EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From the margins to the mainstream
Embedding widening participation in higher education
Case studies

This study has reviewed the 23 case studies from the previous two reports (published in 1998 and 2002), focusing on evaluating the on-going effectiveness and embedding of these initiatives. This has been done via a questionnaire and telephone follow-up. In addition, new examples of practice were sought in a sector-wide survey distributed to institutions by Universities UK and the Standing Conference of Principals. A total of 141 examples of practice were returned by the sector and these have been collated into a searchable and updateable directory of practice, available at www.heacademy.ac.uk/wpdirectory. Eleven new examples were selected for more in-depth analysis by a research visit, including observation and interviews, and analysis of key documents.

Short summaries of the case studies are listed throughout at the foot of each page.
Preface

This is the third in a series of reports published by Universities UK and the Standing Conference of Principals charting the development of widening participation activity across the UK higher education sector. The study analyses 34 in-depth case studies (including a re-examination of the 23 previous case studies from the 1998 and 2002 reports) and evaluates their effectiveness in increasing access to higher education by disadvantaged young people. The report examines the policy context for widening participation in all four nations, and also includes a substantial analysis of recent data.

One of the key innovations of this report is the focus on how institutions and partnerships have embedded their widening participation practices to improve both access to higher education and success within it. This is the main challenge now facing the sector as it moves away from a project-based approach – as seen in the 1990s when the first Universities UK/SCOP report was published – towards longer-term, sustainable processes and practices. Embedding widening participation across higher education institutions will depend on the development of more sophisticated tools for monitoring and evaluation, and measuring the impact of initiatives like those highlighted in the report.

A key fact highlighted in the report is that the overall participation rate for young students in higher education with two or more A-levels or Highers is already approaching 100%. The challenge remains to increase the number of students from disadvantaged groups achieving the qualifications required for entry to higher education, including the development of more robust vocational routes allowing for progression into the sector at different levels.

This report (alongside the two previous studies) is a testament to the skills and dedication of staff throughout the sector who are committed to inspiring those students with no family experience of higher education to gain the confidence and qualifications to apply to higher education institutions and ensure that they are supported throughout their studies. We believe that concerted action by the sector – in partnership with other agencies – is essential in moving to a more socially inclusive higher education both in terms of the student body and the learning environment.

Professor Drummond Bone
President
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Pamela Taylor
Chair
Standing Conference of Principals

University of Bradford: The Junior University. A wide range of learning opportunities and activities aimed at tackling the on-going intergenerational pattern of educational disadvantage among Bradford’s minority ethnic communities.

University of Dundee: Access Summer School. Summer school offered to carefully targeted disadvantaged young people which results in guaranteed entry for completing students.

University of Glamorgan: Compact scheme. Promotes a comprehensive approach to social and cultural community regeneration and the advancement of educational opportunities for young people attending schools in disadvantaged educational wards, minority groups and adult learners.
Executive summary

This is the third study undertaken by Universities UK and the Standing Conference of Principals to explore how universities and colleges in the UK are supporting access to higher education for young people from lower socio-economic groups (the previous studies, From Elitism to Inclusion and Social Class and Participation, were published in 1998 and 2002 respectively). It also examines how the higher education sector is taking action to ensure that these students successfully complete their courses. The research has the following objectives, to:

a) Analyse the statistical evidence of the performance of higher education institutions and UK regions in widening participation.

b) Identify and share examples of widening participation across the sector.

c) Explore and learn from new examples of practice which increase the participation of students from lower socio-economic groups.

d) Re-visit the 23 previously featured case studies to review their progress and impact.

e) Evaluate the contribution of different institutional structures to widening participation.

f) Examine the strategies for embedding good practice in institutions and evaluate their impact.

g) Assess the sustainability of the widening participation work of the sector.

h) Inform policy about the wider applicability of alternative approaches to widening participation across the sector.

i) Consider the opportunities and challenges facing widening participation.

j) Disseminate examples of practice, findings and recommendations widely across the sector.

Research methods

This study builds on the 1998 and 2002 reports by re-examining the 23 previous case studies, analysing statistical data and new examples of practice. It focuses on an institution-wide approach to widening participation considering the ways in which institutions and partnerships have embedded their widening participation practices. It examines the types of interventions and the groups they target to improve both access to higher education and success within it.

The study used the following methods:

- Statistical review;
- Evaluation of 23 previous case studies;
- Sector-wide survey of practice;
- Examination of new examples of practice throughout the UK; and
- Peer learning and evaluation seminar.

1998 Case studies

University of Glasgow: Pre-University Summer School.
LEA-linked summer schools aimed at getting local disadvantaged students from deprived areas into university and retaining them on course through induction and preparation.

LEAPS: Lothians Equal Access Programme for Schools.
Aims to promote social inclusion and equality of opportunity by facilitating the increased participation and success in higher education of disadvantaged young people in Edinburgh and the Lothians.

University of Lincoln: AimingHigher.
Targets pupils from the age of 14 who have been identified by participating schools as having the potential to succeed but unlikely to consider higher education as a possibility. The project targets schools in disadvantaged areas and offers accreditation of prior experience for school pupils.
UK policy context

Widening participation has become a key policy commitment of the Government and this is reflected across the four countries of the UK:

England

• Aimhigher is the major Government vehicle for outreach activity to widen access to higher education. Aimhigher partnerships provide effective structures for schools, colleges, training providers, higher education institutions and other stakeholders in the development of initiatives for enabling progression to higher education.

• The Higher Education Act [2004] permitted higher education institutions to charge variable fees. The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) was established to ensure that the new fees regime being introduced from 2006 does not deter potential applicants from non-traditional backgrounds.

• Admissions is one of four areas targeted within the Government’s widening participation strategy. Higher education institutions are required to demonstrate that they subscribe to the five principles of a fair admissions system, as outlined within the Schwartz review (2004).

• The Government is committed to improving the parity of vocational and academic qualifications. This is evidenced in its progression strategy, which has been set up to advance vocational and workplace progression into and through higher education. The establishment of Lifelong Learning Networks is a key part of this strategy.

• Higher education institutions receive a widening participation premium to support the success of non-traditional students, though this is deemed to be insufficient to meet the full costs. Proposed changes to the funding of teaching (HEFCE 2005) may lead to enhanced support for the widening participation agenda.

Scotland

• There is a focus on institutional collaboration with four regional fora being established that span further and higher education. Their role has a strategic focus which includes providing co-ordinated actions to widen participation.

• There has been an emphasis on the role of further education colleges as providers of higher education. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework is being used to accumulate and transfer credit across institutions and sectors.

• Student access, retention and success have been promoted through Scottish Funding Council formula-based grants to higher education institutions. These grants aim to support students from neighbourhoods with participation rates of less than half the UK average as well as those with disabilities.

Case studies

Liverpool John Moores University: Compact Partnerships Scheme. The scheme aims to mainstream widening participation activity across the University and meet the needs of non-traditional students through measures such as outreach, inductions, learner support and financial support.

London Metropolitan University (formerly London Guildhall University): Bengali Education Advice Centre. Primarily aimed at enabling people from the local Bangladeshi communities to benefit from HE; also extended to include the local African Caribbean, Turkish and Somali communities. Involves ‘cultural mediation’ between the University and under-represented ethnic minority communities in East London.
Wales

- There are three policy funding initiatives to widen access to higher education in Wales. They are: the widening access premium funding; widening access funding based on higher education institution success in the recruitment of students from lower socio-economic groups; and the Reaching Higher Reaching Wider initiative.
- An A Skills Action Plan was launched for consultation in June 2004 with a view to improving vocational routes into higher education and to support lifelong learning.
- From 2007/08 Welsh higher education institutions will be given the flexibility to charge fees up to £3,000. Welsh domiciled HE students studying in Wales will be eligible for an £1,800 fee grant which offsets entirely the additional fees they would otherwise be charged. A national bursary scheme will be made available.

Northern Ireland

- The Department for Employment and Learning (DELNI) has responsibility for higher education policy.
- There is an Aimhigher roadshow to communicate routes to higher education for young people in Northern Ireland.
- Higher education institutions in Northern Ireland run outreach activities in order to stimulate demand for higher education from under-represented groups.
- Higher education institutions receive a widening access premium to support the retention and success of students from low income families, calculated on the basis of the number of students who do not pay fees.
- Variable fees will be introduced in 2006, and DELNI will have a comparable role to OFFA in England. Higher education institutions will provide access bursaries to students from lower income families and these will be linked to access agreements.

University of Manchester: Targeted Access Scheme. Aims to raise aspirations and increase awareness of further/higher education among disadvantaged young people aged 13-18 in deprived areas of Manchester, and provide them with learning opportunities.

Middlesex University: Compact and Progression Agreement. Aims to improve the participation of disadvantaged young people in deprived areas of North London by preparing them for higher education. The University’s portfolio entry scheme seeks to recognise the ability, talent and motivation needed to progress to higher education.
Participation statistics

An analysis of UCAS data from 2000 to 2004 considers the application and acceptance of full-time students from different backgrounds to higher education in the UK. It also considers institution type and discipline area.

- **Socio-economic status (SES):** There has been little change in applications over the past five years, but applicants from the highest socio-economic groups (SEGs) have increased their share of applications to the more selective institutions. All student groups have the highest chance of a successful application at post-1992 institutions. The second most successful application route for students from higher SEGs is at the more selective institutions, while for those from low SEGs it is at post-1992 institutions.

- **Ethnicity:** Many ethnic groups continue to be over-represented in higher education compared to their population share. Participation by black Africans has increased at the greatest rate during this period. Only females from a black Caribbean ethnic background exhibit greater participation rates than their male counterparts in both 2000 and 2004.

- **Age and gender by socio-economic status:** Younger students are more likely to be from high SEGs, while older students are more likely to be from low SEGs. A greater proportion of males from the high SEGs in the two youngest age groups compared to females are accepted to higher education.

- **School type by gender and socio-economic status:** Overall more women are accepted to higher education than men, but within the independent sector the reverse is true. There has been an increase in acceptances to higher education by students from low SEGs from the independent sector. In 2004 a greater proportion of males compared to females from a high SEG are accepted from a comprehensive school, but from lower SEGs more females are accepted.

- **Tariff scores, socio-economic status and destination:** The possession of a good tariff score is no guarantee of acceptance to higher education, nor is high socio-economic status.

- **Region of domicile:** There is little difference in applications to higher education by SEG between regions. Regional patterns of application relating to ethnic minorities reflect population trends.

- **Socio-economic status and selected subject groups:** There are stark differences between the SES of acceptances between different subject areas. Medicine and Dentistry have high rates of acceptances from the high SEGs and low rates from the low SEGs. Education has a much flatter spread across the SEGs. In all subject areas there has been a slight decrease in the percentage accepted for those classified as members of the ‘higher managerial’ SEG. In contrast, with the slight exception of Engineering subjects, those from ‘semi-routine’ and also from ‘small employers’ (both low SEGs) have shown an increase in the percentage of acceptances.

- **Age, gender and selected subject groups:** Gender differences for Engineering and Physics are apparent across the age bands. This suggests that efforts to persuade females to enter these subject areas have had little effect.
Business and Administration and Education are the most popular with older women, while older males are applying in greater numbers to enter the Engineering and Business and Administration subject groups.

- **Ethnicity and selected subject groups:** There is a noticeable increase in the percentage of successful applicants to Medicine and Dentistry and Engineering from an Asian/Indian background, and to a lesser extent from a Chinese background when compared with population and applicant share. The same group is under-represented in subject groups relating to Physics and Education. For black African students popular and successful destinations are Engineering and Business, for both males and females. There is over-representation of a number of ethnic groups in Medicine and Dentistry. There is a relative lack of interest amongst almost all ethnic groups in participation in Education.

- **Tariff scores for selected subjects:** The tariff score has an important role in acceptance to the selected subject groups, and those from a low SEG have lower tariff scores overall. Therefore they are not applying to and being accepted into the more high demand disciplines or subjects (for example Medicine and Dentistry) that require higher entry scores.

- **School type and selected subject groups:** Those from a grammar or independent school are considerably over-represented in successful applicants to Medicine and Dentistry and under-represented in Education and to a much lesser extent Business and Administration courses. The converse is true for students from lower SEGs.
Activities to widen participation

Range of activities

The research survey identifies that the higher education sector is engaged in activities to widen participation in four broad areas: pre-entry; access and admissions; retention and success; and enhancing employability. Eighty-seven per cent of activities are focused on the pre-entry, access and admissions stages. Particularly popular activities are school outreach, visits to universities and colleges, summer schools, bridging programmes and additional access and admissions support. Many activities utilise existing higher education students; however approaches regarding reward and recognition for their involvement vary widely.

Targeting

Targeting has improved since the previous two Universities UK/SCOP reports were published, but implementation difficulties remain. All of the initiatives submitted to the study had at least one clearly defined target group, and the primary target group for the majority of activities can be broadly defined as ‘social class’. Targeting schools is widely used in lieu of data about the socio-economic status of pupils, but this approach does not guarantee reaching the intended students. Other under-represented groups, such as looked after young people, are being targeted too, and there is greater recognition of multiple disadvantage. Targeting of students within higher education is not widespread; approaches used include identifying students pre-entry and teaching them separately or targeting them for additional support, and identifying students post-entry and providing additional support where necessary.

Widening participation and the student lifecycle

Widening participation interventions are being delivered through aspiration and awareness raising; improving attainment; application support and amended admissions procedures; higher education preparation and transition; induction and social integration; learning, teaching and curriculum development; student support; and employability and progression.

Important developments include: working with pupils in primary schools, the greater involvement of parents/carers, initiatives to promote improved access to selective institutions and disciplines, and a greater focus on the transition phase and the first year experience in recognition of the importance of retention alongside wider access.

Areas identified for improvement include: a broadening of success measures and recognition of attainment in schools, increased vocational routes into higher education and easier progression from vocational programmes into honours degrees, access to financial support information (particularly in the light of forthcoming student funding changes in England), and earlier integration of high quality careers education during a student’s period of study.
Aspiration raising and provision of information. The main approaches used are: student mentors, ambassadors and role models delivering activities in schools, campus visits and taster sessions and summer schools, usually with a residential element. Activities are engaging younger children and involving parents. Parental involvement includes raising their awareness of higher education, reassuring them about the process, engaging non-graduates parents in the higher education process and involving them in learning programmes.

Improving attainment in schools and colleges. This is necessary to increase the supply of qualified entrants to higher education. Four approaches to improving attainment can be found within the case studies: supplementing learning; extending learning; accrediting prior experiences; and supporting students to achieve alternative qualifications or to enter through other routes.

Application and admissions. A number of programmes support students to make their applications to higher education, involving both practical assistance and developing confidence. With regard to admissions procedures; institutions have been involved in reviewing their policies, offering dispensation for targeted students and using alternative entry criteria, mainstreaming good practice and providing staff training.

There is evidence of a growth in activity to increase access for students from lower socio-economic groups into selecting institutions and disciplines. But there is limited evidence of how students with vocational qualifications are being supported into and through higher education. Encouraging examples of how these students are being supported include qualifications equivalence mapping to assist admissions staff, staff development to improve knowledge of vocational qualifications, and mainstreaming existing projects for vocational learners. Young vocational learners however remain under-supported, and progression from vocational sub-degrees to honours programmes is not well developed.

Preparation, transition and induction. Widening participation interventions are using pre- and post-entry activities to prepare students successfully to make the transition into higher education. Interventions include pre-entry information provision and skill development, pre-entry higher education learning and extended pre and post-entry induction.
Learning, teaching and curricular development. There are examples of developments in relation to delivery, assessment, academic support and curriculum content. Academic support is being delivered via drop-in facilities, integrated into induction, e-learning, personal development planning and personal tutoring. Curriculum development includes the creation of new ‘products’, such as foundation degrees, the introduction of new discipline areas and the development of the existing curriculum. The weight of intervention is on the provision of additional learning support, rather than more embedded change.

Social integration. Social integration can be promoted through learning and teaching practices, social spaces and accommodation and involvement in social activities. There are some interesting examples relating to social integration from the case study institutions.

Student services and support. Much student support is not targeted as specific groups, but intended to benefit all students. Widening participation work is however informing student support in some instances. It is anticipated that there will be an increase in the provision of finance-related support with the introduction of variable fees in 2006.

Employability and progression. Interventions designed to build commitment to the higher education process as a means of achieving career goals, and equipping students with the skills to progress into employment or further learning on completion of their higher education study are being integrated into outreach and induction activities. Students are also employed in widening participation initiatives, which assists them to develop transferable skills.

Coherence and complementarity

Many of the interventions and activities discussed above target a specific group, address a narrow range of issues, or operate at a specific stage of the student lifecycle. To create wider access and continuous support for all students, throughout the student lifecycle, projects and initiatives, policies and approaches need to be linked together.

- There has been a shift away from stand-alone activities and one-off projects towards developing co-ordinated and cumulative suites of activities or widening participation programmes, for younger pupils through to Year 12 and 13.
- There are examples of institutions striving to integrate widening participation at an institutional level, but these need to be extended.
Strategic organisation and management of widening participation

Widening participation policy and purpose

Widening participation can be undertaken in response to different policies and for different purposes.

- **Altruism versus recruitment.** Some widening participation activities are intended to increase participation by students from under-represented groups in higher education per se, others are intended to boost recruitment to a particular institution.

- **Changing institutions or changing students.** In institutions that have engaged with widening participation to boost recruitment, there tends to be a higher level of investment and embedding of activities as part of a long-term strategy. On the other hand, more altruistic activities, intended to broaden participation per se, are often funding dependent and may not be sustainable. These interventions are less likely to result in far-reaching institutional change.

- **Internal or external collaboration.** Widening participation requires internal and external collaboration. The majority of higher education institutions are involved in external partnership activities although there are differences in the levels of integration and the divisions between internal and external activities.

- **Research or funding driven approach.** There is growing recognition of the value of evidence-informed practice in designing widening participation initiatives. Higher education institutions are developing the research capacity of widening participation staff, and increasing the relevance of academic research.

Organisational structures

The purpose of widening participation is likely to inform the organisational structure and leadership of an institution.

- **Leadership.** The involvement of senior management is key to the success of widening participation. It facilitates the decision-making process and promotes an integrated approach to widening participation across the institution. Effective leadership is influenced by who is involved, how they are involved, what else they have responsibility for and whether they are supported by other senior managers.

Institutional structures reflect widening participation priorities and shape future possibilities. There are two key structures – dispersed and centralised:

- In a dispersed organisational structure each faculty and service has responsibility for widening participation in addition to their own core work. This promotes the integration of widening participation into all of the institution’s activities. If the process is not managed there may be little connection between different activities. A hybrid model: “dispersed with centralised co-ordination” can avoid this problem.

- In a centralised organisational structure the emphasis is on a “centre for widening participation” that co-ordinates and promotes widening participation across the institution. This provides a focus for widening participation, but it can mean that only the centre for widening participation takes responsibility for this area. A variant of this is a faculty-based model, where
the locus for widening participation is co-located in a faculty or school. This shifts its position from the centre to a more lateral position and connects it with academics rather than only administrative staff.

External collaborative structures differ according to involvement and purpose. Woodrow’s analysis (2002) of partnership arrangements is a useful way of categorising and describing external partnership organisation.

- Partnerships between a single higher education institution and other non-higher education partners tend to have a hierarchical ‘pyramid’ structure with the higher education institution at the top, and others feeding into it and supporting the supply chain.
- Partnerships bringing together several higher education institutions tend to opt for a more lateral model, which can be viewed as a ‘spider’. The emphasis is on increasing widening participation to the sector, rather than recruiting students to individual institutions.
- Discipline-based collaborations can link schools at one end with employers at the other, via a ‘bridge’. The aim is to improve the supply of qualified employees, in response to local labour market needs, whilst preserving higher education institution autonomy.

Structural flexibility and change

Higher education institutions are introducing structural changes to make their provision more accessible to students who wish to combine study with other commitments. Significant developments include the provision of a new extended degree programme, part-time study opportunities, e-learning, and more flexible academic timetables. But there is still further scope for substantial structural change to increase the flexibility of higher education courses to meet the needs of diverse learning groups.

An integrated approach to widening participation

‘Strategic integration’, particularly by developing links between widening participation and learning and teaching policies, is facilitated by the overall leadership of widening participation and related areas, involvement of staff from across the institution, shared responsibility and accountability, and naming widening participation activities in institutional policies. ‘Joined-up practice’ relies on effective communication with and involvement of staff across the institution. Ways of promoting this include explicitly valuing diversity in the mission, devolving widening participation responsibilities across the institution, providing financial incentives to staff and departments, disseminating good news stories, creating personal links across the institution and through staff development. The latter includes staff induction, postgraduate certificate for new staff, sharing good practice and continuing professional development.

External partnerships

External partnerships are a valuable feature of the widening participation agenda. Partners have a number of different roles, including providing access to funding, referring young people or schools to the intervention, advising the project through a steering committee, supporting activities and sharing provision. Liaising with schools can be challenging and the attitude of head teachers and

class teachers is the key to success in this area. Interventions have benefited from having a designated person with whom to liaise. There is concern about the number of initiatives targeted at schools in disadvantaged areas. A co-ordinated partnership approach to working with schools helps to avoid competition and duplication.

Sustainability

Key elements of sustainability are finance, staffing and organisational learning.

- **Financial sustainability.** The majority of widening participation interventions submitted to this study are subsidised by external project funds which can create problems for long-term sustainability, particularly when used to fund core activities. Incorporating widening participation interventions into institutional strategies has meant greater sustainability.

- **Staffing sustainability.** The costs associated with staffing widening participation initiatives can impact on sustainability. The nature of project funding often means that staff are employed on short-term contracts which leads to the risk of losing organisational learning when staff leave at the end of a funding period.

- **Organisational learning.** The move away from project-based initiatives has provided greater opportunities for organisational learning across institutions. This is particularly evident where interventions have been in operation for a number of years. Interventions have contributed towards capacity building of staff who are directly involved in the project and also those across the institution. There is also evidence of widening participation activities enhancing current students’ learning experiences. Organisational learning is further supported by widening participation research by practitioners and academic staff.

Monitoring and evaluation

The introduction of widening participation premia has improved institutional monitoring arrangements. The monitoring of the numbers of students involved in projects is mostly routine, but there is growing recognition of the value of collecting information about processes to inform the development of interventions. Monitoring data are often not differentiated by type of student, and tracking students into and through higher education remains a difficulty for many interventions. There is a fundamental difficulty relating to measuring impact, even if the tracking data are available. There are however examples from the case studies of how this issue is being tackled.

Barriers to evaluation include:

- Tracking and impact measurement are difficult, and staff often do not have the skills or knowledge to implement suitable systems.
- There is a reluctance to collect information about the backgrounds of students.
- Short-term projects have very limited funding for monitoring and evaluation.
- There are concerns about data protection issues.
Conclusions and implications

This study demonstrates commitment to widening access and student success and identifies many strengths of the higher education sector across the UK. In addition, there are challenges and areas for further development.

Transition

There is greater awareness of the importance of transition and the first year experience and associated impact on retention and success. In particular, there is more emphasis on developing students’ understanding and expectations about higher education prior to entry. This process needs to be extended into higher education, especially by means of induction.

Institutional development

To support students during their studies some degree of institutional change is required. There is institutional commitment to widening participation, but further integration throughout the institution is still needed in some instances. The widening participation premium has assisted the integration of widening participation. For example, there is increased academic support for non-traditional students in all higher education institutions and some changes to the mainstream curriculum. Institutional development requires recognition of the benefits of widening participation for both the student body as a whole and the institution itself. This in turn enhances the sustainability of interventions.

Targeting

There is greater awareness of the need to target students as part of widening access initiatives. But the target groups need to be more clearly defined in a way that can be operationalised. Selection should ensure that students who would not otherwise have entered higher education are reached. There could be more widening participation initiatives targeted at work-based learners.

Outreach

There is a large amount of outreach activity taking place, which includes increased work with primary school pupils and greater involvement of parents. Effective strategies have been developed to promote access to the more selective institutions and disciplines. Outreach activities are being combined to create outreach programmes, offering sustained engagement with pupils.

Reaching beyond the academically qualified cohort

The participation rate for young students in higher education with two or more A-levels or Highers is approaching 100%. Work needs to be extended to increase the number of pupils achieving five or more GCSEs or equivalent and to develop vocational qualifications and routes into higher education at different levels. This needs to be coupled with more structural flexibility to facilitate part-time and distance learning.

University of Huddersfield: Design Your Future. The project aims to promote design courses and careers, build student confidence and attract students from lower socio-economic groups into higher education and involves a number of activities conducted in the University and in community settings. The ‘Maths Bridging Course for Engineering’ aims to facilitate entry to higher education courses with a substantial or required maths element, including Engineering, Computing, Education and Mathematics, via a computer-based maths course which runs for seven weeks over the summer.

University of Hull: HEAdFurther. Aims to encourage looked after children to improve their attainment at secondary school level and to aspire to further/higher education. The scheme involves close collaboration with local authority departments and centres around the provision of a
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summer school and long-term one-to-one mentoring with University of Hull students.

Liverpool Hope University: Black Science Summer School. A five-day residential summer school which aims to raise the educational aspirations of Year 11 and 12 pupils from Afro-Caribbean backgrounds, increase their experience of higher education, improve skills in physical science and raise awareness of higher education opportunities in this subject area. The ‘Stepping Stones Residential Project’ is a three-day residential programme which aims to raise the educational aspirations of Year 10-12 pupils with disabilities/special needs and increase their knowledge of the higher education experience.

Loughborough University: Women into Engineering. Aims to encourage more young females, particularly from lower social economic groups, to consider studying Engineering.

Collaboration

There are a greater number of collaborations with a wider range of external partners including further education colleges, schools, other higher education institutions, local education authorities, professional bodies, businesses and community groups. Collaboration has proved to be an effective way of widening access to higher education and can provide access to sources of additional funding and resources.

Monitoring, evaluation and research

There is a good level of routine monitoring of interventions, increased use of pilots and learning from previous widening participation projects, to expand initiatives and influence institutions more broadly. This is supported by more research about widening participation and developmental evaluation about interventions. Tracking students into, and through, higher education remains challenging. This is hampered by the lack of national data to allow tracking and comparison with non-participants. A second challenge is measuring the impact of widening participation. Effective techniques need to be developed, staff capacity needs to be built and funding made available for impact evaluation.
Recommendations

Widening participation practitioners

1. Review target groups to ensure they are: under-represented; clearly defined; and can be identified.

2. Look for a balance between long-term widening participation strategies and increasing the number of under-represented students entering higher education now, including working with primary schools and parents, and improving attainment at GCSE level or equivalent.

3. Review the contents of outreach and induction activities to include more information about vocational routes into higher education, changes to student finance and careers education.

4. Include current higher education students in widening participation activities and review the methods of recognition and reward to ensure all students, including those from low income backgrounds, can participate.

5. Develop more sophisticated and longer-term monitoring and tracking of students’ progress into and through higher education, and collaborate with researchers and other practitioners to develop ways to evaluate the impact of widening participation initiatives.

Higher education institutions

1. Ensure widening participation work is benefiting institutions as well as the students and that there is an equal balance between outreach activity and action within the institution. This could include developing links between widening participation and student recruitment and admissions and involving staff from across the institution, including the students’ union.

2. Look for ways to build widening participation objectives into other institutional strategies, policies and developments to enable all staff to participate. This could include developing learning, teaching and curricula that respond to, and benefit from, greater student diversity and staff development across the institution.

3. Consider introducing greater flexibility to offer alternative modes of study. Develop policy, practice and programmes to support access to higher education for students with vocational qualifications.

4. Find effective ways of ensuring all students benefit from the additional support they require.

5. Ensure the widening participation premium is used to support widening participation explicitly and increase the sustainability of interventions.

6. Look for ways to further support staff to deliver widening participation, by aiming to move to permanent contracts and recognising their skills to avoid the loss of expertise.

and assist in the retention of female engineers within the industry.

**Open University in the East Midlands: Understanding and Increasing Diversity: Developing the Young Applicants in School Scheme Project.** Aims to encourage ethnic minorities to study with the Open University. Through this initiative young people gain from an early experience of higher education by studying short Open University science courses alongside A/S level modules in school.

**University of Wales, Bangor: Talent Opportunities Programme.** A programme of activities for Years 9-11 aimed at improving access to higher education for students in schools in disadvantaged catchment areas in North Wales.
Support bodies
Including the Higher Education Academy, Sector Skills Council Lifelong Learning UK, national widening participation co-ordination team, and the Quality Assurance Agency.

1. Identify and promote the advantages of widening participation and support and encourage higher education institutions to change institutional policies and practices to enable them to benefit from a more diverse student body. This should include promoting a student lifecycle approach to widening participation.

2. Promote and support the development of vocational qualifications and routes into and through higher education.

3. Recognise the skills of staff involved in widening participation and student support and develop the widening participation knowledge and capacity of staff in schools and colleges.

Policy makers and Funding Councils

1. Identify and clarify all under-represented groups: provide definitions and share existing information to underpin policy development.

2. Promote the parity of vocational qualifications, encourage higher education institutions to develop vocational routes into and through higher education, and provide on-going support to students on these pathways.

3. Promote widening participation throughout the student lifecycle and find policy incentives to support higher education institutions to do this.

4. Review the implications for widening participation of institutional and student funding for part-time study.

5. Review whether the widening participation premium is sufficient to meet the full costs of embedding widening participation within higher education institutions.

6. Instigate and support the development of tools to measure the impact of widening participation.

7. Improve the quality of data available to inform widening participation. Consider the value of student identifiers that enable tracking from school through higher education and beyond and/or a single database of all school leavers which is compatible with UCAS and HESA data. Try to avoid changing categories as this makes longitudinal analysis difficult.

Future research

1. Commission similar studies in the future (eg, 2008) to add to this longitudinal review of the sector’s response to widening participation and to identify emerging good practice. This should be extended to include the further education sector; and to include older students and other categories of under-represented groups.

2. Develop methodologies and tools for evaluating the impact of widening participation at the level of interventions, programmes, institutions and partnerships.
Pictures from: the University of Dundee, the University of Glamorgan, the University of Huddersfield, the University of Newcastle, the Open University, the University of Wales, Bangor.