

HEFCE 01/36

June

Guide

Strategies for widening participation in higher education

A guide to good practice

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To	Heads of HEFCE-funded higher education institutions Heads of universities in Northern Ireland
Of interest to those responsible for	Management; Strategy writing; Widening participation
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Executive summary

Purpose

1. Following the submission of institutions' initial statements on widening participation and learning and teaching strategies, the Council commissioned an analysis of the documentation submitted. The Action on Access team – which coordinates the Council's widening participation activities – undertook the analysis of the widening participation statements, whilst the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (TQEF) National Coordination Team undertook the analysis of the learning and teaching strategies. These analyses have identified examples of different approaches and of good practice, which may be helpful to institutions as they develop their strategies.

2. We recently held two seminars which addressed the relationship between widening participation, learning and teaching, and strategic planning. (Presentations from the seminars will be published shortly on the web-site under 'Learning and teaching'.) In recognition of these relationships and in order to enable a coordinated approach we have therefore commissioned this and a companion guide on learning and teaching, which draw on some of the good practice identified. We will also publish the full analyses on our web-site.

3. We intend to issue further, more detailed, guidance in spring 2002 using case studies to show examples of action plans and targets.

4. The companion guide for learning and teaching is published as HEFCE 01/37.

Key points

5. There is no single definition of widening participation and we have not tried to provide one. The guide uses the expression widening participation to denote activities to target the individual groups that HEIs have identified as under-represented and to ensure their success.

6. The guidance in both this and the companion guide builds on what is currently taking place, and what has been learnt by institutions, so as to share best practice. Institutions vary enormously and are at different stages of development of their strategies, and there is much to learn from each other's experience. Brief case studies have been included from English higher education institutions, with contact details for further information. Most case studies relate to full-time undergraduate students but the approaches could also apply to part-time and postgraduate students.

7. The guide is structured in four main sections:

- the first addresses the strategic issues that relate to the preparation and development of a comprehensive widening participation strategy
- the second describes activities to widen participation at each stage of the student life-cycle (aspiration raising, pre-entry activities, admission, first term or semester, moving through the course, and employment)
- the third draws the themes of the guide together by discussing the issue of student success
- the fourth outlines the support available for institutions from the HEFCE.

8. Further information on the policy context of the Council's widening participation strategy, particularly the Excellence Challenge, can be found in Annex A. A summary of the analysis of the initial statements on widening participation is at Annex B.

9. This guide has been written in conjunction with the Action on Access team. Both the team and the Council would like to thank all those who have provided case studies for inclusion in this guide.

10. All the publications mentioned in this guide can be downloaded from the HEFCE web-site www.hefce.ac.uk under 'Publications'.

Action required

11. This report is for information and guidance.

Section one **Widening participation strategies**

Preparation of widening participation strategies

12. In HEFCE 01/29 we have given institutions guidance on the content and structure of widening participation strategies that are to be submitted in July 2001. This section provides more detailed guidance on the various components that HEIs might like to consider when writing a widening participation strategy. These components have evolved from the original guidance on learning and teaching strategies in HEFCE 99/55.

Context

13. It can be helpful at the start of the planning process to articulate in some detail an 'environmental scan' which analyses the problems an institution faces, and the context it finds itself in, that are producing the pressures for change. This contextual analysis can be set in the present, in order to focus on catching up with changes the institution has not yet responded to, or can anticipate a future in order to set long-term goals for change.

14. Some HEIs will be operating within the context of regional or sub-regional collaboration in which the partners have both common and competing interests. Some of the partners may have more buoyant demand and operate more in the national market than others, and some may operate predominantly in a part-time environment. Although there will be some competition between institutions, they may have decided to act as a partnership because they see it as having greater benefits on the whole. Any strategic statement will need to recognise both the benefits and the drawbacks of partnership.

15. The partnership may have a particular strategic focus such as that in the East Midlands, which involves the Universities of Derby, Nottingham and Nottingham Trent in establishing a regional credit framework to maximise their potential in reaching out to communities that are under-represented in higher education. At the same time, the individual institutions will be focused on other activities which seek to widen participation. The role of the strategy in such cases is to recognise both the regional and the institutional perspective.

Ownership

16. How the strategy is produced and communicated is crucial to its success. If there is ownership of a new strategy among the relevant staff it is far more likely to be implemented successfully. Ownership can be achieved in a variety of ways, for example by giving relevant staff an opportunity to contribute to a consultation, or an internal debate. If staff can understand the rationale behind the development of a policy, and see where their individual roles fit within the strategy, they are likely to be committed to the implementation. However, the research on learning and teaching strategies demonstrates that it is not uncommon for staff to be largely unaware of their institution's mission or policies, sometimes despite good intentions in this area.

17. The approaches taken by institutions to writing strategic statements vary widely. The process can include:

- a member of the senior management team writes the strategy

- an individual is given responsibility to draft the strategy, on behalf of a member of senior management
- a working group prepares a draft for a committee
- a group is established with responsibility for overseeing the negotiation of a strategy and for building a sense of commitment and ownership
- there is a preliminary process of discussion at various levels about whether the institution needs a strategy, and if so why, and in what form
- a group is given the task of exploring what other institutions do, and undertaking some research and collection of documentation before a decision is taken on how to proceed
- an 'environmental scan' or analysis of context is undertaken and agreement reached on the problem that needs addressing, before starting on a strategy
- an early draft is referred to departments for discussion and further development
- drafts or early discussion papers are mounted on a web-site and electronic forms are provided for comments, which are then collated and published, or there is an open electronic discussion list
- open meetings are held for all categories of staff on every site to discuss general plans or the implications of the institution's mission for changes in teaching
- institution-wide events to present and debate ideas
- components of an outline strategy are referred to a range of committees and groups with specialist briefs, for them to develop detailed plans
- key staff are appointed or key responsibilities allocated, so that there is senior management support and sufficient staff time to develop a strategy thoroughly
- budgets are negotiated to indicate the scale of the enterprise and the extent of institutional commitment
- formal presentation of final drafts to Senate for approval
- departments develop detailed strategic plans within the broad framework provided by an outline institutional plan
- combinations of the above in multiple stages, over an extended period.

18. It can be helpful if institutions tell us in their widening participation strategies the approach they have adopted so that we can better understand the context surrounding the creation of the strategy.

19. At most HEIs, the staff who will have a more in-depth knowledge of widening participation are:

- staff responsible for co-ordinating widening participation
- widening participation project officers
- teaching staff
- advice and guidance staff
- staff with responsibility for students with disabilities
- staff involved in education development and the learning and teaching strategy
- careers advisers
- estates staff
- human resource managers.

20. Depending on the nature of the HEI's proposed strategy, it may also be helpful to consult with the following groups, or to involve one or more of them in the planning process:

- other HEIs
- local widening participation projects
- local education authorities
- schools

- further education colleges
- adult education providers such as the Workers Educational Association
- Open College Networks
- Lifelong Learning Partnerships
- community forums
- Regional Development Agency
- Government Office.

Goals

21. Experience and research indicate that it can be helpful if strategic statements include a small number of broad but unambiguous and widely understood goals. These help staff to understand where the institution is trying to get to in terms of widening participation overall, and therefore the rationale for individual objectives. Goals can be expressed as a specific mission or vision for widening participation which emphasises values. It can be linked to the institutional mission, or be drafted as a more specific extension to it.

Culture

22. To achieve radical change in widening participation, some HEIs may require a significant shift in organisational culture. The widening participation strategy, or the human resources strategy, can be used to articulate what kind of culture the institution wants to develop and what mechanisms it might use to achieve this.

Quality enhancement and infrastructure changes

23. If institutions want to explore best practice in widening participation strategies they need to go beyond setting goals or formulating policies, and to consider what steps are needed to achieve these goals. It is important that the organisational culture, and reward mechanisms, succeed in capturing staff's time and attention to bring about change.

Implementation

24. Institutions have found it helpful to use the strategy documents to plan the implementation, by spelling out which individuals, working groups or committees are responsible for what actions, who they report to, and to what schedule.

Targets

25. Targets are a crucial element of any comprehensive strategy because they enable HEIs to monitor and measure their progress against specified goals. However, as HEFCE 01/29 and the Action on Access analysis of the initial strategic statements recognise, institutions find it particularly difficult to set appropriate targets when it comes to widening participation. There are three main reasons for this:

- a. Much of the activity is long-term and can therefore be difficult to measure quantitatively, or qualitatively, over a shorter period of time.
- b. The context affecting widening participation is not in the control of the HEIs, and it can be difficult to articulate meaningful targets when there are few fixed points, strategically speaking.

c. The speed of change, for example relating to the financing of student support mechanisms, affects the ability of HEIs to articulate targets easily.

26. However, if HEIs identify specific goals within a strategy these need to be translated into practice by using targets. Setting appropriate targets enables stakeholders to monitor the progress of the strategy, and establish if public funding has been put to appropriate uses. Target setting is more important internally, because it communicates to staff the specifics they need to understand to successfully deliver the HEI's strategy.

27. We recognise the factors that constrain effective target setting, and it is for this reason that the request for revised strategies and action plans (HEFCE 01/29, paragraph 35) suggests that HEIs should re-submit their action plans if targets have to be significantly revised or changed for any reason.

Performance indicators

28. One way of approaching the issue of target setting is to use the wide range of internal and external data now available to institutions. This includes:

- local progression rates into HE from different pathways
- local school performance in terms of participation and attainment
- admission trends broken down by gender, ethnicity, age, disability, socio-economic groups, full-time and part-time, undergraduate and postgraduate
- entry qualification split into A-level, GNVQ, access courses, OCN, NVQ for undergraduate entry
- success and progression data
- graduation data
- employment rates
- performance indicators from us and the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)
- the review of HEIs' 1999 initial strategic statement on widening participation (summarised in Annex B); the full report is on the HEFCE web-site www.hefce.ac.uk under 'Publications'.

29. Many of the data sets can be broken down by gender, ethnicity, age, disability, socio-economic groups, postcode, mode and level of study.

30. The following paragraphs explain the data available, give advice on its use and identify a number of limitations. In addition to this national information, HEIs have access to a rich vein of regional information which may be appropriate to their strategy.

31. Indicators are calculated to help assess the nature, performance and success of many policies across a range of activities in higher education, including teaching and learning, widening participation and research. These indicators can be used to contribute to public accountability and to assist in policy making. They can be useful within an institution to judge the effect of existing policies, the performance of other institutions, opportunities for improvement and national trends. Due to the considerable diversity of the higher education sector – in terms of the missions of institutions, their current stage of development in widening participation, the breadth of activities undertaken and the nature of their student populations – it is important to have a range of indicators.

32. Using a variety of indicators also allows stakeholders to identify those that they regard as crucial. These should then be maintained over time, until they cease to have the same significance, through changes to the institution's policies or mission.

33. The principal national sources of standard HE widening participation indicators and data in England are published by:

- the HEFCE
- the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)
- UCAS.

34. The HEFCE performance indicators for 1997-98 and 1998-99 were published in HEFCE 00/40 and include the following:

- participation of under-represented groups in higher education (Table T1 and T2)
- non-continuation following year of entry (Table T3)
- resumption of study after a year out of higher education (Table T4)
- projected learning outcomes and efficiencies (Table T5)
- module completion rates (Table T6)
- share of research output per share of research input (Table T6).

35. The indicator is given for each institution, and for the sector as a whole. Differences between institutions may be due, in part, to the entry requirements of different subject mixes. Therefore, to inform any comparisons, each institution is also compared with an adjusted sector benchmark based on a notional institution with comparable defining features, and the standard deviation between this and each individual institution is shown in the tables. We are continuing to develop the indicators, and we will consult the sector before making (non-technical) changes in their format or scope.

36. HESA provides the source for most HEFCE performance indicators, and also publishes data by institution, in considerable detail. Institutions should know their own data well, and may be able to examine any significant variations between their own data and that for the sector. The ability to perform additional work and manipulations upon data with nationally agreed definitions can be of great value.

37. UCAS has well established data sets. These permit HEIs to assess their recruitment of applicants for full-time undergraduate programmes. However, the data are not available for students studying alternative modes, and not all full-time undergraduates apply through UCAS; there are direct applications to all institutions and different schemes for some disciplines.

38. Data quality may be of significance in some assessments. The advantage of using nationally agreed definitions is that data should be of a comparable standard. However, precise data definitions may vary from year to year, making an element of caution sensible.

39. Many indicators exist which can be used to assess widening participation so it is generally most efficient to use these first (particularly where they comprise sector-wide benchmarks and are consistently maintained over a period of years). The calculation of 'bespoke' indicators within a single institution may be limited to instances where a clear need is identified which cannot otherwise be met.

For example, the HEFCE performance indicators do not currently include recruitment and success of students from minority ethnic groups.

40. Analyses by ethnic origin or disability are not the subject of any currently published performance indicators. However, standard definitions of ethnic origin and disability classifications have been established by HESA. Institutions will be able to use these data to measure performance internally, between different parts of the institution, and over time. The HESA record captures the number of students who receive Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) and is used to calculate the HEFCE mainstream disability funding.

41. Institutions may, however, wish to use their own data (or to adapt standard indicators) to produce local indicators with a higher level of fine-tuning than is available from national indicators. For example, through an institution's own student record, it may be possible to track students with different entry qualifications through a particular course, to analyse if entry qualifications have a correlation with outcomes. Such analyses may be best as tests of hypotheses: the large volume of data available in most institutions makes analysis difficult unless clear questions are being asked.

42. Commercial market research organisations may, at a cost, produce reports which could not be provided from within the institution. They may analyse existing public sources of data or indicators, and augment this with data from local and national government sources. Maximum use should be made of existing data sources, and any proposal to collect further data (for example by direct surveys of potential students) should be carefully costed and justified.

Participation data

43. Participation data can play an important role when HEIs are seeking to understand how to target under-represented groups more effectively.

44. UCAS provides a variety of indicators across a range of demographic variables including age, sex, social class, ethnic origin and disability for all member institutions. Individual member institutions can also see their own figures. These figures are restricted to applicants for full-time undergraduate courses.

45. There are three HEFCE performance indicators of participation in HE for young full-time first degree entrants; they cover entrants from state schools or colleges, from social class IIM, IV and V, and from low participation neighbourhoods. Each is principally based on HESA returns.

46. The HEFCE social class indicator is calculated from both UCAS and HESA data, and highlights the low proportion across most institutions of students from skilled manual, semi-skilled or unskilled backgrounds.

47. We provide the percentage of entrants from neighbourhoods with low rates of participation in HE for young and mature undergraduate entrants, both full-time and part-time. It is therefore of greater use in assessing overall performance in participation than the previous two measures. Low participation neighbourhoods are assessed via postcode data, with a classification based on the 1991 census. Postcodes are mapped to census enumeration districts in England and Wales (and output areas in Scotland). Neighbourhood types with participation rates less than two-thirds of the national average for young entrants are defined as low participation.

48. We also provide geodemographic data to each HEI on how its own students were assigned, by postcode, to low participation neighbourhoods, but do not publish a national listing of postcodes and neighbourhood types. However, an institution can use its own data over several years to identify its main potential recruiting areas, and to monitor its success in recruiting students from low participation neighbourhoods. We believe that the methodology underlying the postcode premium is fit for purpose, but we are reviewing it and will revise it if there is a suitable alternative.

Student progression data

49. Current nationally published measures of progression are limited, and the HEFCE indicators are restricted to measures of non-completion, rather than of learning outcomes. The principal indicator is a measure of the percentage of entrants to each HEI who continue at that institution, transfer to another, or leave higher education. It is limited to full-time first-degree students, split between young and mature. Information is shown split between low-participation and other neighbourhoods.

50. A further table, of lesser significance, provides a measure of students who return to study after a one year absence in the previous year (for whatever reason).

Employment data

51. Traditionally the only analysis available for determining levels of student employment has been the First Destination Survey. This information is captured as part of institutions' returns to HESA for full- and part-time students in all modes. The recently published performance indicators for employment (HEFCE 01/21) for full-time undergraduates have been based on these data; they capture whether or not students have gone into further study or employment.

52. Employment measures may be of particular significance in widening participation if students with different backgrounds and entry qualifications can be tracked through the full cycle of their study to employment. Such an analysis in detail is best performed by an institution upon its own student records.

53. Case study 1 shows how one university uses the information it has to inform its strategy. This example fits a particular approach but could be tailored to fit others as appropriate.

Case study 1

Kingston University

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As well as the traditional forms of data used by university planning departments, Kingston University's Widening Participation Unit is developing strategies using four particular sources:

- HEFCE performance indicators
- recruitment and admissions data
- potential HE students from sub-regional colleges
- a questionnaire on perceptions of the university.

HEFCE performance indicators

The university has taken the HEFCE performance indicators for the academic years 1997-98 and 1998-99, particularly those relating to access (young full-time entrants – social classes I to V), and has represented the figures at a faculty and degree programme level. This was achieved by merging the HEFCE data and the HESA returns. The results make interesting reading. Although 32 per cent of all young full-time entrants to Kingston University in 1997-98 and 1998-99 came from social classes I to V, this figure varied significantly between faculties and, within faculties, between degree programmes. These figures are distributed to faculties.

Recruitment and admissions data

The university has used the UCAS Postcode Tracking Service to analyse the recruitment patterns of students applying primarily from feeder institutions in the sub-region. In 1998 over 70 per cent of all full-time students came from within a 50 kilometre radius of the university. Analysis using the tracking service shows the numbers of students applying from certain institutions, those who receive offers, those who are rejected, those who accept an offer as 'firm' and as an 'insurance'. This analysis has been carried out from a university perspective, for particular degree programmes, and from a feeder institution perspective, for sub-regional FE colleges and schools.

At present the university is working with the UCAS Research and Analytical Service to extend the analysis to include numbers of students who eventually enter the university, including those applying through Clearing. This process will provide a profile of students who are represented at the different stages of the admissions cycle, showing social class, feeder institution, entry qualification, gender, ethnicity and postcode sector.

Potential HE students from sub-regional colleges

The university leads an HEFCE-funded widening participation project with the University of Surrey Roehampton, St Mary's College Strawberry Hill, Richmond upon Thames FE College, Kingston College, South Thames College, West Thames College, Merton College, Guildford FE and HE College, and Esher College. This project has commissioned the Responsive College Unit to design a database, which can combine data from each of the colleges' Individual Student Records (ISR). This will provide data on the numbers of students studying particular courses at Levels Two and Three in the sub-region and will profile the students in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, programme area, progression, widening participation, and postcode sector.

Questionnaire on perceptions of the university

Recently, the university has collaborated with the University of Luton in developing a questionnaire that is shortly to be used by local schools and colleges in the sub-region. It is given to students who are studying on one year pre-HE programmes, or who are in the first year of two year Level Three programmes. The University of Luton developed the questionnaire and used it in Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire last year with over 800 students.

The questionnaire has now been further developed by the two institutions and will be distributed by Kingston University to 1,500 students in the sub-region of south-west London. The themes covered are perceptions of cost, employment and earnings issues, information and guidance, and general plans and perceptions. Results are fed back to schools and colleges. Responses allow general analysis of the sub-region, which includes classification using gender, age, ethnicity, institution and course studied, and whether or not students are the first generation in their families to enter higher education. Particular institutional profiles will not be publicly released.

Links with learning and teaching strategy

The data can also be useful in developing ways to support students from under-represented groups while they are at the university, a major theme of the institutional strategy. At Kingston, the widening participation strategy is embedded in the university's learning and teaching strategy. For example, one of the priorities of the learning and teaching strategy is to encourage faculties to review and develop the induction that each student receives. Clearly this period, and the first term/semester, are crucial for students who may be the first in their family to be experiencing higher education, or who have previously studied on a course where little reference has been made to the culture of higher education.

The university has therefore decided to allocate funds from the HEFCE widening participation formula funding to pump-prime developments in each faculty, in line with the learning and teaching strategy. One of the criteria for accessing these funds is that the faculty makes reference to the data sources outlined earlier. For example, a faculty can use the performance indicators to justify an emphasis on a particular degree programme. Other data sources can provide information such as profiles of students' entry qualifications. These can be used to recognise their previous learning experiences or, for example, particular assessment strategies.

Joined-up strategic thinking

54. Having considered the components of a comprehensive widening participation strategy, the following section demonstrates how that strategy interacts with other key strategic statements. In particular it shows the widening participation issues that need to be taken into account when planning strategically elsewhere in an HEI.

Teaching and learning strategies

55. The last few years have seen the development of learning and teaching strategies across the sector. Ideally HEIs should consider how they can link their widening participation strategy with the learning and teaching strategy. If an HEI is approaching the student learning from a holistic perspective with a view to students succeeding, then it needs to take account of the needs of the learners it is seeking to recruit.

56. A significant issue will be the extent to which the pedagogical approach of the institution or the staff within the institution address such needs. In some instances the HEI may be seeking to move to a greater reliance on resource-based learning, and that will have its own challenges for all learners. It may or may not be more appropriate to the needs of the targeted widening participation group. The widening participation statement therefore could be included in developing approaches to learning and teaching and to the curriculum.

57. We asked institutions to send us their learning and teaching strategies in January 2000. These were analysed by Professor Graham Gibbs of the National Co-ordination Team for our Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (TQEF). His analysis shows that only 35 per cent of institutions made explicit reference to their widening participation statements in their learning and teaching strategies. However, frequent reference was made to widening participation issues. In particular, the learning and teaching strategies addressed issues of student support, the development of students' skills, and

issues associated with employability.

58. In this guide we have divided the student life-cycle into six stages: aspiration raising, pre-entry phase, admission stage, first term/semester, moving through the course, and employment. Learning and teaching strategies often address issues associated with the fifth and sixth stages ('moving through the course' and 'employment') and sometimes address the fourth stage ('first term/semester'). However they are unlikely to address issues associated with the first two stages ('aspiration raising' and 'pre-entry phase'). Where institutions are changing their curriculum to meet the aspirations or needs of new types of students, or where they are re-orienting their pedagogic processes to be more appropriate to mature or part-time students, this is likely to be presented in their learning and teaching strategy rather than in their initial widening participation statement. An example of a change in the curriculum would be developing more courses that are applied, employment oriented, or skill-focused. An example of a shift in pedagogic processes would be demonstrated by an increasing emphasis on student independence and flexibility, as opposed to a teacher/classroom driven approach.

59. As student recruitment is affected by the nature of courses on offer, and student retention is affected by teaching and learning methods, the learning and teaching strategy is central to comprehensive attempts to widen participation. When developing widening participation strategies, institutions need to think through what they need their learning and teaching strategy to deliver for them.

Human resources strategy

60. All HEIs are being asked to develop a human resources strategy (see HEFCE 01/16) and within this framework they should be addressing a number of factors that are crucial to the success of widening participation strategies. This may focus on measures to build capacity within the HEI (and possibly with partners) including:

- addressing the support needs of project workers on fixed-term projects
- identifying value and reward systems appropriate to widening participation in institutions which might traditionally place a heavy emphasis on rewarding and valuing research and teaching
- ensuring appropriate staff development strategies to embed issues concerning widening participation.

Estates and facilities

61. Equally important to any successful strategy is matching the infrastructure to the needs of students. It is a commonly expressed view that many HEIs do not always provide appropriate facilities for students outside the traditional times for full-time undergraduate study. There are many exceptions, particularly in institutions that provide a significant amount of specialised and part-time study, such as Business Schools which cater for a particular market. However, HEIs may wish to consider the accessibility of library and learning resources and other core facilities.

Disability statements

62. We do not require institutions to submit strategies in relation to disability provision. However, we would encourage institutions to include strategy and policy relating to disability in both their widening participation and learning and teaching strategies. Guidance on establishing baseline provision for students with disabilities was published in 1999 (HEFCE 99/04). It suggested that providing an

inclusive learning environment for students with disabilities is an issue for the whole institution. This is particularly important after the recent introduction of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, which extends the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act to higher education. We were not able to identify an appropriate case study to demonstrate the integration of disability issues at a strategic level. However, the introduction of the new legislation will require HEIs to think carefully about their provision in this area.

63. Institutions may want to connect their strategies for disability with the disability statements which were submitted to us in 2000. These provide applicants and students with information on an institution's provision for students with disabilities.

64. Institutions may well have subsidiary strategies which could usefully inform decision making about widening participation. Examples include marketing strategies and communications and information strategies.

Marketing strategies

65. HEIs have in recent years been developing more sophisticated marketing strategies. Such strategies often seek to attract the traditional students as it is easier to reach them through conventional approaches. While this may be a successful strategy, it needs to take account of the impact certain materials may have on non-traditional groups. For example a 'student lifestyle' magazine which places a heavy emphasis on young people and the social life of a student may put off certain groups. It is important that the marketing strategy reflects the issues affecting all groups that the HEI is seeking to attract. A number of institutions already produce guides for mature students and some produce prospectuses for part-time courses; they all have different roles to play within the strategy.

Communications and information technology

66. Many HEIs have plans relating to the provision of library resources and IT facilities, and may find it helpful to consider if the under-represented groups an HEI is targeting are provided for appropriately within the plan. For example, is there sufficient access to library facilities outside working hours for students who work and may have lectures in the evening?

Childcare arrangements

67. Many HEIs have creche or nursery facilities for children. It is useful to consider whether the information about arrangements is easily available for certain groups. For example, when a mature student enquires about the childcare grant available from a local education authority, is information about the HEI's facilities readily available?

Section two **The student life-cycle**

Introduction

68. One way of drawing together the various stages or phases involved in developing an integrated approach to widening participation is to look at the student life-cycle. By breaking down activities into stages, an institution can demonstrate how it engages at that stage or how it plans to do so. This should be possible irrespective of the target group and the level of study. For example, an institution's aspiration-raising approach to adult learners or younger people can be covered effectively within the same area of the strategy. Similarly the stages are appropriate for all modes of study.

Stages of the life-cycle

Aspiration raising

69. Many institutions work, often in regional partnerships, to raise the aspirations of a variety of groups from adults to school pupils, to encourage them to participate in higher education. The focus may be on 8-year-olds just coming to the HEI to experience a day in the life of a student, or on 17-year-olds engaging in master classes to try to enhance their attainment level. The routes used by the learners are different and the approaches by the HEIs will vary, but there will be some commonality, particularly in terms of data and tracking mechanisms. Clearly institutions can vary the nature of the activity depending on the characteristics of the target group, which may include under-represented sections of the community. An important element of the aspiration raising process is to make sure that the potential student begins to understand the learning and teaching methods used within higher education.

Pre-entry activities

70. This is the phase in which an HEI targets groups of potential students and seeks to assist them in applying successfully to higher education. This may be part of a specific compact arrangement with schools or colleges and may involve detailed progression agreements. Again the strategy may differ for the various target groups, but the HEI should be able to explain the background to the scheme and have a quantitative overview of its impact as well as perceptions by staff and students. A number of the regional projects have this as a strand of activity and HEIs will have experience to draw upon. In some instances the pre-entry phase will have a 'barrier breaking' or preparatory session before the learner moves on.

Admission

71. As the 'gatekeeper' to courses, admissions staff have a pivotal role to play in the achievement, or not, of the aims and objectives for the widening participation strategy. Balancing the demand and supply of different courses with different applicants, and ensuring that students are appropriately prepared to enter a course of higher education, means that admissions staff are aware of:

- compact schemes
- access courses (OCN arrangements)
- assessment of prior and experiential learning (APEL)
- target groups

- monitoring intakes and reviewing recruitment gaps.

72. For some students who may have no family background in higher education, the process of admissions may be extremely stressful. A well designed admissions process can not only help to reduce stress but also contribute to retention, as the student is better informed and more aware of the expectations within higher education.

First term/semester

73. Rather than refer to induction or arrival or welcome, this stage has been extended to demonstrate that the focus is across the whole period: it is not a question of a quick fix in the first few days. The greater the investment in this period the less likely a student is to leave, as they feel more supported. For many students, arriving at a university or college can be a lonely and anonymous experience with a strange culture and vocabulary. In this period, initial support to assist the development of the independent learner can involve:

- diagnostic skill exercises
- workshop support on either a referred or drop-in basis
- skills for learning in HE
- establishment of tutor support
- peer support groups
- introduction to key assessment issues.

Moving through the course

74. This phase is concerned with supporting the learner after the initial semester. It is generally believed that once a student has successfully completed the first semester or term then they should have every chance of being successful in their studies. However, this phase can be a pressure point for students who have found academic work difficult and face catching up while they are starting the next phase of their studies. This phase will normally require significantly less attention as the student feels part of the HEI and its processes. There are strategies that HEIs can adopt, such as the provision of guidance about options and the consequences of choice, as well as reviewing the appropriateness of teaching and learning styles.

Employment

75. This phase focuses on the preparation for employment or further study after the current course. Issues that an HEI may wish to address are the involvement of key skills within the curriculum, the impact of work experience and placement, and the strategies to support students as they make the transition to the working environment with its challenges, constraints and opportunities.

Aspiration raising

76. Aspiring to participate in higher education is a necessary precursor to achieving successful entry to an HEI. Therefore the role and contribution that HEIs make to increasing aspirations to study is often seen as central to widening participation. Indeed many HEIs mentioned aspiration-raising activity in their initial widening participation statements.

77. HEIs will take a variety of approaches to aspiration, depending on their perceptions of the understanding of the target group. For example aspiration raising activity is often based on the premise that higher education is intrinsically a good thing. Strategies based on this premise usually present the HE experience in a very broad sense rather than as a narrow course-based activity.

Examples include:

- junior universities (some schemes include primary age children)
- university experience days
- events for parents and pupils
- school/university partnership schemes
- associate student schemes
- student shadowing
- school visits to universities
- student mentoring schemes.

78. A common element of many aspiration-raising initiatives is exposure to what it is like to be a student. The review of initial widening participation statements revealed that such an approach was seen as an effective way of conveying the message that 'higher education is for you'. This raises the issue of the relationship between the marketing strategies of institutions, and those activities designed to raise the aspirations of targeted groups, which are led by the institution's widening participation unit.

79. In working through this issue, HEIs may need to address some or all of the following questions.

- are the marketing resources of the university being used in a complementary way to the aspiration-raising activities focused on widening participation?
- how is the 'student experience' of higher education at this institution most effectively communicated to under-represented groups?
- how can the impact of aspiration-raising initiatives such as open days and summer schools be evaluated effectively?
- how can aspiration-raising become an effective two-way dialogue between the HEI and the prospective student?

80. The following case studies are examples of how HEIs have approached aspiration raising. This is an activity where there is the most collaboration between HEIs, which may be due to the perception that collaborative working gives students greater choice so that all partners may benefit.

81. A common feature of the regional widening participation projects is a focus on aspiration-raising activities, typically on a partnership basis. It would seem that HEIs are more able to work together in raising awareness as there is the common goal of increasing the numbers of post-16 learners, and sharing activities among local schools such as mentor training and Aiming for a College Education (ACE) days.

Case study 2 Widening participation in Leicestershire and De Montfort University, University of Leicester, University of Loughborough
Contact: Janet Graham, e-mail jg1m@admin.le.ac.uk

This project targets schools, colleges and FE colleges, which were identified in a pilot project. Aims and outputs include activities such as shadowing, tutoring, open days, taster courses, and summer schools. The partners collaborate to develop an information pack for parents, to help parents to advise their children.

Case study 3 Aim Higher
University of Liverpool, Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool Hope, Edge Hill College of Higher Education
Contact: Ann Wade, e-mail annwade@liv.ac.uk

The Aim Higher partnership is between the four HEIs with Liverpool City of Learning. Working together at both policy and operational levels, Aim Higher seeks to identify the barriers to progression to HE by disadvantaged young people in Merseyside, and to add value to the actions of the partners.

It operates by:

- building long-term effective working relationship with schools, FE colleges, Lifelong Learning Partnerships and relevant support agencies
- providing in-depth support to individual young people and learning from their perspectives
- supporting and empowering parents
- examining institutional entry mechanisms, processes and provision
- developing curriculum initiatives which provide bridging support
- disseminating and implementing good practice
- running a year long campaign promoting higher education in Merseyside.

Case study 4 Summer programme for mature students
University of Durham
Contact: Dr Viv Shelley, e-mail v.m.shelley@durham.ac.uk

The Further & Higher Project has been operating since March 2000 through joint funding from the FEFC and the HEFCE and is a partnership between the University of Durham and the local FECs.

The programme will be aimed at both pre-Access and post-Access course students who will be progressing to degrees in October 2001, with distinct programmes for each, but a deliberate 'mixing' of the students on occasion to illustrate what the post-Access students have achieved in a year. It will be run on both campuses at Durham and Stockton: it is expected that learners will opt for the nearest location, but they will be taken to both campuses to emphasise the similarities between and the distinctiveness of each site.

The overall aims of the programme are:

- raising aspirations
- aiding progression
- identifying specific routes to Durham

- aiming to reduce drop-out through adequate preparation for study
- fostering stronger links with community learners
- improving communications with Access course providers and departmental course teams
- contributing to the university's widening participation strategy.

In addition, for the pre-Access students the programme aims to:

- build confidence
- convince potential students of their own ability
- make their goals possible
- empower them to take charge of their own learning
- promote learning as a route to improved quality of life for families and communities in the longer term
- offer 'tasters' of learning and engagement.

The post-Access programme will offer:

- practical support
- contacts and information
- emotional support
- explanation of university structures and terminology
- description of the tutorial system and the role of colleges
- opportunities to meet existing students
- explanation of the mentoring system.

Case study 5 Developing and enhancing study skills for deaf students

University of Central Lancashire

Contact: Lynne Barnes, e-mail L.Barnes@uclan.ac.uk or k.m.Phillips@uclan.ac.uk

The university has developed a Year 0 course for deaf students supporting progression internally or to 'progression partners' with good services. It is disseminating to the sector its Year 0 and model of deaf student support, including research-backed understanding of interactions between deaf students and lecturers in the classroom.

In particular the university is working with Manchester City College to develop access provision for deaf students. This involves a qualification route at Year 0 for full-time students who are deaf, provision to incorporate bespoke study skills packages, and a foundation level in a range of higher education subjects. The provision will encompass guaranteed progression to level one of a degree programme at the university and a negotiated progression to other HEIs.

82. Given the success claimed by these aspiration-raising projects, HEIs may wish to consider the nature of the project work and the partnerships within their strategic statements; aspiration-raising targets require long-term investment and careful nurturing.

83. Another example where broad partnerships are being put into place to help support participation and attainment levels in some of the more disadvantaged areas is the National Mentoring Pilot Project (see case study 6).

**Case study 6 DfEE's National Mentoring Pilot Project
Cardiff University (co-ordinator) plus 15 partner HEIs**

Contact: Professor Alan Evans, National Co-ordinator, e-mail mentor@cf.ac.uk

The National Mentoring Pilot Project (NMPP) is a national scheme funded by the DfEE, the HEFCE and Education Action Zones (EAZs), and co-ordinated by a team from Cardiff University. The aim is to pilot and evaluate a mentoring scheme whereby higher education students offer support, encouragement, guidance, information, technical expertise and personal direction to identified pupils in secondary and middle schools EAZs. The project will assess:

- the improvement in learning of the school pupils
- the extent to which involvement in the scheme influences pupils from deprived backgrounds to seek entry into higher education
- whether involvement in the scheme influences mentors to enter the teaching profession.

The project consists of a series of partnerships, involving at least one HEI, an EAZ and three or four secondary schools. Currently 16 HEIs, 21 EAZs, and 65 schools throughout England are taking part. By the end of February 2001 more than 800 mentors were undertaking mentoring in schools.

Once the EAZ, or the HEIs, have initiated discussions each institution appoints a project director and co-ordinators, who supervise the work of the mentors. Each school assigns a senior member of staff as a school co-ordinator to facilitate and organise the mentoring. There are regular meetings between the EAZ, the HEI and the schools. National conferences are also held to bring together the key players to share knowledge and experiences.

The mentors are paid for their work at a rate of £700 for 120 hours of mentoring per annum, thus ensuring that the project includes a balanced cohort of mentors, including those from financially deprived backgrounds. Mentoring sessions are provided on school premises on a one-to-one basis, outside the classroom, with each mentor having responsibility for four pupils. Each mentor normally offers 120 hours of mentoring over three school terms.

The mentors are normally full-time undergraduate or postgraduate students. Potential mentors attend an awareness-raising session in the first instance which explains the project and their role and obligations. Those who choose to go forward are then put through a rigorous selection process and receive intensive accredited training. The training is co-ordinated and carried out by the Cardiff University team.

The school pupils are between the ages of 11 and 16:

- it addresses individual pupils in years 10 and 11 who are under-achieving and are predicted to obtain several GCSEs at grades D and E who could, with appropriate support, convert these to grade C or above
- it seeks to counter an attitude in many pupils in years 7 and 8 (who had previously been positive about school and their own learning) that education is a chore to be endured and not an opportunity to be seized
- it seeks to counter a belief among certain pupils that higher education is outside the reach of pupils such as themselves, because no one in their family or locality has been to university or college

- it aims to improve pupils' sense of self-worth, motivation, confidence, persistence and application, as well as improving their study skills, time management and goal-setting skills.

The project is independently evaluated by Warwick University. Local monitoring is undertaken by HEI and school co-ordinators. In addition the national quality assurance manager from Cardiff University visits HEIs to collect data and to advise on progress; in 2001-02 he will visit the schools involved.

The project is a five year pilot, scheduled to finish in the summer term of 2004. If before that it has demonstrated that the intervention leads to improved examination and test results, it may be extended to a larger number of HEIs in England.

The following HEIs are partners of the project: the Universities of Aston, Bradford, Cardiff, Central England, Manchester Metropolitan, Newcastle, Nottingham Trent, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Salford, South Bank, Teesside and Warwick, plus Queen Mary (University of London) and Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education.

Pre-entry activities

84. Emphasis in aspiration raising is on demystifying HE and generally raising awareness of what it might have to offer. The thrust in pre-entry activities tends to be on preparation for starting a course. Strategic partnerships with colleges and schools are often a strong factor in pre-entry activities.

85. The degree of formality in such strategic partnerships is extremely variable. At one end of the continuum are formal compact schemes whereby preferential consideration is given by an HEI to students from compact members who successfully fulfil the terms of the agreement. Some compacts have been specifically designed to increase progression to higher education for groups under-represented in a particular HEI's student population, as identified in its widening participation strategy; others are less specific. Some compacts include a residential component to enable participants to experience living on a campus. The notion of preparation for HE in such schemes might therefore include IT and study skills, as well as social preparation.

86. Numbers of compact partners differ between schemes, from one to over 60. For example, the Surrey higher education compact has 65 members: nine HEIs, 21 FECs and 35 schools. The member schools and colleges provide 10 per cent of the total intake to the HEIs in the compact region.

87. The compact approach was originally developed with FECs in relation to access courses for adults; these have tended to develop into Associate College arrangements. A number of HEIs developed links with FECs through franchising and partnership arrangements as a means of widening participation locally. These typically focus on progression support and linked courses particularly through foundation years, 2 plus 2 degrees and other relationships. Some, such as Sheffield Hallam University, have used the model to identify and seek to fill gaps in provision through a Building Pathways project. (Contact: John Harvey, e-mail J.Harvey@shu.ac.uk). Other institutions have set up funding consortia (see HEFCE 00/54, which also refers to good practice documentation on the HEFCE web-site).

88. At the other end of the continuum for pre-entry activity there are unstructured or informal arrangements to support higher education entry. For example, South Bank University has a well established Associate Student scheme which provides members, most of whom attend local colleges,

with access to the learning and social facilities of the university. In contrast to a formal compact, this approach enables local learners to determine how and when they will make use of the facilities, and in doing so they can gain diverse experience of what it is like to be a student at that particular HEI.

89. Because the pre-entry phase involves helping potential students to make the transition from being interested in higher education to discovering what they have to do to achieve a place, the careers service can play an important role. The introduction of Connexions, the Government's new advise and guidance service in England for 13 to 19 year olds, across the country may have an impact on careers services' ability to deliver existing levels of HE guidance, so HEIs may wish to develop more proactive partnership approaches.

90. The full range of pre-entry activities is enormous and reflects local and regional conditions. Monitoring the impact of such activities on groups targeted within the widening participation strategy is crucial to understanding what contribution they make to increasing participation.

Admission

91. The admissions systems within HE have often been at the centre of discussions concerning widening participation. This has focused on entry to full-time undergraduate and diploma courses, and perceptions of gatekeeping to ensure standards, resulting in little change in the social class mix within higher education. Not much attention has been paid to the growing area of part-time student recruitment, which is traditionally more liberal and mostly concerns adult learners with a wide range of previous experience. This is also the case with postgraduate recruitment, where there are many examples of the recognition of experience and other skills being part of the admissions criteria.

92. Admissions procedures have changed since the establishment of UCAS in the early 1990s, which administers most applications to full-time undergraduate courses. However, these changes are mainly procedural and have not led to major change in the make-up of the student population. To achieve greater student diversity, HEIs may wish to establish specific targets for recruitment from targeted under-represented groups. These could be set at course, faculty or institutional level but will need to be included in the strategy. Some HEIs will have already established targets and they will be able to reflect progress to date.

93. Once targets have been established it is important to ensure that they are regularly monitored and reviewed and that they become part of the admission process. The major challenge is to develop a culture within HEIs whereby the admissions process is as valued as other activities. To achieve this requires institutional change and not merely the commitment of admissions tutors. Evidence from a range of studies indicates that the pressure on HEIs to deal with workload inhibits the development of admissions processes. HEIs could consider if they should review procedures through an appropriate committee.

94. Of course many HEIs will have already developed review mechanisms and will have much to offer others. For some this will be a new experience, although there are many examples where individual admissions tutors have taken steps to address equality issues. There is increasing use of extra material to support applications, and course leaders should be able to identify their under-represented groups and to work with staff with responsibility for widening participation to increase recruitment. This is particularly the case with disabled students, where HEIs are given information at a relatively early stage and have to determine whether they can support a student with that particular

need. The advice given to the recruiters by the disability office is key here. It should also be noted that one of the HEFCE-funded Innovations projects is examining the admissions process in a number of HEIs, focusing on the use of extra material within the recruitment process. Further information on this project is available from Michelle Cronin at the HEFCE, e-mail m.cronin@hefce.ac.uk.

95. The extent to which the student is prepared for higher education will have an impact on their successful integration into the institution. In particular, Clearing can be a tense time for potential students as they come under peer and familial pressure to find a place in higher education.

96. HEIs may seek to develop a strategy to assist the student in Clearing, for example by holding open days. Students need to think through a variety of issues, including the implications of going to an HEI in a different area of the country than originally intended. A number of institutions offer summer schools in this period for under-represented groups, with an assessment of curriculum material which then counts towards the admissions criteria. This is often seen as a way of supporting local students to achieve a place on their chosen course by strengthening their preparation.

97. Some HEIs have found it useful during the admissions cycle to undertake activities that help the student to begin to integrate with the institution:

- a. A common feature is to develop a relationship with the applicant through regular correspondence from the course and the institution, in some cases including 'good luck' cards when they sit exams, with contact names in the department. This creates a sense of belonging, but may have an adverse effect on the individual if they do not meet the requirements.
- b. Many HEIs believe that choice is best made through a visit to the institution to meet staff and see the site. The student demonstrates a desire to join the course and the institution makes a return commitment. This is the case both during the standard admissions cycle and the Clearing process.
- c. Some HEIs produce detailed guides to life as a student, and to the process of gaining a place in addition to the numerous books and UCAS documents. They are a mixture of trying to sell and providing necessary information.

98. In approaching this aspect of the life-cycle, the HEI will need to identify the under-represented groups and to establish quantitative targets. Other aspects of the strategy may include:

- staff development activities to ensure targets are understood and achieved
- changes to the procedure to monitor and approve course entry requirements
- development of taster courses for under-represented groups.

First term/semester

99. Once students have started the course it is helpful to consider what mechanisms of student support will be most appropriate. HEIs will use various methods to identify vulnerable groups, but this can be seen as stigmatising if not handled tactfully. Whatever the approach, it is helpful to ask questions about the HEI's provision to establish if it is suitable for a diverse group of students. For example, does the style of the curriculum assume a particular type of background, and if so how easy is it to integrate students from diverse groups into the course? It may be that students from access courses or GNVQ advanced courses, for example, are used to a very different learning style, and may become de-motivated. HND students who transfer to the later stages of degree courses, even within

the same HEI, may require support as they often have a weaker qualification base on entry to higher education than others.

100. These issues may also be relevant for those who apply to study foundation degrees when they start in 2001. Ideally there needs to be an appropriate match between the expectation of the student and the reality of learning experience, so that the student is motivated to continue during those first difficult weeks.

101. A number of HEIs include statements within their learning and teaching strategies that they are about to develop, or have already developed, diagnostic tests and related activities and support. In most instances these are not linked to widening participation strategies but to more general perceptions of student need. At one HEI a number of departments have signed up to providing maths support across the faculty through a drop-in approach, with the aim of helping students to develop the mathematical skills required to succeed. This is an example of keeping the curriculum the same but preparing students for aspects they may find difficult due to mismatches in preparation. (See case study 8.) One institution aims to provide diagnostic testing for all new students and subsequent support for those in particular need. Others have established drop-in generic guidance and support facilities to which students either self refer or are referred by staff.

102. If students are struggling with their course in the first term/semester, it is important that this is picked up before they move on to the next semester. The organisation of an HEI can mitigate against this because course results may not be available until the student is on the next section. This can make it harder for a struggling student to recover lost ground. One common solution is to make sure that some assessments are assigned early in the semester so that difficulties can be identified early on. This also helps the student to become acclimatised to the learning environment and the expectations of the HEI. Similar issues apply to HEIs with modular courses, where the student support structure may not take into account those undertaking combined courses with other departments.

103. A number of HEIs have begun to develop activities that extend the induction period into the first term/semester in order to minimise information overload. This could be done by getting course teams to focus on the following issues during the first term/semester:

- diagnostic assessment of IT skills
- explanation of the assessment process
- use of skills-based modules
- personal support, which may involve personal tutors for all, or larger groups with dedicated staff-student sessions and activities targeted at different groups of learners
- explanation of learning styles
- use of personal development portfolios.

Case studies 7-9 show how three HEIs have addressed the question of learning styles and the transition to higher education.

Case study 7 Self-assessment of students' key skills

De Montfort University

Contact: Sue Bloy, e-mail sbloy@dmu.ac.uk

The university conducted a key skills exercise with new undergraduates in 1999 and again in 2000, from the full range of subjects across all faculties. The aims were to give students the opportunity to measure their own level of confidence at the point of transition to higher education; to encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning and development; and to identify areas where they felt they required further support.

The assessment took the form of a workbook, 'Improving Your Learning', addressing the three skills of communication (oral, written and reading), application of number, and information technology. Activities were designed to challenge students and to raise their awareness of the importance of key skills in higher education. The assessment was delivered in workshops, with tutors taking on the role of facilitator and guide.

Evaluation of the self-assessment sessions in 1999 demonstrated that students valued the opportunity to reflect on their key skills. Feedback from students and staff informed revisions to the workbook, with greater emphasis being placed upon a cycle of action, reflection, review and planning. The revised workbook included exercises in communication (oral, written and reading) against national levels 1-4, with clearer descriptors than in the 1999 exercise which enabled students to make a more accurate self-assessment of their level of confidence. The 1999 exercise had shown similar results in communication for all faculties; in 2000 differences between faculties have emerged which are being used to inform learning support needs at course level.

Case study 8 Support for mathematics

Queen Mary, University of London

Contact: Mick Brennan, e-mail m.g.brennan@qmw.ac.uk

The Core Maths Support project at Queen Mary developed in response to concerns about the success rates of first year students in numerate disciplines. An increasingly diverse student intake has an increasingly varied previous experience of mathematics. There was also evidence of a gap between the assumed starting point for first year students and the reality of students' capability on arrival.

While learning support strategies have a clear link with institutional aims to widen participation, in this case the approach has been to respond to needs across the relevant student population rather than to single out under-represented groups for special treatment.

Because of the extent of the problem, ranging across 10 academic departments, it was decided to organise a support programme through the Learning Development and Continuing Education Unit – the site of other forms of academic support.

Central organisation of the support programme offers advantages in terms of efficiency and the application of specialist skills. However, it also creates the need for excellent co-ordination with academic departments. Ensuring that support classes are integrated into departmental timetables at the outset has been identified as a crucial factor.

Entrants to numerate disciplines sit a diagnostic test which has been structured to distinguish between the mathematical requirements of departments. Each year approximately 1,000 students sit the test. It is designed for optical marking so results are rapidly available. Students are assigned to maths support classes according to their results and academic discipline.

Each discipline has identified 'core' material for students, and classes are differentiated to reflect this. Classes are arranged at various times to ensure that students can attend. The programme consists of a mix of teaching, workshop activity and drop-in sessions. It is staffed by specialist maths teachers and postgraduate students from the participating departments.

The evidence from the diagnostic test is that a high proportion of students would benefit from maths support. In class, teachers have found that they need to revise quite basic concepts, even for some students who have passed A-level maths. This appears to be an issue about depth of learning, since such students are unable to apply concepts from the A-level syllabus in unfamiliar contexts.

Attendance at maths support classes can be poor, however. The attitude of the home department appears to be a key factor. Where attendance at classes is reinforced by the close attention of study advisers (personal tutors) or through departmental policy, such as a sanction precluding entry for Year 1 examinations, there is a clear effect. In the absence of such reinforcement, students often fail to attend.

For students who do attend, the gain is demonstrated by improved results in a test similar to the initial diagnostic one. Student evaluation is positive; a particular value being placed on the chance to develop mathematical understanding from the students' own starting point.

Case study 9 Supporting students from low participation neighbourhoods

Newman College

Contact: Pamela Taylor, e-mail p.t.taylor@newman.ac.uk

There are two projects running at Newman College. The first is an analysis of students' academic writing skills and an investigation of their needs, depending on main subject, entry qualifications and neighbourhood of origin. This project involves analysing samples of students' work and identifying features of writing. It aims to develop better literacy support for students, a literacy strategy for higher education, improved tutor skills in supporting students' writing, and clearer marking policies.

The second project focuses on work-based learning. It involves working with LEA partners on a part-time programme for workers in 'early years' childcare, to identify clear criteria for work-based projects, and provide training for workplace mentors in applying the criteria. The project will also develop guidelines, both on assessing the level of practical activities and on how to make this level transparent through analysis and reflection. The aim is to improve retention on work-based programmes.

Moving through the course

104. By this time the students should be well integrated within the institution, and work at this phase of the life-cycle focuses more on deepening their skills and experiences in order to equip them for the

future. One pre-1992 HEI is addressing this within the learning and teaching strategy. The following are extracts:

'Key skills embedded in induction year work will need to be progressively developed in the stages of study. It will be important to ensure that skills are formally assessed at the appropriate time and that all students are exposed to the widest variety of assessment techniques possible. Not only will this allow them to show their command of particular skills in an appropriate manner but it will also allow the display of these skills formally.'

'Developing skills for the future through focusing on employability. This may include modules giving work experience (widely defined so that it is not simply paid employment but voluntary work, work in the community, support of research etc) might be made part of the structure of programmes, either on an individual or group basis. Whichever model is followed, modules should be a part of the course structure and formally assessed.'

Employment

105. The successful transition from courses to employment is an issue that affects all students, including those from disadvantaged groups. At a planning level this issue will also have an impact on a range of institutional strategies, including widening participation. There has recently been an increasing emphasis on employability issues, in recognition of the pace of change, and growing complexities of the working world and attitudes to work. For example, it is less likely that graduates will be working in one career for 40 years, and more likely that they will be moving careers and/or undertaking short-term fixed contracts. Therefore HEIs are thinking through the implications of these changes for curriculum design and student support mechanisms.

106. Some HEIs have set up job shops to help students find term-time work, which can enhance employability, and others are re-thinking the place of work placements within the curriculum. Some provide students with the opportunity to work for the institution in libraries, sports facilities or administration. We will shortly be consulting the sector on the new Active Community Fund which will provide funding for volunteering activity for staff and students.

107. Other HEIs have taken a curriculum approach by introducing taught modules which focus on career management skills. These are provided by the careers service, and aim to develop skills in the individual to prepare them for a range of employment opportunities.

108. The University of Central Lancashire is developing this concept through an on-line approach with a project which has four strands:

- a. The development of careers planning tools available over the university IT network.
- b. Careers education over the internet.
- c. New careers education initiatives within the curriculum.
- d. A staff development pack to help non-specialists to deliver careers education programmes.

109. As with all widening participation activity, HEIs are considering how to adapt their approaches to different groups of students. For example, the national figures demonstrate that minority ethnic groups are less likely to achieve employment following graduation than white students. Many factors may be

relevant here, particularly the recruitment policies of employers. But there is also a role within HEIs, who may wish to focus on the support they provide such students.

110. Some of the HEFCE-funded Innovations projects focus on employability issues for minority ethnic groups:

- a. Career Focus: Enhancing Career Opportunities (Windsor Fellowship) will offer a series of recruitment skills training workshops.
- b. Black and Asian Students' Employment, AGCAS (national association for careers advisers in higher education) will deliver a coherent package of local pilot initiatives.

111. The question often raised is whether to have a careers service open to all, or whether there should be a focus on groups that the HEI believes are less likely to secure appropriate employment. An interesting model for a targeted approach, which has yet to be tested, is the Connexions Strategy introduced by the DfEE on a phased basis across the country, led by local careers services. The concept is to focus additional resource on the most disaffected young people to help them to engage with the support available (<http://www.connexions.gov.uk>). If Connexions is successful it will have implications for HEIs' approaches to career guidance.

112. Part-time students are another group who will have different needs to the young undergraduate majority. Part-time students may well have already identified a future career, and are more likely to be familiar with the working world, but for some there could be a need for career development advice which takes into account the work they are already doing, or past employment history. One approach is to provide targeted workshops to different groups of students explaining the nature of careers support, and to develop an additional support programme to take account of specific issues. For example, a workshop could focus on the needs of students with disabilities, with information about the networks of help available and advice on negotiating with employers for appropriate adjustments.

113. Another approach is to develop a mentoring programme with local/regional businesses, so that successful employees within a variety of organisations act as mentors to the target group of students.

Case study 10 Insight Plus

Contact: Adam Nichols, e-mail Adam.Nichols@crac.org.uk

The Insight Plus programme is a partnership of CRAC (Careers Research and Advisory Centre), NUS (National Union of Students), PricewaterhouseCoopers and NEBS (National Examining Board for Supervision) Management, which will establish a national award for undergraduate key skills development. It will provide a framework for the accreditation of different types of casual work experience through non-academic activities, including involvement in clubs and societies and volunteering in the community as well as part-time paid work.

There will be a structured learning programme that represents a practical and formal means of matching students' casual work experience with employers' requirements for key skills competencies.

The objectives are:

- to give employers a greater insight into the experience and competencies of potential recruits
- to provide a standard or 'kitemark' for the skills developed through extra-curricular activities

- to give students the opportunity to optimise the value of their extra-curricular learning and provide a framework for career management
- to give students the chance to demonstrate what they have learnt and to have that learning accredited.

The programme will be delivered via students' unions, using the networks developed by the National Union of Students through its successful National Student Learning Programme and Stadia projects.

Case study 11 Enhancing student employability

Lancaster University

Contact: Terry Wareham, e-mail t.wareham@lancaster.ac.uk

Lancaster University's learning and teaching strategy includes five elements targeted on enhancing student employability:

- personal development profiling for students. A web and paper-based personal development profile is being piloted in three departments in the academic year 2000-01. In 2001-02 this will be expanded to other departments, with full implementation planned for 2002-03
- increasing opportunities for work experience for students on professional courses. This is a long-term project, which involves setting up effective employers' panels and developing opportunities within the public and private sectors for greater integration of work and study
- integrating students' parallel work experience into their overall learning experience. The implementation of personal development profiles will enable students to articulate and reflect upon the skills and experience developed in their work placement, and gain insights into their learning and working practices
- integrating key skills into every programme of study. The '5D' project, started as a pilot in 1998-99 with five academic departments, is now supporting departments across the institution in developing programme specifications for all schemes of study, and using this process to undertake a fundamental review of learning objectives, learning and teaching methods and assessment. The integration of key skills into the curriculum for each programme is an integral part of this review and development process
- 'career management skills' are being integrated with key skills and profiling.

Case study 12 Focusing a strategy around student skills development

Queen's University of Belfast

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Some institutions have spread their efforts and funding across a wide range of goals. The Queen's University of Belfast has targeted much of its efforts towards the development of students' skills. This involves:

- using a 'developing learning and teaching fund' to ensure that all degree programmes provide opportunities for students to develop personal and employability skills, by 2003; this is supporting 30 projects over three years
- developing student records of achievement with profiles of skills for all students by 2003-04, to encourage students' ownership of skills
- extending opportunities to develop skills through work-based learning, and experience abroad

- developing generic skills modules for non-vocational students
- seconding the equivalent of one member of academic staff per annum to the University Skills Initiative.

Case study 13 Implementing a strategy concerned with graduate attributes

University of Leicester

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A central component of the University of Leicester's learning and teaching strategy is the specification of the attributes of a 'Leicester graduate', and mechanisms to ensure that the development and assessment of these attributes is designed into every degree programme. The attributes have been defined centrally and guidelines have been developed for each one. The university's guidelines on 'team working skills' are reproduced below. These specify minimum requirements for degree programmes.

Each degree programme must define within existing provision, or as a part of new curriculum elements, an appropriate range of opportunities for students to develop team working skills. These should enable them to function effectively as a member of a team to facilitate the collective achievement of a designated task.

The following is the minimum outcome for which learning opportunities should be provided within all programmes. By the end of the programme students should be able to:

- work with other team members to identify, distribute and undertake tasks necessary to complete a project
- identify and work with the strengths and weaknesses of individual team members
- communicate effectively with other team members to ensure effective operation of the team
- deal sensitively with dissent and disagreement
- evaluate the contribution of themselves and other team members to the completion of a project; appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of team working; describe those tasks which are most effectively achieved by team effort, and a range of activities designed to facilitate team building.

Appropriate learning opportunities must be a fully integrated part of each programme of study. A range of opportunities must be provided in order to ensure that:

- there is progression of skills development through the programme of study
- all students undertake supervised working in groups for a significant fraction of timetabled time. The work should be task oriented, and may include:
 - tutorial or seminar work which is substantially interactive and not primarily tutor-led
 - practical classes or field work
 - any other activities in which students interact with one another to complete specified tasks
- all students undertake at least one substantive group-based project during their course. A variety of different experiences are suitable, but the key features are that it should be:
 - autonomous – the students must work in teams mostly without tutorial support
 - task based – there must be specified outcomes
 - assessed – the outcomes must be assessed by methods that include evaluation of team working

- the project will normally constitute one module, usually with 10 credits, but other arrangements are acceptable provided they accord the activity equivalent weight in the degree programme
- assessment of team working forms a part of all programmes of study.

Accommodation must be made for students with disabilities and specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia.

Each degree programme has a programme co-ordinator who prepares templates specifying how the attributes are designed into programmes. Examples from two departments are appended to the learning and teaching strategy to model how this can be done. The templates are submitted to faculty learning and teaching committees by a specified date.

Once an overview of existing provision is clear, the university will put in place support programmes to help fill gaps and develop practices and share these developments across the university.

The university will provide materials, exercises, marking criteria, staff development programmes and opportunities for individual guidance, and workshop programmes for students.

114. Many institutions use the terms 'student-centred learning' and 'lifelong learning' in their learning and teaching strategy. However, few have defined what these terms mean in practice, or put in place mechanisms for making progress or identifying whether progress has been made. An exception is illustrated in case study 14, which involves specifying, for example, the minimum requirements for all programmes for the volume of project-based learning, compulsory training for all programme directors, and a schedule and targets for implementation.

Case study 14 Developing student-centred learning and lifelong learning

University of Birmingham

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The first goal of the learning and teaching strategy of the University of Birmingham is 'to give greater emphasis to student-centred learning and the development of all students as effective lifelong learners'. To achieve this the strategy, the university has set the following targets (among others):

- project work is included in all undergraduate programme proposals for students entering from October 2000 – normally at least 40 credits at level 3
- programme specifications, defining skills and knowledge achieved, to be developed by the start of the 2001-02 session (for subjects early in the QAA academic review cycle) or by the start of 2003-04 for all remaining subjects
- embedding and articulation of key skills in all programmes to be encouraged through a staff development programme on writing programme specifications and defining learning outcomes, which is to be instituted from 2000-01. Attendance by school programme directors and directors of learning and teaching will be compulsory
- guidance documentation to facilitate accreditation of work-based learning to be developed for approval by the Academic Board by the end of 1999-2000

- formal schemes for recognising learning achieved away from the university (for example during the year abroad or in industrial placements) will be considered by the Academic Board during 2001
- student progress files to be developed and implemented by all schools for entrants in the 2001-02 session
- the enhancement of student learning through C&IT, within the context of a 'web-enabled campus': the West Campus Learning Resource Centre to provide over 800 teaching spaces including PC clusters from 2001-02
- schools to determine targets within their own learning and teaching strategies (by the start of 2000-01) for the development of appropriate IT-based learning resources; and a learning development unit to be established to enable secondment.

***Case study 15 Developing the expertise of specialist and non-specialist careers advisers
University of Central Lancashire
Contact: Val Farrar, e-mail VFarrar@uclan.ac.uk***

The Disability Development Network (DDN) project grew out of a small group of higher education careers advisers who met over three years to share concerns and practice in working with disabled students. The benefits to each service were invaluable: above all concerns about guidance with individual students were shared.

The network formally began in January 2000 when all higher education careers services were asked to give named contacts of staff working with or interested in work with disabled students. Over 80 names formed the basis of the network, and the survey identified existing good practice. The idea of the expanded network is to create a forum for the exchange of:

- resources
- practice
- developmental work.

The longer-term aim is to harness the expertise of the network to develop careers guidance for disabled students within all services.

- The project team has established different ways of networking: regional meetings, telephone links with named contacts for particular concerns, discussion lists, electronic newsletters, and 10 small working groups to collaborate on issues such as employer perspectives and marketing careers services to disabled students.

The project team's work has been primarily to get the network up and running. But it has also created new resources, collated existing materials, and produced a directory of external agencies which can support disabled students and careers advisers in career planning and guidance.

From the start, the team has used existing communication channels and structures. The national association for careers advisers in higher education, AGCAS, has a Disability Sub-Committee whose members have informed the direction and activities of the project. CanDo, the careers web-site for disabled students and graduates (which is merging with Skill, the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities) published project updates and materials.

Case study recommendations and questions for HEIs

115. The case studies are generally intended to provoke questioning. However in some areas of the student lifecycle some specific questions present themselves.

Aspiration raising

116. In setting targets for aspiration-raising, HEIs may wish to consider the following:

- what will be the target groups and age range?
- what will the scale of activity be compared to present levels?
- who will be involved within the institution?
- will there be a mixture of one-day events and short courses?
- how will the approach be monitored and reviewed?
- will there be a staff development programme for those involved?

Pre-entry activities

117. In setting targets for this aspect of the strategy HEIs may wish to consider the following:

- What will be the range of activities that are undertaken and how does this compare to present levels?
- How will the strand one of the Excellence Challenge and the Opportunity Bursaries impact on the activities?
- Will the strategy involving summer schools being developed and what will be the scale of activity?
- What activities will seek to contribute to the raising of attainment levels?
- Will compact arrangements be part of the strategy and if so what will be the nature of the compact and which courses will it involve?
- How will the activities be monitored and reviewed?

Admission

118. In developing an overall admissions policy and specific admissions requirements the HEI may wish to consider the following process:

- developing overall policies relating to admissions criteria for all levels of course based on the targets it has set for the recruitment of non traditional students
- these policies may then be related closely to a particular course that identifies its recruitment needs against its current profile and then has its proposed criteria approved by the faculty board taking into account the targets set for widening participation
- monitoring the successful implementation of these strategic policy goals in the annual course monitoring which allows colleagues to focus both on the admissions criteria and the learning and teaching implications of the strategy

First term/semester

119. In setting targets for this aspect of the strategy HEIs may wish to consider the following:

- Identifying at the course level the issues which are most likely to affect success and to build in support to the first term/semester
- Developing institutional template for integrating new students into the culture of higher education learning, teaching, assessment and living
- Developing monitoring and review strategies which are then included in any annual course review process
- Developing specific support seminars

Moving through the course

120. In developing an approach to the moving through the course phase HEIs may wish to consider the following:

- Are there mechanisms in place to ensure that a student stays engaged with the institution during this phase?
- Are there mechanisms which ensure that students continue to get up-to-date information about services and provision which may change from year to year?
- Are there mechanisms which encourage students to start looking ahead towards career and employment issues?

Employment

121. In developing a policy to employability HEIs may wish to consider the following:

- How can HEIs help students to identify and articulate the transferable skills they have acquired during their course of study?
- How are students integrated with careers services during the final stages of their course?
- Whether targeted help needs to be provided for specific groups of students?
- Has the HEI identified the areas of the curriculum that improve employability?
- Has the HEI identified any curriculum design and delivery issues that are affected by employability concerns?
- Does any policy on employability successfully link up with existing 'third leg' or HEROBC activity at a strategic and operational level?
- Can the HEI undertake local research that will inform both regional agendas and the HEI's strategy? For example by working with Regional Development Agencies and National Training Organisations on regional and sector-based targets.

Section three **Student success**

122. Student success is the theme that binds this guide with the companion publication on learning and teaching, and is the context within which the strategic planning for both these areas will take place. As the recent request for revised widening participation strategies highlighted, we need to continue to build on the successful recruitment of under-represented groups by ensuring the successful retention and eventual progression of students into employment.

123. Student success is also the theme that binds the elements of the student life-cycle together. These elements are mutually dependent: without an effective aspiration-raising and recruitment process the student may not enter the institution, but this positive start needs to be built upon in the first term/semester and subsequently in order to achieve a positive outcome. A number of HEIs have taken steps to research the reasons for non-completion and then develop ways to increase retention. It is important to recognise that student success is the context within which a widening participation strategy functions. The measure of success is the achievement of the goals the individual started with, although for some these goals may be unrealistic or represent an ill-informed choice or be a result of accepting a limited local offering.

124. HEIs with different backgrounds have approached the issue of student success in a variety of ways. Some have developed a holistic approach to the student life-cycle as described in this guide; others have focused on particular aspects of the experience. Institutional diversity will dictate whether the issue is addressed from a course/departmental base or centrally by the institution as a whole. These are very different strategies and are not mutually exclusive. Much will depend on the culture of the institution and the type of student generally recruited. For example, an institution with a devolved admissions process that relies heavily on departmental ownership will understand awareness-raising strategies in a different way to an institution with a heavily centralised system. It is therefore important to develop an approach that fits both the institutional aims and its ability to deliver to the target group.

125. To monitor and evaluate the success of the institutional approach it is helpful to have integrated management information systems that track the student from pre-entry to moving on phases. Institutions may also like to consider whether their student support service functions are contributing effectively to the successful recruitment, retention and progression of students. Earlier this year we commissioned KPMG to audit a number of institutions in relation to the systems that administer student support funding (hardship, bursary and fee waiver funds). Based on the evidence of the audit we have produced a self-assessment checklist which can be used by HEIs to audit their systems, as a simple check, or as part of a more in-depth review. The checklist will be made available to the sector later this year.

126. Two of the following case studies have also been published in the learning and teaching guide (HEFCE 01/37) as they demonstrate good practice in relation to the generic themes of retention and student success.

127. HEIs might find it helpful to consider developing a specific retention strategy, which could be targeted at specific groups of students if required. One such example is the Open University, which has developed a retention strategy that concentrates on part-time students.

Case study 16 Retention strategy

The Open University

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During the last two years, through the work of the university's student retention programme, valuable new insights have been gained into students' perceptions of quality and flexibility at the interface with the institution. A strategy for student retention is evolving which is based on the critical factors that appear to affect the persistence of students. These factors have been deemed 'value indicators' – sources of value to the student at critical points in their learning journey. In a similar way 'value inhibitors' detract from the learning experience in such a way as to encourage withdrawal. Put together they form a 'student value chain': the retention strategy is based on modelling and inputting new sources of value into the chain, attending to the value inhibitors and thus improving retention.

The university's vision is to ensure that students have a successful higher education experience and fulfil their aspirations by making informed decisions, gaining their preferred qualification, and continuing to study in a lifelong learning context. The university aims to ensure that when students encounter difficulties there are flexible systems of rewards for their endeavours, and rescue measures which encourage students to return in the future to continue learning.

The university decided to consider proposals to manage open entry in the context of student retention. The strategy needed to:

- meet the need for enquirers to make informed choices about the right course of study. In particular it was necessary to:
 - communicate the necessary information, advice and guidance to facilitate choice in a variety of means including electronic, personal, paper-based text, advice from peers and so on. To highlight, in particular, the amount of time needed for distance study and the impact this will have on their lives
 - direct students to the appropriate level of difficulty of course
 - provide course preview materials to give an accurate picture of what the course is like
 - direct students to the relevant starting point and level of difficulty of course
 - understand students' study intentions and measures of success. This information should be collected at registration and disseminated to relevant staff so that the university can evaluate student progress and target effective interventions during study
 - 'reward and rescue' students. Significant numbers of students on their first level 1 course withdraw before the end of the course, but almost a third of these have completed three or more pieces of assessed work. Reward and rescue could be achieved by developing a simple integrated framework for study which would allow students to suspend study if they encountered serious difficulty and rejoin the next presentation of the course with 'banked' completed assessments. Significant slices of work leading to a meaningful suite of learning outcomes gained part-way through a long course would be rewarded with appropriate credit at that point. The invitation would be extended to rejoin the 'second half' of the course in a subsequent presentation

- assist students to feel integrated into and valued as a member of the academic community:
 - theories of student retention all recognise the critical importance of achieving social and academic integration of the students if they are to be retained within the academic community. The retention strategy emphasises the importance of establishing relationships in the first few weeks of the course. Key issues in securing the early relationship are encapsulated in an induction strategy
 - at this time brand recognition and the quality of the educational product should be reinforced through establishing dialogue with the student and providing them with essential, coherent information to embark on the course, thus avoiding information overload
- produce courses that are more suited to students' needs:
 - evidence obtained by the retention programme reveals a compelling case that the most important academic factors leading to drop-out in the distance, part-time environment are: workload, density of concepts being taught, pace and manageability of study and the poor management of student expectations about time needed for study
 - the new strategy therefore centres on developing internal workload templates so that all elements of the course or programme that need to be studied in order for specified learning outcomes and other QAA requirements to be met can be achieved in an appropriate amount of time
 - key retention data will also be incorporated into course approval and annual internal review processes, and evidence given of the actions taken in the light of the previous year's retention data as a central part of the review process
- track student progress and provide key elements of student service:
 - university evidence shows that certain interventions are highly valued by students and are cited as reasons why 'at risk' students stayed with the university. The retention programme is in the process of establishing objectives and ownership for a series of interventions across the study year that will establish and maintain a dialogue with the student. The key value indicator in relationship retention is shown to be the associate lecturer who acts as personal tutor to the student. New opportunities for a more proactive role for the tutor, especially in the very early part of the study year, should find a place in the strategy, along with other interventions such as the provision and mediation of exam feedback and increased flexibility in patterns of study and submission of assessed work
 - students who leave the university by any route will receive a retention-friendly contact which will encourage their immediate or longer-term return. The type of contact should reflect the level of the student's 'engagement' and hence the previous 'investment' by both the student and the university
- monitor and evaluate:
 - undertake effective shifts in measurement and review so that key institutional information is communicated to the university community, and thus provides the motivation for change.

The university has devised key milestone data about the retention of its students. This has been vital in shifting the agenda about recruitment and retention and fostering new attitudes and new

behaviours. New behaviours have begun to take shape as colleagues have been prompted to notice – and, on an institutional level, are increasingly being required to respond to – critical retention information.

The following diagram summarises the value enhancers and value inhibitors that relate to retention.

Open University: Student retention programme

Sense of community

Wider university links

Maintain dialogue

Strategic recommendations	Managing open entry	Early relationships	Courses to meet needs & track progress and student needs					
Stages in the learning journey	Enquired to OU	Reserved a place	Registered and paid-up	Course start	First assessed work handed in	Completed one third of course	Completed Course	Continue to study
Value enhancers: result in a tendency for students to persevere	Clear information Help with locating starting point	Provide a named contact Well structured literature Same message	Early contact with tutor Reaffirm brand quality Coherent, brief guide to getting started	Peer-mentoring Early contact with tutor Integration, social and academic	Prompt feedback Manage workload Dialogue with tutor leads to ongoing integration and builds study skills	Tutor – ongoing dialogue Belief in early academic success confirmed by academic feedback	Helpful with new skills to prepare for exam Give feedback on exam Congratulate & explore options	Continue dialogue between exam and start of new course Good course choice information
Value inhibitors: result in a tendency for students to withdraw	Mass of complicated information Burden of choice too great	Conflicting messages Confusing array of contact points and information Cost	Overload of generic institutional level information Lack of information about chosen course	Mismatch between expectation of course and study and the reality Too difficult to juggle study & work/home	Workload too high Difficult to get back on track when get into difficulty	Lack of dialogue Not enough help with ongoing management of study Workload too high	Lack of exam feedback and mediation of study options Lack of early chance to re-sit exam	Cost of next course transfer to another HEI Dissatisfaction with OU experience

128. Many issues have an impact on retention, including the crucial one of staff development. The next two case studies show how collaboration can enhance staff development activity, and the benefits of using student support documents.

Case study 17 Academic staff development to improve support for disabled students

University of Nottingham

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The University of Nottingham is currently co-ordinating a project to promote and transfer expertise regarding staff development and disability to an existing regional network of non-disability specialists, the M1/M69 staff development network.

The network includes 10 universities: Aston, Central England, Coventry, De Montfort, Derby, Leicester, Loughborough, Nottingham, Nottingham Trent and Warwick. The expertise will be used to create and embed 'good practice' regarding disability into the existing short course programme on 'teaching and learning issues'; and to generate 'good practice' in a selection of courses provided by network members in their own institutions (IT courses and the institutions' programmes for accreditation of academic practice).

The key objectives are to:

- transfer the organic model framework, developed at the University of Nottingham, to staff development officers and trainers involved in the M1/M69 network
- review, evaluate and amend materials and processes for 40 short courses on teaching and learning in the M1/M69 joint programme, ensuring good disability practice
- investigate 10 courses within the network institutions (including C&IT) with a view to generating good practice; then to produce 10 case studies for dissemination in the sector
- embed disability issues within the current postgraduate certificate in academic practice. Two programmes seeking ILT accreditation will be developed
- assemble five exemplars of academic staff supporting disabled students as part of their mainstream responsibilities within the network of universities. These will be available to existing members of academic staff to assist them in assembling ILT portfolios; thus demonstrating the possibility of embedding support for disabled students within general teaching and assessment practices.

Anticipated outcomes:

- recommendations on curriculum design, teaching and assessment methodologies to incorporate disability considerations on all short courses within the network
- agreed criteria made available for future course development
- 10 in-house network courses reviewed and changed to incorporate disability considerations and the provision of case studies for the sector as a whole
- disability awareness to be embedded in two of the current courses organised by network members for probationary academic staff (which are seeking ILT accreditation)
- materials from the courses run in each university circulated across the network
- re-evaluation of the organic model as a dynamic mechanism for achieving change outside the context of Nottingham

- findings publicised and disseminated across the sector to ensure that universities have access to wider expertise.

Case study 18 Student support documents

University of Liverpool

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The University of Liverpool is undertaking a three year development project to establish the use of student support documents to develop effective and consistent practices in the admission and on-course support of disabled students. It is anticipated that by the end of January 2003 all disabled students will have an individual student support document which details agreed support and responsibilities for the student, academic department, welfare and advisory services and other relevant support structures (both internal and external). In addition, there will be a number of disability-related training programmes for staff across the university.

The approach has been incremental: the initial 12 months focused on students and staff from five pilot departments (architecture, geography, medicine, sociology and veterinary science). The development team established working links with key staff and attended appropriate course/tutor meetings. The team also designed and developed a dedicated web-site.

The five pilot departments have welcomed the approach, even though the number of disabled students entering in September 2000 was less than originally anticipated. There is currently (spring 2001) commitment from a further 17 academic departments to bring in student support documents. The early link ensures that a large number of staff will be aware of developments and will have met with the team from welfare and advisory services prior to the new intake of students in 2001. Academic departments thus become comfortable with colleagues from central services, are knowledgeable about the developmental ethos and do not feel over-burdened with additional responsibilities.

A major factor is that students also feel comfortable with the relationships developed both with advisory staff and their academic departments. In any large institution, communication between academic staff and disability services is often minimal. The process of meeting and offering support and expertise has created a more open environment that benefits all parties.

To ensure that project activities are disseminated to a wide university audience, membership of the steering committee is diverse:

- academic departments
- administrative services
- Centre for Careers and Academic Practice
- Guild of Students
- central training office
- counselling service
- student and examinations division (registry).

This collaborative approach has resulted in a number of linked initiatives, for example to the Dyslexia Resource and Support Programme, a student-led mentoring initiative providing support and advice to

dyslexic students (see the web-site at www.liv.ac.uk/disproj). Such initiatives are crucial to the project profile and to embedding its main goals.

129. The final case study shows how an HEI has taken a student-centred approach at both the strategic and operational levels which, as the performance indicators demonstrate, is helping the institution to have a successful widening participation and retention record. This has been achieved by using joined-up thinking and integrating widening participation and learning and teaching with the student experience.

Case study 19 A student-centred approach

Staffordshire University

Contact: David Jenkins, e-mail d.jenkins@staffs.ac.uk

The institution works to widen participation and to open its doors to those who might otherwise not enter higher education; it is very proud to have a socially and culturally diverse student body. Staffordshire works towards a staff base who believe that the whole 'student experience' is important.

It has established a number of mechanisms to help aid the progression of local students from FE to HE:

- the SURF (Staffordshire University Regional Federation of the University and FE partners) consortia. The university leads a consortia involving a number of local colleges, which facilitates the rationalisation of provision, the strengthening of relationships and the consolidation of progression routes
- the PALS scheme (Preferential Access for Local Students). This scheme guarantees the offer of a place at Staffordshire University to every local student who meets the minimum entry requirements
- SULC (Staffordshire University Lichfield Centre). Established in collaboration with Tamworth and Lichfield College, the centre offers information and guidance on HE to local people.

The university is involved in a number of funded projects, one of which is the Staffordshire Universities Maths Summer School (SUMSS). This project is led by Staffordshire in partnership with Keele University and nine local FE colleges. It involves the creation of a six week summer school, building on the good practice established by other universities in combining study in mathematics to GCSE equivalent with opportunities to develop personal transferable skills, the provision of career and academic guidance sessions, and familiarity with university environments. Of the 33 students who enrolled on the first summer school in 2000, 27 achieved GCSE equivalence.

The main objectives of the project are:

- direct access onto sub-degree or degree courses for successful students, or referral to an appropriate access route
- identification of the skills mix between the two universities in order to develop their ability to operate collaborative initiatives
- to establish a process for identifying and targeting students from disadvantaged groups
- to establish an effective and positive approach to assessment and interview for places on SUMSS
- provision of practical structures and features (childcare, transport and so on)

- evaluation and dissemination of the model and the experience.

A larger version of the summer school will be run in 2001, with 80 students in North Staffordshire and 40 students in South Staffordshire.

The university is also a minor partner in the FE-led project run by the Workers' Educational Association (WEA). The main aims of this project are to:

- develop a partnership of universities across the West Midlands with the WEA
- map the WEA Access to HE curriculum against relevant university courses
- co-ordinate programmes and activities designed to assist WEA adult students to progress into HEIs
- identify ways to use access funding to support cohorts of WEA students as they move into HE
- provide staff development for WEA and university teachers and admissions and guidance workers.

Section four **Support for institutions from the HEFCE**

130. We are committed to supporting institutions to develop the sophistication and effective implementation of their learning and teaching and widening participation strategies. To do so we have set up expert support teams to support HEFCE-funded projects. There are currently five such teams:

- Action on Access
- National Disability Team
- Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund National Co-ordination Team
- Foundation Degree Support Team
- Innovations Support Team.

131. The advice and expertise of the teams is available for the sector to draw upon. Further information on the teams is available from the following web-sites:

- www.actiononaccess.org
- www.natdisteam.ac.uk
- www.ncteam.ac.uk
- www.foundationdegree.pwcglobal.com
- www.innovations.ac.uk

132. In terms of widening participation a considerable amount of work has already been undertaken by HEIs. The limiting factors to future progress are the development of holistic approaches to planning, clarity over targets and measurable outcomes, and robust monitoring strategies. The Action on Access team has identified a series of activities to enable a further step-change in institutional commitment to embedding widening participation in their strategic and operational plans. These include:

- continued production of the newsletter 'Update on Inclusion' to disseminate good practice in widening participation across the sector
- continuing development of the Action on Access web-site, adding a discussion board for project support
- facilitating themed inter-regional links on, for example, credit framework developments, working with young children and on-course support
- a more structured framework for analysing the activities being carried out by the projects regionally and nationally
- seeking to enhance the key issues of target setting, measurable outcomes and embedding within a monitoring and review framework
- encouraging the integration of regional project work and other widening participation initiatives within institutions
- exploring methods to ensure a more holistic approach through links with the learning and teaching strategies and the disability developments
- helping to ensure that project staff address the issue of embedding the successful outcomes of project work into institutional strategies
- consideration of how to enhance dissemination to the FECs delivering higher education courses
- exploring solutions to the problem of long-term tracking of the beneficiaries of project-funded activities.

133. Support and advice is also available from the Institute for Learning and Teaching (ILT) and the Learning and Teaching Support Network. Information is available from their web-sites at:

- www.ilt.ac.uk
- www.ltsn.ac.uk

134. The Council also intends to disseminate examples of international best practice to English HEIs where appropriate. This will be done via the HEFCE web-site (www.hefce.ac.uk) and seminars.