



Widening Participation

A Rough Guide for Higher Education Providers



Acknowledgements

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Contents



Introduction	3	Learning, Teaching and Institutional Management	12
Who is this guide for?	3	The HE Academy and professional standards	12
What is Widening Participation – the Student Lifecycle	3	The subject centre network	13
Key facts	4	CETLs	13
Social class	4	Rewarding and Developing Staff	13
Disability	4	Widening Participation in Northern Ireland	14
Ethnicity	4	Key Facts	15
Attainment in schools and colleges	4	Drivers	15
Applications and acceptance	5	Work in institutions	17
Data	5	Who should be involved?	17
Obstacles	5	The 50% target – institutional targets	17
Initiatives and drivers	7	Corporate plans and WP strategies	17
Government and Funding Council Policies	7	Fees and finance	17
The 50% target	7	Outreach and partnership working	18
Performance indicators and student success	7	Admissions	18
Equality legislation	7	Curriculum development	18
Variable tuition fees and bursaries	7	Learning and teaching	19
Fair access – OFFA	8	Professional development	19
HEFCE funding for widening participation	8	HR strategies	19
Funding HE in FE	9	Research	19
Gateways to the professions – the Langlands Review	9	Feedback	20
Fair admissions – the Schwartz Report	10	WP Resources	21
Curriculum change – 14-19	10	National organisations and websites	21
Partnership working	11	Academic and institutional centres	21
Aimhigher	11	Journals	21
Lifelong Learning Networks	11	Databases	21
Collaborative provision: FE and HE	12	Glossary of Acronyms	22
Foundation Degrees	12		

Action on Access

Who We Are

Action on Access is the national co-ordination team appointed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England HEFCE www.hefce.ac.uk and the Learning & Skills Council LSC www.lsc.gov.uk to support their Widening Participation (WP) strategies for England. The team also supports the Department of Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland DELNI www.delni.gov.uk in Widening Participation.

The team supports the Aimhigher initiative funded jointly by the HEFCE and the LSC. Action on Access works with further and higher education institutions and supports individual institutions with their widening participation strategies.

The team undertakes commissioned research and influences and contributes to the policies of the funding councils.

The central administrative and policy team is located at the University of Bradford.

Strategic Partnerships

Action on Access has also established strategic partnerships with the National Disability Team www.natdisteam.ac.uk and the Higher Education Academy www.heacademy.ac.uk. A joint website with the National Disability Team has been created at www.inclusion.ac.uk

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Introduction

Widening Participation in Higher Education has been a major area of government priority over recent years. One consequence of this has been an increase in policy and practice activity at national, regional and institutional level. Given this volume and range of activity, the need for colleagues in the sector to keep apprised of Widening Participation developments has grown ever greater. This guide has been produced to offer summary information on the main issues and questions relating to Widening Participation. It is a guide to practice rather than an overview of theory and research, although the 'resources' section at the end will point you in these directions. The information provided is in summary form giving readers an introduction which can be followed up via reference with further reading. The web version of this guide can be updated and we would welcome reader feedback on both information gaps and shelf-life of the information.

Who is this Guide for?

- For everyone providing higher education – with a particular focus on England, although we hope it will also be of use and interest to colleagues across the UK. It is to help institutions join up their work around all aspects of widening participation and the student experience. At its broadest this means thinking about the roles and development of all staff involved with students in any way – administrators and clerical staff, academics, library and computing staff, technicians – as well as senior and academic managers, and widening participation and equality specialists.
- The section on work in institutions is focused on universities and HE colleges. We recognise that the provision of HE in an FE college involves a different context, and some parts of this section will be more relevant to colleagues in FE colleges than others.
- Below we've set out key facts and definitions, identified key policy areas, with links to websites, and then we've set out to identify who needs to be involved in work and thinking on all these critical areas.
- Colleagues new to working on widening participation developments may also find this guide useful in gaining an understanding of the current issues and questions.

What is Widening Participation – the Student Lifecycle

Widening Participation in HE is usually taken to refer to activities and interventions aimed at creating an HE system that includes all who can benefit from it – people who might not otherwise view learning as an option, or who may be discouraged by social, cultural, economic or institutional barriers. It is important to distinguish *increasing* participation from widening participation as, despite periods of expansion in HE, the former has not resulted in the latter. Widening participation is often discussed in terms of particular groups that are under-represented within higher education across the board – or within a particular kind of institution or curriculum area. Social class differentials in HE participation rates are key to understanding under-representation and to taking steps to widen participation in HE, although no numerical government targets have been set in relation to class.

Widening Participation is about far more than simply recruiting a wider range of school-leavers to existing full-time programmes "on campus", and it involves thinking about older, part-time and work-based students. It is often thought about in terms of the different stages of the student lifecycle. These are: pre-entry, transition, curriculum, student support, and employability. The sections in this guide can all be mapped against the different stages of the student lifecycle – which themselves overlap and interrelate.





Key Facts

Social class

The participation of young people from social class V is significantly lower than from social classes I and II. The social class V participation rate has more than doubled since 1991-92, but increases in participation by all have left poorer classes filling the same share of the student population. Recent research demonstrates that young people living in the most advantaged 20% of areas are five to six times more likely to enter higher education than those living in the least advantaged 20% of areas. It also shows that young women are 18% more likely to enter HE than young men – and that this inequality is more marked for young men living in the most disadvantaged areas. (*Young Participation in Higher Education*, HEFCE, 2005). (The social class definition is based on parental occupations using the standard occupational classifications: I = Professional; II = Intermediate; IIIN = Skilled non-manual; IIIM = Skilled manual; IV = Semi-skilled; V = Unskilled.)

Disability

An 18 year old with a disability or a health problem is 40% as likely to enter higher education as an 18 year old without a disability or a health problem. Some young people with disabilities may delay entry to higher education, while learning difficulties may make higher education impractical for others. The proportion of students reported as declaring disabilities has increased by 50% in five years. The most common disability among students is dyslexia. Others relate to mobility, hearing and sight.

Ethnicity

A report published in 2002 (National Audit Office) showed that ethnic minorities form a growing share of undergraduate students, making up 15% of all students. This picture masks a more complex situation where rates of

participation vary between different minority ethnic groups and types of institution. Some groups, such as Indian, Chinese, African and Asian Other, are much better represented than others. Some groups – Black Other, Pakistani and Bangladeshi are under-represented compared to their position in the young population. Minority ethnic students are better represented in the post-92 HE institutions, in more vocationally and professionally oriented subjects and in Greater London. There are pockets of very low representation in certain subjects, in some pre-92 universities and specialist colleges, and in some more rural regions. (See the interim report on *Minority Ethnic Students in Higher Education*, published by DfES Research, on www.employment-studies.co.uk/summary/summary.php?id=rr448)

Attainment in schools and colleges

The single most significant factor in the social class division in HE participation is differential attainment in schools and colleges. While around 43% of 18 year olds from higher socio-economic backgrounds gain two or more A levels, only 19% of those from lower socio-economic backgrounds do so. Nine out of ten people with two or more A-levels go on to HE by the time they are 21. However this doesn't mean that the "solution" to widening participation lies solely in increasing A level attainment – work is being done to create alternative progression pathways into HE based on vocational qualifications, recognised by parents, students and admissions officers, and to encourage more HE institutions to consider students with vocational qualifications at level 3. At the moment only 40-50% of those with level 3 vocational qualifications progress to HE, compared with 90% of those with two or more A levels.

Applications and acceptance

Added to this, applicants from poorer social classes are less likely than average to succeed in converting their applications to accepted offers, whereas applicants declaring disabilities are as likely as others to do so. Both groups have particularly low success rates in applications to study medicine, dentistry and veterinary science, and their participation rates in these subjects are also low. There are large variations among institutions in the relative success rates of applications from groups with low overall representation in higher education. Some institutions have low participation by these groups because they do not attract many applications from them, while the problem for other institutions is a high failure rate of applications from these groups. A study of application data from the year 1996-7 showed that ethnic minority applicants had lower rates of success during the applications procedure than their white counterparts, and this was particularly so for Black Africans and Pakistanis. For instance, applications yielded 70% initial offers and 65% firm offers for white students, whereas the corresponding figures for Black Africans were 57% and 38%. (*Help or Hindrance? Higher Education and the Route to Ethnic Equality*, Shiner & Modood, British Journal of Sociology of Education, Vol 23, no2, 2002)

Data

Patterns of low representation in other countries are similar to those in England. The most active countries in relation to students with disabilities have anti-discrimination legislation and good publicly available data that show increasing participation. England now has anti-discrimination legislation with the passage of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 but does not yet have good data on participation. Participation data in relation to social class is published in a number of forms, including the HEFCE performance indicators for the years

beginning 1996, and HEFCE's "Young participation in higher education" (HEFCE 2005) (all available at www.hefce.ac.uk/publications). The Polar Data, available on the HEFCE website under "widening participation", consist of maps and data sets that show how the participation of young people varies according to where they live. www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/polar/

Obstacles

People with disabilities and those from poorer social classes face similar obstacles to participation, with different emphases between the two groups. The main obstacles, identified from cohort studies and focus groups, are:

- early disengagement from education, making these groups less likely than others to obtain the entry qualifications for higher education;
- poorer educational opportunities prior to higher education, making these groups less likely to obtain high grades in entry qualifications or demonstrate other qualities that higher education providers seek;
- concerns about completing and benefiting from higher education, making these groups less confident that higher education would be the right choice for them;
- difficulties in securing financial support, where groups with low representation face greater uncertainty and complexity than others, including limited entitlement to loans or help with fees if they study part-time.

www.nao.org.uk-publications-nao_reports-01-02-0102485.pdf

Initiatives and Drivers

Government and Funding Council Policies

The 50% target

The government wants to see 50% of all 18-30 year olds participating in higher education by 2010. Different HE providers are expected to play different roles in achieving this.

“Widening access and improving participation in HE are a crucial part of our mission. Participation in HE will equip our citizens to operate productively within the global knowledge economy. It also offers social benefits, including better health, lower crime and a more tolerant and inclusive society.”

HEFCE Strategic Plan 2003 – 2008.

Performance indicators and student success

Published annually since 1999, the indicators provide comparative data on the performance of institutions in widening participation, student retention, learning and teaching outcomes, research output and employment of graduates. They cover publicly-funded higher education institutions in the UK. The indicators published in 2004 were published by the HE Statistics agency (www.hesa.ac.uk) and were the sixth set of performance indicators for UK universities and higher education colleges. In previous years, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) published them on behalf of the four UK funding bodies. Indicators from previous years are available from the HEFCE web site www.hefce.ac.uk/pi

Currently the indicators give only limited data on part-time students and do not cover those FE Colleges that are directly funded to provide higher education. The picture they give is therefore a limited one.

The indicators demonstrate different patterns of recruitment and completion amongst students in different groups of institutions and raise questions about definitions of student success. For analysis and discussion see the Action on Access website – “Student Retention and the HEFCE Performance Indicators”, and “Student Success in Higher Education”. www.actiononaccess.org

Equality legislation

Discussion on the 50% target often focuses on social class because the inequalities in access to participation are so persistent and so marked. But there are also issues of equal opportunities and fair access – either to HE itself, or to particular courses and subject areas – in relation to gender, race and ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, age and disability. Key legislation includes the Sex Discrimination Act, the Race Relations Amendment Act, and the Disability Discrimination Act. The Race Relations Amendment Act in particular places institutions under a positive duty to promote Race Equality – which means looking at all aspects of the student experience, including curriculum issues. Such legislation also covers staff in institutions, as does legislation on part-time and fixed term working. The website for the Equality Challenge Unit (part of Universities UK and SCOP) gives detailed information on all these areas www.ecu.ac.uk Also see the National Disability Team website www.ndt.ac.uk

Variable tuition fees and bursaries – the DfES

From 2006 HE providers will be able to vary fees for full-time undergraduate courses up to a limit of £3000 a year (part-time fees are already unregulated). In order to do this they will have to make an agreement on fees and bursary support with OFFA (see overleaf). At the same time payment of fees for full-time students will be deferred until graduation and the levels of student support available in the form of grants and loans will change.





For further information see the DfES website: www.dfes.gov.uk/hegateway/hereform/index.cfm

The introduction of variable fees will mean that HE providers will be better funded, and some of this funding will be available to be spent on teaching and learning, and student support. However there are fears that differential fees and bursaries will have a differential impact on students from different income groups and from groups with different attitudes to debt, and on institutions taking larger numbers of poorer students. There are also concerns that part-time students are being treated inequitably – and that there will be an inequitable impact on the institutions with the highest numbers of part-time students (see the NIACE website (www.niace.org.uk). Part-time students will not be able to defer payment of fees. (For a HEFCE response see “funding” section below). A further complication exists for FE colleges providing higher education, some of which will be able to set their own fees (those directly funded – see below) and some of which will have to set fees determined by their HE partners – of which they have more than one, each setting different fees and offering different bursaries. Because FE colleges often offer provision to local, less well-off students, some may choose to keep fees lower.

Fair access – OFFA and access agreements

The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) is an independent body which aims to promote and safeguard fair access to higher education for under-represented groups in light of the introduction of variable tuition fees in 2006-07. OFFA is led by the Director of Fair Access. The Director will require all publicly funded providers of higher education in England who decide to charge tuition fees above the standard level to submit an Access Agreement. This agreement should set out how they will safeguard and

promote fair access – in particular for students from low income groups – through bursary and other financial support and outreach work. Access agreements regulate fees for full-time, home/EU, undergraduate students only. Without an Access Agreement approved by the Director, an institution will not be able to charge tuition fees for full-time students above the standard level. For more information visit the OFFA website www.offa.org.uk

HEFCE funding for widening participation

The HEFCE funding to English HE providers is intended to reflect the costs associated with the two main aspects of the student life-cycle. This allows the widening participation allocation to be used for both raising aspirations and supporting student success. The allocations are determined on the basis of students who complete their year of study.

The two aspects are:

- pre-application costs (the costs of widening access and aspiration raising) and post-application costs (the costs and risks that institutions are incurring by recruiting students that are more likely to drop out, otherwise known as funding for student retention).
- The formula funding for the widening participation allocation for both full-time and part-time students is split: approximately 20% for widening access and 80% for improving retention.
- The funding for widening access weights undergraduate new entrants according to either young HE participation by ward for full-time undergraduates under 21 on entry, or average educational achievement by ward for part-time and mature undergraduates.
- A measure of prior educational attainment of full-time students is used to determine the levels for the improving retention part of the widening participation allocation.

HEFCE also makes a mainstream disability funding allocation reflecting the proportion of students in receipt of the Disabled Students Allowance.

In February 2005 the HEFCE Board acknowledged that the 2004 Higher Education Act offered different incentives to students for full and part-time study, and was particularly concerned that financially disadvantaged students may be deterred from studying part-time following the introduction of the new fee and student support regime. It therefore agreed that a widening participation-type measure for 2006-07 should be developed to ensure that those least able to afford higher fees should not be disadvantaged and can continue to study on a part-time basis.

Funding HE in FE

In England just over 10% of HE is delivered by Further Education colleges (FECs). Of these around 160 FECs are directly funded by HEFCE for their HE provision. The rest of the HE provision in FECs is indirectly funded (and some FECs may have direct and indirect funding) which can be via single or multiple HE partners, through franchising and consortium arrangements.

The 2003 White Paper made it clear that the government sees FECs as being significant in delivering their HE widening participation objectives, mostly in terms of sub-degree and foundation degree provision, organised through structured relationships between FECs and HEIs. FE colleges largely recruit locally and serve students who may not have been successful through traditional, academic routes. Added to this, the so-called “mixed economy colleges” with substantial levels of both FE and HE tend to make progression to HE a strategic priority. All this means that HE provision in FE is a critical part of widening participation and opening up provision. Nonetheless the funding of HE in FE throws up real problems for FECs, as identified in the report of the Mixed Economy Institutions (HEFCE, July 2004).

Problems identified include:

- Discrepancies in funding and support for directly funded FECs, which don't receive HEFCE capital funding, benchmark statistics or the same levels of enhancement support (although this latter is being addressed)
- Different funding for “non-prescribed” HE, which can affect progression opportunities
- Indirect funding from multiple partners leading to different levels of support and demand from HEIs, resulting in different experience for students in the same FEC, and a lack of control for the FEC over student numbers and fee levels
- Overall very different levels of funding between FE and HE mean that staff pay and conditions result in widely varying levels of scholarship and professional development for staff delivering HE.

Gateways to the professions – the Langlands Review

During the passage of the HE Act concerns were voiced that higher and variable fees might deter students from entering the professions, and might impact upon the choices open to poorer students in following the longer courses and subsequent study required for many professions. The Secretary of State for Education and Skills commissioned an independent report to examine the gateways into the professions and asked Sir Alan Langlands, Vice-Chancellor of Dundee University, to lead this work. The report will make recommendations to Ministers on action that can be taken by employing organisations to provide clear accessible gateways for all graduates who want to pursue a career in the professions. This work is being supported by Public and Private Sector Reference Groups and a wide range of stakeholders. The report will look at the widening participation implications of access to the professions in the light of variable fees. The report is due to the Secretary of State mid-2005.



For more information visit the DfES HE gateway on their website:
www.dfes.gov.uk/hegateway/hereform/gatewaystotheprofessions/index.cfm

Fair admissions – the Schwartz Report

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills commissioned Professor Steven Schwartz, Vice-Chancellor of Brunel University, to lead an independent review of the options which English institutions providing higher education should consider in assessing the merit of applicants for their courses, and to report on the high-level principles underlying these options. Professor Schwartz and his Steering Group published their final report on 14 September 2004. It contains advice to institutions and the sector on admissions policies, qualifications and applications. It recommends the setting up of a national centre of expertise on admissions issues, including vocational qualifications, and the further consideration of issues to do with part-time students. It notes that many institutions are not conversant with vocational and level 3 qualifications other than A levels. The report overall recognises the need for changes to be made to existing admissions arrangements to achieve a fair process. Whilst the report recognises that diversity benefits staff and students alike, it is clear that institutions do not make achieving diversity a strategic objective of their admissions procedures.

Curriculum change – 14-19

The government commissioned a review of the qualifications framework for 14-19 year olds, and the review group, chaired by Mike Tomlinson, reported in October 2004. The report proposed a new diploma framework that would allow young people to progress at their own pace. Diplomas would be awarded at four progressively more demanding levels: entry, foundation, intermediate and advanced, and would facilitate a mix of vocational and academic study. The Government

responded in a White Paper, published February 2005, in which elements of the Tomlinson proposals were adopted but the proposal for an overarching diploma was rejected. Instead it was proposed that A levels and GCSEs be strengthened, and greater “stretch” and differentiation for the best A level candidates be provided. At the same time it is proposed that a number of vocational diplomas be developed to simplify and strengthen the available vocational routes.

Greater scope for young people to apply to HE with a mix of vocational and academic qualifications would have significant implications for admissions to HE, and for widening participation amongst groups more likely to come through vocational and work-based routes. It remains to be seen if the parallel routes enshrined in the White Paper will have the same reforming effect as the single diploma envisaged by Tomlinson, or whether those universities that select their students on a competitive basis will focus on the greater differentiation of A level candidates, leaving the recruitment of students with the new vocational diplomas to institutions that already prioritise widening access.

For more information see
www.14-19reform.gov.uk and
www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/14-19educationandskills/

Partnership working

A key component in thinking about how to widen participation and reach groups of potential students that have hitherto not considered higher education is partnership working, between higher and further education, schools, employers, advice and guidance networks, parents, community groups and training providers. Initiatives such as **Aimhigher**, **Lifelong Learning Networks**, and **Foundation Degrees** are all predicated on partnership working.

Aimhigher – HEFCE, the LSC and the DfES

Aimhigher is an integrated programme (including Excellence Challenge), supported by HEFCE, the DfES and the LSC, to promote partnership working between schools, FE colleges, HE institutions, employers and others, to raise aspirations and increase applications to higher education amongst under-represented groups. The government intends that the integrated Aimhigher programme should become the national outreach facility to support widening participation. Most activity in the integrated Aimhigher programme will operate on a sub-regional basis, with some co-ordinated at a regional level. £7 million is being allocated for national projects: £5 million initially and £2 million as part of a rolling programme. The funds will support either activities that cut across regions and would operate more effectively at a national level, or examples of innovative practice which it would be beneficial to roll out nationally.

Action on Access is the national co-ordination team appointed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Learning & Skills Council (LSC) to support their Widening Participation (WP) strategies for England for the three years up to December 2005. The team also supports the Department of Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland (DELNI) in Widening Participation.

The team supports the Aimhigher initiative funded jointly by the HEFCE and the LSC. Action on Access works with further and higher education institutions and supports individual institutions with their widening participation strategies. www.actiononaccess.org

Lifelong Learning Networks – HEFCE and the LSC

In June 2004 HEFCE and the LSC invited institutions to consider establishing Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs), to provide a focus on vocational routes into and through higher education, in the context of lifelong learning. Potential networks have been offered development funding of between £10,000 and £30,000 to produce a full business plan. HEFCE has invited NIACE to work with them to take forward three key themes for LLNs. These reflect the importance attached to ensuring that learners can move between programmes and institutions, the need for changes in what higher education has to offer to accommodate vocational learners, and the contribution that LLNs can make to the wider aims of lifelong learning. The three themes are: progression accords between network partners, changes in the higher education curriculum needed to support LLNs and the qualities and characteristics of lifelong learning.

LLNs' claim to distinctiveness is that they will bring together different HEIs and FE colleges, creating a network that reconnects the sectors for the purposes of progression, at a time of some uncertainty about market pressures stemming from the introduction of variable fees. HEFCE is particularly concerned to engage FE colleges more closely. www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/pubs/lifelong.doc



Collaborative provision: FE and HE

Collaborative provision between FECs and HEIs is a key element in delivering HE opportunities to those who may wish to study locally, who may progress to higher education via vocational and work-based routes, and who may have returned to learning through the familiar setting of an FE college. The nature of the relationship with the accrediting HEI is critical, given its role in determining fee level, student numbers, progression opportunities, and the levels and style of student support on the transition from an FEC to an HEI. Relationships between staff in FECs and HEIs can be productive and beneficial on both sides, and the provision of effective support and development, in particular for academic staff in FECs who have less access to scholarship and research opportunities, is key.

Foundation Degrees

Foundation degrees were launched in September 2001. They were designed to be a new intermediate vocational HE qualification, developed in partnership between FE colleges, HE institutions and employers. Foundation Degrees are required to make provision for those achieving the two-year foundation degree to progress to a full honours degree. The Government envisages them as a key component in achieving the 50% participation target (see above) and in assisting with widening participation in HE from students more likely to follow vocational routes. They depend on partnership between institutions and employers.
www.fdf.ac.uk
www.foundationdegrees.org.uk

Learning, Teaching and Institutional Management

At the same time as developing specific initiatives around widening participation, higher education is directing more attention to teaching and the support of learning, in recognition of the fact that a more diverse group of students will require greater attention to learning and teaching (L&T), and at the same time fee-paying students will in general make greater demands on their institutions. Initiatives include the setting up of the **HE Academy**, moves towards developing **reward strategies** for L&T, a **professional standards framework**, more attention to **professional development**, and the new **Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning**.

The HE Academy and professional standards

The Higher Education Academy, launched in 2004, is taking forward work to accredit and support learning and teaching in higher education, via a number of initiatives, including the subject centre network. The Academy recognises the inter-relationship between teaching and widening participation which is identified as one of their key themes. Work started in 2004 to consult the sector on the proposal to commission work through the Higher Education Academy on the development of professional standards for academic practice and continuing professional development (CPD) that will support teaching and learning in higher education. This work will need to integrate considerations of the implications of widening participation for teaching and supporting learning in HE. The Academy will take forward work done through the old ILTHE to accredit programmes of initial teacher training within institutions, and to develop a framework for the registration of accredited teachers within HE.
www.heacademy.ac.uk

The subject centre network

The HE Academy also hosts the subject centre network that aims to support staff in teaching and learning in relation to their subject and discipline area. Some of the subject centres have addressed widening participation areas directly, and the Academy is drawing together information in this area.

www.heacademy.ac.uk/1017.htm

Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs)

Following a bidding process, HEFCE has announced the creation of 74 Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs) to promote excellence across all subjects and aspects of teaching and learning in higher education. Funding of £315 million over five years from 2005-06 to 2009-10 for CETLs represents HEFCE's largest ever single funding initiative in teaching and learning. A complete list of CETLs and brief descriptions are on the HEFCE web-site.

Although the focus of the CETLs varies widely, a number are specifically concerned with issues to do with widening participation and linked issues such as e-learning and distance learning.

Rewarding and Developing Staff

Improving teaching and learning in order to enhance widening participation and student success means paying attention to recruitment and reward strategies and to the development and support of a diverse staff, alongside a diverse student body.

Concern that human resource management within higher education was patchy and needed in many cases to be more professional, combined with a recognition that institutions need recruitment and reward strategies that place a higher value on teaching and learning – particularly in institutions where research funding

is limited, led to the introduction of Rewarding and Developing Staff – a HEFCE funding stream that, inter-alia, was intended to get institutions to address issues of rewarding good teaching, and addressing gender and race discrimination in pay and staffing policies. At the same time campaigning by staff unions brought issues of inequitable pay and reward systems to the fore. The funding is now to be consolidated into teaching funding and HEFCE is consulting on the introduction of a self-assessment tool to aid institutions in assessing their recruitment retention and reward strategies.

Staff unions continue to campaign for more equitable reward strategies and to the ending of pay discrimination on the ground of gender and race – work goes forward together with the Equality Challenge Unit (www.aut.org.uk); www.natfhe.org.uk; www.ecu.ac.uk



Widening Participation in Northern Ireland

Since the overall participation rate in higher education is already much higher in Northern Ireland, the 50% target for increased participation in HE in England, set by the Prime Minister, has less significance for NI, and as a result, this target has not been adopted by the Department for Employment and Learning.

Widening participation in higher education by students from groups who are currently under-represented is, however, one of the Department's key strategic goals.

Since 2000 the Department has been addressing this issue through a number of policy directions and a range of specific funding mechanisms including:

- Special project funding specifically aimed at allowing the universities to test their strategies and approaches to making access to HE available to under-represented groups, and to develop partnerships with schools with traditionally low levels of participation in HE.
- Project funding aimed at assisting disabled students, including a project to establish a register of support workers for students with specific learning difficulties, e.g. dyslexia support workers, readers, notetakers.
- A widening participation premium which is paid to the universities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, the allocation of which is based on non-fee paying students.
- A widening access premium for students with disabilities. This disability premium is based on the number of full-time undergraduate students in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance.
- A requirement on the part of universities to produce widening participation strategies which detail activities, targets and performance indicators regarding the recruitment, retention and progression of students from under-represented groups.

In addition, the Department for Employment and Learning and the DfES have worked with the Royal Bank of Scotland on the introduction of the "Aimhigher" Roadshow in NI. The Roadshow visits targeted schools and FE Colleges and aims to increase awareness of and participation in HE amongst young people who may not have considered it as an option.

The Department for Employment and Learning has carried out a review of its policies and initiatives on Widening Participation. In line with the recommendations of an Expert Group on widening participation, established to inform this review, work has started on the development of structures and processes to support an integrated NI Regional Strategy for Widening Participation.

The Department intends to bring forth legislation which will introduce variable deferred tuition fee arrangements from academic year 2006/07. As a condition of charging variable fees of up to a limit of £3,000 higher education providers will be required to have Access Agreements in place which include the provision of student bursaries. These Access Agreements will sit within the Widening Participation Strategies which the Institutions will continue to produce. These strategies will, in time, link into the Regional Strategy for Widening Participation.

Key Facts

Lower socio-economic classifications

Statistics on participation by social class, using data obtained from UCAS, which is based on Northern Ireland domiciled accepted applicants to full-time undergraduate courses in the UK, show that groups 1, 2, 3 and 4 are over represented in the HE institutions whereas groups 5-7 are underrepresented.

Students with disabilities

Information on students with disabilities is highly variable in quality since it is collected on the basis of self-disclosure by the student. The HEFCE performance indicator relating to student disability is based on those students who are in receipt of Disabled Students Allowance. In 2002/03, 27.4% (820) of the 2,990 NI domiciled disabled students enrolled at UK HEIs were in receipt of DSA. This figure is lower than the UK average.

Ethnic minorities

The statistics indicate that the vast majority of students in NI are white. In addition the statistical evidence suggests that ethnic minority groups are not under-represented in HE.

Drivers

Equality legislation

Northern Ireland Act 1998 Section 75 Statutory Equality Obligations

In accordance with Section 75 (1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 ("the Act"), the Department shall "in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity" between:

- Persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- Men and women generally;
- Persons with a disability and persons without; and
- Persons with dependants and persons without.



Work in Institutions – Making a Difference

Who should be involved?

The sections below are primarily focused on those providing HE in universities and HE colleges, although some aspects should also be relevant to those providing HE in FE colleges. The sections look at different areas of institutional work and suggests what needs to be considered in terms of implications for widening participation. They also make suggestions about groups of staff that need to be involved: senior management teams; academics; part-time lecturers; researchers; learning support staff; widening participation and equality officers; human resources staff; those working in libraries, information resources and computer support; educational and staff developers; colleagues in other FE and HE institutions and partner organisations.

The 50% target – institutional targets

Senior Management teams have a critical role in Widening Participation to and in institutions. All HEIs have had widening participation strategies operating over recent years and these are becoming embedded across institutions. Experience of implementing a strategic approach to widening participation objectives within HEIs demonstrates that different kinds of institutions will need different approaches. So for example if you are a research-focused institution that can afford to turn students away you will have different targets to those institutions with a more teaching-focused and outreach-based mission. But what do your staff really think about widening participation? Do some of your academics think that more means worse? Have you stimulated positive internal debate to allow staff to develop a sense of ownership of positive WP strategies – or is WP hidden in a small corner of the institution and the preserve and responsibility of only a very limited number of staff? What does widening participation really mean for your institution and in your departments? Does everyone know? Does your WP strategy use information from your own, and from sectoral, **performance indicators** in order to plan future work – and do you encourage the identification of under-represented groups at the **subject level**, and the setting of targets at this level?

Corporate plans and WP strategies

Planning for widening participation is critical to ensuring continuing progress towards the aims and objectives set by HEIs. Widening participation strategies were until recently a condition of grant and it is anticipated, following advice given by OFFA in its guidance, that HEIs will continue to build on their strategies in the context of Access Agreements. There is clear evidence from HEIs that strategies have proved an important component in relation to:

- Target-setting
- Monitoring progress
- Staff development
- Tracking
- Student success
- Partnership working

As widening participation strategies have developed, important links have been made with corporate plans. This is seen by many HEIs as an important part of embedding WP and this should be an area in which Senior Management teams should be looking to take forward their WP institutional commitments as corporate plans are reviewed and revised.

Fees and finance

Senior Management teams are setting fee and bursary strategies – did the same people write the Access agreement? What is the impact of the fees and bursary strategy on part-time provision and partnership working, and indeed on the





institutional WP strategy? What flexibility will be available at department and course level – for instance with respect to late recruitment or to courses that depend heavily on part-time recruitment? Is student support aimed at a very small number of high achieving students or will bursaries be spread more widely? How does the bursary strategy relate to work on admissions, and targeting of under-represented groups at the subject level, (see above)? **Have academic managers and course planners and leaders been consulted?**

Outreach and partnership working

Widening participation workers will already be involved in partnership working with colleges, schools, employers, training providers and others. **Admissions staff** may also be involved in work with partners on progression routes. Some **academic staff and managers** may be involved in outreach activities like summer schools and visits to schools – but how widely does this extend? And how far does institutional policy on widening participation reflect and respond to the needs of groups under-represented in HE? Is some of this work going on without reference to specific Aimhigher partnership working – based on longstanding contacts held by **individual academics**? Have staff with responsibility for disability and race equality been involved in outreach work? How far has institutional outreach been linked up with work on admissions criteria, understanding of vocational qualifications, and curriculum development – which might involve **all academic staff**? Have those staff involved in outreach, including Aimhigher, been encouraged to work with **educational developers and HR staff** to discuss the scope for disseminating information within the institutions, and their and others' development needs? What opportunities have been taken to collaborate with and learn from, staff in neighbouring FE colleges and other HE providers? Has work on **lifelong learning networks** been integrated with Aimhigher work?

Admissions

Are **admissions staff** involved in widening participation work, and the Aimhigher partnership work? Have they been offered staff development on WP issues? What impact has the Schwartz Report had on admissions so far – have staff been engaged in thinking about vocational routes and qualifications? Is the approach to admissions consistent between departments, and might there be innovative practice that can be shared between departments – for instance in terms of thinking through how vocational qualifications could be recognised?

Curriculum development

Reaching out to different groups of students means developing the curriculum with them in mind. It's a huge challenge for staff as it means not only engaging with issues like foundation degrees, vocational progression and part-time routes, but thinking about issues like race equality and the curriculum, and issues of disability. Re-appraisal of course popularity and the viability of areas of curriculum provision will also be affected by research funding, RAE strategy and calculations over fees. Once again this is about joining-up work going on at subject and discipline level with outreach, admissions and equalities work – and making sure it is driven by a coherent strategic overview. Has your institution's assessment of its RAE strategy been informed by its targeting of different student groups and its assessments of local and regional needs identified through partnership working?

Discussions about the detail of admissions policies will need to link up with thinking on course and programme design, and partnership work on progression opportunities – for instance in relation to students with vocational qualifications, or those coming in from work-based routes. Who is driving this work at institutional level? Does it depend on different levels of engagement in different departments? How does it interact with your research strategy?

There may be pockets of work going on within your institution – for instance on developing the curriculum with respect to race equality or disability. The HE Academy subject centres have supported work in these areas within particular disciplines. What can you do to spread this practice within your institution – through the **learning and teaching committee**, your **equalities staff**, or via work that brings **heads of department** together?

Visiting and **part-time lecturers** are often **practising professionals** outside the institutions and may have valuable links to their **professions** and professional bodies, within which there may also be debates about broadening recruitment to the profession. Is their contribution to recruitment and curriculum development being considered and maximised?

Learning and teaching

One of the biggest challenges for **academic staff** is to reappraise the ways they teach and support learning when working with a wider range of students, with different experiences and academic backgrounds. When your learning and teaching strategy was developed – were academic staff consulted and was it integrated with your institutional widening participation strategy? Staff and educational development, and teaching and learning units, will be involved in making provision to support staff in responding to more diverse student needs. Have staff themselves been asked what they need – and what form that support might take? Some provision may be required by legislation – are **all staff** being reached in terms of support for disabled students? Does that include **staff in libraries and learning support services**? Although many issues may be generic, others will be subject-specific – are academic departments given time and budgets to allow them to share strategies for changing their learning and teaching approaches? The **HE Academy** offers support on learning and teaching in relation to

widening participation – do your staff engage with the relevant **subject centres** and their work on WP? **Part-time lecturers** play an increasingly large teaching role in many institutions – are they involved in development and planning activities? Part of your widening participation strategy may be to extend part-time study opportunities – if **part-time students** are taught by part-time staff then they can form a highly marginalised group, and you need to ensure they are integrated into institutional life.

Professional development

Is development in relation to widening participation restricted to staff with key and identifiable roles – such as admissions staff – or integrated into your development policy for all staff? Have staff been asked what they consider to be their development needs in relation to widening participation? Have obligations with respect to race and disability legislation been met for all staff? Where are staff concerns about the impact of widening participation addressed – does your development policy include opportunities for staff teams and peer groups to discuss necessary support and development strategies? Have staff been given opportunities to learn with and about other sector partners such as FE and schools? Have staff involved in Aimhigher from your institution been asked to feed in to staff and professional development planning? Have lecturers delivering HE in an FEC been given appropriate training and support for HE accreditation?

Human resources and HR strategies

What do you reward and how? Do **academic staff** believe that research is more highly valued than teaching or widening participation? Have you thought about how activity relating to widening participation can be identified and recognised in a range of jobs – for instance in the context of introducing job evaluation, or in working towards recognised professional standards in partnership with **campus trade**

Work in Institutions – Making a Difference



unions? Do you have active equality policies for your staff with the aim of supporting a **diverse staff**, to reflect your aspirations for a diverse student community? Have you done a **race and disability audit** of your staff – and looked at where men and women are employed and at what level? Have you considered using the **HEFCE self-evaluation tool** to monitor your HR strategy against key targets on widening participation and learning and teaching? If you will be hosting a CETL, does the reward strategy integrate with your overall reward strategy – and in turn with your widening participation and equality strategy?

Research

There a number of ways in which research strategies will impact upon both teaching and learning strategies and on widening participation, not least in relation to curriculum development. Research students are the academic workforce of the future and key to widening participation beyond the undergraduate level and to achieving diversity at all levels of the institution. They can also play a key part in working with undergraduate students and supporting diverse student groups. Have **postgraduates** been involved in discussions about widening participation, and equality issues such as race and disability? Are they included in training and accreditation for learning and teaching? Is research undertaken with respect to widening participation itself?

Feedback

Action on Access welcomes feedback on this guide and suggestions for additional information or sections that might usefully be included. Please send your comments to:

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The suggestions below are intended to point you in the right direction. They are not intended to be exhaustive, nor have we attempted to list individual publications (although some are referenced at appropriate points in the guide). Suggestions for additions are welcomed.

National organisations and websites

- Action on Access for news and resources in relation to widening participation in institutions, Aimhigher and the newsletter Inclusion: www.actiononaccess.org
- The HE Academy for information on widening participation and learning and teaching – see thematic work and links to the subject centres: www.heacademy.ac.uk
- HEFCE and LSC for funding and associated information: www.hefce.ac.uk (see sections on Widening Participation, and Publications) www.lsc.gov.uk
- National Audit Office for reports on widening participation and student achievement: www.nao.gov.uk/publications/vfmsublist/vfm_edu.htm
- House of Commons Education and Employment Select Committee for reports on access, WP and student retention and success: www.publications.parliament.uk
- Universities UK for reports on institutional practice, including work on student debt by Claire Callendar, at South Bank University: www.universitiesuk.ac.uk
- NIACE, for information on adult learners and associated issues such as part-time student: www.niace.org.uk
- DfES: www.dfes.gov.uk (see the Higher Education gateway and HE reform)
- The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, the Dearing Report, contains considerable background information to the current policy and practice on WP www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/ncihe/sumrep.htm
- Working group on 14-19 reform (Tomlinson report): www.14-19reform.gov.uk/

- Lifelong learning for information on older learners: www.lifelonglearning.org.uk
- FACE (Forum for the Advancement of Continuing Education) The Organisation for Lifelong Learning: www.f-a-c-e.org.uk

Academic and institutional centres

- Continuum at University of East London: www.uel.ac.uk/continuum
- Institute of Access Studies, at Staffordshire University: www.staffs.ac.uk/institutes/access/
- European Access Network: www.ean-edu.org
- Centre for Higher Education Research and information (CHERI) at the Open University: www.open.ac.uk/cheri
- Institute of Employment Studies, University of Sussex: www.employment-studies.co.uk
- Widening Participation at Aston University: www.aston.ac.uk/prospective-students/wp/

Journals

- Journal of Access Policy and Practice, ed Prof. M Stuart, Sussex University; see www.niace.org.uk/publications
- Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, the journal of the Institute of Access Studies and the European Access Network; see www.staffs.ac.uk/journal
- Journal of Access and Continuing Education, ed Prof M Osborne, Stirling University; see www.niace.org.uk/publications
- International Journal of Lifelong Education, ed J Holford, P Jarvis and S Parker; see www.tandf.co.uk/journals

Databases

- www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/socpsy/rwp/index.htm
- www.heacademy.ac.uk/1017.htm



Glossary of Acronyms

A

AA	Action on Access Area Adviser
ABRC	Advisory Board for Research Councils
ACCAC	Awdurdod Cymwysterau, Cwricwlwn ac Asesu Cymru (Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales)
ACE	Adult Continuing Education
ACFHE	Association of Colleges of Further & Higher Education
AF	Area Forum
AGCAS	Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services
AGR	Association of Graduate Recruiters
AGWP	Advisory Group on Widening Participation
AH	Aimhigher
AMA	Advanced Modern Apprenticeship
AMR	Annual Monitoring Report
AoA	Action on Access
AoC	Association of Colleges
AP(E)L	Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning
APC	Association of Principals of Colleges
API	Age Participation Index
APL	Accreditation of Prior Learning
ASG	Area Steering Group
AUA	Association of University Administrators
AUCL	Association of University & College Lecturers
AUT	Association of University Teachers
AY	Academic Year

B

BA	British Academy
BA/BSc	Bachelor of Arts/Science
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic

C

CASE	Council for the Advancement and Support of Education
CAT	Credit Accumulation & Transfer
CATS	Credit Accumulation & Transfer Scheme
CCEA	Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
CE	Continuing Education
CER	Continuing Education Record
CHEST	Combined Higher Education Software Team
CIHE	Council for Industry and Higher Education

CoVE	Centre of Vocational Excellence
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CURL	Consortium of University Research Libraries
CVCP	Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals now Universities UK
CVE	Continuing Vocational Education

D

DDA	Disability Discrimination Act
DELNI	Department of Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DHA	District Health Authority
DHFETE	Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (for Northern Ireland)
DoH	Department of Health
DSA	Disabled Student Allowance

E

EAN	European Access Network
EAZ	Education Action Zone
EC	Excellence Challenge
ECCTIS	Education Counselling & Credit Transfer Information Service
EiC	Excellence in Cities
EQUALL	Equal Opportunities, Access and Lifelong Learning (HEFCE committee now subsumed by NPB)
ERA	Education Reform Act 1998
ESECT	Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team
ESF	European Social Fund
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
EU	European Union

F

FACE	Forum for the Advancement of Continuing Education
FAST	Forum for Access Studies
FD	Foundation Degree
FE	Further Education
FEC	Further Education College
FEFC	Further Education Funding Council (now LSC)
FESR	Further Education Statistical Record
FHEA	Further and Higher Education Act 1992
FTE	Full-time Equivalent
FY	Financial Year

G

GNVQ General National Vocational Qualification

H

HE Higher Education
 HEA Higher Education Academy
 HEA Higher Education Adviser
 HEC Higher Education Corporation
 HECS Higher Education Contribution Scheme
 HEERA Higher Education External Relations Association
 HEFC Higher Education Funding Councils
 HEFCE Higher Education Funding Council for England
 HEFCW Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
 HEI Higher Education Institution
 HEIF Higher Education Innovation Fund
 HEIST Higher Education Information Services Trust
 HESA Higher Education Statistics Agency
 HESES Higher Education Students Early Statistics
 HMI Her Majesty's Inspectorate
 HMSO Her Majesty's Stationery Office
 HNC/D Higher National Certificate/Diploma

I

IAG Information, Advice and Guidance
 IIP Investors in People
 ILAs Individual Learning Accounts
 ILR Individual Learner Record
 ITT Initial Teacher Training

J

JANET Joint Academic Network
 JISC Joint Information Systems Committee

L

LAC Looked After Children
 LAE Liberal Adult Education
 LAN Local Area Network
 LEA Local Education Authority
 LLL Life Long Learning
 LLN Lifelong Learning Network
 LLSC Local Learning and Skills Council

LSC Learning and Skills Council
 LSDA Learning and Skills Development Agency

M

MaSN Maximum Student Number
 MIS Management Information Systems
 MLE Managed Learning Environment

N

NAB National Advisory Body
 NABCE Non-Award Bearing Continuing Education
 NAFE Non-Advanced Further Education
 NAHT National Association of Head Teachers
 NAO National Audit Office
 NATFHE National Association of Teachers in Further & Higher Education
 NCRT National Communications Resource Team (Aimhigher)
 NCT National Co-ordination Team for Teaching and Learning
 NCVQ National Council for Vocational Qualifications
 NDT National Disability Team
 NFER National Foundation for Educational Research
 NIACE National Institute for Adult Continuing Education
 NIAO Northern Ireland Audit Office
 NIHEC Northern Ireland Higher Education Committee
 NISS National Information Services and Systems
 NOCN National Open College Network
 NPB National Partnership Board
 NTET National Target for Education and Training
 NUS National Union of Students
 NVQ National Vocational Qualifications

O

OFFA Office for Fair Access
 OFSET Office for Standards in Education & Training
 OFSTED Office for Standards in Education
 OLF Open Learning Foundation
 OU Open University

Glossary of Acronyms



P

P4P	Partnerships for Progression
PCT	Primary Care Trust
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
PGR	Postgraduate Research
PGT	Postgraduate Taught
PI	Performance Indicator
PQ	Parliamentary Question

Q

QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

R

RA	Action on Access Regional Adviser
RAC	Regional Advisory Committees
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise
RC	Regional Consultant
RDA	Regional Development Agency
RF	Regional Forum
RGO	Regional Government Offices
RHA	Regional Health Authority
RPB	Regional Partnership Board
RSA	Royal Society of Arts

S

SAM	Subjects Allied to Medicine
SCES	Subject Classification for Education Statistics
SCOP	Standing Conference of Principals
SCOPVEC	Scottish Vocational Education Council
SCR	Short Course Record
SEDA	Staff & Educational Development Association
SENET	Skills and Education Network
SHA	Special Health Authority
SHEFC	Scottish Higher Education Funding Council
SI	Statistical Indicator
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SOED	Scottish Office Education Department
SRHE	Society for Research into Higher Education
SSC	Sector Skills Council
SuperJANET	Super Joint Academic Network

T

TCA	Tertiary College Association
TCS	Teaching Company Schemes

TEC	Training & Enterprise Council
TEED	Training, Enterprise and Education Directorate (of the DfES)
THES	The Times Higher Education Supplement
TQM	Total Quality Management
TTA	Teacher Training Agency

U

UACE	Universities Association for Continuing Education (now UALL)
UALL	Universities Association for Lifelong Learning
UCAS	Universities & Colleges Admissions Service
UCEA	Universities and Colleges Employers Association
UCISA	Universities & Colleges Information Systems Association
UCoSDA	Universities' and Colleges' Staff Development Agency
UDACE	Unit for the Development of Adult Continuing Education
Ufi	University for Industry
UKADIA	UK Arts & Design Institutions Association
UKCC	United Kingdom Central Council for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting
UKERNA	UK Education Networking Association
USCAS	Universities Standard Classification of Academic Subjects
USR	Universities Statistical Record
USS	University Superannuation Scheme
UUK	Universities United Kingdom

V

VET	Vocational Education and Training
VFM	Value for Money
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
VLL	Vocational Lifelong Learning

W

WAB	Wales Advisory Board for Local Authority Higher Education
WAN	Wide Area Network
WBL	Work-Based Learning
WOED	Welsh Office Education Department
WP	Widening Participation
WRL	Work Related Learning



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