

January 2004/06
Core funding/operations
Consultation

Comments should be submitted by
Friday 23 April 2004

This document invites comments on our draft widening participation and fair access research strategy. It considers our medium- and long-term research priorities, not just short-term or ongoing work. It includes information on specific projects proposed or in progress, and a selection of previous work on the barriers to HE.

HEFCE widening participation and fair access research strategy

Consultation

HEFCE widening participation and fair access research strategy: consultation

To	Heads of HEFCE -funded higher education institutions Heads of HEFCE -funded further education colleges Heads of universities in Northern Ireland Heads of non-HEFCE funded further education colleges in the FE sector Selected national bodies
Of interest to those responsible for	Widening participation, Strategic planning, Research
Reference	2004/06
Publication date	January 2004
Enquiries to	Sarah Howls tel 0117 931 7073 e-mail s.howls@hefce.ac.uk

Executive summary

Purpose

1. This document invites comments on our draft widening participation (WP) and fair access research strategy.

Key points

2. This report includes a draft of the HEFCE widening participation and fair access research strategy. We now wish to consult formally on the strategy and would welcome responses from all organisations involved in widening participation activities in the HE sector before we publish a final version in July 2004.

3. The draft strategy sets out our broad priorities for research in widening participation to higher education. In particular it considers:

- our medium and long-term research priorities, not just short-term or ongoing work
- how we intend to improve the quality of research used by the Council
- how we will improve HEFCE's capacity for taking account of external research and for linking with other bodies with research interests.

4. The development of the draft strategy has been guided by three principles: the need to engage with and build on existing knowledge, the need to work in partnership, and the need to build capacity across the sector to both undertake and use WP research.

5. The draft strategy provides a summary of those areas within our strategy that we believe are of immediate priority. These are as follows:

- a. Costs of widening participation (see paragraphs 19, and 24-27).
- b. Evaluation of Aimhigher (see paragraphs 19 and 29).
- c. Aimhigher menu of depth and diversity evaluation (see paragraphs 19 and 29).
- d. Barriers to HE – literature review (see paragraphs 19, and 30-31).
- e. WP research facility (see paragraphs 19 and 65).

6. Two consultation seminars will be held in March (see paragraph 10). Early booking is advised as places are limited.

Action required

7. We invite responses to be sent to Sarah Howls at HEFCE, to arrive by **Friday 23 April 2004**.

8. We welcome comments on any aspect of the strategy. However, we would find it helpful if respondents frame their responses in terms of the following questions:

- a. Do you endorse the broad approach of the strategy? If not, what elements cause you concern and why?
- b. Overall, do you agree with the priorities for research we have suggested?
- c. More specifically, with regard to the proposed review of existing work on the barriers to higher education (HE), do you believe that this should be one of our priorities?
- d. Do you agree with the proposal for a widening participation research facility in principle? What should be our main considerations for such a resource? Would you like to be involved in the future consultation on the more detailed proposals?
- e. What are your views overall on the research we are either currently undertaking or intending to commission?
- f. What, from your viewpoint, are the main unresolved issues and associated risks to implementing this strategy?

Responses

9. Responses to this consultation should be sent to the HEFCE at the address below to arrive by Friday 23 April 2004:

Sarah Howls
HEFCE
Northavon House
Coldharbour Lane

BRISTOL
BS16 1QD

or by e-mail to s.howls@hefce.ac.uk

Seminar

10. We will hold two consultation seminars in March 2004:

- Manchester, 24 March at the Renaissance Hotel
- London, 26 March at One Great George Street

The seminars will be most relevant to those who have responsibility for developing and implementing WP policy in higher education, WP practitioners and researchers. Places are limited. If you wish to attend send an e-mail to the address below indicating which seminar you would prefer to attend. Confirmation of your registration will be e-mailed to you.

wp_researchseminar@hefce.ac.uk

HEFCE draft widening participation and fair access research strategy

Introduction

11. In our strategic plan for 2003-08 (HEFCE 2003/35) we stated that widening access and improving participation are an essential part of our mission. We aim to ensure that all those with the potential to benefit from higher education have the opportunity to do so, whatever their background and whenever they need it.

12. This document sets out our plans for a programme of research which will inform and support the policies developed to meet this strategic aim. The specific aim and objectives of our widening participation and fair access research strategy are outlined below.

Aim

To ensure that policies developed to meet the Council's strategic widening participation and fair access objectives are informed and supported by a robust evidence base.

Objectives

- To build a high quality, sustainable evidence base for widening participation policy and practice and to ensure that such an evidence base is widely accepted.
- To ensure that new knowledge generated by research is properly communicated and widely understood.
- To improve our capacity for taking account of and making good use of knowledge produced in the wider research community.
- To build capacity in the higher education sector to both undertake and make appropriate use of research to inform the strategies and action plans of institutions.

Key performance target

- Widening participation policy initiatives will be supported by robust and current evidence.

13. To deliver our strategic plan effectively and to the excellent standard we believe essential, we need to develop and manage effective policies. We need to ensure that our cycle of policy-making is well informed by higher education research and expert knowledge. In this way we will be able to follow the National Audit Office's recommendations for effective policy making (2001):

Departments need to have in place well developed strategies which determine their longer term information needs, how and in what form such are to be collected, how best to share information, and the quality assurance arrangements required to ensure that the data are accurate and reliable.

14. This strategy sets out to address these recommendations in the context of HEFCE WP research. We aim in particular to:

- think about our medium and long term research priorities, and not only about short-term or ongoing work
- improve the quality of research used by the Council; this strategy sets out how we intend to do this
- improve HEFCE's capacity for taking account of external research (in other words, research which it had not commissioned) and for linking with other bodies with research interests in the area of WP.

We recognise that in this field, even with an improved evidence base, there is still likely to be considerable uncertainty about 'how things are', and even more uncertainty about 'what works'.

15. It is important that the Council's role with regard to research is clearly understood. We commission and use research for the specific purpose of developing funding policies. To this end, research and evaluation is used to:

- account for funds that have already been allocated
- make a case for future or further investment, in particular areas of HE funding
- inform and support practitioners in the sector
- inform and engage policy makers both within individual institutions and in government departments.

16. We also need to clarify our research role in relation to student support issues such as the proposals for variable fees, student bursaries and grants. Funding student support is not within our remit. But where this overlaps with our widening participation remit, we do, and will continue to, work with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to ensure that issues of student support are considered in the work we undertake.

17. This strategy is specifically designed to inform the Council's policies in respect of widening participation and fair access. Research strategies addressing our other strategic aims (enhancing excellence in learning and teaching, enhancing excellence in research, and enhancing the contribution of HE to the economy and society) are being developed, and we will ensure that our WP strategy links into and takes account of these and other work being undertaken or proposed. For example, work undertaken on foundation degrees, work-based learning routes and employability will be relevant to both the WP and the learning and teaching research strategies.

Background

18. To clarify the research priorities for widening participation, in March 2003 we hosted a seminar which brought together Council officers and sector researchers. Discussions highlighted a number of cross-cutting issues in undertaking WP research:

- **Definitions.** Many previous studies identified difficulties in defining what is meant by 'under-represented groups', non-traditional students', 'WP students' and so on. In a recent report on retention, Action on Access (2003, Vol. I) argued that in order to identify the characteristics of a 'WP student' we need to have a starting point or 'norm' against which we can compare. However, the report goes on to argue that the concept of a 'normal' student is difficult to sustain given the level of diversity within the student population and therefore, we need to accept that how non-traditional groups, are defined and identified often vary according to the institutional and cultural context. Despite these conceptual difficulties, previous studies have attempted to identify broad groupings of people who are under-represented in HE. These include those from lower socio-economic groups, students with non-traditional HE qualifications, disabled students and certain minority ethnic groups. However, even for these groups the uncertainties in the underlying measurements are much greater than is often supposed. Nevertheless, the idea of under-representation – that is groups with participation rates significantly below the average for the cohort under consideration – seems an appropriate working definition for the purposes of research.
- **Measures of student success.** We recognise the need to develop more sophisticated means of defining and measuring success in HE if we are to effectively evaluate the impact of widening participation. The 'gold standards' of A-levels and three-year full-time honours degree courses are not always appropriate measures of the success of WP activities. The development of credit accumulation frameworks and the encouragement of lifelong learning also require the application of more flexible measures and definitions of success.
- **Scale of research.** Much research into WP has been small scale. Such studies often provide valuable insights and case studies, and can explore an issue in depth. But it is often difficult (and unwise) to draw conclusions from them that apply to the whole HE sector. Consequently a need has been identified for larger-scale research, to provide broad, high-level sector data to complement the smaller-scale work.
- **Quality and capacity.** Linked to the previous point are concerns regarding quality of research. A lot of small-scale WP research is undertaken by WP practitioners rather than researchers, and may, at times, lack methodological rigour. However, WP practitioners' knowledge of 'on the ground' issues in WP is often invaluable. There could be significant benefits in bringing together a number of disciplines to investigate WP issues, thereby providing different perspectives.
- **WP research facility.** A need has been identified for a central facility for WP research to hold, maintain and disseminate existing research (both UK and international). Such a facility would need to be managed with strict quality control mechanisms to ensure that it contained the best available research and to ensure that the information available is current.

19. We want our strategy to take account of these issues, and we have attempted to illustrate within it how we intend to work with our stakeholders to address them.

Guiding principles of the strategy

20. The development of our strategy has been guided by three principles: the need to engage with and build on existing knowledge, the need to work in partnership, and the need to build capacity across the sector.

- a. **Engage with and build on existing knowledge.** There is a large body of existing evidence and knowledge of widening participation issues, and we need to critically engage with this work to ensure that we do not 're-invent the wheel'. This will mean developing systems and partnerships that allow us to do this on both a national and international level.
- b. **Working in partnership.** It is crucial that we do not work in isolation. By working in partnership we will ensure that we have up to date knowledge of work being undertaken by sector partners and others. Also we will be able to pool resources and data to enable us to commission larger, more far-reaching studies encompassing a broad range of perspectives. We want to develop research partnerships with other HE funders (such as the other UK HE funding bodies and the Teacher Training Agency) as well as other bodies such as the Higher Education Academy, the Learning and Skills Development Agency, the Learning and Skills Research Council and the Society for Research into Higher Education. This strategy is an important first step in addressing partnership working. We are already working closely with the DfES, the Department of Health, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Universities UK (UUK), the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP) and the Universities and College Admission Service (UCAS) on various projects, and we will continue to develop and expand these partnerships. We also seek to identify and develop international partnerships to ensure that our research is informed by international as well as national experience.
- c. **Building capacity.** As noted in paragraph 18 above there are concerns regarding the quality of research undertaken in widening participation and capacity within the sector to carry out methodologically robust and sufficiently broad research in this area. We are committed to working with our partners to help build WP research capacity within the sector and thereby drive up the quality of WP research. Through the work of our national co-ordination teams (see paragraph 70) and the identification of good practice, we will seek to ensure that practitioners are aware of the benefits of using multidisciplinary teams to address research areas and of working in partnership to increase the resources available to undertake such research. We will also work to determine whether more can be done to bring disparate WP researchers together and ensure that infrastructures are in place to support them.

We will also encourage UK researchers to consider work that uses international comparators. While we acknowledge that many issues might be culture-specific and therefore not transferable to the UK, research to date has shown that there are areas of

commonality and that lessons can be learned from activities and policies that have been investigated in other countries.

Summary of our WP research priorities

21. The following provides a summary of those areas within our strategy that we believe are of immediate priority. We intend to begin work in these areas in 2004. All new projects, if not undertaken in-house, will be commissioned through an open tender process.

- a. **Costs of widening participation.** We, UUK and SCOP commissioned consultants to undertake a study to determine the cost of WP to higher education institutions (HEIs) to provide evidence for our submissions to the 2004 comprehensive spending review. The consultants presented their initial report to us, UUK and SCOP in October 2003, and the final report in December 2003. We will publish the report in February 2004. We intend to develop and refine the methodology used in this study in the medium to long term to address the issues of how institutions can determine the level of resources they need to devote to WP to meet their objectives and how the impact of the activities funded can be measured (see paragraphs 26-29).
- b. **Evaluation of Aimhigher.** When the two Aimhigher initiatives are integrated in April 2004 we will have one evaluation which will need to bring together the two existing evaluation strategies. The evaluation of Aimhigher (formerly known as Excellence Challenge) has been in progress since 2001, and a feasibility study for the evaluation of Aimhigher:P4P has been conducted. The single integrated evaluation strategy will incorporate national surveys and tracking work, qualitative work and work by the Aimhigher partnerships themselves (see paragraph 31).
- c. **Aimhigher menu of depth and diversity evaluation.** To accommodate the variety of areas in which evaluation might be deemed appropriate, we have proposed that projects be purchased by partnerships from a centrally held menu of evaluation. The menu would include all the potential evaluation projects considered to be both feasible and desirable for understanding and evaluating Aimhigher. The menu will run alongside the national evaluation, and will provide the qualitative and contextual data to complement the national findings (see paragraph 31).
- d. **Barriers to HE – literature review.** We have proposed conducting a review of the available knowledge regarding barriers to HE for various under-represented groups to make existing data more accessible. We would intend commissioning the review in mid-2004 (see paragraph 32-33).
- e. **WP research facility:** We intend to set up a working group to develop a proposal for a central facility which will collect and critically assess a range of WP research products for the benefit of WP researchers, policy makers and the wider sector (see paragraph 69).

22. In addition to the above, the strategy discusses other work that we are either currently engaged in or planning to undertake. This work is summarised below:

- **Surveys of qualified young people who do not take up the opportunity to enter HE.** We propose that regular surveys, similar to those previously carried out by UCAS, are initiated to find out, then monitor, the reasons why a minority of qualified young people who apply to study at HE level subsequently do not take up a place (see paragraph 34).
- **Establishing reliable participation rates.** We will use the full output from the 2001 Census to establish participation rates of different social classes and ethnic groups with increased precision (see paragraph 34).
- **Aspiration and transition of disabled students.** We and the LSC jointly commissioned a study to investigate the progression of disabled students from FE to HE and the issues that arise during transition. The study involves a literature study of existing resources and studies of outreach, aspiration-raising and transition of disabled students from FE to HE. The first stage of the project focused on outreach to disabled students, and reported in October 2003. The second stage focuses on transition issues and will report by March 2004 (see paragraph 36).
- **Factors indicating potential.** We hope to work with the Sutton Trust on its proposed trial of SAT tests (see paragraph 45).
- **Admissions bias** We will work with the DfES to reanalyse datasets and hope to undertake further work with UCAS data, once they are available electronically, to examine admissions bias. In particular we will explore the issue of bias against ethnic minorities and other groups, as well as investigate further the relationship between predicted and actual grades and how this relationship might vary (see paragraph 46).
- **Partnership working.** We intend to document case studies to identify examples of good practice of partnership working in the sector. We intend to make this widely available and to use this work to highlight issues of working in partnership that would benefit from further investigation (see paragraph 73).

Themes

23. For the purposes of the strategy, widening participation has been divided into six broad themes:

- the cost of widening participation
- outreach and raising aspirations
- access and admissions
- retention and student achievement
- lifelong learning
- after graduation: employability and progression to postgraduate study.

24. Each of the above themes are discussed further below. Much of the research undertaken under such themes can be usefully organised around the idea of a student life cycle but we are aware that other approaches are equally valid, such as considering WP and the institution, or WP and the subject. We would welcome information regarding work being planned or ongoing within other themes/approaches. We will be considering all kinds of research – from small-scale, practitioner-led, action research to larger-scale, sector-focused studies.

25. Some research activity will cut across a number of themes. Any such research will be considered under a 'generic widening participation research' category.

The cost of widening participation

26. In 2001 we commissioned an evaluation: 'Evaluation of the HEFCE Widening Participation Support Strategy'. The report was published on our web-site in June 2003 (www.hefce.ac.uk under Publications/R & D reports) and it confirmed that most HEIs believed that the funds allocated to them for WP at that time (£28 million in 2001-02 and £38 million in 2002-03) were too low. Recommendations were also made by the Education and Skills Select Committee in July 2002 and its predecessor Committee, the House of Commons Education and Employment Committee, in February 2001 to increase the WP allocation.

27. In response to the above, in March 2003 we announced that the WP allocation for the period 2003-04 would total £255 million (HEFCE 2003/14), an increase on 2002-03 of £217 million. This has been interpreted as representing a premium of about 20 per cent, although the calculations are more sophisticated than this would suggest.

28. However, a study by PA Consulting conducted on behalf of the funding council and UUK in 2002 estimated that the additional costs to institutions of attracting, recruiting and supporting non-traditional students ranged from between 30 to 35 per cent. This study was intended to be a pilot study and consequently involved only two HEIs. With such a small sample we are unable to say whether this finding applies to the wider sector.

29. Our interest in evaluating the cost of WP is three-fold:

- a. In the short term we need to establish a firmer evidence base to support our submission to the 2004 government comprehensive spending review. Consequently, we, UUK and SCOP commissioned consultants to undertake a study that would provide such evidence (see Annex A). It will provide a descriptive account of what institutions are currently spending on WP.
- b. In the medium term, we intend to develop and refine the methodology so that we can further improve our understanding of:
 - what institutions spend on WP
 - the costs of a range of established WP activity

- the organisational capacity required to deliver an effective WP programme
- what resources institutions need to devote to WP.

We would also aim to apply this improved methodology broadly in time to yield more robust evidence for our submission to the 2006 comprehensive spending review.

- c. In the longer term we want to ensure that, as more and more institutions embed widening participation into their mainstream structures and processes, the additional costs of widening participation to those institutions can still be identified and quantified and that the impact of activities undertaken can be measured and assessed. A rigorous methodology developed over time should enable us and individual institutions to accomplish this.

Outreach and raising aspirations

30. There are a number of elements to this part of our research strategy.

Aimhigher evaluation

31. The Aimhigher programme will be launched in April 2004, bringing together two existing programmes: Aimhigher (formerly known as Excellence Challenge) and Aimhigher:P4P. We are working with the LSC and the DfES to develop a single Aimhigher evaluation strategy. The evaluation aims to identify what works in terms of encouraging progression of under-represented people into higher education, for whom, and under what circumstances. We want to determine how and why interventions work or do not work, in order to inform, influence and improve policy and practice. The evaluation will be at a national level, and also at regional and sub-regional levels. Details of the proposed evaluation programme are at Annex A.

Barriers to HE

32. A number of studies have already been conducted to determine the nature, preponderance and scale of the barriers to HE faced by a range of non-traditional entrants; some are listed at Annex B and we have no wish to duplicate existing work. However, we have identified a need for the large body of existing knowledge on barriers to HE to be brought together and the data to be interrogated so that the gaps in evidence can be identified and areas of agreement and disagreement can be determined. For example, how much of a determining factor is finance on entry to HE for students from lower socio-economic groups when all other variables are taken into account? There is much debate on this question but the studies to date have been unable to provide a definitive answer.

33. Therefore, as an immediate measure, we propose commissioning a review of the available knowledge on barriers to HE which would cover the range of different student groups, including: students from the lower socio-economic groups, part-time students, disabled students, mature students, students with dependants, and students from ethnic minority groups. The resulting report would be made widely accessible to the sector. In

addition to revealing the areas for further research, the review should make it easier for institutions to factor this knowledge into the development of their strategic documents and for the Aimhigher partnerships to work it into their plans. It may also identify examples of good practice in overcoming or minimising the effects of such barriers. Details of the proposed review are at Annex A.

34. Prior to the completion of this review, we can draw broad conclusions about what we know and what we need to find out, as well as describe the work that is already planned or in progress:

- a. There is widespread agreement that some of the most significant barriers to HE occur in the early years of secondary education (we recognise that significant barriers occur much earlier, at primary and even pre-school stage, but we have focused on the stages at which HE can appropriately intervene), and that the aspiration and attainment of students from years 8 and 9 needs to be raised. This is clearly a long-term policy issue, and the lag between interventions and measured impact on HE participation will be up to a decade.
- b. It is clear that to effect changes in the shorter term, policies need to focus on young people who have level 3 qualifications and choose not to progress to HE, and on finding effective routes into HE for mature students who were unable or unwilling to enter HE at age 18 or 19. There is currently contradictory evidence about what constitutes the real barriers for these potential entrants, particularly young non-entrants with level 3 qualifications.

In addition to the above, we are interested in those applicants who go through the application process but do not subsequently enter HE. We want to resume the 'non-starter' survey which used to be carried out by UCAS, using more reliable data, to try and establish why those applicants who have received offers to do not enter HE. We are also interested in applicants who do not receive an offer at all and those who receive offers which they subsequently cannot meet. We will work with UCAS to take these proposals forward.

- c. We believe that the underlying measures of participation, which (implicitly or explicitly) underpin the whole WP agenda, and discussions of barriers to participation in particular, may be unsafe, especially the rates by social class and ethnic group. Therefore, we have a programme of work to try and establish reliable participation rates, using new sources of population data and the 2001 Census results.
- d. The HE module of the DfES's Youth Cohort Study which is being undertaken with two cohorts (based on a sub-sample of the main Youth Cohort Study) will, at the first stage (aged 17) explore young people's attitudes, aspirations and plans in relation to HE. The second stage of the study will then explore (at age 18) students' choices and experiences in relation to HE and investigate the reasons why some young people's plans change or are not realised. The study will provide insights into why young people make the choices they do with regard to HE.

35. We wish to encourage research that focuses on the practical questions of interest to practitioners: identifying and removing barriers to progression for under-represented groups.

But we also wish to develop a deeper understanding of those barriers and the way they interconnect, and would therefore encourage researchers to both make explicit the theoretical framework within which they work, and to contribute to theories that improve understanding.

Progression from FE to HE

36. There is a need to examine more closely the progression routes from further to higher education and the transition issues that such students face. The proposed literature review on the barriers to HE will uncover existing work in this area, and from that we will be able to determine what longer term research is needed. We will work in close collaboration with the LSC to ensure that work undertaken meets the needs of both sectors. We are already involved in a joint project with the LSC looking at the specific issues facing students with disabilities as they progress from FE to HE. Details of this project are at Annex A. We are also attempting to link individual student data from further education colleges and higher education institutions in order to determine the pattern of progression.

Supply and demand

37. In 2003 the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) produced an update to the HEFCE study 'Supply and demand in higher education' (HEFCE 01/62). The updated study, 'Supply and demand to 2010' (available at www.hepi.ac.uk under Articles) shows that, following the Qualifications for Success and other reforms in schools, there has been an increase in the number of 17 year-olds with two or more A-levels between 1996-97 and 2002-03. The paper implies that, should this trend continue, the 50 per cent target may be met by an increase in the numbers entering HE with 'traditional' qualifications. This depends, critically, on the propensity of students with the curriculum 2000 A-levels behaving in the same way as those who had gained traditional A-levels before these changes. There is no way of knowing whether this will be the case.

38. We do know that post-16 staying-on rates for the lower socio-economic groups are lower than for the other groups. The development of curriculum 2000 A-levels was, in part, an attempt to encourage more students from these groups to continue in education. But we have no way of knowing yet whether this has been successful. Therefore, the increasing numbers of students with A-level qualifications, whether curriculum 2000 or traditional, may not necessarily include a much increased proportion of students from the lower socio-economic groups. So, in terms of widening participation this uplift in the numbers gaining two or more A-levels may not move the social inclusion agenda much further forward.

39. We will continue to monitor trends in supply and demand.

Access and admissions

40. Policies on access and admissions have an impact both on 'widening participation' (that is, the recruitment of students who otherwise would not enter HE at all) and 'fair access'

(that is, ensuring that students from disadvantaged backgrounds have a fair chance to gain admission to the more selective institutions).

Widening participation

41. Developing policies on admissions and curriculum can help to widen participation, through recruitment of students who do not come through traditional routes of A-levels taken at 18 or 19. Alternative routes include progression agreements with schools and colleges, access courses, recognition of prior learning both experiential and formal, credit accumulation agreements/frameworks and recognition of vocational qualifications. There is a need for evidence on how widely these alternative means of determining potential are used by HEIs in their admissions processes, and whether they are effective predictors of future success in HE, in order to ensure support for widening participation.

42. We already hold information about the extent to which different factors are being taken into account in admissions process. For example, the evaluation of the HEFCE WP support strategy (see paragraph 26) and the HEI surveys in the Aimhigher evaluation both look at this issue. We are also looking at progression paths from FE to HE in one area, by linking the Individual Learner Record (ILR) to Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data. Lessons from this study will provide insights into how it might be extended to give a picture of 'non-traditional' routes into HE across the sector.

Fair access – the search for indications of potential

43. There has been dispute over the reliability of A-level results as an effective indicator of subsequent HE achievement. However, all the evidence that we have examined supports the position that A-level results have a strong association with HE achievement. However, to add to the uncertainty, initial offers are usually based on predicted A-levels rather than the actual grades achieved. There is widespread agreement that use of actual results would prove more reliable, but it is also generally acknowledged that in practice it would be very difficult to organise admissions in such a way to make this possible. The DfES published an issues paper on post-qualification admissions in November 2003 which concluded that the principle of post-qualification admissions is right in theory but needs more work and cross-UK support if it is to work properly in practice.

44. DfES appointed Professor Steven Schwartz to lead a review of fair admissions to HE. The review questions whether it is legitimate to admit students with grades lower than those normally expected for entry, and whether a student's social or economic background should be considered in the admissions process. The review was out for the first stage consultation until end November 2003, and the DfES is planning to launch the second stage early in 2004. The first stage consultation can be accessed via the DfES web-site at www.dfes.gov.uk/hegateway.

45. There have been various suggestions as to how A-level results might be supplemented with other information to give a better indication of potential, and there would clearly be value in carrying out large scale trials. The need to find supplementary measures

is most acute for departments where nearly all applicants are expected to get three grade 'A's at A-level. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority is considering a range of proposals on how to discriminate between applicants who have all attained the highest grades at A-level. In addition we have proposed the following work to be undertaken in-house at the Council:

- a. Our analysis of schooling effects (HEFCE 2003/32) which looked at A-level attainment will be extended to look at other factors, including school at 16.
- b. We have approached the Sutton Trust to see if we can collaborate with their proposed trial of SAT tests. The proposal would be to combine the SAT scores with our other administrative data and track the students through to graduation. This is likely to give a more complete and consistent analysis.
- c. We already hold some data on applications and offers linked to the HESA records. We are negotiating with UCAS to extend this extract to cover all data that is available electronically. Such a consolidated data set will enable us to explore issues of bias within admission processes. And, as UCAS increasingly uses electronic applications, more data will become available.

A particular area of concern in terms of fair access is bias against students from some ethnic minority backgrounds in some institutions. Shiner and Modood (2002) concluded that, particularly in some 'pre-1992' HEIs, there was 'a strong indication that many minority candidates face an ethnic penalty and have to perform better than their white peers to secure a place'. This finding was supported by research undertaken in 1998 by McManus, which showed that coming from an ethnic minority, as well as being male, was a negative factor in determining the chances of being made an offer of a place in medical schools.

46. We intend to re-analyse the Shiner and Modood data set using other indicators. Upon completion of this re-analysis, should their results be confirmed, our long term plan is to analyse complete rather than sample data. Such data are not available at present but UCAS plans to operate a predominantly electronic application system from 2006 which will provide the level of data needed to undertake this analysis.

47. The new fee and student support regime, and the establishment of an Office of Fair Access, will undoubtedly impact the dynamics of the HE sector, and will have implications for the way we fund widening participation. Together with UCAS and other partners, we will monitor any such changes, in order to assess the impact of these policies once they are established. In the meantime, we are reviewing the teaching funding method, the results of which will inform our allocations for 2004-05 and beyond. The review was recently the subject of a consultation (HEFCE 2003/42) which included consideration of how we allocate funds for widening access and improving retention. The deadline for responses to this consultation has passed, but the document can still be accessed via our web-site at www.hefce.ac.uk under Publications.

Retention and student achievement

48. Research into retention is at a relatively early stage due to the focus in recent years on outreach and access issues. We established in paragraph 18 that there is a need for clearer definitions when looking at student withdrawal. But equally as important is a more flexible measure of success – the ‘gold standard’ of the traditional three-year honours degree is not always an appropriate measure when investigating retention of non-traditional student groups. We are currently looking at progression routes as students take study breaks and move between institutions, to assess the extent to which such flexible learning routes do lead to the achievement of HE qualifications.

49. In addition, certain assumptions regarding non-traditional student groups do not always stand up to analysis. For example, it is often assumed that ‘non-traditional students’ are at a greater risk of drop-out than traditional entrants to HE. However, evidence suggests that differences in drop-out rates by social class can almost entirely be explained by pre-HE achievement, there being little or no social class effect, when entry qualifications are taken into account (Education and Employment Committee, 2001). Indeed, students ‘disadvantaged’ by attending state schools have higher expected HE achievement than students from independent schools after other factors are taken into account (HEFCE 2003/32).

50. Further work is planned to explore the interplay of ethnicity, socio-economic background, disability, prior educational achievement, and other factors in HE achievement. However, while such studies, using administrative datasets, can establish which factors are associated with dropping out, they do not provide answers as to why students drop out. But by establishing the factors and the patterns of student withdrawal across a number of different student groups, we will be able to plan future research in this area from an informed base.

51. We are particularly concerned about any bias against students from ethnic minority backgrounds as they move through the course. As noted in paragraph 45, evidence suggests that bias may exist in offers made by some institutions to students from ethnic minority backgrounds. A further question must be whether any such bias exists throughout the period of study and the effect of any such bias on subsequent HE achievement.

52. Another major concern is to ensure that students targeted through Aimhigher are able to successfully complete their chosen programme of study in HE. As part of the Aimhigher evaluation, we intend to develop a tracking system whereby we can monitor the uptake of HE study by targeted students and their subsequent success.

53. In addition to issues regarding retention of under-represented students there are growing concerns about the impact on HE achievement of increased term-time working by nominally full-time students. A forthcoming report from the Centre of Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI), ‘Impact of debt and term time working on higher education’ shows a negative association between term-time working and HE achievement, even after other factors are taken into account

54. A further group of students of particular interest are disabled students, because the factors affecting retention and success of such students are not clearly understood. What is known is that disabled students tend to be less successful in terms of the level or class of qualification achieved. We have invested £2.8 million in Strand 2 of a funding programme 'Improving provision for disabled students'. A total of 23 projects have been funded under Strand 2 to develop and disseminate resources to the learning and teaching of disabled students. Details of projects funded are on our web-site at www.hefce.ac.uk under Widening participation/Disability. In the shorter term, research is planned by the National Disability Team to look at retention issues for disabled students. The team also intends to review the audit tools used by HEIs in terms of provision, policies and curriculum for disabled students. Details of these projects are at Annex A.

55. We have also contributed over £20 million to the ESRC's Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP). Three of the projects funded under phase three of the TLRP have implications for WP:

- a. The first of these projects is a study focusing on the experience of disabled students in HE. The aim of this four-year study is to investigate the reasons for the lower success rates of disabled students. It is hoped that the findings from the research will illustrate the way change occurs in institutions and the impact of such change on its disabled student population, and ultimately encourage institutions to alter their practice. This is a long-term project which will not report until 2007.
- b. A second project consists of a large scale longitudinal study into the learning biographies of 150 adults aged 25 and over. The study aims to provide an understanding of the reality of learning throughout life from the point of view of those for whom learning does – or does not – matter.
- c. A further project aims to increase our understanding of the range of learning outcomes of an increasingly diverse higher education system and to investigate how these are socially and organisationally mediated.

Details of all projects funded under the Teaching and Learning Research Programme can be found at www.tlrp.org under Projects.

56. There is a desire within the sector to establish what works and what does not work when it comes to retaining students most at risk of dropping out. Our national co-ordination team for WP, Action on Access, has identified case studies highlighting good practice in retention in its report 'Student Success in Higher Education' (2003) available on request from Action on Access. But more work is needed on the reasons why some HEIs have higher drop-out rates than comparable institutions. HEPI is already undertaking some work in this area, the results of which will inform our plans for taking this issue forward.

Lifelong learning

57. The European Commission defines lifelong learning as:
All learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competencies within a personal, civic, social and employment-related perspective.
58. We are currently developing our strategy on lifelong learning. Our research needs in this area are therefore not yet known.
59. The proposed literature review discussed in paragraphs 32 and 33 will identify issues around the barriers to lifelong learning, and we will use the knowledge generated during this exercise to inform our medium to long term research objectives in lifelong learning.
60. Particular attention will be paid to work which addresses the needs of part-time students, mature students and students taking part in non-traditional modes of learning (including foundation degrees, work-based learning and e-learning).
61. We are already exploring the possibility of using the Office of National Statistics' (ONS') longitudinal study when it is updated by the 2001 Census data to try and identify more accurately mature students who fall within the WP remit. We have already determined the proportions of mature students which have prior HE qualifications and with prior HE achievement but we are unable, with the data currently available, to determine the socio-economic background of these entrants. This is where the ONS data will be of benefit.

After graduation: employability and progression to postgraduate study

Employability

62. Existing data suggest that students from disadvantaged backgrounds tend to have weaker entry qualifications. As a result of these weaker qualifications and the propensity of such students to study locally they often tend to go to less prestigious universities and gain lower class degrees, all of which can be expected to, and often does, give them a relative disadvantage in the labour market. There is a question as to whether, in addition to the 'indirect' effect of social background, there are additional direct disadvantages for students from less privileged backgrounds.
63. Evidence suggests that such direct effects are small, at least for young graduates. For example, the modelling underpinning creation of the employability performance indicators showed that social class had only a small effect on the chances of being unemployed when other factors were taken into account. Research by CHERI (HEFCE 2002) using a wider range of measures of employment success also showed that indirect effects accounted for most of the observed differences in outcomes for young graduates. Direct disadvantage where it existed was not large, and was confined to particular groups, using particular measures of employment outcomes. However, it is worth noting that it is common for

disadvantages to reinforce each other, and recognise that mature students in particular have been disadvantaged in the graduate labour market.

Progression to postgraduate study

64. There has, so far, been relatively little interest in 'widening participation' in postgraduate education. A study undertaken by Paul Wakeling of the University of York (2002) investigated the relationship between social class and progression to postgraduate research. He showed that graduates from higher social classes were more likely to take a programme leading to a PhD, but that these differences could be accounted for by the research standing of the departments where they graduated. We have done preliminary investigations which seem to show that having graduated, differences in background (which are so important in determining the chances of entering HE) are much reduced when we look at postgraduate study. Through linking student records, data are available to explore this issue further, though such analysis has not been given a priority. The questions may become more pertinent when we have data for the first graduates with debts from three or four years of undergraduate study without maintenance grants.

Generic WP research

Longitudinal Study of Young People in England

65. The DfES recently commissioned a Longitudinal Study of Young People in England. It is intended that the study will have a main set sample of 15,000 young people and their parents. The study would start interviewing at age 13-14, which is before the critical pathway decisions are made, and will continue to follow them until they reach age 25 which, it argues, is more fitted for analysis of the increasingly extended patterns of transition. In addition, to ensure that it can get some meaningful results for ethnic minority groups, it will boost the initial sample by 5,000 with an expected achieved additional sample of 3,750. This study will provide a rich source of data over the long term, but by its very nature it will be some years before findings of real relevance to actual participation in HE become available.

Administrative data on higher education students held by HEFCE

66. The HESA individualised student data, and the equivalent data from further education colleges (FECs), form the foundation for much of our research into WP issues. These data have been greatly enhanced through fuzzy matching to form a longitudinal record so that we can follow students as they progress through their studies, even if they change institution. This provides the foundation for our Performance Indicator (PI) publications and our research into students' progression and achievement. These data have been enhanced by linking with individual data provided by UCAS. Negotiations are under way to further enhance the data by linking with individual data held by the Student Loans Company (SLC) and the new individual state school pupil record. These will give us a much fuller description of the socio-economic and educational background of students.

67. In addition to the above we have linked individual data from the LSC with HESA data for students studying HE in FECs and from this we have, for example, been able to look at student progression from HND/HNC courses to degree courses. We will try and extend this data link to include all students at FECs to better describe the patterns of progression from FE to HE-level study.

Administrative data on applicants to higher education held by HEFCE

68. We already hold some data on applications and offers. We are negotiating with UCAS to extend this extract to cover all the data that are available electronically. This will enable us to explore issues about bias, that have been raised both within the funding council and the DfES. As already noted, there are concerns about possible bias against students from ethnic minorities. The DfES has stated that students from FECs rather than schools are disadvantaged (DfES, 2003), and this consolidated data set will enable us to systematically explore these issues. As the UCAS increases its use of electronic applications, more data will become available.

WP research facility

69. A need has been identified for a central facility which will collect and critically assess a range of WP research products (see paragraph 21). We intend to develop this proposal further by setting up a working group to consider the type of resource required, the scope of the resource, the feasibility of it containing large data sets and the advantages to the sector. Once we have a detailed proposal we will consult widely on the specification of the resource. We are keen to ensure that any such facility has capacity to take account of, and work with, other similar services in the HE sector, such as the learning and teaching portal within the HE Academy. We welcome expressions of interest from individuals who would like to take part in the consultation for this resource.

The national co-ordination teams

70. We co-fund two national co-ordination teams which help us to fulfil our commitments to widening participation:

- Action on Access is the national co-ordination team for widening participation, and is jointly funded by us and the LSC to support WP partnerships across England. The team was appointed in October 2002, having won an open tender, to support practitioners and institutions in developing their widening participation activities and strategies, and to offer advice to the funding councils when needed. As part of this function the team is to undertake a programme of research to support us and the LSC and the Aimhigher partnerships. (Examples of research projects the team undertakes are at Annex A). More information can be found at the Action on Access web-site (www.actiononaccess.org).
- The National Disability Team (NDT) is funded by us and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland. The NDT works to improve provision for disabled students in higher education. The NDT undertakes research to support

institutions in the advice and guidance they deliver to students and to help institutions and practitioners improve their provision. More information can be found at the National Disability Team's web-site (www.natdisteam.ac.uk).

- Action on Access and the National Disability Team operate a strategic alliance to promote knowledge and awareness of disability within the broader widening participation agenda and widening participation within disability, thereby enhancing socially inclusive access to higher education. More information can be found at the Inclusion web-site (www.inclusion.ac.uk).

Broad issues

71. It has been suggested that we should invest in more innovative work. While we understand the need for 'blue skies' research into the issues of participation and success in HE we have to abide by the reasons we, as a funding body, undertake research (outlined in paragraph 15). However, we continue to investigate, with our partners and stakeholders, alternative ways of undertaking research that fulfils this purpose.

72. We are concerned that research should be conducted to determine the 'value added' of HE. A working group at the Council is investigating the feasibility of researching a number of difficult conceptual issues such as this one, and we will develop our proposals for any work in this area once the working group has reported its recommendations in early 2004.

73. Much of the work undertaken by institutions to widen participation is conducted in partnership with other bodies such as FECs, schools, Regional Development Agencies and community groups. This is especially true of the activities undertaken in outreach as part of Aimhigher, but partnership working is not limited to this programme. Therefore, we believe that it would be beneficial to have more evidence on successful partnerships. We propose collecting examples of good practice in partnership working which we will be able to make available to the sector. Issues that arise from this activity will help us to identify further work that would benefit institutions and partnerships.

Conclusion

74. The above outlines our strategy for providing evidence to underpin our policies on widening participation. It will require commitment and significant investment to implement fully. Previous studies have shown that the benefits to individuals and society of higher education are wider than simply economic. The Institute of Education (2003) found that graduates tended to be healthier than non-graduates in that there tended to be lower levels of depression, obesity and smoking among the graduate groups. They were far less likely to be unemployed and had higher levels of multi-skilling. They had a greater appreciation and understanding of different ethnic groups and were more active in their communities. Graduates also tended to read more to their children who went on to demonstrate enhanced scores in reading and mathematics. Though the researchers made every effort to compare like with like, we cannot be certain that HE is the cause of these differences; but it is likely that this is, in part, the case. Therefore, with such potentially wide-ranging advantages to be gained from participating in HE, the appropriateness of our commitment to a more socially inclusive system is clear and the investment, we believe, is fully justified.

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Annex A

Specific projects proposed or in progress

The projects are grouped by themes, as listed in paragraph 23.

Cost of widening participation

1. In July 2003 we, UUK and SCOP commissioned consultants (JM Consulting) to identify the costs to institutions of implementing the WP agenda. The study will identify activities in which HEIs are engaged in terms of both outreach and retention and the associated resource inputs, and will link to the related report that JM Consulting have produced for the Council on the costs of diverse modes of provision (The costs of alternative modes of delivery, August 2003, available at www.hefce.ac.uk under Publications/R & D reports). The resource inputs for WP will be costed to establish the level of additional funding used in support of WP students. A sample of 20 institutions participated in the study to determine the full costs of WP to institutions. The consultants presented their initial report to us, UUK and SCOP in October 2003 and delivered the final report in December 2003.
2. The above provided the evidence we needed to support our submission to the 2004 comprehensive spending review. We intend to develop this work further and refine our costing analysis to link cost inputs and outcomes for the 2006 comprehensive spending review.
3. In addition, we are also undertaking a review of the teaching funding method which may have implications for the way widening participation funds are allocated (HEFCE 2003/42). The results of this review will inform our method of allocating funds for 2004-05.

Outreach and raising aspirations

4. **Aimhigher evaluation programme.** It has been agreed that we will have one evaluation for Aimhigher when the two initiatives are integrated from April 2004. This evaluation will attempt to determine, so far as possible:
 - a. Volume of activity (through monitoring processes).
 - b. Effectiveness, in other words whether Aimhigher has the desired impact on inputs, processes, outputs and aims.
 - c. Cost-effectiveness, in other words the cost of inputs, how efficiently these are translated into outputs, and how effectively these outputs achieve the aims and objectives of Aimhigher.
 - d. Additionality, in other words what difference the programme makes over and above the impact of other ongoing interventions and policies. (We acknowledge that, due to the lack of availability of comparison groups, this may be difficult to determine.)

5. This evaluation will need to bring together the two evaluation strategies for Aimhigher (formerly known as Excellence Challenge) and Aimhigher:P4P. The development of a single evaluation has been informed by the existing Excellence Challenge evaluation, and by a feasibility study which the National Centre for Social Research conducted for the evaluation of Aimhigher:P4P (HEFCE 2003). The feasibility study can be accessed via our web-site at www.hefce.ac.uk under Publications/R & D reports. We, the DfES and the LSC are proposing:

- a. **National evaluation.** This will build on the existing Aimhigher (Excellence Challenge) evaluation methodology. Multi-level data will be collected from learners, teacher/tutors, educational providers, and where appropriate, employers. We will also evaluate the impact on other target groups, including work-based learners (for example, on Modern Apprenticeships and foundation degrees), mature learners, non-HE based post-16 learners and the unemployed. The DfES is assessing the feasibility of gathering a sample of Aimhigher participants for follow-up surveys, to match to administrative databases such as the National Pupil Database and the Individual Learner Record, and to develop comparison groups of matched non-participants from administrative databases.
 - b. **Regional/ sub-regional evaluation.** A 'menu' of evaluation options. Partnerships will tell HEFCE what research they wanted and we will write a research menu which partnerships could buy into. The research will be designed, commissioned, managed and analysed centrally, with plenty of regional involvement. Partnerships will retain the option to follow their own research and evaluation plans, with quality being monitored through Action on Access and the successor to the regional monitoring groups. The regional research options might include, for example, feedback forms (asking participants what they got from Aimhigher and what they think its effect was); in-depth work (interviews, case studies); and surveys of different groups involved. We would ensure that these did not overlap with the national work set out in a. above.
6. **Barriers to HE.** We propose commissioning a review of existing research into barriers to HE. The review would involve compiling a complete, or near-complete bibliography, with brief descriptions of the topic, conclusion and scale of the study and where it would fit into an agreed topology. It would then need to provide a critical assessment of those studies which most closely dealt with issues within our policy framework. We expect to commission this review in mid- 2004.
7. **Non-starter survey.** We propose resuming the non-starter survey that used to be undertaken by UCAS. This survey would identify those students who were offered a place at an HEI but subsequently failed to enter HE. The purpose of the survey would be to gain an insight into factors which influenced the decision not to participate, and to establish what could be done to make HE more attractive. Given the long lead times involved in setting up such a survey, we propose to initiate such a project in the near future.
8. **Participation rates.** We will use new sources of population data and the 2001 Census results to try and establish reliable participation rates.

9. **Youth cohort study.** The HE module of the DfES youth cohort study will explore young people's attitudes, aspirations and plans in relation to HE. It will then explore their subsequent choices and experiences in relation to HE and investigate the reasons why some people's plans change or are not realised.

10. **Transition of disabled students from FE to HE.** We are undertaking a joint study with the LSC to investigate progression of disabled students from FE to HE and the issues that arise during transition. The project will involve a literature survey and studies of outreach, aspiration-raising and transition of disabled students from FE to HE, and encompasses the following themes:

- student aspiration to apply to HE
- decision making process to apply to HE
- support received in applying to HE
- application and admissions process
- transitional issues of access to facilities and support between FE and HE institutions
- transitional issues of learning and teaching styles between FE and HE institutions which cause particular difficulties for disabled students
- other issues relating to aspiration raising and transition for disabled students.

11. The first stage of the project focused on outreach to disabled students. It reported in time to inform the guidance to Aimhigher partnerships in October 2003. The second stage, focusing on transition issues, will report by the end of February 2004.

Access and admissions

12. **Schooling effects.** Our analysis of schooling effects (HEFCE 2003/32) which looked at A-level attainment will be extended to look at other factors, including school at 16.

13. **SATs.** We have approached the Sutton Trust to see if we can collaborate with its proposed trial of SAT tests. The proposal would be to combine the SAT scores with our other administrative data and track the students through to graduation. This is likely to give a more complete and consistent analysis.

14. **Admissions bias** We already hold some data in applications and offers linked to the HESA records. We are negotiating with UCAS to extend this extract to cover all the data that are available electronically. Such a consolidated data set will enable us to systematically explore these issues of bias within admission processes. As UCAS moves towards electronic application, more data will become available. In addition, we intend to re-analyse the Shiner and Modood data set to further explore their results using other indicators to test their conclusion of bias against ethnic minority applicants. If our re-analysis confirms their results, our longer-term plan is to analyse complete rather than sample data. However, such

data will only become available when UCAS moves to an electronic admissions system in 2006.

Retention and student achievement

15. **Flexible learning and HE achievement.** We are currently looking at progression routes as students take study breaks and move between institutions to assess the extent to which such flexible learning routes lead to the achievement of HE qualifications.

16. **Tracking.** We will, as part of the evaluation of Aimhigher, develop a tracking system for those students targeted by the programme in order to establish that they are able to successfully complete their chosen programme of HE study.

17. **Retention of students with disabilities.** The National Disability Team has proposed two projects to focus on disabled students:

- To investigate retention issues by type of impairment and discipline area, and identify the factors that may determine a high or low retention rate. This study would commence mid-2004 and would report in 2005.
- To conduct a review of the tools that institutions and others have developed in response to the need to undertake institutional audits of provision, policies and the curriculum for disabled students. The aim of the review would be to establish the way institutions may have benefited from the range of tools already created, identify any gaps in provision and work with partners to address such gaps. The work would be conducted in three phases:
 - the first phase would focus on existing tools applied to 'on-course' provision. It would commence in November 2003 and report in June 2004
 - phase two would focus on entry and transition
 - the final phase would focus on exit from the institution.

18. **Retention and learning and teaching.** Action on Access has proposed a number of projects including:

- a study to establish the level of synergy between institutional learning and teaching strategies and widening participation strategies
- working with the Learning and Teaching Support Network Generic Centre to establish the level of awareness of widening participation in the subject centre network. This work is ongoing and will report in July 2004
- creation of a database of secondary material on learning styles, modes of study, assessment and so on, which relate to a diverse student population.

19. **The experience of disabled students in HE.** A four-year study funded through the ESRC TLRP investigating the reasons for the lower success rates for students with disabilities.

Lifelong learning

20. **Barriers to lifelong learning.** The planned review of the barriers to HE will identify issues particular to lifelong learning, and this knowledge will inform our medium- to long-term research objectives in this area.

21. **WP mature students.** We are currently unable, with the data available, to determine the socio-economic background of mature entrants to HE. Therefore, we are exploring the possibility of using the ONS longitudinal study when it is updated by the 2001 Census data to try and identify more accurately those mature students who fall within the WP remit.

After graduation: employability and progression to postgraduate study

22. **Progression to postgraduate study.** We have done some preliminary investigations which seem to show that, having graduated, differences in background are much reduced when we look at postgraduate study. Through linking student records, data are available to explore the issue further. Although we are not currently undertaking such analysis this may become more pertinent when we have the data for the first graduates with debts from three or four years of undergraduate study without maintenance grants.

Generic WP research

23. **Partnerships.** We will commission a study to identify examples of good practice in partnership working, both within the Aimhigher programme and more broadly. It is intended that this initial research will also identify further areas for study to better understand and benefit from partnership working. The initial case studies should take no longer than six months to complete and we would hope to begin this work early in 2004.

Annex B

A selection of previous work on the barriers to HE

1. **Widening Participation and Fair Access: An overview of the evidence (HEPI, 2003).** This report maintains that the participation rates for young people for a given A-level achievement does not vary by social class. This means that how well pupils perform at school is the key determinant of whether they go on to HE and how well they do when they get there. If the issue of pupils leaving education at ages 16, 17 and 18 were addressed and pupils from the lower socio-economic groups were to stay on in greater numbers and achieve the level 3 qualifications required for HE, participation would automatically be widened.
2. **From elitism to inclusion (UUK 1998).** This study comprises 14 case studies demonstrating good practice within HEIs in eradicating or minimising the barriers to access for under-represented groups.
3. **Social Class and HE: Issues affecting decisions (DfES 2001).** This small study identified finance as a major barrier to HE for those from lower socio-economic groups but it argued that this was one of a number of issues affecting decisions.
4. **Socio-economic disadvantage and access to HE (Forsyth and Furlong, 2000).** This study identified a number of barriers to HE for students from lower socio-economic groups including educational, geographical, financial and social factors.
5. **Attitudes to debt (Callander, UUK 2003).** This study identified debt-aversion as the primary barrier to HE for those from lower socio-economic groups. However, the study failed to factor in previous education attainment. The data are being reanalysed to see if predicted A-level grades can explain the differences in attitudes about going into HE.

Annex C

Stakeholders

1. We have identified the following as being key stakeholders in our WP research strategy:

- Action on Access
- Association of Colleges
- Centre for Higher Education Research and Information, The Open University
- Department for Education and Skills
- Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland
- Department of Health
- Economic and Social Research Council
- European Access Network
- Forum for the Advancement of Continuing Education
- further education colleges
- Higher Education Academy
 - Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education
 - Learning and Teaching Support Network
- Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
- higher education institutions
- Higher Education Policy Institute
- Higher Education Statistics Agency
- Institute for Access Studies
- Joint Information Systems Committee
- Learning and Skills Council
- Learning and Skills Development Agency
- National Disability Team
- National Institute of Adult Continuing Education
- National Union of Students
- Scottish Higher Education Funding Council
- Society for Research in Higher Education
- Staff and Education Development Association
- Standing Conference of Principals
- Teacher Training Agency
- The Sutton Trust
- UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice, Queen Mary
- Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
- Universities UK
- University Association for Continuing Education
- WP practitioners (institutional WP officers, Aimhigher co-ordinators and so on)

2. In view of our commitment to partnership working and our desire to work internationally, we will also be sharing our strategy with our international colleagues.

List of abbreviations

CHERI	Centre of Higher Education Research and Information
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
ESRC	Economic & Social Research Council
FE	Further education
FEC	Further education college
HE	Higher education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher education institution
HEPI	Higher Education Policy Institute
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
ONS	Office for National Statistics
SCOP	Standing Conference of Principals
TLRP	Teaching and Learning Research Programme
UCAS	Universities & Colleges Admissions Service
UUK	Universities UK
WP	Widening participation