

**Research Conference: Promoting Equity in Higher
Education**

27 -28 January 2010, Eastwood Hall, Nottingham

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

Day one: 11.05 – 12.30

Session type: Paper presentations

Room: Lawrence

Theme: Access

**Equity and the ‘Fair Admissions’ Practices of Leading HEIs: Mapping the
Terrain**

Presenter: Julian Skyrme, University of Manchester

A burgeoning policy and research literature now exists with respect to widening participation in higher education. Far less is understood about the policies and practices of higher education institutions (HEIs) attempting to advance equity within the more specific arena of ‘fair admissions’. Examining the UK’s most selective HEIs, a new mapping framework will be presented to better understand and explain the different ‘positions’ taken by HEIs, particularly with regard to the use of socially contextual data in decision-making. Case-study evidence from one HEI is then presented to demonstrate how equity should be understood as a plural, multi-levelled and context-specific concept.

A brief overview of the key national policy context with respect to ‘fair admissions’ will set the scene through the presentation of ‘iconic statements’ within key documents. Using my own Doctoral research, a visual mapping framework will be presented and the audience invited to place different HEI policy-positions within this as a demonstration of its utility. The factors impacting on the pursuit of equity in HE will then be brought to life through the presentation of case-study data, using quotations from one Director of Admissions. Finally, key questions will be suggested to aid discussion for the remaining ten minutes.

On Establishing a Modus Vivendi: the Exercise of Agency in Decisions to Participate or Not Participate in Higher Education

Presenter: Peter Kahn, University of Liverpool

It is becoming increasingly clear that the notion of 'removing barriers' offers a limited foundation for widening participation to higher education. Drawing on realist social theory, we consider how decisions to participate or not participate form part of a process to establish a modus vivendi or 'way of life' for oneself. We explore factors that affect how individuals pursue courses of action around entry into potentially alien educational contexts. Our analysis suggests that interventions designed to widen participation should take account of different modes of reflexive deliberation, underpinning social and cultural structures, and a range of notions of human flourishing.

The presentation will be based on a paper recently accepted for publication in the London Review of Education. Copies of the paper will be made available to the audience so that the argument may be absorbed more fully after the session. Given this, the session will allow at least 15 minutes for debate around key ideas within the paper, with the presenter seeking particularly to encourage contributions to the debate that relate both to the theoretical adequacy of the paper's main argument and the implications for policy and practice to promote equity.

Women in Engineering: Approaches to Inclusion and Engineering Curriculum Development

Presenter: Sarah Barnard, Loughborough University

Despite sustained efforts to promote engineering careers to young women it remains the most male dominated academic discipline. This paper will provide an overview of UK data and research on women in engineering higher education, within the context of Europe. Reporting on preliminary findings of a EU-funded project – 'Higher Education Leading to Engineering and Scientific Careers' – we will discuss how gender inclusion is being addressed in the UK alongside engineering curriculum development and innovation, and how engineering education research is framed in economic or utilitarian, rather than gender-equality, terms. We suggest that the current climate of curriculum innovation is an ideal time to emphasise the importance of gender inclusivity in what is traditionally a male subject area in order to promote a culture of equality and inclusion in engineering higher education.

Day one: 11.05 – 12.30

Session type: Paper presentations

Room: Barber

Theme: Student Engagement

Higher Education Students and Ethnicity: Triangulation of Qualitative and Quantitative Funded Research Programmes

Presenter: Catherine Lido, Thames Valley University and Jessica Morgan, University of Greenwich

Authors: Mary Stuart, Kingston University; Catherine Lido, Thames Valley University; Jessica Morgan, University of Greenwich

There is evidence that minority ethnic students face barriers to experience, progression and outcomes in higher education. Quantitative and qualitative evidence revealed factors which affect a positive student experience and enable successful outcomes for diverse students in the UK. Factors discussed include academic self-esteem, peer support, belonging and identification with the university, well-being, satisfaction and outcome marks. A large-scale survey study revealed certain minority ethnic groups reported higher academic self-esteem, stronger positive identification with their university and a stronger sense of institutional belonging than their white counterparts, however they also reported lower levels of peer support, social engagement and subjective well-being (interactions with gender, class and disability are considered). Findings were triangulated via educational life-histories conducted with Widening Participation students.

Changing Practices- Co-creating Solutions: Moving Towards a More Democratic Partnership Approach within the Equality Agenda in Higher Education

Presenter: Terry Finnigan, London College of Fashion

This paper discusses the impact of two innovative projects involving alumni from diverse backgrounds who were asked to reflect on their experiences at university and then given the opportunity to feed this back to a wider cohort. They were encouraged to consider how their own experience could be improved and have the opportunity to discuss possible solutions with new students and staff with a view to influence changes in curriculum practices and modes of delivery.

These two interventions have been a very powerful way to influence and promote the equality agenda at the institution. Stuart (2000) talks about encouraging active participation from a wide range of the student community, which will start to redefine the parameters of the Academy itself. Burke (2002) also points out that effective widening participation depends on explicitly addressing the experiences, practices and meaning of students themselves.

Identifying Barriers to and providing Support for Students' Self-Engaged Learning: a Study of Evidence-Informed Practice in a Year 2 Childhood Studies Module

Presenter: Jiamei Xiao, University of Huddersfield

Achieving self-engagement on the part of students is of particular relevance in the context of widening participation. But what are the conditions for self-engagement? The present paper begins by engaging the audience with some challenging questions linked to classroom scenarios. How comfortable are you to admit your own preconceptions and taken-for-granted assumptions and share critical incidents with students? What barriers prevent you from engaging students' reflective learning at a personal level? After exploring potential barriers to self-engagement on the part of both students and teachers, section two introduces the teaching and learning practices involved in a Year 2 BA Childhood Studies module: Cultural Diversity and Inclusive Education. Students are encouraged to participate in an inclusive learning experience that features critical thinking, reflection and small-scale investigation. A 'learning together' approach is modelled through the tutor's self-engagement. In combination with developing self-awareness and building self-efficacy beliefs, these processes have proved conducive to student engagement, achievement and progression. The third section draws on evidence from students' reflective writing to explore issues of self-engagement and widening participation at the level of student consciousness. The final section discusses self-engagement in the light of the findings and reflects on the implications for teaching and learning.

Day one: 11.05 – 12.30

Session type: Paper presentations

Room: Ambergate

Theme: School Partners

Evaluating Three Models of School–University Partnership at the University of York: Learning Lessons and Planning for the Future

Presenters: Vivien Hendry and Hannah Ainsworth, University of York

Authors: Vivien Hendry, Hannah Ainsworth and Carole Torgerson, Institute for Effective Education, University of York

School-university link programmes contribute to widening access and participation, diversity, raising students' aspirations, and staff development. This paper presents findings from stakeholder interviews and focus groups on the experiences of those involved and the impact of three programmes associated with the University of York, to identify the factors which contribute to or inhibit the success of building links between schools, colleges and HE institutions. The analysis explored programme characteristics including programme aims, activities, and aims of the activities, programme uniqueness, and aspects that did or did not work. Best practice and barriers for school–university link programmes were identified.

The presentation will present the results from three in-depth case-studies to, discuss the potential scope of building links between secondary and tertiary education; show how these programmes aim to contribute to widening participation and access, increasing diversity in tertiary education and promoting social equity through providing opportunities for students from disadvantaged groups; demonstrate factors for best practice and potential barriers to aid programme development for practitioners elsewhere; and present a methodology for how a rigorous and comprehensive evaluation could be conducted to promote best practice for researchers evaluating these types of programmes in the future.

Changing School Culture & Increasing Progression to Higher Education for Under-Represented Groups: the Impact of the Aimhigher Programme

Presenter: Graeme Atherton, University of Westminster

This paper argues that the Aimhigher programme has had a significant impact on the institutional culture of schools in England. Aimhigher is primarily a programme aimed at learners, but its effect is going beyond the participants in its funded activities.

Analysing a survey of 150 schools, interviews/focus groups with 30 staff and case studies of 10 schools in 6 areas of England, shows Aimhigher has acted as a catalyst making progression to Higher Education a far more central concern in the schools in the study. However, the sustainability of these shifts is uncertain & tied up with the uncertain future of widening participation policy.

The presentation will begin by posing a series of challenging questions to the audience. The audience will be asked to consider these questions over the course of the presentation, and they will form the basis for discussion. The questions will include:

Is a partnership framework like Aimhigher needed? Or can HEI led widening participation activity affect school cultural change?

How much of the widening participation policies of HEIs dependent on schools themselves having the ability to invest in such work?

Is 'embedding' of cultural institutional change a myth?

Should 'widening participation' activities be available to all pupils, regardless of background?

What are the implications for Higher Education Institutions of changes in the culture of schools?

What is the relationship between shifts in culture and increased progression to Higher Education?

Day one: 11.05 – 12.30

Session type: Paper presentations

Room: Alfreton

Theme: BME Achievement

Time for Change: Findings from Four Action Orientated Projects to Improve the Progression and Degree Attainment of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Students

Presenter: Christine Broughan, Coventry University

Following our successful application to join the HEA Summit Programme, four projects were funded by Coventry University that involve the development,

implementation and dissemination of new ideas that have the potential to make a significant contribution to the progression and attainment of BME students in Higher Education.

The projects represent diverse approaches to addressing the needs of BME students and we have learnt vital lessons that will inform our practices and policies in the future. The projects span the division between academics, student mentors and professional services staff and offer a more holistic learning experience for students. The projects have adopted a community of practice approach (Wenger, 1998) and we have witnessed growing enthusiasm to make a real difference to the student experience but it is not without its particular difficulties. The projects have identified 'soft' and 'hard' measures in order to evaluate their relative success.

This paper will share the findings of these projects and discuss the barriers and challenges faced when trying to achieve sustainable change across institutions. The session will conclude with a group discussion as to the relative contribution of soft and hard measures of 'success' and their impact on sustained change in vision and strategy.

Evaluated practices to enhance student retention, achievement and progression (e.g. in areas of student support or teaching, learning and assessment) of diverse student groups.

Journeys to Success: an Enquiry into those Factors which Contribute to the Attainment of Black and Minority Ethnic Students in Four Discipline Areas at Roehampton University

Presenters: Jo Peat and Sandra Craig, Roehampton University

This paper forms part of a national project exploring attainment issues for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students across the UK. BME students constitute almost 40% of Roehampton University's undergraduate population. Data indicate that in 2007 - 2008 they were less likely to gain a 1st or 2:1 than their white counterparts. Through appreciative inquiry (AI), we have attempted to identify factors linked to teaching, learning and assessment which have contributed to improving the attainment of students across 4 discipline areas. This will lead to a series of recommendations to policy groups across the university, suggesting ways of enhancing the attainment of these students.

One aspect of our project involved asking groups of BME students to visually represent their ideal university. This could be done purely pictorially, via a visual, annotated map of their learning journey or a mind map. These pictures have provided rich data for analysis, as the students depicted aspects that had not arisen in interviews and questionnaires. We will explore these with the audience, asking them to contribute their understanding and analysis of the pictures to the debate.

Day one: 11.05 – 12.30

Session type: Paper presentations

Room: Chatterley

Theme: Researching Vocational Learning

Foundation Degree Graduates in the South West: Motivations, Concerns and Aspirations

Presenter: Marc Lintern, University of Plymouth

Authors: Marc Lintern, Harriet Dismore and Helen Hicks, University of Plymouth

Foundation degrees are higher education qualifications delivered in further education currently attracting a sharp increase in enrolment. In 2007-08 there were approximately 72,000 students nationally enrolled on foundation degrees and the expectation is that the number will rise to 97,000 by 2010. Generally, these qualifications attract people from a diverse range of backgrounds, particularly those from low participation neighbourhoods, over 21 years old on entry and, in the south west, from rural areas. Students from these type of backgrounds have therefore been linked to Government skills and widening participation agendas.

Data from the Destinations of Leavers in Higher Education (DLHE) survey was used to establish the activities of foundation degree graduates approximately six months after graduation. This was supplemented with additional questionnaires and focus groups examining students' motivations.

Foundation degree students expressed a range of motivations, incentives, commitments and aspirations and were faced with a variety of support mechanisms and hurdles whilst studying. While driven by a general desire for self-improvement, in the main, the aspirations of foundation degree students focused on maximising employment opportunities, changing career direction or enhancing their knowledge and understanding of their current job. The research also explored other areas of students' experiences including their attitudes to the value of their foundation degree, access to and use of careers advice and the perceived benefits of studying for a foundation degree. The findings are compared to reports of 'traditional' students' experiences (e.g. Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; Crozier et al. 2008) before exploring the extent to which the foundation degree route is offering an equitable route to higher education for non-traditional students.

Uncovering Diversity and Widening Participation in Higher Education: How can Work Based Research take us Forward?

Presenter: Geoffrey Elliott, University of Worcester

This paper arises from themes spanning two conferences commissioned by the UK Further Education Research Association, held at Middlesex University Centre for Excellence in Work Based Learning Partnerships on work based learning and research in the post-compulsory education sector. In it, I explore the potential contribution of collaboration in work based research to creating new knowledge about diversity and equity in higher education: specifically how WBR can ensure that potentially marginalised and powerless individuals and groups can make their voice and bring their concerns to academic research, and the safeguards that need to be built into research methodology to ensure that this happens without distortion by the academy. The notion of researchers' 'ethic of care' is introduced and applied to the work based research setting. A typology of collaborative research is offered and guidelines are given for practitioner researchers wishing to investigate their own and colleagues' practice in enhancing diversity and widening participation.

Widening Participation – Why Bother?

Presenters: Jacinta Elliott, Elliott Walker Consultancy and Sunita Morris, Leeds Metropolitan University

Developmental evaluation research conducted in faculties of health in 10 universities in Yorkshire and the Humber during 2008-2009 revealed both a heavy reliance on traditional methods of recruitment and selection, and an apparent disconnect between admissions processes and widening participation initiatives in the majority of cases. There was a notable lack of dialogue between admissions staff and widening participation activists. Following an initial survey 5 sites were chosen for evaluation projects with the intention of bringing widening participation and admissions processes together through focusing on alternatives to conventional selection methods. This project is still in progress.

Research into the interactions between admissions departments and widening participation 'activists' in the health faculties of the ten universities in Yorkshire and the Humber. This was initially done by internet searches, phone conversations, email exchanges and literature searches. Alongside this a questionnaire was circulated to establish what selection methods were in use for entry to health professional education courses.

In addition the YAHODHPEN (Yorkshire and the Humber Opening Doors into Professional Healthcare Education) network membership were consulted. Five universities were selected for developmental evaluation. The researcher visited groups of staff leading on both WP and admissions in each of the universities and

they explored the current levels of interaction between admissions depts. and widening participation leads and looked at possible ways of making these more dynamic and developmental. This is one strand of a bigger project which is on-going with a projected completion date in the early summer of 2010.

Day one: 14.00 – 15.00

Session type: Workshop

Room: Lawrence

Promoting Inclusive Cultures in Higher Education

Presenter: Helen May, Higher Education Academy

This session will introduce delegates to the key findings and conclusions of a study undertaken as part of the Academy's facilitative change programme 'Developing and Embedding Inclusive Policy and Practice'. The programme involved ten institutional teams and offered a framework to facilitate and support them in embedding inclusive policies and/or practices to enhance the learning experience of students from under-represented groups. Over the course of the programme the Academy conducted research to explore the teams' experience of developing and embedding an aspect of inclusion related to disability equality and/or widening participation. Participants in the workshop will be invited to examine the implications for inclusive policy and practice that emerged from the study and to discuss how the recommendations might be applied to various stakeholder groups within their own institutions. The final report is being made available to the sector in time for the conference.

Day one: 14:00 - 15:00

Session type: Workshop

Room: Barber

Triumph against Adversity: How 'Access to Social Work' Students in Further Education Colleges Exert Individual Agency and Overcome Structural Barriers to Gain Entry to Higher Education

Presenter: Jean Dillon, Middlesex University

Based upon research undertaken by the author and her professional concerns as a Senior Lecturer in Social Work at a post-1992 university in the South East of England, this paper explores an aspect of post-compulsory education where challenges and barriers to higher education entry may be experienced; namely, for black minority ethnic students enrolled on further education 'Access to Social Work' courses in England. Underpinned by principles of social justice, Access to Higher Education courses endeavour to promote widening participation to students who are generally from less privileged social backgrounds and who have historically been under-represented in higher education.

Drawing upon theoretical ideas relating to social reproduction, critical race theory, feminist theory and life span development principles, the paper examines the education and career choices of 'Access to Social Work' students, exploring whether their choices are influenced by any key 'turning points' linked to structure and agency factors. The paper also identifies whether these students' ambitions are being thwarted by more stringent entry requirements for social work education introduced in 2003, and the increased emphasis by Government on basic skills development. Finally, it illustrates how individual agency is exerted to overcome structural barriers to gain entry to higher education.

Day one: 14.00 - 15.00

Session type: Workshop

Room: Ambergate

Finding the 'Right' People. Filling the Gaps in the Social Class Profile of HE Applicants

Presenters: Susan Hatt and Neil Harrison, University of the West of England

The overarching aim of the workshop will be to explore the question of social class measurement in the context of widening participation. Three specific questions will be addressed: How helpful are geo-demographic proxies (e.g. Index of Multiple Deprivation) for locating socio-economic groups? How accessible and reliable is socio-economic data gathered from young people? Do the socio-economic categories used by policy makers, practitioners and others usefully reflect the purposes of widening participation? The workshop will aim to draw on the real-life experience of practitioners in the audience, coupled with the presentation of recent research in the field.

Day one: 14.00 - 15.00

Session type: Workshop

Room: Alfreton

Diversity, Achievement and Success in Higher Education

Presenter: Kate Kirk, Manchester Metropolitan University

'DIVERSITY AND ACHIEVEMENT: HOW NON-TRADITIONAL ENTRY STUDENTS SUCCEED IN HIGHER EDUCATION', is a NTF research project, involving a series of longitudinal studies with non-traditional entry undergraduate students in HE in the UK and Australia.

A participatory, dialogical and critically reflective research methodology has captured the voices of students as they progress towards graduation. Findings provide information on pathways and transition to HE, how sources of support are accessed and utilised and strategies adopted to manage life and learning in order to succeed.

The key message of this paper is that insight gained from this research can influence the creation of inclusive learning, teaching and assessment strategies.

Material from research participants' 'life and learning' narratives will be shared in order to reach an understanding of the experience of non-traditional entry students in the transition to HE and during the early stages of undergraduate study.

The workshop will provide the opportunity for delegates to engage in a creative and practical activity designing inclusive learning, teaching and assessment activities for transition to, and induction into, HE.

Day one: 14.00 - 15.00

Session Type: Workshop

Room: Chatterley

Preparing Diverse Students for Success

Presenter: Grace Wong Sneddon, University of Victoria

The workshop will focus on the development and application of a student success framework to support diverse students based on the work of Dr. George Kuh who developed the Inventory for Student Engagement and Success (ISES). With an eye to those groups currently under-represented, we will use the framework to examine students' needs in terms of their preparation for post secondary, their exploration of the educational opportunities in the institution and the establishment of the goals and values they desire at completion. The participants will use the model to explore how an institution can examine, assess and develop the conditions to support this process.

In small groups, using the mission statements of their institutions, participants will formulate and share some of the implicit goals and aspirations expected of their students at completion. After a discussion of their institution's definition of student experience, student engagement and student success, they will use these constructs of the model to examine the interaction of antecedents and consequences particularly in terms of the role an enacted mission makes as an intentional and explicit commitment to all students related to graduation rates, persistence and student engagement. The intent of these interactive discussions is to model capacity building for participants to take back and use in their institutions.

Day one: 15.30 – 16.30

Session type: Workshop

Room: Lawrence

Social Class and Higher Education: What the Research Tells Us....

Presenter: Jacqueline Stevenson, Leeds Metropolitan University

The Academy continues to commission and publish research syntheses which are made available to the sector through its EvidenceNet service (<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/evidencenet>). Each one in the series identifies significant research on a particular topic, presents a summary of key reports, synthesises the findings from these reports together with those from the wider literature on the topic, and explores the implications for stakeholders.

This workshop will focus on the findings of a synthesis of the literature on the role of social class in the access, participation, retention and success of students in higher education. Participants will be invited to engage with the findings and examine the implications of the key messages for different stakeholder groups in their own institution. The session is being led by the author of the synthesis which is due for publication in Spring 2010.

Day one: 15.30 – 16.30

Session type: Workshop

Room: Barber

The Contribution of Flexible and Lifelong Learning to Widening Participation: What the Research Tells Us

Presenter: Muir Houston, University of Glasgow

The Academy continues to commission and publish research syntheses which are made available to the sector through its EvidenceNet service (<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/evidencenet>). Each one in the series identifies significant research on a particular topic, presents a summary of key reports, synthesises the findings from these reports together with those from the wider literature on the topic, and explores the implications for stakeholders.

This workshop will focus on the findings of a synthesis of key reports and literature in the area of flexible learning. This includes findings on the contribution of flexible learning to improving access for under-represented groups (lower socio-economic groups and disabled in particular) and the contribution of different types of flexible/lifelong learning to the experience and success of those students within and beyond higher education. Participants will be invited to engage with the findings and examine the implications of the key messages for different stakeholder groups in their own institution. The session is being led by one of the authors of the synthesis which is due for publication in Spring 2010.

Day one: 15.30 - 16.30

Session type: Workshop

Room: Ambergate

Developing Your Diversity Research: Four Case Examples of Practice

Presenter: Philip Frame, Middlesex University Business School

This workshop focuses on designing and implementing research into student diversity. It was undertaken to evaluate our practice of developing productive diversity management capabilities, or the ability to work effectively with difference, amongst our students. Four case examples are presented, which illuminate four different research methods. These can broadly be characterised as either “in module”, or “naturalistic”, where an integral part of the module was the production of data and “out module”, that is, using research instruments such as questionnaires. Which, though, is appropriate to your context and what are the practicalities of implementation? An informed commitment to take action is the anticipated outcome of this workshop.

You will be actively involved by sharing: your objectives, your definitions of diversity and your motivations for undertaking such research, as well as reviewing the methods presented in the light of your own aims and circumstances. In identifying your research opportunities, you will be invited to explore questions about: focus, students, staff or both; the forum chosen for your research, naturalistic or contrived; and what may facilitate or inhibit your proposed activities. The workshop will conclude with a role play exercise concerning intercultural miscommunication and the significance of this when interpreting diversity data.

Day one: 15.30 - 16.30

Session type: Workshop

Room: Alfreton

Recycling for Sustainability in WP: ‘Greening’ the Development of Research Capacity

Presenters: Liz Marr and John Rose-Adams, Open University

Authors: Liz Marr, John Rose-Adams, Alice Peasgood, Jonathan Hughes, Open University

This workshop draws on work currently being undertaken in CWP to propose a methodology for ‘follow-on research’ in WP which brings together two recognisable but often distinct strands of research activity- micro-level practitioner research and evaluation (measuring impact, identifying what works etc) and macro-level theorising around over-arching themes (social class, gender, ethnicity etc.) - to shape and influence higher level policy decisions. It pulls together findings from a number of seemingly disparate research reports and describes a process for ‘scaling’ and locating in a theoretical context. Examples will include ICT and accessibility, engaging young people and community aspirations.

Workshop participants will be provided with sample findings from some projects and asked to explore, in small groups, how these might be categorised, what theoretical frameworks they might apply and what policy recommendations might emerge from their analysis.

Day one: 15.30 - 16.30

Session type: Workshop

Room: Chatterley

Hearing the Voice of Disabled Students: an Action Research Approach

Presenter: Peter Smith, University of Sunderland

This paper presents the findings of an action research project: “Furthering the involvement of disabled students”; a collaboration between the HE Academy, the

Equality Challenge Unit and seven Universities. The project explored different innovative approaches to further the involvement of disabled students in the decision making processes across an institution. The project team shared experiences and lessons learnt, to form guidance for best practice including how to engage senior champions, the role of technology, linkages to institutional processes and how to incentivise disabled students. This paper presents the results of the project and reflects upon the action research approach taken.

The approach taken will be highly interactive. We will make a short presentation of the aims of the project, the approach taken, and the outcomes to date. The presentation will be made by a number of the participants in the project. We will then encourage a debate with attendees around the following: the validity of action research to identify best practice and form policy; how the lessons learnt from this project can feed into policy and practice; gaining senior staff commitment; share experiences of working with disabled students and, effective methods of engaging with student groups

Day two: 10.00 - 11.20

Session type: Paper presentations

Room: Lawrence

Theme: Policy Agenda/Discourse:

Widening Participation: a Confusion of Tongues

Presenter: Jacqueline Stevenson, Leeds Metropolitan University

Authors: Jacqueline Stevenson and Sue Clegg, Leeds Metropolitan University

This paper takes as its focus the contradictory discourse of widening participation and shows how definitions of WP are not only contested in public policy and by social theorists, but also by practitioners. In the light of these debates, it would seem unsurprising if staff in HEIs hold contradictory views, and that institutions send out contradictory messages. However, while there is research into the diverse experiences of students, little research has looked beyond the discursive framings of WP to how staff in institutions define and understand 'widening participation'.

The session will start by drawing on participants own definitions of, and philosophical commitment to, widening participation and how this influences their own practice. The authors will then report on an institutional case study exploring how academic and non-academic staff were making sense of their practice in the light of the multiple discourses within the field. We will conclude by discussing with participants how this lack of clarity and the contested language of widening participation may mean that WP practice will remain both the preserve of committed individuals and largely incapable of having a sustained impact on broader institutional cultures and discourse.

Connecting the Dots: Long Term Access Strategy and Short Term Statistics

Presenter: Jim Elliott, Curtin University of Technology, Perth

Authors: Jane den Hollander and Jim Elliott, Curtin University of Technology, Perth

In a perfect world, we would be able to draw a direct connection between interventions to improve access to higher education and subsequent entry, retention and achievement of the students who were the target of those programs. Unfortunately, this is not easy for several reasons: the variables that affect access to and participation in higher education are multiple, interactive and operate over long periods of time; programs to address this may be highly focused on a small number of variables and funded over comparatively short time frames; there are usually pressures and influences to demonstrate that key performance indicators are being met over calendar year time frames; and there may be some disconnection between the data arising from programs aimed at improving access, and those targeting subsequent participation and persistence in higher education.

This brief paper responds to these data dilemmas by connecting the dots between access and retention programs. Data from several programs at Curtin University will be presented – Curtin LinkUp (an access program aimed at low SES secondary schools), Curtin's extensive Student Mentor Program and outreach programs aimed at supporting students who enter university from known at-risk groups. The paper seeks to demonstrate that the consistent sum of series of disconnected data sets may nonetheless give support to the effectiveness of access and retention programs.

Continuities and Changes in Academia's Promotion of Racial Equality in the UK Ten Years after Macpherson

Presenter: Andrew Pilkington, University of Northampton

2009 saw the tenth anniversary of the Macpherson report, a high profile report that characterised the major institutions in British society as institutionally racist and prompted a series of initiatives to combat such racism. This paper will focus on academia and will explore the mechanisms by which the British state has encouraged universities and other higher education institutions to address issues relating to equality and diversity, generally and race and ethnicity, specifically. Strategies employed by the New Labour government, first elected in 1997, designed to widen (student) participation and promote (staff) equal opportunities will be explicated. It will be argued that these colour blind measures had a very limited impact prior to their incorporation into specific duties following the Race Relations (Amendment) Act. The implementation of this legislation initially raised the profile of issues relating to race and ethnicity, but this change proved short lived and both race and ethnicity, and equality and diversity, issues have subsequently been de-prioritised and fallen down the agenda.

While a series of commissioned evaluations suggest that government initiatives did make a significant difference and that universities have made progress in the last decade in promoting race equality and acknowledging ethnic diversity, deconstruction of the discourses underpinning these official evaluations reveals significant lacunae and remarkable continuities. The implications of these findings for a conceptualisation of universities and other higher education institutions as institutionally racist will be addressed and the possible interventions that we can make explored.

Day two: 10.00 - 11.20

Session type: Paper presentations

Room: Barber

Theme: Admissions

Role of Equity-Related Factors in Influencing Students' Choice in Higher Education Market

Presenter: Maha Mourad, The American University in Cairo

The objective of this empirical paper is to highlight the role of equity-related factors in influencing students' choice of universities and hence enhancing their brands image in the competitive Higher Education (HE) market. The paper starts by presenting a brief literature review focusing on the consumer selection of the university and the role of equity related factors in influencing the choice. Followed is a discussion of the results of two rounds of empirical studies. The empirical setting for this research is Egypt which has recently liberalized its HE market. The Egyptian HE market is facing the same challenges as the UK market in terms of urgent need for expansion to meet the expected increase in the demand. In addition, in both markets the governments are tackling decades of under-investment in the HE sector which put the universities under pressure to be involved in more fund raising activities such as working on attracting foreign students as a source of revenue. This results in a highly competitive market. The first empirical study investigates the students' selection of HE institute in Egypt focusing on the different equity related factors that influence the choice. The second one investigates the parents' perception of the HE institutions in terms of providing equal opportunity to each student and to what extent this affect their choice. This research aims to develop a modified conceptual framework of the equity-related factors in influencing the university choice. As a result, this paper could be used by HE institutions to influence their strategic management decisions as it gives better understanding of the role of equity-related factors in determining students' choice and enhance brand image.

Investigating the Experiences of Disabled Learners during the Admissions Process

Presenters: Mike Wray, Action on Access; Laura Graham, UCAS

This paper will present preliminary findings from a joint Action on Access/UCAS project which is investigating the issues faced by disabled applicants when applying to higher education and disabled applicants' decision-making processes. Disabled applicants have been asked to complete a survey and a student diary throughout the 2009-10 application cycle, in order to chart their experiences of applying to higher education.

The paper builds on recent work by Jacklin, Robinson, O'Meara and Harris (2007) by focusing in detail on the experiences of disabled students entering HE. In particular it looks in more detail at how disabled applicants make their decisions about what and where to study, and the process of advising the higher education institution about their condition/impairment.

The presenters will consider the following questions with the audience: What issues do disabled applicants face? What assistance do they receive? What advice do they find useful? What do disabled applicants think about disclosing disability in the UCAS application? How do disabled applicants make their choices about the institutions to which they apply?

Barriers to Progression in the Professions: Application and Selection

Presenter: Rachel Davis, Royal Veterinary College, University of London

Bridging programmes and progression agreements have opened new routes into professional degree programmes. However, selection criteria and admissions procedures can be complex, deep-rooted and resistant to change, actively opposing widening participation. We investigated admissions policies and procedures for vet degrees at the Royal Veterinary College with the aim of understanding the barriers to progression for students from non-traditional backgrounds. Interview transcripts were collated alongside a survey of the opinions and experiences of staff undertaking admissions interviews. Interview performance varied widely and was often poor in students applying through the bridging programme, particularly vocational learners. Fair access to the professions cannot be achieved without resolving the conflict between maintaining standards and encouraging diversity.

This paper tackles one of the major barriers to progression in the professions – application and selection. Our personal experience at the coal face of student selection led us to question the efficacy of admissions procedures. A collaborative, cross-department approach (academic and administrative) allowed us to harness a wide range of expertise, attitudes and experiences in the development of our student

support materials. We used an evidence-based approach to investigate current practice, using the information gathered to develop an IAG tool for students and to inform staff development and training in the challenging arena of application and selection within a professional degree programme.

Day two: 10.00 - 11.20

Session type: Paper presentations

Room: Ambergate

Theme: Inclusive L&T

Equality Proofing the Curriculum

Presenter: Leonie Ramondt, Anglia Ruskin University

Jaki Lilly, Faith Marchall, Leonie Ramondt, Marian Reading, Tom Stacey, Anglia Ruskin University

Over the period of September 2007 and 2008, an interdisciplinary team from Anglia Ruskin University participated in the HEA developing and embedding inclusive policy and practice programme, to equality proof their curriculum. This initiative catalysed a cross-disciplinary team to work together to establish the training needs of academic colleagues, design and deliver appropriate CPD, develop management approaches to embed inclusive practice and develop an inclusive practice online resource. Evidence was generated from staff and student surveys as well as from focus group responses. These research findings informed the development of the TeachInclusive website, a SEDA accredited course and a Re-usable learning object on creating accessible documents.

Performance management criteria for academic staff were reviewed to establish how a commitment to meeting the needs of students with a range of learning needs might be demonstrated within individual job roles. The Guidance Notes to a revised staff appraisal scheme now refer to 'development of inclusive teaching practice' as a possible objective against which performance can be tracked.

Further, the academic administration / quality assurance processes concerned with module and pathway validation were refined. This now includes questions on how an inclusive learning environment will be provided through module / pathway design, delivery and assessment. Also, the Head of Modular Programmes worked with the Student Retention Strategy team identifying key issues which specifically informed their staff development workshops and the Getting Started section of the TeachInclusive website.

Towards Inclusive Learning and Teaching - Principles into Practice

Presenter: Christine Hockings, University of Wolverhampton

How can we academically engage all of our students in meaningful learning within large and diverse groups? This was the key question driving the ESRC/TLRP funded research project 'Learning and teaching for social diversity and difference in HE.' Key findings from this project indicated that inclusive and academically engaging learning and teaching was more likely when teachers:

Created safe classroom environments that encouraged students to articulate their thinking openly and where 'getting stuck', being uncertain, and being different was seen positively.

Adopted learning strategies that allowed students to bring their own experiences to bear on the subject matter.

Connected subject matter with students' interests and aspirations e.g. by selecting or negotiating topics and activities relevant to students' (imagined) identities.

Used resources, humour and anecdotes relevant to the subject and sensitive to the social and cultural diversity of the group,

In this paper I draw upon classroom video, student and teacher interviews and other data from this project to illustrate these findings and to explore the complexities and challenges of teaching students from a wide range of social, cultural and educational backgrounds. I also discuss the implications of these findings for academic development, curriculum design and classroom practice with reference to the HEA commissioned Inclusive Learning and Teaching Research Synthesis (Hockings, forthcoming).

Reflections on the Inclusive Campus

Presenters: Patrick Allen and Sean Walton, University of Bradford

This is a reflective paper that describes and critically evaluates a university-wide programme of change at the University of Bradford. It is based on ongoing activities that have occurred partly as a result of our participation in the HEA-supported initiative, 'Developing and Embedding Inclusive Policy and Practice in HE'. We reflect upon aims to improve the learning experience for all students by implementing inclusive learning and teaching practices across the university. We identify the critical success factors for the programme, describe the strategic approach taken by the university, discuss how these changes are being implemented, and reflect upon the journey towards achieving positive change. We will engage the audience by sharing with them selected materials that have been generated from some of our Professional Development activities that have taken place at the University in recent

months and in particular to look at processes of Reflective Practice that have been facilitated in our Workshops and ongoing activities on a social networking website. We will also share selected audio from interviews that have been conducted with both staff and students at the University. Our audience will be encouraged to embark on their own process of review and reflection.

Day two: 10.00 - 11.20

Session type: Paper presentations

Room: Alfreton

Theme: School Partners

An Evaluation of the Impact of Dedicated Learning Mentors in Raising Aspiration and Attainment in Non Selective Secondary Schools

Presenters: Sharon Smith and Felicity Dunworth, Aimhigher Kent and Medway.

Aimhigher programmes aim to widen participation in higher education through work with selected students in schools where indicators show there is potential to raise aspiration and attainment. Central to this is the funding of dedicated Learner Mentors to work intensively with students identified as likely to benefit from focussed support, particularly in key transition years. Such students have low aspirations, are at risk of underachieving and have parents with no experience of higher education.

This paper presents quantitative and qualitative findings on the impact of Learning Mentors, including the predicted and actual attainment of mentored students against their peers, and the longitudinal tracking of individual students over years as they progress. Complementing these measures is qualitative research that reveals shifts in attitude and aspiration through generic and individual case studies.

The paper contends that Learning Mentors have a significant impact upon GCSE attainment, retention and progression beyond 16. We hope to provoke discussion on the impact of such research on policy and practice in an economic climate where strategies to widen participation in higher education may suffer.

Access and Success in Melbourne's West

Presenter: Merryn Davies, Victoria University

In early 2009 the Australian Government set “a national target that, by 2020, 20 per cent of higher education enrolments at undergraduate level are people from low socio-economic backgrounds”.

Victoria University in Melbourne already draws over 23% of its undergraduate students from low SES backgrounds. The paper focuses on the University's Access and Success partnership project with the Region's schools, which grew out of research that identified serious concerns for students in Melbourne's west regarding their aspirations, school attendance, academic achievement, and school completion rates.

Key research questions for the project included:

How can a university increase the access and success of young people in its region in higher and vocational education?

What university strategies, partnerships and outreach activities can support young peoples' aspirations and capabilities in succeeding in higher and vocational education?

How can recommendations emanating from this research be used to support an increase in the participation rates of people from low socio-economic status in higher and vocational education?

Through a review of the literature and of project research data, this paper explores the role of collaborative school-university partnerships in widening participation in higher education.

Approaches to Sustainability

Presenters: Jim Tate and Susan Hatt, University of the West of England

This paper is based on a research study in SW England that explored the ways in which colleges engaged in Aimhigher activities, aligned Aimhigher with their college priorities and would seek to continue the activities beyond the funding period. The findings suggested that colleges valued the opportunity to promote HE progression to their students and felt that Aimhigher complemented their core business. Working with whole class groups facilitated sustainability as progression activities became a routine part of the curriculum. The study suggested four different approaches to sustainability: seeking alternative funding sources, embedding, mainstreaming and leaving a legacy.

These findings provide a framework within which participants will be able to explore their conceptual understanding of 'sustainability' in relation to widening participation in higher education. Following the presentation, participants will be invited to discuss the four approaches to sustainability, consider their relevance to their own practice and note possible alternative approaches.

Day two: 10.00 - 11.20

Session type: Paper presentations

Room: Chatterley

Theme: Student Wellbeing

A Study of the Influences on the Wellbeing of First Year Students in Three Universities in Kent

Presenter: Moira Mitchell, Canterbury Christ Church University

This paper will present the findings of a longitudinal study across three universities which investigated the wellbeing of students in their first and second terms and examined their help seeking behaviours. Psychological wellbeing was measured with the widely used General Health Questionnaire (GHQ).

Many students were found to have high stress levels starting university (scoring 6 or above on the GHQ) but overall psychological wellbeing improved from term 1 to term 2. Students with no family history of Higher Education recorded significantly lower levels of psychological wellbeing than other students. Concerns about academic performance and inadequate finances caused the highest levels of stress. Choice of subject is also a significant cause of stress which did not lessen in the second term indicating that retention rates are linked to satisfaction with subject choice.

The audience will be invited to discuss interventions or service developments that could be implemented to address the key problems identified by the research. Examples from institutions that participated in the research will then be presented for consideration. These include a review of the pastoral role of academic staff and how they are supported, an initiative to improve student subject choice and a review of academic feedback arrangements.

Open Minds: Creating an Inclusive Learning Culture for Students with Mental Health Difficulties

Presenter: Charlotte Morris, University of Brighton

Open Minds is a successful, dynamic Widening Participation project which has run at the University of Brighton over two years. It has worked collaboratively with colleagues across the university to enhance the learning experiences of students with mental health difficulties alongside supporting the wellbeing of all students. Aimed at developing a more inclusive learning culture, it has initiated a wide range of activities aimed at challenging stigma, including awareness raising, mental health and wellbeing promotion and research into student experiences to underpin staff development and resources.

The paper will provide an outline of project activities and report on findings from ongoing research and evaluation. The project has highlighted the importance of fostering a strong community which values and celebrates diversity; empowers students with strategies to manage their wellbeing; encourages a sense of responsibility for the welfare and wellbeing of all its members; ensures support systems are highly visible and accessible and normalises discussions around mental health in a variety of forums. Participants will have the opportunity to ask questions and reflect on their own personal, departmental and institutional practices. They will be invited to contribute their own examples of positive practices relating to student mental health and wellbeing.

Exploration of the Experiences and Needs of Dyslexic and Non-Dyslexic Nursing and Midwifery Students of the Personal Academic Tutor Support and How Their Needs Could Be Met

Presenter: Anna Crouch, University of Northampton

The Disability Right Commission (2004) requires employers to eliminate discrimination. The Nursing and Midwifery Council (2004; 2008a; 2008b) also require programme providers to support all students and provide evidence of how disabled students would be supported in clinical and academic settings.

This paper gives an overview of the preliminary findings of a qualitative study which explored the experiences and needs of 15 non-dyslexic and 7 dyslexic nursing and midwifery students of their personal academic tutor support and how those needs could be met. Research ethics approval was gained from the university and participants gave informed consent. Following one-to-one face-to-face tape recorded interviews, data was transcribed and analysed using the constant comparative method.

Themes generated include 'very supportive', 'gives guidance on practice' and 'available to help'. Difficulty with writing was identified as an academic need by a majority of dyslexic students but by a minority of non-dyslexic students. Help needed by dyslexic students included 'support for completing assignments' but expressed satisfaction for ongoing support. Professional needs for both dyslexic and non-dyslexic students and their perception of how tutors could help seem to vary.

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Day two: 13.30 - 14.30

Session type: Workshop

Room: Lawrence

A Methodological Approach Used to Explore the Experience and Attainment of Different 'Diversity' Groups

Presenters: Ann Walker, Sheffield Hallam University

The paper will explore a methodological approach which has been used at Sheffield Hallam University to compare the experiences and attainment of different groups of students. A matched sample of students were surveyed to identify their perceptions of their teaching and learning experiences and an average mark for the year of study was calculated from the University's student information data.

The research has considered the diversity of the student body, the heterogeneity within 'diversity groups' and variations in the assessment strategies adopted by different subject areas. The methodology adopted demonstrates the importance of using robust approaches to sampling and statistical analysis when undertaking comparative cross institutional studies.

The focus of the paper will be on why the approach was taken and how the methodology facilitates a more sophisticated explanation of the research findings. We will use a range of examples from the research and explain what can be said about them and what cannot.

Day two: 13.30 - 14.30

Session type: Workshop

Room: Barber

Mining the Data to Develop Practice

Presenter: Jo Wiggans, Aimhigher Greater Manchester

To demonstrate how data on HE applications and participation is used in Aimhigher to drive approaches to widening participation.

Objectives- to explore examples of Aimhigher data used to inform school, college and local authority progression strategies; and to drill down into the data to enable differentiated approaches for targeted learner groups

The workshop will use examples of Aimhigher Greater Manchester HESA and UCAS data reports, comparisons with national data and contextualised within deprivation and attainment data. The data is used to drive the work of Aimhigher in two different ways: to increase partner understanding and change institutional practice and to drive Aimhigher delivery priorities. Data examples will include: ward-based analysis of applications to Russell Group institutions; UCAS acceptance rates of different (anonymised) post-16 institutions; gender analysis of UCAS data, cross-referenced to social class.

The workshop will begin with a brief introduction to the datasets Aimhigher uses and the regular reports we produce. Participants will be given examples of local data reports of various kinds and asked to consider a) what the data is telling them about what WP interventions are needed and b) what other information is needed to complete the picture. In the discussion, Aimhigher Greater Manchester examples will be offered to illustrate how the data has changed practice.

Day two: 13.30 - 14.30

Session type: Workshop

Room: Ambergate

The Postcards Project: International Students' Thoughts about their Experiences Studying in the UK for a Higher Degree.

Presenter: Carmel de Nahlik, Coventry University

International students often struggle to reconcile their prior learning trajectories and UK HEI expectations (de Nahlik & Morris, WIP). The Postcards project collected summary data from international students about particular aspects of HEI practice in the UK, covering topics that prior evidence suggested could affect successful completion. Using a "postcard" data collection artefact, participating students were invited to notionally send a piece of advice on the problem topic area to friends from home coming to Coventry.

Day two: 13.30 – 14.30

Session type: Workshop

Room: Alfreton

The Retention, Success and Achievement of Black and Minority Ethnic Students: What the Research Tells Us ..

Presenter: Gurnam Singh, University of Coventry

The Academy continues to commission and publish research syntheses which are made available to the sector through its EvidenceNet service (<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/evidencenet>). Each one in the series identifies significant research on a particular topic, presents a summary of key reports, synthesises the findings from these reports together with those from the wider literature on the topic, and explores the implications for stakeholders.

This workshop will focus on the findings of a synthesis of key reports and literature in the area of the retention, success and achievement of Black and minority ethnic (BME) students. Participants will be invited to engage with the findings and examine the implications of the key messages for different stakeholder groups in their own institution, particularly in relation to the development of evidence-informed

interventions to support the success of BME students. The session is being led by the author of the synthesis which is due for publication in Spring 2010.

Day two: 13.30 - 14.30

Session type: Workshop

Room: Chatterley

Developing Writing Opportunities to Support Research into Practice: Widening Access and Widening Audiences

Presenters: Yvon Appleby, University of Central Lancashire and Liz Mayes, Furness College

This workshop will explore ways of writing about practice for academic and professional audiences. Practitioner research has many individual benefits but the wider impact is often limited by the difficulty of accessing wider audiences. The workshop will look at recent projects which develop writing opportunities for both trainee teachers and teacher trainers. Publishing this writing provides access to wider audiences and supports individual professional development as through writing authors become creators as well as consumers of knowledge by linking research to practice. Writing from practice provides important insights into issues of access and inequality from the experiences of learners, something which often remains underreported. The workshop will outline the process of developing writing opportunities for practitioners using two examples for our work. Building upon this we will explore wider strategies for writing for publication particularly for practice based research.