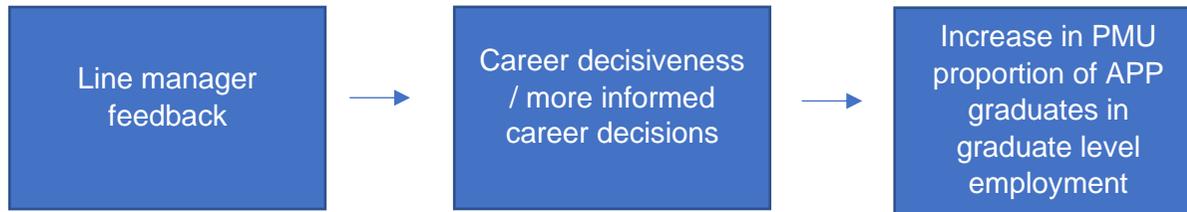
- The scheme has been developed by a cross institutional team, the SC strategy group, consisting of the Director of People and Organisational Development, Head of Student Recruitment, Student Engagement Officer, Head of Employability, Head of Transformation and two Student Colleagues. The group is responsible for the SC scheme's strategic direction and for its implementation.
- SC line managers are responsible for the day-to-day delivery of the scheme. They are also beneficiaries of the scheme alongside SCs.

CHANGE MECHANISMS

The SC scheme's ultimate aim is to increase the proportion of PMU APP graduates in graduate level employment. The causal pathways that enable this aim to be achieved are outlined below.

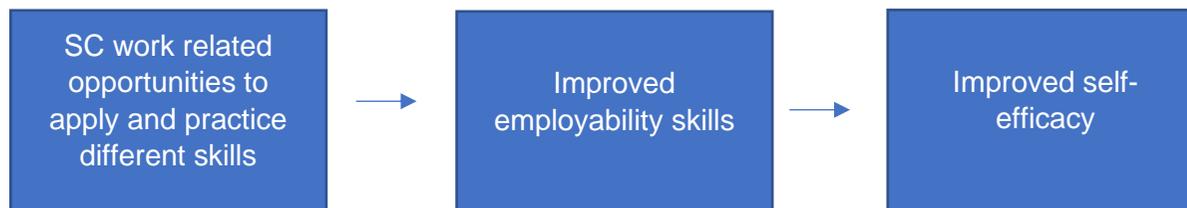
Causal pathway 1:

Improving SC career decisiveness / SCs making better career decisions are important outcomes of career related interventions (Langher et.al., 2018). To achieve this outcome, SCs need to receive feedback on their performance from their line manager, who also acts as their mentor.



Causal pathway 2:

Improving SC self-efficacy and graduate level skills, what York and Bennett, 1998 called capability, which is strongly correlated with employability outcomes (Caricati, 2016) of employability programmes that combine 'hard' and 'soft' skills, similarly to the SC scheme. To achieve these outcomes, SCs need varied work-related opportunities to apply different skills.



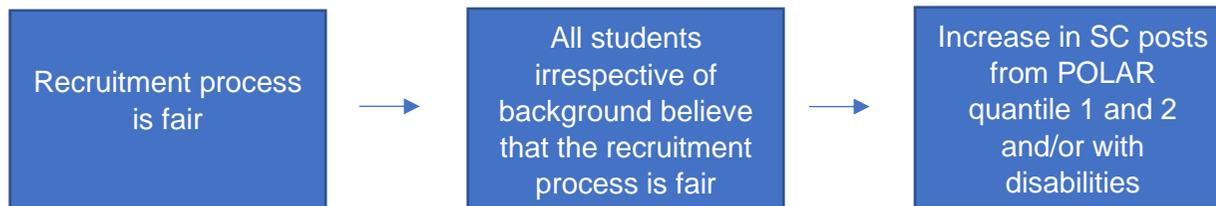
Causal pathway 3:

For all SC needs to be met, irrespective of background and/or disability, and for them to have a positive working experience/be engaged, their relationship with their line manager/mentor is crucial. This relationship should be based on trust, creating a safe environment in which constructive conversations can take place (Masango, 2011).



Causal pathway 4:

SCs' commitment to apply for a SC role and accept it, if it is offered to them, and SCs to believe that the recruitment process is fair, are contingent to the recruitment process being fair.



Causal pathway 5:

To support increased awareness and understanding of the SC scheme amongst all Marjon students and potential students, all SCs irrespective of background and/or disability must be able to access the schemes' promotional and marketing materials easily. This requires that such materials, and SC roles and their corresponding adverts are created thoughtfully and inclusively, having *all* SC needs in mind.



ASSUMPTIONS

- Sufficient allocation of resources.
- All managers and People Team colleagues understand the importance of the scheme, are willing to implement it and believe that it can support students in gaining graduate level employment.
- Marjon careers office support is effective.
- Alignment of the SC scheme's needs with PMU's Talent scheme, which supports staff PD, is appropriate.
- SC materials and resources to line managers and SCs are delivered as intended and are effective.
- Line manager training and facilitation is effective in how they support SCs who have declared a disability or have other self-reported needs.
- Managers and SCs use the skills framework and track SC progress.
- SCs reflect on their skills and know what they need to do to improve them as well as on their own career prospects.

WHAT IS THE EVALUATION AIM?

1. Use a 'small *n*' methodology, in this case Transformative Evaluation, focusing on under-represented groups in HE, and reflect on its use for the purposes of impact evaluation in a HE context.

WHAT ARE THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS?

1. What is the usefulness, if any, of Transformative Evaluation as a 'small *n*' methodology when used for impact evaluation in a HE context?
2. What is the impact of the SC scheme on SCs from POLAR4 quantile 1 and 2 and/or SCs with self-reported disability(ies).

WHAT METHODOLOGY ARE YOU USING?

Transformative Evaluation – this methodology builds upon the Most Significant Change methodology.

RISKS AND LIMITATIONS

- Policy changes and / or changes in priorities imposed by the external HE environment.
- Changes in priorities within PMU.
- Financial constraints – internal and/or external supporting the institution.