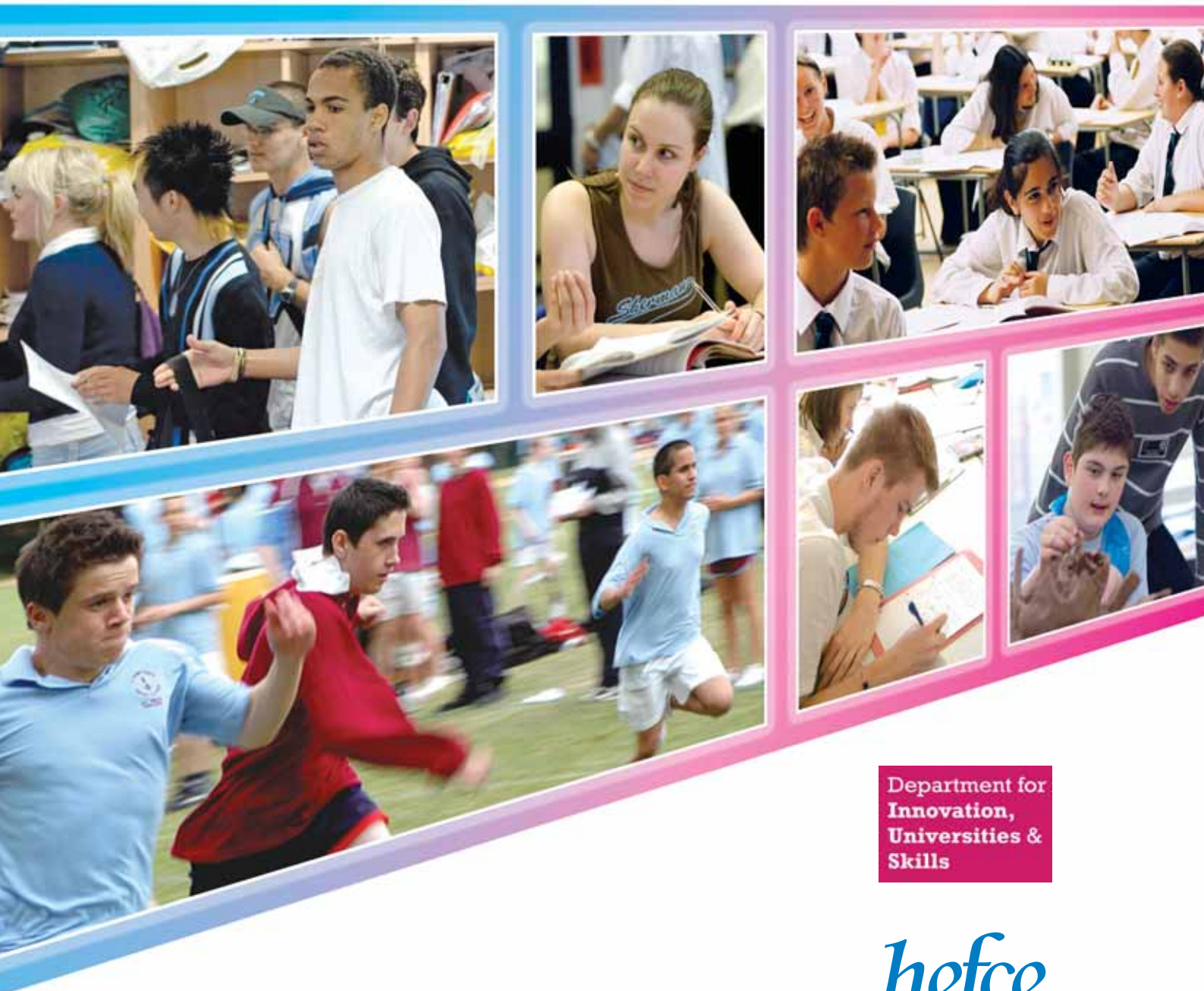


Compact schemes in higher education institutions

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Compact schemes in higher education institutions

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Executive summary

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to provide information about compact schemes, raise awareness of them across the sector, show how they contribute to outreach and recruitment activities, and set out some key principles for their use and further development. We discuss the types of compact scheme and their purposes; the eligibility and involvement of schools, colleges and learners; the coverage of schemes and the benefits and outcomes for learners involved in them. The report will provide a source of ideas and information to support institutions as they plan their own compact schemes.

Key points

2. We commissioned ACL Consulting to undertake research on compacts. The full report is available as Annex B to this document on the HEFCE web-site, www.hefce.ac.uk, under Publications and the case studies are attached to this report at Annex A.

3. Common themes and key principles emerging from the research that can help to make compacts successful include:

- clarity about target groups and purpose
- strong relationships between HEIs, schools and colleges
- staff in HEIs, schools and colleges, and compact participants understand that compact offers (standard or modified) are based on evidence about individuals' potential
- good data collection and analysis about applications, entry and student success.

4. Broadly speaking, there are three kinds of compact scheme:

- a. Outreach-type schemes that focus more on raising aspirations and attainment and providing advice and guidance than they do on admissions. Although all must have some link with admissions to be counted as compacts, the emphasis is on aspirations and attainment.
- b. Schemes that rely mainly on the 'standard offer' and form part of the wider marketing, recruitment and widening participation strategy of higher education (HE) providers.
- c. Schemes that link achievement, or evidence of potential, in some form of additional learning to variable offers.

5. There are known to be 51 institutions offering some form of compact, although many reject the use of this term. Most are offered by single institutions but some are collaborative schemes. They engage up to 60,000 learners in around 1,700 schools and colleges and help at least 8,000 people enter HE every year.

6. The benefits of compacts to learners are significant. They provide additional support for learners prior to entry: learners are better prepared, make more effective applications and have a familiarity with HE that stands them in good stead on entry. There is little available data, but it appears that learners, on the whole, perform as well or better than other students.

7. Compact arrangements are diverse and this is a strength. It reflects the market position and mission of institutions, and the relationships they have negotiated with partner schools and colleges. There is no reason to expect them to conform to a single model, nor any good reason why they should.

8. The research has identified weaknesses with targeting, data collection, data analysis and clear, publicly available information about compacts. There are four key recommendations:

- a. HE providers should be clear about the target groups and the purposes of a compact. Many schemes will have broad recruitment purposes as well as specific widening participation aims; sometimes these will be regarded as

synonymous. Where widening participation is an aim the scheme should take account of the guidance on targeting recently issued by HEFCE and prioritise the involvement of those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- b. HE providers should collect better data on compact participants. Appropriate data protection permissions should be obtained to use and share data for the purposes of research and evaluation.
 - c. HE providers should monitor the performance of compact participants after entry to HE and provide support for learners to enable their success on the programme and success in terms of progression or employment on leaving HE.
 - d. HE providers should provide a clear summary of the main features of the 'compact' including conditions of eligibility and the main benefits of the scheme, including information on the offer that the 'compact' makes. Where existing arrangements are not regarded as a compact the relevant information should be made available in an appropriate way.
9. We hope that the reporting of this research, the identification of key principles and practices involved in a range of compact schemes together with the more detailed case studies, will provide a basis for institutions to review and develop compact arrangements or, in some cases, consider how new schemes could be introduced.

Action required

10. No action is required.

Introduction

11. In October 2007, at the request of the Minister of State for Higher Education and Lifelong Learning, HEFCE commissioned ACL Consulting to make a study of 'compact schemes'. We wanted to know:

- how many compact schemes there are
- how many higher education institutions (HEIs), schools, colleges and learners are involved in them
- how compact schemes work with learners to encourage access to higher education (HE).

12. We knew that there was a great deal of variety in compact arrangements but did not realise just how much. Many HEIs do not use the term 'compact' at all, and some feel that this term is an inappropriate description of what they do. Most are offered by a single HEI but a number are collaborative. Some compacts are highly focused arrangements offering additional learning and support; others are less formal arrangements designed to encourage and sustain interest in HE. The difficulties of definition and consequently the difficulty of making generalisations about compacts are discussed below. Nevertheless, there are a group of related practices that can reasonably be included under the heading of 'a compact' and, provided proper account is taken of the qualifications set out in the research, there are things we can say about them with a reasonable degree of confidence.

13. A compact, as the word implies, involves some kind of agreement. We defined the term as 'a set of arrangements between HEIs, schools and colleges that provide special conditions or consideration for entry into the HEI'. 'Consideration' might mean anything from a promise that applications will be carefully and sympathetically considered, to a variation in the standard offer associated with successful participation in some form of additional learning. As such, compacts are a means of establishing a closer working relationship and understanding between HEIs and schools and colleges. They are also an active means of widening participation in targeted communities.

14. A survey and web search identified 51 HEIs known to be offering some form of compact arrangement. Together, those institutions enrol a little over half the total undergraduate population. Compacts are therefore significant, but vary hugely in scope. Probably the best measure of their reach is that the median number of learners involved in a compact is around 348. Such schemes generate a median number of about 248 applications and 105 entrants each. To put this in perspective around 318,000 people enter full-time, undergraduate HE in England each year. Some schemes, particularly those engaging with younger learners where the principal purpose is to raise aspirations and change expectations, can be quite extensive. Compacts of all kinds probably involve some 1,700 schools and colleges, and between 40,000 and 60,000 learners.

15. The full ACL Consulting report on the coverage and characteristics of compacts including details of methodology used is at Annex B, which is available with this document on the HEFCE web-site, www.hefce.ac.uk, under Publications. The researchers also conducted a number of case studies; brief details and results are at Annex A.

16. This report provides a summary and discussion of the research. We discuss the types of compact scheme and their purposes, then turn to details of eligibility and involvement by schools, colleges and learners, and attempt to estimate the 'coverage' of schemes. We then identify the service or benefits that compacts provide for learners. We provide an indication of outcomes in terms of the number of applications and entrants associated with compacts, and discuss the evidence relating to the achievement of entrants who participated in a compact scheme. Recommendations are identified in the course of the report and summarised at the end.

Types of compact and their purpose

17. Compact schemes are designed to both increase and widen access to HE. For many institutions the boundary between these two is blurred or non-existent and some institutions regard their recruitment and widening participation (WP) activities as synonymous. But since very few

institutions enrol the same proportion of students from lower socio-economic groups as is found in the population as a whole, there is a distinction to be made. This is important because while compacts are designed to widen participation they are, in many cases, also designed to strengthen and support the recruitment of all students. Many compacts, for example, will include a majority of, if not all, local schools and colleges.

18. Compacts are sometimes criticised for being concerned with recruitment to specific institutions rather than promoting access to HE more widely. But institutions are of necessity concerned with recruitment and compact participants are interested in entering HE. As long as compacts change perceptions about the accessibility of HE and provide additional opportunities to demonstrate ability, it would seem more sensible to encourage the link with recruitment than criticise it.

19. The research identified three kinds of compact:

- a Those where the principal focus is raising aspirations and encouraging young people to engage with learning to underpin a new expectation that HE will be accessible. Our examples are collaborative schemes although arrangements of this kind might be put in place by a single HE provider.
- b Schemes which are usually (although not necessarily) offered by a single HEI where raising aspirations and changing expectations are clearly linked to institutional recruitment strategies.
- c Institutional and collaborative compacts that make a modified offer to learners who have engaged successfully in some form of additional learning.

20. These are not distinct categories; they merely bring out some key salient features of different approaches. In some sense all compact schemes are linked, more or less directly, to recruitment. Almost all such schemes are 'open' in the sense that learners are free to make an application to any institution and are likely to benefit in doing so from their involvement in a compact. Even those schemes that make no adjustment to their offer provide some opportunities for learners to engage in additional

learning, and HEIs will certainly take account of the abilities and motivation demonstrated by compact participants when considering offers.

21. If we gave more importance to secondary differences there would, of course, be a larger number of categories. A small number of schemes, for example, are subject-specific. We could include 'access to medicine' schemes in a category of this sort. But subject-specific schemes share the characteristics of schemes that link modified offers to additional learning and as a basis for categorising schemes; this is more important than the subject focus. In what follows we draw out some differences.

Compacts as outreach

22. Compacts can be a form of outreach, a means of 'connecting' HEIs with learners in schools and colleges in the local area or region, and of cementing relationships between institutions in different educational sectors. Younger learners are involved, with the scheme promoted most actively to those aged 14 and above. The aim is to encourage younger learners to think about their commitment to learning and to understand that with the achievement of certain broad learning goals they will find a place in higher education.

23. The CARD (Choose A Real Deal) scheme is a collaborative compact involving HEIs, colleges and schools in the West Midlands. Based in the University of Wolverhampton, it is operated by Aimhigher areas on behalf of 11 institutions. It guarantees participants that 'there will be a place of higher education study available to you if you successfully complete the HE CARD goals'. These are: successful completion of a programme of study for qualifications that are required for entry to HE; and evidence of relevant commitment and experience, from work experience to participation in 'taster' programmes and summer schools. The guarantee is 'collective', although each institution makes its own final decisions on all applications. Only a handful of CARD scheme applicants have actually needed to make direct use of the scheme's guarantee of assistance; most secure a place of their choice in the normal way. The scheme is about nurturing individuals in making a commitment to higher education.

24. The Sussex Liaison and Progression Accord similarly assures appropriately qualified local learners that they will be made a 'standard offer' by one of a number of local universities. But, in contrast to CARD, it does not require the completion of any 'goals'.

25. We have described these schemes as a form of 'outreach' because their principal purpose lies in changing perceptions of HE accessibility. There are relatively few schemes of this kind, and member institutions quite often run their own schemes separately.

HE provider schemes linked to recruitment

26. Compacts offered by HEIs that form part of the institution's marketing and its WP strategy are also a form of outreach, but reflect the services and specific entry conditions of particular institutions.

27. Typically, such schemes are ambitious in scope. A single scheme may involve more than 100 schools and, since a number of year groups will be counted in membership, thousands of young people will be regarded as participants. For example, 53 schools and 11 colleges currently have a compact relationship with the University of Derby; Kingston University has 23 partner schools and expects this number to grow significantly. Indeed, Kingston had 69 compact entrants in 2006, 267 in 2007 and expects to have 500 in 2008. At Derby, compact scheme activities take place with all year groups in secondary education but the scheme is focused on years 12 and 13. At Kingston, each faculty has its own recruitment and WP strategy, and this is reflected in learners targeted through the compact.

28. Schemes of this sort do not usually make variable offers, although at Kingston there is some flexibility: where there is evidence that the student's predicted grades do not reflect his/her potential, there can be a reduction of up to 30 UCAS points. As with compacts-as-outreach, potential applicants will usually be made a standard offer. At Derby, applicants are guaranteed an offer of a place or an interview if they meet the minimum entry requirements for the programme and the student is assessed as capable of succeeding at university by their school/college and by university admissions staff.

29. Probably over half of compact schemes are of this kind (see below for an estimate of the number of schemes offering some form of additional credit).

Additional learning and variable offers

30. Almost all compacts offer support of one kind or another to participants, and often this takes the form of involvement in additional learning. At Derby, for example, 157 separate compact activities were run for school pupils from year 8 through to year 11 in 2006-07. However a number of schemes link specific forms of additional learning to the opportunity to earn credit and to variable offers. Typically this can involve 40 UCAS tariff points (equivalent to two grades at A-level).

31. In Newcastle University's PARTNERS scheme, additional learning takes the form of involvement in a two-week, assessed summer school. At the University of Birmingham, it is successful completion of a Higher Education Learning Module. For a group of HE providers in the Kent and Medway scheme additional credit can be earned in a variety of ways, for example, through Millennium Volunteers, the Duke of Edinburgh Award or key skills gained in part-time work. For a scheme led by Leeds Metropolitan University, participants can achieve 30 tariff points by successfully completing a progression module.

32. These schemes are, of course, quite different in their detail. At the University of Birmingham, the scheme offer only applies where applicants have made the university its firm choice; this is not the case in Newcastle's scheme. In Kent and Medway, institutions have agreed to treat a range of widely available educational experiences in the same way. For the Leeds Metropolitan scheme, institutions have a shared 'credit agreement'. They are all using credit, or tariff points, as a way of providing opportunities for learners to demonstrate their capacity for higher education in different ways.

33. In total, 17 institutions (roughly a third of all compacts) stated that they provided an opportunity to gain additional credit linked to a revised offer.

Involvement and eligibility

34. In this section we investigate: who is involved in compact schemes and what, if any, are the conditions for the involvement of schools, colleges and individuals.

35. Only four of 46 respondents described their scheme as 'national'. Some specified schools and colleges that were already involved with the institution, for example through a Lifelong Learning Network, or involved in the delivery of validated programmes such as foundation degrees. A little over a fifth of respondents identified schools linked with Aimhigher partnerships and/or in disadvantaged areas. Only three respondents identified schools that sent significant numbers of students to the institution, or schools that had a 'good fit' with institutional mission. Although responses were therefore qualified in a variety of ways, nearly all were 'local' or 'regional' and most were, in practice, open to all state-maintained schools and colleges in the geographical area covered. The openness of compact schemes is demonstrated in the case studies at Annex A. The University of Derby scheme seeks to involve schools and colleges where learners are less likely to enter HE, but no local school or college would be excluded if they expressed a wish to join.

36. Most compact activity is only limited by geography, communications, and the staffing and other resources that can be devoted to this activity. Newcastle's PARTNERS scheme, for example, operates throughout the North East. As its reputation has grown, schools in West Yorkshire and Cumbria have expressed interest, raising issues of manageability.

37. The approach to involvement of schools and colleges is matched by the approach to learner participation eligibility. A majority of survey respondents regarded all learners in the school/college as scheme participants if they wanted to participate. Around half had some kind of targeting process with specific WP purposes in mind. Typically the criteria for eligibility for individuals in such cases are quite widely drawn

and include being the first in the family to enter HE; a local authority care leaver; or in receipt of an educational maintenance allowance. In almost all cases, individuals need to meet only one criterion. Socio-economic status is rarely specified, and less than a third of compact schemes collect data on the occupation of the household's chief wage earner. The University of Birmingham's Access to Birmingham (A2B) scheme is exceptional in requiring students to be first-generation HE participants and live in a low-participation neighbourhood and have parents who are not in professional occupations. The case for receiving an A2B offer is increased if learners demonstrate that they have had to overcome some considerable disruption to their education 'due to personal circumstances and/or a declared recognised disability'.

38. All in all, practical targeting of schools and colleges is limited, and the targeting of individuals for involvement in compact schemes is based on quite broad and usually flexible conditions. As we have seen, compacts for many institutions are part of a broader marketing and recruitment strategy. It would be inappropriate to confine such schemes to a narrower range of schools and colleges, for example. On the other hand, where a declared purpose of the scheme is to widen participation, schemes should prioritise the involvement of learners from the WP target groups as set out in HEFCE's guidance on targeting (lower socio-economic groups and those from areas of relative deprivation, including young people leaving care)¹. Schemes should also collect sufficient data about participants to make an assessment of the effectiveness of the scheme's contribution to WP (see recommendations below).

The coverage of compact schemes

39. In conducting this study, consultants distributed a questionnaire to 131 HEIs. Setting aside 17 institutions that are conservatoires or primarily postgraduate institutions, the survey and web

¹ HEFCE 2007/12 'Higher education outreach: targeting disadvantaged learners', available at www.hefce.ac.uk under Publications.

searches found an even split between institutions that offer a compact and those that do not: 51 institutions offer some form of compact, 51 do not do so and there are 12 institutions for which there are no data. The 51 institutions that do have a compact account for a little over 52 per cent of all undergraduates. Between them they engage with around 1,700 schools and colleges, and between 40,000 and 60,000 learners.

40. As indicated in the introduction, there are difficulties in arriving at a good estimate of the actual reach of compacts because some involve a relatively loose relationship with a large number of schools, colleges and learners while others are more tightly focused on a smaller group of schools and targeted learners. When collaborative schemes are added to the picture, averages and median figures may be misleading because we may not be comparing like with like.

41. The data are set out in full in ACL Consulting's report, showing the distribution by size of compact networks with schools and colleges, and the number of institutions falling into one of a number of ranges for participation by learners.

42. The median number of learner participants per participating institution is 348, applicants 248 and entrants 105. So compacts are significant enough but relatively small-scale business set against the

318,000 people who enter full-time undergraduate programmes each year: the ratio of compact members in schools and colleges to the overall undergraduate population in the HEIs offering those schemes was 1:20 or smaller in 22 of 34 HEIs.

43. The case studies give a good indication of 'reach' alongside the data collected through the survey. Kingston's undergraduate population was 18,200 in 2006-07 when 69 compact participants entered the university. The numbers for Kingston, Derby, Newcastle and Birmingham are set out in Table 1.

44. It is reasonable to conclude that half the sector has some involvement with compacts but their significance probably lies more in the nature of the relationships that compacts establish between HEIs, schools, colleges and, most importantly, learners, than in how many of them there are. They are a way of building relationships with schools and colleges, often expressed in a formal agreement with designated responsibilities for senior staff. They engage learners in thinking about HE and encourage learners to set targets in relation to their ambition to study particular courses at particular institutions. We have made no attempt to measure the impact of compacts in motivation and achievement prior to HE application but there is a widespread view among staff in schools, colleges and HE providers that this is significant.

Table 1 Compact applications and entrants for selected institutions

	Full-time undergraduate entrants 2006-07	Number of compact applicants	Number of compact entrants
Kingston	5,866	185	69
Derby	3,310	1,055	385
Birmingham	4,600	529	125
Newcastle	4,410	497	205

The benefits and outcomes for learners

45. The core of any compact involves the 'motivator' described above, additional learning activities, support for the application process and, for those who satisfy the demands for additional learning, an offer linked to specific achievement.

46. Almost two-thirds of compact schemes offer access to additional learning opportunities; a third require additional learning to be completed; and half seek to involve compact students in other activities offered by the HEI. We have already noted the additional module in the scheme led by Leeds Metropolitan, the requirements of the schemes offered by the Universities of Birmingham and Newcastle, and the range of learning opportunities offered by the University of Derby. Activities offered through the CARD scheme in the West Midlands include residential experiences on HEI campuses, touring drama productions in schools, and student-life workshops. At Kingston (as in other HEIs) the compact is linked to related WP activities through the Schools and Colleges Liaison Team. In about a third of schemes where learning is linked to a variable offer, learning is more structured and the outputs assessed by university staff.

47. Some forms of collaboration have developed between institutions with their own separate compacts that offer additional benefits for learners. The White Rose scheme, for example, links the Universities of Leeds, York and Sheffield in an agreement to give special consideration to applicants that have participated in compacts with the other two institutions.

48. Almost 90 per cent of schemes offer additional support to participants in making an application to HE. Kingston believes its scheme helps students identify the right course. Some schemes, such as those at Birmingham, Newcastle and Derby, use an additional or supplementary application form alongside the UCAS form and refer on the UCAS application to participation in the compact. This can involve participants in a dialogue with teaching staff at the university as well as staff in the school/college.

49. Slightly fewer than half of schemes guarantee compact participants an interview, although this proportion rises when account is taken of schemes that offer a place or an interview to candidates who meet their requirements. An 'interview' in this context should be read as additional consideration; few institutions now interview candidates except for certain specialist and professional areas (for example performing arts and nursing). An interview is an additional opportunity for a candidate to demonstrate their capacity and potential for study on their chosen programme.

50. The benefits for the learner in setting their sights on HE entry, in preparing for HE, and in making a more effective application, are reasonably clear. There is some evidence – or at least a perception on the part of staff in HEIs – that students arrive on campus better prepared than they would otherwise be. For example, participants in Newcastle's PARTNERS scheme already know how to use the library and resource centre, and know their way around the university, being familiar with lecture theatres, departments and the students' union facilities.

51. On the whole, compact participants do as well as others when they enter HE although evidence on this score is currently weak, reflecting weaknesses in data more generally. Relatively few institutions provide ongoing support for compact participants once they enter HE, and the monitoring of their performance appears to be limited.

52. Half of our respondents told us that they monitored the performance of entrants who had participated in compacts but fewer could provide detail on retention and achievement. Of those who could provide detail, a clear majority found that compact participants did about the same or better than their peers; some reported a mixed picture in different subject areas, but none reported that performance was worse overall. For some schemes quite detailed information is available.

53. At Newcastle University, the number of compact participants achieving 2:1 or 2:2 during 2000-2004 was above the University average.

54. At the University of Birmingham, A2B students were marginally less likely to graduate (although a little more time is required for significant numbers to come through the system). On the numbers we have, they were marginally more likely to leave before completing their course (13 per cent against 11 per cent) and less likely to achieve a 2:1 (51 per cent against 61 per cent). On the other hand, 10 per cent had achieved a first and this matched the performance of other students. And compared with students entering Birmingham through clearing, A2B students were as likely to graduate and less likely to leave before completing their course.

55. At Derby the evidence suggests that compact students take longer to complete their programme but most do complete.

Data issues and communications

56. There are exceptions, but on the whole there are weaknesses in data collection and analysis. Only 40 of 45 respondents provided details of data collected about participants. Returns indicated that less than 90 per cent asked about age and gender; less than two-thirds reported data on ethnicity and disability; and less than a third asked about parental occupation. This is surprising since all these data are requested in the UCAS application form and, although not available during the application process, they are made available subsequently. Matched with data for compact participants these data would provide a rich source for analysis enabling institutions to understand better the communities they are reaching through compact schemes.

57. The benefits made available to learners through compacts are, by and large, communicated through partnership links with schools and colleges, through leaflets and brochures, but most importantly, through one-to-one contact between teachers and pupils. There could be better use of the internet. In many cases information was not easy to find or clearly presented. For every scheme, there should be: a clear summary of the main features of the

compact; the eligibility of schools/colleges and individuals to participate; its main benefits; and the offer that the compact makes. Where modified offers are made, there should be clearly stated requirements for the additional evidence of potential that the applicant is expected to offer.

58. As noted above, monitoring and analysis of compact participants once they have entered HE is even more limited. There are some difficulties associated with definition and type of compact. It is not easy, for example, to draw the line around 'compact students' in a scheme which regards a large part of the local school/college population as participants even if there has been no specific individual application or enrolment. There are also issues of burden. Institutions and their partners have invested considerable resource in making the compact available. Out-of-the-ordinary obligations to monitor and assess performance of what is often a very small group of students could be difficult to manage or justify.

59. On the other hand, simple systems would suffice to record the personal details and characteristics of participants, and once flagged on the university's data system it should be relatively simple to track progress. The recent National Audit Office report on improving retention² and the Quality Assurance Agency report on widening participation³ have both drawn attention to the need to improve data collection and analysis. The benefits for institutions engaged in compact schemes are numerous. Better data and analysis would encourage better management and enable institutions to make more assured judgements about the value of schemes and their value for money. It would also enable them to begin to answer more interesting evaluative questions, not just 'how well have compact participants done after entering HE compared with others?' but 'how well have they done compared with others who share similar characteristics and attainment but did not participate in a scheme?'

² National Audit Office 2007, 'Staying the course: The retention of students in higher education', available at www.nao.org.uk under Publications/Value For Money (VFM) Reports.

³ Quality Assurance Agency 2008, 'Outcomes from institutional audit: progression and completion statistics', available at www.qaa.ac.uk under Reviews & reports/Institutional audit: England/QAA standards for institutional audit.

60. Information about compact schemes on the internet was difficult to find and publicly available information, although available to partners, was not always easy to find. We make some recommendations about these matters below.

Conclusions and recommendations

61. Concerns about fair admissions and equal opportunities have meant that compact schemes have attracted more attention than they would otherwise receive. They are an important means for HE providers to build local relationships with schools/colleges and potential applicants but they probably only provide direct assistance to a few thousand of the 318,000 entrants to full-time undergraduate programmes each year. Their indirect influence, on the other hand, may be much greater, in that they raise awareness of HE and change perceptions of accessibility. All the evidence suggests that they are worthwhile for participants and for the institutions that offer them.

62. The report has found a diversity of experience and strengths in the different kinds of compact scheme and no reason to expect them to conform to a single model. Some are simply another form of outreach to widen participation. Many, probably most, are part of the institution's wider marketing and recruitment strategy, sitting alongside and complementing its efforts to widen participation. Typically such schemes make standard offers to compact applicants; the value of the scheme to the institution and to the learner is the way the scheme paves a route to HE. Those schemes that vary the offer made where the learner successfully completes additional learning, independently or as part of the HE provider programme, are providing additional means for learners to demonstrate their motivation, capacity and potential. Admissions decisions remain decisions about the suitability of applicants for a place on the programme; the compact is designed to help the applicant to prepare better and make a more effective application.

63. We identified a number of key principles in the executive summary and elaborate some of them here.

- a. Compacts can make the promise of HE real for learners. This is most obviously the case with schemes that are a form of outreach but also those linked to recruitment. Creating this link between institution and learner will widen as well as increase participation.
- b. Compacts are an effective way of showing what a university has to offer; it makes the campus familiar, and often the library and other services. Compact students already know their way around. It is also a way for institutions to demonstrate a commitment to its local community, and this too communicates openness.
- c. Schemes that offer substantial support to learners through advice and guidance, and involvement in additional learning, are particularly valuable and HEIs thinking of adopting compact arrangements should consider the forms this can take (additional modules, interviews, special events and summer schools).
- d. Compacts should offer learners from disadvantaged backgrounds additional opportunities to generate evidence of their capacity to succeed as a student on their chosen course. This may be through involvement in additional learning but may also be through the additional information provided by teachers about an individual's potential.

64. Because compacts are part of the wider marketing, recruitment and WP strategies of many institutions, schemes tend to be inclusive rather than exclusive – accepting, if not actually seeking, widespread involvement of local schools and colleges. Where schemes target individuals for involvement, the criteria usually allow quite a wide degree of discretion and are likely to result in quite a wide mix of actual participants. In many respects this approach is appropriate given the place of the compact scheme in the institution's wider strategic

thinking. However, all schemes, particularly those where WP is the declared and principal purpose of the scheme, should take account of the targeting advice in guidelines recently published by HEFCE. There should be a conscious attempt to prioritise the involvement of learners from the principal target group, those from lower socio-economic groups and areas of relative deprivation, including those leaving care.

65. The advice on targeting makes it clear that this is to be achieved through data collection and analysis that enables HE providers to engage in an informed dialogue with colleagues in schools and colleges about who is benefiting from the scheme, rather than the imposition of rules. Institutions need to know who is currently involved in compact schemes before they can make a judgement about what more, if anything, needs to be done to ensure that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds are appropriately involved. It is important therefore that HE providers offering compact schemes collect better data on participants, including parental/carer occupational background.

66. This recommendation is extended to include better data monitoring of the performance and achievement of compact participants on entering higher education. This will provide impetus for the provision of additional support to learners where necessary, and the way to evaluate the success of the compact as a means of linking institutions to schools and colleges, widening participation and ensuring student success.

67. Finally, we have noted the paucity and uneven quality of information made publicly and easily available on the internet about compact schemes. The 'publicity' material that we have seen, the letters, brochures and other explanatory material made available to schools and colleges about the compact is generally clear and of a high quality but publicly accessible material is not easy to find. It is not necessary to describe arrangements as 'compacts' where institutions do not feel that this is an appropriate term. But it should be possible, in detailing matters relating to admissions, or work

that HEIs do with schools and colleges, to provide a summary of the principal features and purposes of compact-type arrangements. We recommend all HE providers do this.

Summary of recommendations

68. HE providers offering a 'compact' with schools/colleges and learners should be clear about the target group and purpose. For example, the scheme might be limited to a defined geographical area for reasons of practicability. Many schemes will have broad recruitment purposes as well as specific widening participation aims; sometimes these will be regarded as synonymous. Where widening participation is an aim the scheme should take full account of the guidance on targeting recently issued by the HEFCE and prioritise the involvement of those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

69. HE providers should collect better data on compact participants who engage with the scheme including post code (providing analysis of links to areas of low participation and relative disadvantage), date of birth, school/college, ethnicity, gender, disability, whether leaving care, and parental/carer occupational background. Appropriate data protection permissions should be obtained to use and share data for the purposes of research and evaluation.

70. HE providers should monitor the performance of compact participants after entry to higher education and analyse data for the purposes of evaluation and policy development. Monitoring should also provide a basis for selective intervention as necessary to support learners to enable their success on the programme and success in terms of progression or employment on leaving HE.

71. HE providers should make publicly available on the web and/or in print a clear summary of the main features of the 'compact', the eligibility of schools/colleges and individuals to participate in the scheme, its main benefits, and the offer that the 'compact' makes. Where modified offers are made there should be clearly stated requirements for the

additional evidence of potential that the applicant is expected to offer. Many HE providers do not regard the arrangements they have made as constituting a 'compact' and this recommendation should not be read as a requirement that all providers must conform to a particular description or present information in a standard way. Where there is a 'scheme' that the institution designates as a 'compact' it should be described and presented as such. Where the arrangements are regarded as an extension of the school/college liaison function, external relationships, or of matters relating to admissions, the relevant information should be made available in an appropriate way.

Annex A

Compacts study: Case studies

Introduction

1. The following five case studies, conducted by ACL Consulting, are each structured in six sections:
 - Section 1 Background – history of the scheme and key elements of the offer
 - Section 2 Membership – number and type of students involved and the terms of membership for schools and colleges
 - Section 3 Content – activities for students prior to university entry, support services for scheme members
 - Section 4 Admissions process – admissions processes and distribution of compact students across the University
 - Section 5 Impact and assessment – impact on the University, students and member schools and colleges
 - Section 6 Marketing – marketing to schools, students and university staff
 - Section 7 Management and data collection – how the scheme is managed, monitoring and data collection
 - Section 8 Future developments

Case study: University of Birmingham A2B (Access to Birmingham) scheme

Section 1 – Background

2. A2B was launched in 2000-01 and has gradually evolved over the intervening period. In 2006-07 scholarships were introduced for A2B students who achieve the full prospectus offer rather than their alternative A2B offer.

3. A2B applies to Year 13 students only.

4. The aim of the scheme is to:

- give fair consideration for students who would, in all probability, succeed at the University of Birmingham but whose actual and predicted academic achievements up to Year 13 suggest that they may be unlikely to achieve the required 'standard offer' for their course
- make the option of studying at University of Birmingham available for those students whose aspirations are otherwise unlikely to include it.

How A2B works

5. The process is straightforward:

- a. Schools and colleges register for the scheme – only state-funded institutions in the 'Greater West Midlands' area are eligible.
- b. Students who meet the A2B criteria (see below) at registered institutions are either identified by their school-/college-based A2B co-ordinator or may self-nominate with the support of the school/college co-ordinator.
- c. Interested students are required to complete a Supplementary Application Form (SAF) in addition to UCAS Apply.
- d. The information in the SAF is considered by the A2B team at the University – it makes a recommendation to the University or faculty admissions team as to whether the student meets the entry criteria for A2B and whether they are academically suitable for study at the University of Birmingham. Applications are graded from 1 – strongest, should receive an A2B offer – to 4 – weakest, should not receive an A2B offer.
- e. All A2B applications, regardless of the grades awarded by the A2B team, are passed to the

appropriate admissions team for their consideration.

- f. If the University/faculty admissions staff feel that the applicant is capable of study at the University they make an A2B offer.
- g. The A2B offer is communicated to the student in the normal way (through UCAS's Track system).
- h. In order to be able to activate their A2B offer, the student has to:
 - i. make the University of Birmingham their firm choice
 - ii. complete the Higher Education Learning Module (HELM) – see 'Content' below for more details – simply achieving the grades of the alternative offer is not sufficient.
6. On the SAF, students are required to make a statement about why they want to study at the University of Birmingham and to specify any circumstances that may have had an impact on their academic performance. The member of staff recommending them to A2B is required to confirm the details in the student's application, indicate how the student meets the A2B criteria and record predicted grades at A Level.
7. In order to be eligible for A2B, students must fulfil the following criteria:
 - be at an A2B registered institution and recommended for A2B by staff at the institution
 - be the first generation of their family to apply to higher education institutions (HEIs) through the traditional route (that is, during Year 13)
 - attend a school/college or live in an area with low rates of progression to higher education (HE)
 - have parents who are not in professional occupations.
8. Additionally students who, in the opinion of their teachers, have had considerable disruption to their education to date – sufficient to mean that their predicted and/or actual exam results do not fully reflect their potential – are encouraged to apply via A2B.

The 'deal'

9. This is as described above – i.e. if you make the University of Birmingham your firm choice, pass the HELM and get the grades required by your A2B offer you are in.

10. Given these conditions individual learners may be offered up to the equivalent of 40 UCAS tariff points. The University is firmly of the view that passing the HELM plus achieving an A2B offer is the equivalent of a standard 'A level grade only' offer.

11. In any given year, the A2B offer will not necessarily be the same for all A2B students in the same department.

12. All students with an A2B offer who actually perform well enough in their Year 13 exams to achieve the standard offer – e.g. ABB at A Level rather than a typical A2B offer for the same course of ACC – will receive an A2B scholarship of £1,200 for each successful year of study at the University of Birmingham.

13. The A2B scholarship is paid in addition to the Birmingham Grant of £840 p.a., which is payable to all students from households with an income of less than £34,600 p.a. – most A2B applicants would be eligible for the Birmingham Grant. Despite the fact that c£2,000 p.a. is available, on the basis of

discussions with staff and students, the financial benefits arising from A2B have had little impact on the students in terms of their decision to apply to the University of Birmingham⁴.

Section 2 – Membership

14. A2B is best regarded as a series of steps that the potential A2B applicant has to take rather than something that they become 'members' of (the term may therefore not be appropriate in an A2B context):

- step 1 – apply for a programme/ course at the University of Birmingham via UCAS
- step 2 – complete and submit the SAF
- step 3 – receive an A2B offer (effectively the student is now 'accepted on' A2B)
- step 4 – choose University of Birmingham as your conditional firm offer (if the student does not do this then their A2B offer lapses)
- step 5 – pass the HELM (if the student does not do this then their A2B offer lapses)
- step 6 – secure grades to meet the A2B offer (if the student does not do this then their A2B offer may lapse).

15. 'Membership' data for the last two academic years is as follows:

Year	No. of SAFs submitted	No. of A2B offers made	A2B students making UoB their firm offer	A2B students passing HELM	A2B applicants accepted at UoB
2005-6	356	213	146	114	94
	(100%)	(60%)	(41%)	(32%)	(26%)
2006-7	529	328	215	148	125
	(100%)	(62%)	(41%)	(28%)	(24%)

⁴ Note this is not the same as the Birmingham Scholarship, although it is set at almost exactly the same level. Birmingham Scholarships, which are worth £1,260, are generally only available to students who achieve AAB or above at A Level (or an equivalent level of performance in other exams – IB; BTEC etc).

16. The number of SAFs submitted represents around 10% of total undergraduate starts; the number of A2B applicants starting an undergraduate programme at Birmingham in 2006-07 represents around 3% of total starts.

17. Approximately one in every four SAFs completed results in a student starting a course at the University of Birmingham. The conversion rate seems relatively low (though it is still higher than that for standard entry students) and may reflect applications from Year 13 students who are unsuitable – either because they are not sufficiently academically able or because they do not meet the criteria.

18. For 2007-08, at the time of the fieldwork 72% of SAF applications received had resulted in A2B offers being made. This is an improvement on previous years.

19. It is largely up to each individual student in A2B-registered institutions to determine whether or not they apply through A2B. School/college staff may offer advice on predicted grades and eligibility but ultimately it is up to the student to decide whether or not they want to apply. Staff are unlikely to refuse to sign the SAF if the student is determined to apply.

20. The only restrictions on applications are geographically based at institutional level (i.e. the school/college must be in the Greater West Midlands area) and A2B eligibility criteria based at individual student level (i.e. if the student does not meet the criteria then they will be ineligible for A2B).

21. Prima facie, there is little reason for schools/colleges not to get involved – staff confirmed that the additional work involved in completing the institutional element of the SAF (a brief reference and confirmation of predicted grades) is far from onerous. The processes cost relatively little for the schools and colleges involved.

22. All three institutions covered by the fieldwork were also involved with the Coventry (Phoenix) compact. The level of support received was similar for both schemes. None were involved in any other compact arrangements.

Section 3 – Content

23. In terms of the content of the programme, the key activity is the HELM. This is a required part of A2B – those students that do not complete it lose their A2B offer.

24. The HELM has three elements:

- a day spent ‘shadowing’ a current undergraduate
- a set of study skills modules
- an assessed piece of work.

25. The first and second elements of the HELM are completed during Year 13.

26. The study skills module is completed on-line and is intended to give A2B applicants an insight into what studying at an HEI is like. The module is designed to take around 15 hours to complete. The pass mark in the end of module test is 75%.

27. The intention behind the student shadowing day is to give A2B applicants a clear idea of what being at an HEI is like. Ideally A2B applicants should shadow an undergraduate in their chosen area of study. The on-line evaluation for the study skills module also asks students about their shadow day experiences – a clear majority rated it either ‘excellent’ or ‘very good’. Where A2B students shadowed an undergraduate from the course they were particularly interested in, they generally found the experience to be extremely valuable.

28. Overall ratings for the shadowing and on-line elements of the HELM are very high (90%+) in terms of increasing students’ levels of confidence and understanding of academic study and preparing them for study at an HEI.

29. The assessed piece of work is completed after the Year 13 examinations (i.e. in July). The work is set by the faculty to which the A2B applicant has applied and is intended to give them an insight as to the level of work that will be expected of them in their first year. In completing the assessed piece of work, the A2B applicant should receive support from the faculty – either a member of staff or a post-graduate student is assigned to them as an academic tutor.

30. Students are able to access the University's library and can submit draft outputs for comment from their tutor before submitting the final version for formal assessment. Academic staff involved in this part of the HELM are offered guidance on good practice in relation to setting and marking the assignment element. The assessed work is marked 'Pass/Fail'.

31. Those finishing the HELM are asked to complete an on-line evaluation survey, focusing on the degree of difficulty experienced in completing the work. The academic writing and critical analysis sections of the study skills modules were assessed as 'quite hard' by a majority of students; other elements (plagiarism, essay writing and oral presentation) as 'easy'. The University is broadly happy with this balance. Responses in relation to the assessed piece of work are more mixed, reflecting the fact that these are set at departmental, rather than whole-institution, level. However, most students find the whole 'HELM experience' to be challenging and valuable preparation for university life.

32. Prior to starting at the University, A2B students have their own induction day.

33. The University offers in-school/college briefings about A2B for both staff and students.

Section 4 – Admissions process

34. A2B applications are fairly well distributed across programme areas and broadly proportionately in line with applications more generally.

35. Where there is any skewing in applications from partner schools and colleges, this tends to be due to the subjects being popular A Levels at those institutions. For example one college reported high numbers of A2B applications for accounting, economics and business-based courses. These are, however, their most popular A Level subjects.

36. A clear majority of applications (60%) come from further education and sixth form colleges.

37. The involvement of academic admissions staff differs little in respect of A2B applicants in terms of process – they receive a 'graded' SAF from the A2B team and make an alternative A2B offer to the student on the basis of this. The A2B offer will usually be one or two grades below the standard offer.

38. In 2006-07, of the 215 students who chose their A2B offer (plus passing the HELM) as their conditional firm offer:

- 77 met or exceeded the grades required by their A2B offer
- of those that did not meet grades required by their A2B offer, many still got onto courses at the University of Birmingham (35 on their first choice of course; 13 on another course).

39. In total, 58% of the 215 A2B students who chose their A2B offer as their conditional firm offer in the academic year 2006/07 enrolled at the University of Birmingham in October 2007.

Section 5 – Impact and assessment (staff and student judgements)

On the HEI

40. A2B encourages more applications from local students to the University. That students with different backgrounds, life experiences and motivations to study are admitted to the University has, in the view of staff and students, had a beneficial impact on the programme areas in which they study.

41. Applications in general – i.e. not just from A2B students – are disproportionately up from the institutions that feed through the greatest number of A2B students, suggesting that there may be knock-on benefits from A2B in terms of the wider exposure that the University of Birmingham gets within these institutions.

On students

42. The feedback from those completing the on-line survey on A2B is overwhelmingly positive. Last year (2006/07) the A2B team also ran a questionnaire and focus group discussion with first year undergraduates to get their views of A2B once they had started their courses. Almost all feel that A2B is a good preparation for HE and gives the student confidence that they will be able to cope with their first year.

43. In terms of 'What appealed?' to A2B students, the following points were widely made:

- generally, the alternative offer

- more specifically, an improved chance of getting into a competitive course
- assistance with the applications process
- a belief that A2B would help you get into the University of Birmingham, whether or not you achieved the grades
- the ability to stay local but still go to a prestigious HEI.

44. School- and college-based interviewees felt that A2B had not/would not affect the decision on whether or not to apply to university – most if not all A2B applicants were already decided on this being their preferred route post-Year 13. Where A2B did have an impact was on the choice of which HEIs to apply to. A2B was considered to be enough to make a real difference, bringing the University of Birmingham into consideration for more students.

45. For many A2B applicants, the University of Birmingham represents their only chance of going to a Russell Group university – in particular where parental pressure and/or financial concerns make it unlikely that they would be able to live away from home whilst at university.

46. Students do not see themselves as part of an 'ex-A2B' group once they are at the University. Their view is that A2B was about enabling them to get to Birmingham only; once they are in there is no reason for them to be treated any differently from any other student. This is generally very much how they are treated by the University, although individual departments vary in the extent to which they pay closer attention to their ex-A2B students.

On the partner schools/colleges

47. Schools and colleges felt that A2B did not affect the decision on whether or not to apply to university but did affect the choice of which HEIs to apply to. In some cases the contrast between the pre- and post-A2B position is marked – for example, from a position where the college found it very difficult to get students to apply to University of Birmingham pre-A2B to one where over 100 now apply each year.

48. Those who knew the detail considered that the HELM was good preparation for HE and that, in

terms of content and timing, A2B worked well.

49. However, the nature of A2B is that it places relatively few demands on the schools and colleges and therefore the impact on the partner institutions was minimal.

On staff

50. The A2B team devote a not inconsiderable amount of effort to marketing the scheme internally. There is an A4 brochure specifically for University admissions staff and an annual briefing to review last year and update staff on any changes for the current year.

51. All staff are now supportive of A2B – most departments make alternative A2B offers even though there is no absolute requirement for them to do so.

52. Data for students who were first year undergraduates in 2004 (i.e. would ordinarily have graduated in July 2007) shows that, compared to students coming through clearing, A2B students were:

- as likely to graduate
- three times more likely to graduate with first class honours
- less likely to have dropped out – 13% compared to 20%.

53. Compared to those coming to Birmingham through the non-A2B/non-clearing route, A2B students were:

- marginally less likely to graduate (by 3% – in part because A2B students were more likely still to be studying after their third year)
- as likely to graduate with a first (10% of the cohort) but much less likely to graduate with an upper second (51% versus 61%) and therefore more likely to graduate with other degree classifications
- marginally more likely not to complete their degree (13% for A2B compared to 11%).

Section 6 – Marketing

54. A2B is marketed to state schools and colleges in the Greater West Midlands area. 110 are currently registered.

55. The A2B team have focused their work on areas of socio-economic deprivation, starting with schools and colleges with below average performance in Birmingham, the Black Country, Coventry, Warwickshire and Staffordshire. All schools in the area with less than 45% of candidates achieving grades A to C at GCSE have now been invited to join A2B.

56. Any institution that is state-funded and in the Greater West Midlands area could apply if they think any of their students might qualify.

57. More specific targeting (e.g. at young people with no family experience of higher education) occurs:

- potentially, when A2B is introduced to Year 13 students – schools/colleges may opt to present information on A2B to those likely to be eligible or who indicate an interest only, rather than to the whole year group
- at the application stage – schools/colleges will know who A2B is targeted at and should know enough about the circumstances of their students to ensure that only those likely to meet the A2B criteria apply
- at the stage in the process where applications are considered by the A2B team – they give a grade 4 to applications that do not meet the A2B criteria (i.e. a clear signal to admissions staff that an A2B offer should not be made).

58. A2B is mentioned on the University's web site as part of the Teachers and Careers Advisers pages and is accessed by typing 'Access to Birmingham' into the site search engine.

59. There is also a suite of A2B-specific materials (single sheet format), variously targeted at:

- potential University of Birmingham students
- staff in schools and colleges
- admissions staff in the University.

60. Further information brochures in a similar format cover student finance ('The A2B Student Finance Guide') and a general introduction/expression of interest form for teachers/lecturers ('Access to Birmingham: The A2B Scheme').

61. The A2B team respond to requests for presentations to students and/or staff from institutions that are already involved.

62. Schools/colleges are either approached about membership by the A2B team or initiate the contact themselves. They are attracted to A2B because it offers their students a better chance of studying at their local Russell Group HEI.

63. Students are attracted to A2B for the same reason as institutions are interested in the programme – i.e. it offers them a chance to study at their local Russell Group HEI.

64. Schools and colleges currently rely on the A2B team for on-going support, especially in terms of annual presentations in the Autumn Term to Year 13 students and to staff with Year 13 responsibilities.

Section 7 – Management and data collection

65. The cost of operating A2B is estimated at c£90,000 p.a.. Two thirds goes on staff; the balance on other operating costs, the majority of which is consumed by payments to academic staff for supporting the assessed essay element of the HELM – faculties are paid by A2B on a per capita basis for supporting the assessed essay element of the HELM.

66. In addition A2B receives uncosted support from various parts of the University – for example from the central admissions team and departmental admissions tutors in relation to additional time taken to review A2B applications and candidates and in responding to specific queries on A2B applications.

67. A2B has operated with a full-time officer for the past 18 months – prior to this it was run on a more ad hoc basis through the Outreach Office. A second A2B-specific person has recently been recruited. The team also uses around one half of a full-time post to help administer the scheme.

68. Overall responsibility for the scheme rests with the Head of Outreach.

69. The scheme is overseen by the Student Skills and Academic Support Board of Studies, chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic Quality and Students).

70. The schools and colleges are clear that they get a much better level of service/support for A2B from a dedicated team than was previously the case.

71. The cost of compact-related activity to the partner schools and colleges is minimal – effectively the time taken to complete the school/college reference part of the SAF plus some counselling of students on whether or not they should apply.

72. The institution's involvement effectively finishes when the SAF is submitted – and therefore takes place over a relatively short period of time (Autumn Term). There are no on-going requirements to pay, for example, for visits to the HEI (the student covers these).

73. Data is collected in respect of each A2B applicant's age, gender, ethnicity, postcode and the occupation of the chief wage earner in the student's household as part of the application process.

74. A2B staff would concede that, to date, tracking of ex-A2B students' progress once they are at the University has not been a particularly strong element of the scheme. However, there is now a more robust data set and more information can be provided to schools and colleges on the performance and retention of their former A2B students. Regular feedback on applications will be given to all schools and colleges with over ten A2B applicants.

75. The following is a summary of the data collected regarding A2B:

Data	A2B position
List of schools and colleges that are members of the scheme	This information is readily available through the A2B team
Student members in these schools and colleges, together with any biographical, socio economic etc data	Students only become 'members' (if 'member' is an appropriate term in an A2B context) once they have applied by completing the SAF alongside their UCAS form. This data is therefore available
Records of the number of compact member students applying to the HEI, ideally by school of origin	This information is readily available through the A2B team
Data on conversion (applicants to enrolments)	This information is available from the University's management information systems (MIS) team; it is reported on in the A2B annual report
Information on which faculties or subjects A2B students choose etc	This information is available from the University's MIS team; it is not something that is regularly reported on and to access it requires a specific query of the database to be written
Information on retention of compact students compared to overall rates	This information is available from the University's MIS team; it is reported on in the A2B annual report
Information on progression rates of compact students, final degree classifications etc compared to overall rates	This information is available from the University's MIS team; it is reported on in the A2B annual report
Student satisfaction information	The A2B team have surveyed HELM completers and ex-A2B first year undergraduates
Cost data on compact activities	Reported as a budget line within the finance system
Annual reports on compact activity	A comprehensive annual report, containing much of the above information, was produced for the first time 2006-07

Section 8 – Future developments

76. The on-line study skills element to HELM is being re-designed to make the experience more interactive. The intention is that it will be offered more widely to pre-university students (i.e. not just used with A2B students).

77. More A2B student profiles will be put on the web pages.

78. More information will be fed back to schools on how 'their' A2B applicants and ex-students are progressing.

79. The A2B team will use the Sutton Trust/Goldman-Sachs Foundation summer school programme ('the Academic Enrichment Programme') as a means of marketing A2B – and the University more generally – to/within A2B partner schools.

Case study: University of Derby compact scheme

Section 1 – Background

80. Derby first ran a compact scheme in the mid-1990s (its focus was then on providing a route into HE for Asian girls).

81. The focus of the compact is now more broadly drawn, targeting the local population that would not ordinarily be contemplating HE.

82. The scheme is a partnership between the University and local schools and colleges. Its purpose is to raise students' aspirations and ensure smooth progression to HE. It also helps the University to maintain good links with its partner organisations through visits, staff exchanges and a range of other joint activities.

83. The key principle behind the scheme is that the best way to encourage progression to HE is through students actively participating in events at the University and at the individual student's school/college.

84. The compact is particularly focused on Years 12 and 13, although compact-related activities take place throughout the secondary years.

How it works

85. The compact process is relatively simple; in the majority of cases:

- a. A local school/college signs a partnership agreement with the University.
- b. Students from partner schools and colleges interested in applying to the University fill in a Compact Application Form (CAF)⁵.
- c. A tutor at the school/college reviews the CAFs and confirms the information contained in them⁶.
- d. When completing their UCAS application through Apply on-line, the student writes

'compact' in the Further Details box. Ideally the CAF and the UCAS form are submitted at the same time.

- e. The CAFs are sent to the compact administrative team and the details entered onto the compact team's database.

86. There are exceptions to the above. In particular the process as outlined has not always worked well in larger institutions (i.e. local further education colleges), where the volume of applicants may make it difficult for all applicants to complete a CAF and get it signed. In cases where applicants to the University from compact partner institutions have not completed a CAF:

- a. The compact team identify these students from local schools and colleges from an internally produced admissions report.
- b. They write to these students retrospectively to explain the scheme and ask the students to complete and return a CAF (included with the letter).
- c. If the applicant is willing to register as a compact student, they will complete the CAF, get a tutor to sign it and send it back to the University.
- d. The compact team's database is updated with the further information supplied.

87. Currently around a quarter of CAFs are completed in the manner outlined in paragraph 86.

88. The CAF is also available for completion on-line – completed forms are emailed to the compact team by the student; the compact team then emails the names of these students to their contact in the appropriate school/college. The contact then responds by e-mail to confirm they support each student's compact application.

⁵ The CAF asks for general information on the student, much of which is covered by the details in the UCAS application. The CAF is used because it is easier for the compact team to obtain the relevant information separately than to extract it from UCAS-based data and because certain information included on the CAF – in particular a declaration that the student is the first in their family to go to university via the traditional route and the signature of the school to support the application – are not included on the UCAS form.

⁶ The tutor is signing to confirm the details included in the CAF and that the student: has a good attendance record; has a good level of core skills; and, in their opinion, is capable of succeeding in HE.

The 'deal'

89. Applying through the compact route benefits students by:

- a. Guaranteeing the offer of a place or an interview for most degree and diploma programmes, subject to:
 - i. the minimum requirement for entry to Derby of two A Levels (between 140 and 240 UCAS tariff points, depending on the degree course, fewer for Foundation degrees and HNDs), a BTEC National Diploma, Advanced GNVQ etc being met
 - ii. a CAF being completed
 - iii. the student having a good record of attendance and punctuality
 - iv. the student having a good level of core skills
 - v. the student being judged to be capable of succeeding at University by their school/college and by University admissions staff.
- b. Offering advice and assistance with the UCAS application process from University staff.
- c. Offering the opportunity to access events and be part of visits specifically reserved for compact students.
- d. Having a dedicated induction day for compact students only.
- e. Receiving a 'compact bursary' – this is available to all compact students applying for full-time programmes (except those in receipt of an NHS bursary) and is a one-off payment of £400, paid at the start of the Spring Term of the first year.
- f. Offering the opportunity to earn money by working for the compact team whilst at University.

90. Students can also get help prior to applying by completing a Compact Enquiry Form, though in practice they raise any queries they have through other means.

91. The University also provides a range of advice, information and activities for local students from compact partners who are contemplating HE and their families.

92. As part of its compact, the University used to make an alternative offer to compact students; this is no longer the case – it was generally perceived to make little difference to those applying, was increasingly difficult to implement under current regulations and seemed to be counter-productive in that it gave the wrong message about the University to potential students.

Section 2 – Membership

93. Whilst students do benefit from the compact, its main focus is on building relationships between the University and its local schools and colleges – membership is therefore something that is best viewed as institutional rather than individual.

94. Up to Year 13, it is staff at the partner institutions, rather than the students, who determine which activities/events are accessed (although the students may well have opportunities to express their views). In Year 13, there are a number of events specifically targeted at compact students which the students can decide whether or not to attend.

95. In 2006-07, 7,500 students at partner institutions were 'actively involved' in the compact – i.e. attended a compact-related/organised event, either at their school/college or at the University. The figure will include some double-counting (those attending more than one event will be counted more than once).

96. A partner institution interviewed as part of the fieldwork is also a member of Nottingham Trent's compact scheme. The level of support it receives from each HEI is felt to be broadly equivalent – indeed the schemes are in many ways similar. As a partner of both universities, the college generally tries to avoid differentiating between which HEI is running a particular event when these are held in college – simply offering them on an 'are you thinking about HE' (rather than an 'are you thinking about HE at ...') basis.

Section 3 – Content

97. Signing up to a partnership agreement enables the school/college to gain access to a range of activities offered by the University for school pupils and college students – these are offered from Year 7 onwards, but with a particular focus on Years 10 to 13. Events and activities are delivered both in the partner institution and at the University.

98. Prior to Year 13, events and activities tend to be delivered in the partner institution rather than at the University⁷ and to be more about generic issues relating to HE. Areas covered in these events include:

- general awareness raising of HE as an option
- how to choose an HEI or a course
- skills development for HE – personal effectiveness; communications; time management; problem solving; team building; interview skills; study and research skills
- developing self-esteem
- issues encountered at HEIs – finance; relationships; personal responsibility; living at home whilst studying at university.

99. The available activities are summarised in the ‘Compact Scheme Activity Brochure’. Where possible, compact team staff hold individual meetings over the second half of the Summer Term with partner institutions to plan each partner’s activities for the next academic year. There is also scope, with a few weeks’ notice, for activities to be requested during the academic year. In theory there is no limit to the number of activities that an individual school or college can access in any given year; in practice resource constraints may impose a limit on the number of events that can be delivered.

100. In addition to the range of activities contained in the Compact Scheme Activity Brochure, partners are also able to access other scheduled events – for example visits specifically reserved for compact students – and more generally

to ask the compact team to facilitate access to the University for particular groups of students, subject areas etc. For example:

- a. A group of students with an interest in studying a particular subject area at an HEI can ask to visit that subject area at Derby.
- b. Members of staff at a partner school or college can build relationships with the relevant department at the University to ensure curriculum continuity and enable staff development⁸.

101. Derby is as flexible as possible in trying to meet the needs of individual partners. If what is being sought is not currently available within the planned/structured programme of events and activities, the compact team will work with the partner and the relevant parts of the University to try to make it available, developing new materials and activities/events if necessary.

102. Feedback from the partners is that master classes and taster events at the University are important, both in terms of switching students on to HE in general and to Derby in particular. These events tend to take place in Years 12 and 13.

103. In terms of activities run in 2006-07:

- 157 separate compact activities were run for Years 8 to 13
- 42 information sessions were held at partner institutions
- 12 HE awareness days were held for Year 10s from compact partners at the University (770 pupils attended)
- 13 taster days/master classes and eight information days were held for compact partners’ Year 12s.

104. Applicants from partner institutions are able to access support from the University in relation to completing their UCAS application.

⁷ Though some campus-based events are offered (e.g. HE awareness raising days for Year 10, and occasional Year 8 and 9 groups, and taster days and HE information events for Year 12). In a typical year around 30 campus-based events will be held for compact partners – see below for further details re what is offered.

⁸ Indeed partners will often use the compact team as the first port of call for any questions relating to HE or the University.

105. The compact team also run an enquiry service for compact students and their families – most queries are finance or admissions-related.

106. There is a post-results ‘advice on options’ service available for compact students who do not get the required grades for their first choice programme but who have been made alternative offers by the University, or for those who were rejected and want advice on the available options.

Section 4 – Admissions

107. In 2006-07:

- 1,055 applications were made through the compact route (up 51% on 2005-06)
- 385 compact applicants accepted a place at Derby (up 34% on 2005-06) – in terms of the gender of the applicant, almost two thirds were female, a third male; c10% were from minority ethnic communities
- the conversion rate (offers to acceptances) was 37% – this was down by 5% on previous year but still high in comparison to the University as a whole (a conversion rate of 22.5%).

108. There were no new partners involved in the compact applications cycle in 2006-07 so growth has come from greater engagement with the University by existing partners.

109. The University operates through five faculties – three broadly subject-based plus one for joint honours programmes, with the fifth faculty comprising all activity at the Buxton campus. Two fifths of compact applicants are for programmes in the Faculty of Education, Health and Sciences; there are almost no compact applications for the Buxton campus¹⁰. The balance is distributed equally across the other faculties. Apart from Buxton’s under-representation, the split is broadly in line with the profile of undergraduate admissions overall.

110. There are no courses for which compact partner students cannot apply.

Section 5 – Impact and assessment

On the HEI

111. The mix of students at the University has changed over time; the compact has played its part in attracting more students from non-traditional HE backgrounds and therefore had an impact on the culture of the University.

112. The compact has provided a focus for the University’s work with schools and colleges and is a means through which to develop relationships by:

- making it easier for faculties to generate links with schools and colleges
- developing structured and sustainable links between university departments and schools and colleges.

On students

113. The principal aims of the compact are to get students who would not normally aspire to HE to believe that it is something that is ‘for them’ and to provide information, advice and guidance through the admissions process to support students in their application. The following quote is evidence for this:

‘The trips you have organised to the University taster days have made a real difference – the students are so much more motivated and focused. It has changed the nature of the group, impacting even on students who did not go.’
(BTEC National Tutor – Health and Social Care)

114. Given the nature of the scheme, some students are likely to benefit more than others. For example those who have already decided to go to the University and decided what subject they want to study may obtain less benefit than those who are undecided; however they are still entitled to receive the bursary and some of the information sessions, such as the finance-based ones, should be of interest and value to them.

⁹ 4% of applicants were rejected – it is not immediately clear why this would be: if a student was not applying to a programme that was suited to them then efforts would be made to place them onto another programme; for programmes that interview, applicants may have failed at interview (but the University run an interview preparation workshop programme for compact partners to try to mitigate against this).

¹⁰ Work is underway to address this – in particular a Buxton-based compact team (half-time officer plus two compact assistants) that has been successfully signing-up schools and colleges as partners in the High Peak and surrounding area.

115. Comparisons with the University population as a whole are difficult because figures for retention and progression are calculated differently, being programme-based. Also, compact students comprise a relatively small proportion of students at programme level. However, the data that is available suggests that compact students take longer to complete their programme but most do complete in the end. To date, 13% of the 2004 compact intake (15 students in total) have withdrawn with no qualification.

116. There are opportunities for ex-compact students to become student mentors and help in the delivery of compact-related activities. In spite of this they do not see themselves as a separate group from the main student body.

On the partner schools/colleges

117. Schools and colleges have seen a number of beneficial effects from involvement in the compact:

- increased participation post-16 from non-traditional learner groups
- more motivated students
- improved retention and achievement of students – particularly at Key Stage 3
- improved progression to HE.

118. Schools also derive benefits from improved links with their local HEI, including:

- staff and curriculum development/benchmarking opportunities, currently in relation to specialised diplomas in particular
- better preparation of their students for what they will encounter once they leave school
- a reference point for any questions they might have regarding HE in general or the University in particular.

On HEI staff

119. The impact of the compact on academic staff at the University is limited. The key thing that is required of them is to participate in the various events and activities that are put on for the students at partner schools and colleges. The extent to which individual departments are prepared to do this varies.

120. The senior management team are very supportive of the compact.

121. Each faculty has its own marketing officer, who provides a point of contact for the compact team when they are seeking to set up events for students.

122. For those staff who are interested, the compact offers a means through which they can develop relationships with staff in partner schools and colleges. For example university staff have provided input into the new specialised diplomas.

Section 6 – Marketing

123. All institutions within a 30-mile radius of the University are eligible to apply to be a compact partner of the University – 52 schools and 11 colleges.

124. There is an information leaflet for interested parties and the web site has a compact scheme section, readily accessed by typing 'compact scheme' into the site search engine, either of which might act as a trigger for interest. However, the approach to marketing the compact to potential new partners is low-key¹¹.

125. Once initial contact is made, discussions proceed to the point at which a partnership agreement is signed between the University and the school/college. At this stage partners get access to the range of events offered by the compact (see Section 3).

126. To maintain the relationship between the University and its partners:

- the compact admissions pack, which includes information on some of the events on offer that

¹¹ The compact team focuses its time and effort marketing the compact, compact activities and the importance of applying through the compact route to current partners and their students rather than on generating new partners.

year for compact partners, is formally launched with partner institutions each year in September

- there is an annual partnership meeting to foster links between the University and partners
- an annual report disseminates the work of the compact to staff internally and externally
- a compact newsletter is produced twice a year for University staff and partners.

Section 7 – Management and data collection

127. There is a team of five (equal to 3.5 full-time equivalent members of staff) that is focused on compact activity – a manager; two development officers (one per site; both currently half-time only); an administrator for the scheme and a half-time administrative assistant.

128. The compact manager reports to the Head of Academic Partnerships (UK) in the School of Flexible and Partnership Learning and, through the Head of School, to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Learning, Teaching and Scholarship.

129. In addition to the full-time team, the scheme uses ex-compact students in one of two ways to help run the scheme:

- a. Student mentors – supporting on-site activities for students of partner institutions (e.g. open days; departmental visits), though mentors can also go into partner institutions to support members of the compact team and compact assistants delivering activities. Those who came to the University via the compact route are specifically targeted to work as mentors.
- b. Compact assistants – since 2004, ex-compact students with at least six months' mentoring experience have had the opportunity to work as compact assistants. This is a more externally focused role – assistants receive additional training to enable them to develop and/or deliver activities and events in partner institutions. Assistants can also work in the compact office if

there is insufficient contact time with students in any given month. There were four compact assistant posts in 2006-07.

130. Mentors and assistants are formally trained for their role; the work is paid; they have a University contract of employment and assistants have a guaranteed number of hours per month (18).

131. The compact team maintain their own database of compact activities and students; this provides information on:

- applications and enrolments by partner institution and by University faculty
- the gender and ethnicity of applicants
- the range of compact activities and numbers attending – many of these are subject to post-event evaluation by those attending
- retention and progression.

132. The management information available enables the team to:

- produce a comprehensive annual report (shared with partner institutions)
- provide anonymised feedback to partners on how their ex-students are progressing.

133. Compact staff meet regularly as a group to review the compact.

134. The University estimated the total cost of the compact to be £360,000; the main costs are:

- the compact team
- the mentor and compact assistant programme
- hospitality (transport to and food provided as part of University-based events)
- the various give-away materials offered to students attending compact-related events.

135. The cost of compact activities to partners is minimal – activities and events are free and the main associated cost, travel, is largely refunded through a per capita payment to the partner. The aim is to ensure that financial considerations are not a barrier to participation in any compact activities.

Data collected/available:

Data	University of Derby position
List of schools and colleges that are members of the scheme	Collected and published in annual report
Student members in these schools and colleges, together with any biographical, socio economic etc data	Not really applicable – the notion of membership is better applied to the institution rather than the student
Records of the number of compact member students applying to the HEI, ideally by school of origin	Collected and published in annual report Breakdowns by gender and broad ethnic origin also produced
Data on conversion (applicants to enrolments)	Collected and published in annual report – down to school level
Information on retention/drop-out of compact students compared to overall rates	Collected and published in annual report
Information on progression rates of compact students, final degree classifications etc compared to overall rates	Not collected due to incompatibility of data sets
Student satisfaction information	Collected for compact-related events and activities
Cost data on compact activities	Identifiable through the University accounting system but not ordinarily reported on (e.g. cost information is not included in the final report)
Annual reports on compact activity	Produced

Section 8 – Future developments

136. The compact team are proposing to use the University's student record system to track ex-compact students through from application to graduation.

137. The profile of the compact scheme in the High Peak area (based around the Buxton campus) will continue to be built.

138. Opportunities for partnership agreements will be extended to colleges outside the current 30-mile boundary. The University is also looking to develop discrete compact arrangements for applicants:

- from the Birmingham and Solihull area
- aged over 21, who are not covered by current arrangements

- from work-based learning – this dimension to the compact is currently under development; however, applicants to HE via Apprenticeships have yet to come through.

139. Efforts will continue to be made to increase the proportion of male applicants and applicants from minority ethnic groups.

140. On the back of compact arrangements, the University is also looking to develop more subject-based links between specialist schools and the relevant department within the University (currently 46 partners have specialist status).

Case study: Kingston University compact scheme

Section 1 – Background

‘The mission of Kingston University is to promote participation in higher education, which it regards as a democratic entitlement’

141. Kingston strongly supports the objective of ensuring that, in the context of the introduction of top-up fees, disadvantaged students are not deterred from entering higher education.

142. The University has a well-developed Widening Participation (WP) Strategy that has been in place for four years. This has been successful in attracting and supporting students from groups under represented in higher education. The strategy is being revised for the next five years and is linked with and overlaps Kingston’s Learning and Teaching Strategy. It consists of four strands:

- aspiration raising
- pre-application support and guidance
- post-application support and guidance
- on-course support for a more diverse student population.

143. Co-ordination of the strategy is based in the Academic Development Centre¹² and works closely with the University’s marketing arm, UK Marketing. Strands of the strategy are also clearly identified in the Human Resource Strategy. The University also houses and manages the London South Aimhigher Partnership and in-house activities dovetail with those of Aimhigher.

144. In the autumn of 2006, the Academic Board of the University approved a Quality Enhancement Strategy (QES). The QES brings together all of the objectives of the University’s WP strategy (including the Access Agreement) the Learning and Teaching Strategy, ‘academic’ staff development from the Human Resources Strategy and contains objectives to ensure quality assurance and enhancement are effectively linked.

145. A number of the QES objectives are particularly relevant in the context of the Access Agreement:

- a. Awareness raising and aspiration raising, including the provision of opportunities for Non Traditional Entrants (NTEs).
- b. Application and pre-entry – to provide opportunities for students from more diverse backgrounds to enter the University.
- c. Employability – NTEs are supported in their transition to the workplace, for further study and have an equal opportunity for success with other graduates and diplomates.
- d. Review and evaluation – tracking, monitoring, reviewing, evaluating and disseminating all WP activities to ensure that targeting, monitoring and evaluating work with NTEs is informed by clear evidence and is of clear benefit to students.

146. In line with the above, all faculties are provided with data and bench marks to complete an annual Widening Participation Action Plan. This contains key priorities and areas for investigation including the following:

- a. Raising awareness in under-represented groups at school, college and the work place of all opportunities in HE in general, and Kingston in particular.
- b. Improving the information, advice and guidance offered to under-represented groups prior to and during their application to the University.
- c. Ensuring that admissions practice is based on fair access principles.
- d. Implementing the University’s compact scheme targeted at applicants from local schools, colleges and workplaces (and care leavers nationally).

¹² The Head of Widening Participation is also the Deputy Director of Academic Development.

The compact scheme

147. The scheme is funded through the Access Agreement. The first intake was in 2006. As can be seen from the above it is one part of a number of integrated and related strategies and mechanisms. The scheme specifically targets¹³:

- students who have no family tradition of going to university
- local authority care leavers
- those in receipt of Educational Maintenance Allowance
- mature applicants to full-time Foundation degree programmes
- other applicants considered on a discretionary basis, for example students who for personal reasons can only attend a local university.

148. The compact eases the transition to university amongst these students by providing them with:

- a bursary of £300 per progressive year of study
- flexible entry requirements (a possible reduction of up to 30 UCAS tariff points)
- a single point of contact for information, advice and guidance throughout the admissions process.

149. All applications to the scheme must be supported by a reference from their school/college which sets out why a student's predicted grades may not reflect their true potential. This will then inform the offer the University may make.

150. There is a single point of contact for each student to provide guidance during the application process. This includes information, advice and guidance on which course to apply for, course fees, funding arrangements and accommodation.

151. The scheme is in its third year and has grown steadily since its pilot in 2006. 150 enrolled places were available in 2006, rising to 300 for 2007 entry and 500 for 2008 and thereafter.

152. There are named contacts within faculty admissions and within the partner schools and colleges.

153. A new web site and on-line application process has recently been launched for students applying for 2008 entry.

The 'deal'

154. All applicants must meet at least one of the eligibility criteria in paragraph 147 above.

155. There is a single point of contact to guide the applicant through the application process, including information, advice and guidance on which course to apply for, course fees, funding arrangements and accommodation.

156. An on-line compact application has to arrive within five days of the UCAS application for the student to be considered for a modified offer. (Applications are accepted outside of these timescales, for example when the University writes to students holding an offer later in the year).

157. Each application must be supported by a tutor/teacher reference.

158. Flexible entry requirements mean that compact students may be made a modified offer with a deduction of up to 30 UCAS tariff points.

159. Provided the student meets the offer requirements, a place will be awarded.

160. Each successful entrant receives a £300 bursary per progressive year of study over and above any other bursary entitlement.

161. Following enrolment, each student has the opportunity to contact the compact co-ordinator if they are having any problems. The University will not contact the student directly but the compact co-ordinator remains a single point of contact to provide as much help and support as is needed after enrolment.

162. Subsequently the compact student will be treated the same as any other student.

¹³ Applicants have to meet only one of these criteria.

Section 2 – Membership

Learner membership

163. Nine schools and colleges accepted the invitation to join a pilot scheme in 2006. There are now 23 schools and colleges participating in the compact scheme with a target of recruiting 500 students per year. The programme is in a period of expansion, although in the future this may be more about recruiting students from particular groups or with different qualifications – for example more BTEC and Diploma students.

164. The table below illustrates the growth in the number of compact applicants to the University.

	2006	2007
Received	185	626
Eligible	158	573
Enrolled	69	267

165. The type of student varies across faculties and is a reflection of each faculty's widening participation strategy, priorities and targets.

166. It is the task of tutors in schools and colleges to identify potential compact applicants using the eligibility criteria in paragraph 147.

School membership

167. Schools and colleges join simply because there is no reason not to. As one HE Careers Advisor said:

'For us there is no down side, we only have to supply a reference and we have the opportunity of persuading more of our young people to apply to university.'

168. The University has always worked closely with its local schools and colleges and in many ways the emergence of the compact is a logical development of these long-standing relationships.

169. Future expansion of school membership will be driven by the University looking slightly further afield geographically, as well as schools/colleges approaching the University because of the reputation of the scheme.

Section 3 – Content

Raising aspirations and attainment

170. The University has an established Schools and Colleges Liaison Team which co-ordinates a range of activities for students in schools and colleges from Year 7 upwards. This includes working directly with students and student ambassador schemes.

Pre-application information and guidance

171. Applicants are supported with information on finance, a range of compact and progression arrangements and student mentoring activities.

172. There is a view – but no hard evidence – that the compact scheme helps students to find the right course. This is because of the support and guidance provided by the University to schools and applicants prior to entry.

Support and guidance

173. There are no special arrangements for compact students once they arrive at the University. Although compact students can be identified if necessary for monitoring and comparison purposes, they are not identified to teaching staff.

174. There is no evidence that compact students require more support or take up more resources. In fact the University is at pains to point out that all students receive the support that is appropriate to their particular needs.

175. A vital element in this approach is the University's Quality Enhancement Strategy (QES). The objectives of the QES follow the 'student life cycle' defined in its broadest sense. This applies from the first point of contact with potential students to graduation, and lifelong learning and career management for graduates. The student life cycle moves on through application, recruitment, pre-entry support, induction, on-course support, learning, teaching and assessment, career management and lifelong learning.

176. Staff in participating schools and colleges are offered help with the UCAS and compact application by admissions staff and the Education Liaison Team.

Section 4 – Admissions

Admissions – some facts and figures

177. In 2007/08 there were 518 applicants via the UCAS main scheme of whom 466 (90%) were deemed to have met the compact eligibility criteria. 444 (86%) of these were made offers (conditional or unconditional) and 326 (73% of those offered places) chose to accept (firm or insurance acceptance). Of these 210 (64% of acceptances) finally enrolled at the University.

Conversion rates of compact and non-compact UCAS main scheme applicants across Kingston University

KU	All		Compact	
	N	% conv	N	% conv
Applicants	32,066		518	
Offers made	22,676	71%	444	86%
Applicant acceptance	8,766	39%	326	73%
Enrolled	4,349	50%	210	64%
Overall application to enrolment conversion		14%		41%

178. The data shows consistently better conversion rates for the compact scheme applicants. This is replicated across all of the faculties i.e. the conversion rate is higher for compact scheme applicants.

179. Compact applicants are consistently less likely to decline an offer than other applicants.

The admissions process

180. The compact scheme operates across all faculties except for Health Care¹⁴. It is a faculty decision as to the criteria they apply for selecting applicants. As mentioned earlier, each faculty has its own WP strategy with its own particular emphases.

181. All compact applicants submit a reference which, in the first instance, is received by the

Education Liaison Team. They assess every reference and make recommendations to the appropriate faculty, although the final decision of making an offer belongs to the faculty. Sometimes, when predicted grades are too low, applicants will be advised of alternative courses.

182. The focus of the reference is to identify why the predicted grades for that applicant might not be a true reflection of their ability and potential. On occasion the reference is returned to the school/college for more detail or amplification of specific points.

183. Offers are made by the faculty. It is at their discretion to make a modified offer, usually a reduction of 30 UCAS tariff points but exceptionally 40.

184. All compact students receive a bursary of £300 per year of study as a matter of right. This does not affect their right to apply for other bursaries or awards. This is communicated to applicants as part of the application process.

Section 5 – Impact

On the HEI

185. The overarching agenda is of widening participation and the compact scheme is integral to both the philosophy and delivery of this.

186. Recruiting students from non-traditional backgrounds and observing their progress has been viewed positively by staff in faculties and admissions¹⁵.

187. There is no doubt that the compact enables the University to reach non-traditional students in greater numbers, although the evidence for this is, so far, largely anecdotal. The University collects and collates data through the University student record system. They will carry out detailed analysis of the social characteristic variables as the scheme progresses.

188. Staff in the faculties are supportive of the compact scheme and treat it as a normal part of their admissions processes.

¹⁴ This is because the compact scheme only applies to students who are paying the full top-up fee. Students on courses such as nursing do not.

¹⁵ This is not to say that staff were prejudiced in their view of some students – rather that the compact has demonstrated the positive benefits derived from recruiting compact students.

On students

189. Only three students were interviewed and their accounts are anecdotal. Two of the three were from a minority ethnic background, one was a mature student who had returned to learning after a gap of nine years. All were first-generation university students.

190. The students were very positive about the compact scheme. All of them had been invited to events at the University prior to applying but were only vaguely aware of what applying under the compact scheme meant.

‘I like the idea of being a compact student, especially the £300. But I don’t think it makes any difference to how I study or what my friends think of me.’

‘I was going to apply (to the University) anyway but I was told by the college that I could apply through the compact scheme. The next I knew about it was a letter of acceptance.’

191. The students get no extra support or tuition and seem not to need it anyway, although of course it would be provided if and when needed.

192. There is no evidence that compact students form a separate group. They are all assimilated easily into the main student body.

193. Two of the students reported that their parents had been informed about the compact scheme and were pleased and proud that their children had benefited from it.

194. As the partner schools and colleges are all local to Kingston it seems likely that many of the compact students would have applied to Kingston anyway.

On the partner schools/colleges

195. The school (only one was interviewed) reported that the scheme helped to focus the minds of students more closely on the application process. It also boosted the motivation of some students and made them more optimistic about applying to the University.

196. Many students only look locally and the compact scheme is especially helpful to them. Other

students who apply away from home have almost certainly made up their minds as to where to apply and what to study. The compact scheme would seem to have little impact on these students.

197. The school interviewed commented that:

- the scheme was easy to understand in terms of the offer
- it was straightforward to administrate
- it has clear criteria for eligibility
- the support and guidance given to the school and the students by Kingston was effective
- the scheme was helpful to some students in helping them to find the right course¹⁶
- for some students it was instrumental in raising their aspirations.

198. Internally the scheme is simple to operate; the main task is publicising it to teachers and tutors. This is done through bulletins to members of staff and year group tutors.

‘There is no down side – it’s just a case of providing a tutor’s reference.’

On staff

199. Staff have been generally supportive of the compact scheme from its inception. There are a number of reasons for this.

- a. The scheme started with the backing of the Vice-Chancellor and fits with the college’s mission and WP agenda.
- b. Every faculty has a WP strategy. The compact scheme is an integral part of this.
- c. Resources were provided to administer the compact scheme. This resulted in academic staff not being over-burdened or taking on too many extra tasks.
- d. The compact scheme is part of an integrated approach to teaching and learning. It is supported by the QES which provides academic and pedagogic support for all staff through a clearly expressed quality framework.

¹⁶ The process of writing and refining the reference can be helpful in concentrating students’ and tutors’ minds as to which course the student should apply for.

Section 6 – Marketing

External marketing

200. The compact scheme is funded via the Access Agreement at £75,000 per annum. This sum covers the staffing, management and marketing of the scheme. Separating out a specific figure for marketing is not possible.

201. The University has built partnership arrangements with local schools and colleges as part of its Access Agreement and Widening Participation Strategy.

202. All the schools marketing and liaison comes under the auspices of the University's marketing arm, UK Marketing. However, it is worth noting that there are also close links between individual faculties and compact partner schools and colleges.

203. Each faculty has its own WP strategy and a designated WP champion. For example, a faculty may wish to place more emphasis on recruiting from ethnic groups or from a higher proportion of BTEC students. This will have a bearing on how both WP and the compact operate within each faculty.

204. Students are identified in partnership between the University and school/college. Interestingly, where students apply from a partner college or school but not via the compact scheme the University writes to them to ask if they have considered applying via the compact. This is done prior to the final June 30th deadline.

205. There is a range of activities concerned with external marketing including:

- a. Outreach work in schools and colleges to raise awareness of higher education and the compact.
- b. A single point of contact for information, advice and guidance.
- c. Support from the Education and Liaison Team based within UK Marketing to support the faculties in a range of widening participation activities.
- d. Brochures and leaflets promoting and explaining the compact to students in schools/colleges and also to potential Foundation degree students.

- e. The compact features on the University web site but it would be fair to say that this is not seen or used as a major marketing tool.

Internal marketing

206. This has been made easier in the first instance by the active support and backing of the Vice-Chancellor.

207. The appointment of a WP champion in each faculty provides further impetus.

208. The Deputy Director of Academic Development and Head of Widening Participation has made presentations of the compact scheme to admissions tutors and directors of study in each faculty.

209. These presentations have focused on:

- the compact scheme in the context of the University's mission
- statistical evidence about teaching, learning, retention and progression of compact students.

Section 7 – Management and data collection

Management

210. The compact is managed by the Education Liaison team, comprising the Education Liaison Manager and the Widening Participation Co-ordinator. They report to the Deputy Director of Academic Development and Head of Widening Participation.

Monitoring and data collection

211. To carry out an analysis of compact data, compact data sets over two years (2006 and 2007) both combined and separated are used. To enable wider comparisons with the wider Kingston population they have also been linked to the 2007 Kingston applications data set and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) return for the 2006/07 period. This monitoring and data analysis is ongoing.

212. A sample of the data collected includes:

- growth in numbers of compact applicants broken down on a faculty basis
- retention of compact students
- conversion rates of compact and non-compact applicants
- courses with the most compact applicants on a faculty basis
- courses with the highest number of compact rejections
- courses with the highest number of compact offer declines
- number of accepted compact applicants from each feeder institution.

213. A key message from the data is that progression of the compact entrants of 2006-07 from Year 1 to 2 was higher than that for all undergraduates. The progression data from the compact students who enrolled in 2007-08 will provide a far richer picture.

214. Research into social factors of compact applicants is ongoing but there is no hard evidence as yet.

215. The data provides evidence for institutional change, for faculties in terms of what courses students are applying for. Additionally, the Education Liaison Development Team get feedback from faculties on why their compact recommendations have been rejected. Feedback can also be provided to students.

Section 8 – Future developments

216. The University recognises that the compact scheme is an effective vehicle for easing the progression of students from under-represented groups entering the University.

217. The scheme will continue and from 2008 will offer up to 500 compact bursaries for every year of study to students from local schools and colleges who have no family tradition of going to university or are in receipt of Educational Maintenance Allowance.

218. Additionally bursaries will be offered to all care leavers and to all applicants to full-time Foundation degree programmes who are being charged the top-up fee. This latter category emphasises the University's commitment to employer engagement and work-based learning.

219. They plan to use the compact scheme to add value to their work welcoming Lifelong Learning Network progression agreements and students applying to the University with the new diploma qualifications.

220. Other students will be considered on a discretionary basis, for example students who can only attend local university because of health reasons.

221. The University will set aside £75,000 to ensure the effective management of the compact scheme.

Case study: Newcastle University compact scheme

Section 1 – Background

222. In 1998 the University, partly from its own desires and partly in response to HEFCE's drive for WP, revised and devised its WP strategy. This is built on a number of key principles including:

- a. The encouragement of able, highly motivated and enthusiastic students of all backgrounds to apply to their degree programmes.
- b. Recognition that many talented and able people are not fully confident about applying to university.
- c. The undergraduate intake was dominated by applicants from outside the region. The region contains above-average numbers of people from disadvantaged backgrounds, many of whom could be served by their local university.

223. Two related programmes have been initiated under PARTNERS – the PARTNERS Programme Supported Entry Route and the Newcastle Guaranteed Offer Scheme. For the sake of clarity both are described below but it is the PARTNERS Programme Supported Entry Route that is the main focus of this case study.

224. PARTNERS is the name given to the University's Widening Participation Project, established in 1999. It consists of a formal partnership agreement between Newcastle University and 105 state schools and further education colleges in Cumbria, Tyne and Wear, Darlington, Durham, Hartlepool, Kirklees, Middlesbrough, Northumberland and Stockton.

225. In developing PARTNERS the University devised a comprehensive programme of events, activities and financial support for individuals in participating schools and colleges, underpinned by the provision of high quality information and HE advice.

The compact – PARTNERS Programme Supported Entry Route (PARTNERS Programme)

226. At the core of the agreement with schools and colleges is the PARTNERS Programme. The aim of the PARTNERS Programme is to raise aspiration and facilitate progression into the

University by a supported entry route, for able students from under-represented groups.

227. It offers eligible students a modified conditional offer from the University, together with a requirement to attend a two-week Assessed Summer School.

228. Continued efforts have been made to tighten criteria for acceptance onto the PARTNERS Programme Supported Entry Route to ensure that the focus of the programme is able young people in state schools and colleges from social groups under-represented in HE, low-participation neighbourhoods and those recommended for inclusion by schools and colleges on the basis of other personal factors of disadvantage.

229. The Assessed Summer School, the culmination of the PARTNERS Programme Supported Entry Route, enables students to demonstrate their potential for success at the University and helps them make an effective transition between school/college and the University. Students must successfully complete the Summer School and meet the terms of their offer in order to gain entry to the University.

230. The Summer School itself has been developed as a pre-entry module and the academic curriculum is subject to the University's normal quality assurance systems. Students attend up to 40 hours of contact time and are expected to complete from 30-50 hours of personal study time.

231. It runs on weekdays over a two-week period. Students who are unable to 'reasonably commute' to the Summer School each day are offered free accommodation in a student hall of residence. All students have their daily travel costs reimbursed.

232. The timetable is divided into two strands: Academic Subject and Higher Education Skills. All students are required to complete assessed work based on the work covered during the Summer School. An assessment of the student's potential is made on the basis of this work. The assessment process is overseen by an External Moderator and results are ratified by a Board of Assessors.

233. Students eligible for the PARTNERS Programme Supported Entry Route who receive a PARTNERS offer will receive an offer which takes account of and gives credit for the successful completion of the Summer School taken at the end of year 13 and/or the final year at college.

The PARTNERS 'deal':

- applicants complete and submit a PARTNERS application form and an on-line UCAS application
- this includes a teacher/tutor reference
- PARTNERS staff consider whether the application meets the strict PARTNERS eligibility criteria
- if the applicant is provisionally accepted onto the PARTNERS Programme, their UCAS application is then considered by admissions staff in the relevant subject area
- if they decide to make an offer it will be a modified offer based on successful completion of the Assessed Summer School
- if the applicant decides to accept the offer they must make Newcastle their firm choice through UCAS
- all students whose predicted grades and subjects at A level or equivalent match those required for a PARTNERS offer are guaranteed to receive a PARTNERS offer, except where selection is based on grades plus additional selection criteria (such as assessment, portfolio or interview)
- there is a range of activities and supporting information available to applicants regarding fees, bursaries
- the University has a range of additional scholarships and prizes specifically for PARTNERS students worth either £500 or £1,000.

Newcastle Guaranteed Offer Scheme

234. This scheme is open to any student in PARTNERS schools and colleges irrespective of background or disadvantage. Eligible students are made a conditional offer at the typical entrance requirement level for the degree programme(s) concerned. Once an offer has been made, it is up to

the student to achieve the necessary grades.

235. The Guaranteed Offer Scheme applies to all degree programmes, except where selection is based on grades plus other criteria (such as assessment, portfolio and interviews).

Eligibility:

- the school/college must be involved with PARTNERS
- the student must meet specific subject requirements at A level and equivalent and GCSE as listed in the Undergraduate Prospectus or web site for the course(s) applied for
- predicted grades must be within one grade of the typical offer in each subject. For example, if the typical offer is BBB and the student is predicted to achieve CCC, they will receive a guaranteed offer of BBB. Students applying with BTEC qualifications are considered on an individual basis.

236. The guaranteed offer is described by the University as a 'fringe benefit' to the schools and colleges involved in PARTNERS. Although the students do not receive a reduction in grade level, for students in more popular subject areas this is an advantage because even students with outstanding predicted grades may not get an offer from the University.

Section 2 – Membership

Learner membership

237. Membership of PARTNERS has increased year on year.

- 2000 – 41 students entered the University via PARTNERS
- 2001 – 125 students
- 2002 – 101 students
- 2003 – 151 students
- 2005 – 186 students
- 2007 – 205 students.

238. A total of over 1,100 students have been admitted through the PARTNERS Programme to date.

239. There are currently 105 schools and colleges who have signed a formal Partnership Agreement with the University.

240. Once a school or college has joined PARTNERS, they are free to select students to join the programme, provided they meet the eligibility criteria (see above) and the school/tutor thinks the student would benefit from higher education.

241. The University runs events for and in schools and colleges for learners from Year 10 and up. These include talks, summer schools and events aimed at raising awareness of university life. They provide learners with the opportunity to meet university staff and students.

242. The University visits PARTNERS schools and colleges to talk to Year 12/first year college and 13/final college year learners about PARTNERS and the financial support available for learners in PARTNERS schools and colleges. It is likely however, that learners will have heard of PARTNERS through some of the events listed above or via school staff before the more detailed formal presentation in Year 13.

School/college membership

243. Membership has grown over the years and is widely known by schools and colleges throughout and beyond the region.

244. Schools and colleges join because they perceive that it offers benefits to them particularly in helping to motivate learners and also in assisting the school to improve achievement and increase the number of learners going on to higher education.

Section 3 – Content

Activities offered

245. There are a number of activities offered by the University for Year 10 learners upwards under the PARTNERS umbrella. The events for younger ages are seen as necessary first steps in awareness raising. Events include:

- Year 10 – visits to the University with an opportunity to meet students; University Summer School, a three-day event to give a taste of university life
- Year 11 – A Student Guide to Student Life, led by students from the University

- Year 12 – a menu of talks, events and a residential summer school about student and university life
- Year 13 – staff visits to schools and colleges to introduce the PARTNERS Programme; University visits and student-shadowing activities.

246. In addition to the above the University runs activities specifically for students on the PARTNERS Programme Supported Entry Route. These include:

- an information evening – with a focus on student finance and the Assessed Summer School
- a pre-Summer School tutorial
- the Assessed Summer School – compulsory for entry through the PARTNERS Programme Supported Entry Route.

Support for PARTNERS students at University

247. No particular extra support was provided for PARTNERS students in the first years of operation though this has recently changed – see below. It is thought that any problems arising would be dealt with on an ‘as needs’ basis by the appropriate academic and student support services.

248. Although PARTNERS students are tracked through their university course by PARTNERS staff, there is no differentiation made between them and other students. However, after the first year of PARTNERS, which saw a number of PARTNER students not completing, the following measures were introduced by the Student Recruitment Team:

- a. One-to-one advice sessions with members of PARTNERS staff in October/November of the year of entry.
- b. Development in conjunction with the Accommodation Office of a pilot Home Affiliation Scheme to give students living at home access to facilities in halls of residence and to make them feel involved in University life.
- c. Regular contact via a PARTNERS Mailbase to encourage PARTNERS entrants to become involved in pre-entry awareness raising activities and talks.

- d. The development of a traffic light system to assist in the identification, tracking and support of vulnerable students.

249. Many PARTNERS students live at home. This can lead to problems where, for example the student is a carer, where there are financial problems and/or where the student is a member of a strong social circle. However, these factors often apply to non-PARTNERS students who are home-based.

250. The University has developed a range of scholarships and prizes specifically for PARTNERS students. These are worth either £500 or £1,000. They recognise excellent achievement on entry to the University. Information about these awards is provided on the web site – www.ncl.ac.uk/partners.

Support for school staff

251. The University works closely with school/college tutors and sixth form heads to explain the PARTNERS Programme and to help with the application process. This is supported by explanatory documentation.

252. The University's outreach and awareness raising activities result in University staff visiting schools and talking to heads and teachers.

253. The University does not specifically help with the UCAS application process but may give advice to schools and colleges on preparing the references for students applying for the PARTNERS Programme.

Section 4 – Admissions process

The admission process

254. This is a six-stage process as follows:

- a. The learner, either through their tutor or individually, discusses their eligibility with Student Recruitment.
- b. They complete the PARTNERS Programme Application Form.
- c. They complete the on-line UCAS application in the usual way. In addition they add a capital P on their UCAS form, for the PARTNERS degree programme applied for.
- d. The school/college tutor adds a reference and sends a copy of the UCAS form to the

University, with the PARTNERS Programme application form.

- e. Student Recruitment staff consider the form and make a decision as to whether the applicant will be accepted onto the PARTNERS Programme. Confirmation or rejection is sent in writing.
- f. If the student is eligible for the PARTNERS Programme, their UCAS form is then considered by admissions staff in the relevant subject area(s). They make the final decision as to whether a PARTNERS offer should be made.

255. If an offer is made, it will include the requirement that the applicant successfully completes the Summer School.

256. After some reluctance by some departments in the early days, the PARTNERS Programme operates across all but two subject areas (of approximately 220). These exceptions are where professional courses are subject to external validation and the external bodies require certain entry qualification criteria.

257. Applications to subject areas largely mirror the pattern of non-PARTNERS applications.

258. The latest statistics show that 70% of those eligible applied to the Summer School and of these 85% were admitted to the University. This means that in all probability 70 or so applicants out of 276 attendees failed to get the necessary grades.

259. Although a record of PARTNERS students is kept centrally, most academic staff are not aware of who the PARTNERS students are.

Section 5 – Impact and assessment

On the University

260. The University sees PARTNERS as a mechanism for extending its reach into the local student group. The overriding agenda is widening participation and the PARTNERS Programme Supported Entry Route is integral to this.

261. Approximately 25% of the University's applicants come from PARTNERS institutions.

262. There has been an increase of over 60% in applications from PARTNERS schools and colleges since the introduction of PARTNERS.

263. PARTNERS students are not just accepted but welcomed by many. Although it is impossible to quantify, PARTNERS has made a considerable impact on the attitude and culture of the University.

On students

264. Although only taken from a sample of three, the PARTNERS Programme has had a very positive effect on students.

265. They reported that:

- the Summer School was good fun and hard work
- the benefits of the Summer School were particularly noticeable in the first few weeks at university. These students had an easier start than non-PARTNERS students. They knew how to use the library and resource centre, they knew their way around the University, e.g. lecture theatres, departmental locations, student union, the bar(s)!
- they had learned some useful study skills
- they knew pretty well what to expect on arrival
- they were frequently asked questions regarding the above by other students.

Progress of PARTNERS students

266. Anecdotal evidence shows that PARTNERS has a motivational effect on applicants both in terms of their desire to go to university and in striving to achieve the necessary entry qualifications.

267. The following information has been gathered from tracking PARTNERS students:

- PARTNERS students are graduating with good degree classifications
- the number of 2:1 and 2:2 classifications achieved by the 2000-2004 cohort was 2.5% above the University average. This increases to approximately 10% when looking at the 2003 and 2004 cohorts
- of the 2002-2004 cohorts, 92% of PARTNERS graduates have achieved a 2.2 classification or above. This compares well to the University average of 95% for the same three years.

Destinations of graduates

268. Although the number of PARTNERS students is very small relative to the institutional and national cohorts, the figures suggest that the pattern of PARTNERS graduates' destinations are similar to the overall pattern of graduates from Newcastle, although a higher proportion of PARTNERS graduates have gone on to further study.

On the partner schools/colleges

269. The following information and reflection was supplied by a comprehensive school and a local further education college.

270. Both of them operate in areas of relatively high deprivation where there have traditionally been low participation rates in HE.

271. They reported that:

- PARTNERS has given impetus to the idea of applying to HE among young people
- it has been useful in introducing potential students to the benefits of HE and in explaining the financial assistance available
- PARTNERS has added extra motivation to many learners and given them a clear target to aim for
- activities and talks lower down the school have been valuable in making an early start on awareness raising.

272. Both college and school found the scheme easy to administrate and the University helpful and supportive. There are close working relationships between University and PARTNERS institution staff.

273. PARTNERS work has been built in to the management time of the sixth form head and tutors.

274. From the point of view of both school and college there were no disadvantages and many benefits to be derived from membership. Judging by the number of schools who are requesting to become PARTNERS schools, it would seem that the high reputation of PARTNERS is spreading.

On University staff

275. After some initial reservations on the part of some staff there is now a general acceptance/welcome of the PARTNERS Programme.

Experience has proved that PARTNERS students are equally as good if not better than traditional students; they provide no more problems than other students, show good retention and achievement and help departments and the University as a whole achieve widening participation objectives.

276. A key factor in the acceptance of PARTNERS students by departments and academic staff is the support mechanisms put in place by the University (see above) and the rigour of the University's quality assurance for all learners and programmes.

277. Departments are aware of who the PARTNERS students are but this may or may not be communicated to teaching staff. The aim is that teaching and learning support should meet the needs of all students.

Section 6 – Marketing

278. A budget of £6,000 is allocated to marketing PARTNERS. This covers costs associated with producing web-based and printed publicity material. In addition, much of the marketing/publicity is through reputation and word of mouth.

The partner schools and colleges

279. As the north-east region contains above average levels of deprivation it was felt that widening participation and PARTNERS were applicable across the region as a whole. Thus every state school and further education college were/are potential members.

280. More recently the issue has been about keeping the number of schools/colleges to manageable proportions. As the success and value of PARTNERS has spread, so the eagerness of schools to join has grown. PARTNERS already has member institutions as far away as Kirklees in West Yorkshire and recently a number of additional schools in Cumbria have expressed an interest in joining.

281. The problem is not one of publicising and recruiting partners but of managing demand.

Eligibility

282. If a candidate meets any one of the four criteria listed below, they will provisionally be accepted onto the PARTNERS Programme.

- a. The candidate lives in a government defined low-participation neighbourhood, as indicated by their home postcode.
- b. The candidate has attended a school at the age of 16 where the number of students achieving five or more GCSE grades A-C is 30% or less.
- c. The candidate attends a school where the average points score per student is less than 68% of the national average.
- d. The candidate is currently receiving free school meals and/or Education Maintenance Allowance/Adult Learning Grant.

283. If the candidate does not meet any of the four factors above, but has experienced difficult family or individual circumstances that the school or college believes may have affected their performance, then they will be considered on an individual basis, according to a weighting system.

Internal communication

284. Because of its longevity and its widespread uptake throughout the University there is less need to communicate PARTNERS internally, although recently, an annual newsletter has been introduced.

285. In the early days there was some resistance from some academic staff about lowering of standards but these have largely been overcome. It helped that PARTNERS was part of a larger University plan for widening participation and that initially, enthusiastic departments were the first to participate. Their experience and the monitoring of PARTNERS students showed that achievement and success rates of PARTNERS undergraduates were favourable comparable to students who had entered via the traditional route.

Publicity

286. The PARTNERS programme has a range of publicity materials including brochures and leaflets targeted at schools, colleges and students.

287. An annual newsletter was launched in January 2008 which gives information on recent developments in PARTNERS and related activities in schools and colleges.

288. There is information on the University web site and a dedicated site at www.ncl.ac.uk/partners.

289. There is a telephone helpline.

290. Information about PARTNERS is also disseminated through events run by the University both in and out of schools and colleges. The Year 10 summer school is a typical example.

291. The University has developed a Student Ambassador Scheme that employs 35 students on an annual contract who visit schools and colleges to give talks about higher education and PARTNERS. These students also support on campus events acting as positive role models and mentors.

Section 7 – Management and data collection

Management

292. The PARTNERS Programme forms part of the responsibility of a number of areas of the University.

293. At strategic level it is overseen by the Marketing and Communications Directorate.

294. The direct management of the programme is the responsibility of the Head of Undergraduate Recruitment and Admissions within the Marketing and Communications Directorate.

295. Tracking of students is the responsibility of the Student Recruitment Manager.

296. Additionally there is staff time to run the Assessed Summer School and the time of responsible academic staff within departments.

297. It is difficult to quantify staff and management time devoted to PARTNERS as many of the activities are integrated with other widening participation and access procedures

Data collection

298. Data collection has been ongoing since 2000. Data collected includes inter alia:

- diversity indicators and widening participation benchmarks¹⁷

- progress of PARTNERS students including – retention rates, performance on graduation, degree classifications, destinations.

299. More specifically the University collects data for each student who attends the PARTNERS Assessed Summer School to include – social class, ethnicity, age, gender, numbers from low participation areas and areas of relative deprivation.

300. Collected data and the associated narrative are documented. The latest analysis is contained in the 'Progress Report on Students Entering the University through the PARTNERS Programme Supported Entry Route', March 2008.

Section 8 – Future developments

301. The future is likely to include more of the same, notwithstanding refinement of practice at pre-application, application and on-course practice. Other priorities for the future will include:

- a. Pre-entry – continued work with teachers, advisers and parents to target identified under-represented groups through the PARTNERS Programme Supported Entry Route, in particular working with mature students, deaf and disabled students, looked-after children and black and minority ethnic groups.
- b. Post-entry – further work to raise awareness of on-course support and retention for PARTNERS students entering the University in January and June of Stage 1, the most vulnerable periods for PARTNERS students.
- c. Consideration of the introduction of additional support interventions for Stage 2 PARTNERS students and building upon links with Wellbeing Services, Student Services and the Students' Union to ensure continued support for PARTNERS students.
- d. Consideration of how much further, both geographically and in student numbers, the PARTNERS Programme can grow in the next few years.

¹⁷ These include: National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification, low-participation neighbourhoods, disability, black and ethnic minority statistics. All of these are disaggregated on a north-east and 'all' basis.

Case study: Wolverhampton University and the HE CARD scheme

Section 1 – Background

302. The origins of the Wolverhampton compact scheme were in the 14-19 Pathfinder project established by the Wolverhampton local [education] authority, which linked in with the Black Country ‘Partnerships for Progression’ programme which later became Black Country Aimhigher. These initiatives were already boosting widening participation access to the University, but the time was judged right to formalise this progression by implementing a scheme that both encouraged motivation among young people and also ensured the recognition of that motivation through a guaranteed offer of a University place.

303. The current HE CARD scheme has been running in its present form for three years: it began with the 2005-06 academic year. It is a consortium scheme that includes four of the West Midlands’ Aimhigher areas:

- Black Country
- Herefordshire and Worcestershire
- Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin
- Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent.

304. In terms of HEIs, the following are full partners:

- Aberystwyth University
- Birmingham City University
- Harper Adams University College
- Keele University
- Loughborough University
- Manchester Metropolitan University (Cheshire campuses)

- Newman University College
- Open University West Midlands
- Staffordshire University
- University of Wolverhampton
- University of Worcester.

305. The programme is run by four Aimhigher areas in the West Midlands and no one institution has a constitutionally dominant role in its management. However it is fair to say that Wolverhampton was largely responsible for the original design of the programme’s arrangements and maintains a presence on the steering groups and committees that oversee it.

306. It will be appreciated that although learner participation in the programme is currently regionally based the group of consortium HEIs is not, and the HE CARD programme is always keen to encourage additional institutions to join the programme. As will be seen, the demands on institutions that do so are not particularly arduous and the benefits, at least in the eyes of current institutional members, considerable.

How the compact works

307. The HE CARD programme is based on a bilateral agreement between the young person and all of the institutions operating collectively. CARD is an acronym for ‘Choose A Real Deal’, and the deal is as follows.

308. Learners undertake to achieve goals in Study, Commitment and Experience:

Study	Successful completion of a programme of study that results in appropriate qualifications that are required for entry onto your chosen course of higher education study
Commitment	Responsibility in achieving your Higher Education CARD goals. Demonstrate good personal organisation, attendance, punctuality and completion of work
Experience	Take part in a range of focused activities that will help you understand where you want to go in the future and how to get there. This must include both: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HE: evidence of research into and an ongoing participation in link activities and relevant/appropriate experience of further education/HE between 14 and 19, e.g. taster courses, student life workshops, summer schools and related research activities • Work-related learning: evidence of participation with the world of work. This could be an apprenticeship, work-related project, Enterprise activity, work experience or part-time job¹⁸

¹⁸ Taken from ‘HE CARD Student Handbook 2007/2008’

309. If learners achieve these goals, then for their part the HEIs guarantee:

- 'there will be a place of higher education study available to you if you successfully complete the HE CARD goals
- you will be entitled to access a programme of awareness raising activities to help you understand and prepare for progression to higher education
- you will be entitled to access impartial advice and guidance (including financial guidance) for progression to higher education'¹⁹.

310. Students are asked to note that the programme does not guarantee a place on a specific course at a specific university. For a few professional courses e.g. social work, teaching, nursing, the HE CARD cannot guarantee a place.

311. HE CARD students are issued with a membership card resembling a credit card, with documentation, and with a loose-leaf folder or Individualised Learning Plan where this is available in which they build up evidence of their work towards the three goals. This evidence is reviewed by the students' school, and when they judge it complete they confirm that the student has met their side of the compact and is entitled to the guarantee outlined above.

312. Although each school applies its own judgement to establish whether a particular student has met the three goals, one Aimhigher area ran an event to collectively 'moderate' a sample of evidence folders from a range of schools. This is not a requirement of the CARD programme as schools are in the best position to judge students' achievements and progress. However, consideration of evidence in relation to the goal of experience was a useful exercise.

313. Once the school has certified that the learner has achieved all three HE CARD goals, the learner's success is recorded on the database maintained centrally by Aimhigher for this purpose. The learner also receives a certificate, and is entitled to enter CARD on the section of the UCAS on-line

application reserved for additional qualifications. Students can also describe the activities they have participated in through the personal statement part of the UCAS form.

Institutional objectives behind the programme

314. Although the programme is run jointly between 11 HEIs, it does not necessarily follow that all HEIs' objectives behind joining the programme are the same. It is Wolverhampton's specific objectives we discuss here.

315. Widening participation is central to Wolverhampton's mission. It has maintained very strong links with its 'own' authority (Wolverhampton LA) and also with its Black Country neighbours. The University sees itself as having a duty towards Wolverhampton and the Black Country, and encouraging greater take-up from the young people in its sub-region is central to that duty.

316. HE CARD is specifically not seen as a recruiting device, and the University declares itself quite happy if individuals whom it has nurtured through CARD activities go off to Aberystwyth or wherever. So objectives in terms of increasing numbers of young people applying to Wolverhampton were not set. However a great deal of attention is paid to the number of young people joining the programme, and to the proportion of these members who will subsequently progress to an HE place. As will be seen later, whether or not the young people take advantage of the CARD promise is not seen as relevant.

Section 2 – Membership

Learner membership

317. In 2006-07 there were around 3,000 learners from 56 schools in eight authorities in membership of the HE CARD programme. This number is expected to increase for a number of years.

318. Once schools have registered, they are free to select the learners to join the programme. The

¹⁹ Ibid.

programme is not 'open access', and schools are required to choose learners who (in their opinion):

- have the ability to go on to higher education, and be likely to score five A* to C at GCSE
- have the potential to benefit from HE study²⁰.

319. Ideally, learners should be nominated at the start of Key Stage 4 (year 10, age 14+) or even earlier. By convention, therefore, most schools set the criterion for entry as a 50% chance of gaining five or more A* to C at GCSE as defined by Fisher Family Trust or other Value Added data.

320. Schools can register as many of their learners for HE CARD as they believe fit the criteria above.

321. Equally, however, some schools argue that evidence of completing the CARD programme would be useful for any prospective student.

322. Where schools do believe that an 'at risk' student might struggle to meet the five A* to C criterion, but that he or she would otherwise benefit from HE CARD, they do have the option of recommending that an exception to the criteria be made.

323. Once students are chosen, they have to consent to take part in the programme, and a 'learner agreement' is provided for student and parent to sign.

School membership

324. Schools in the current four target Aimhigher Areas (nine local authorities) are all invited to join the programme and register. It is largely the responsibility of Aimhigher, and of the local authorities concerned, to encourage schools to take up this offer.

325. There is no suggestion that schools in membership of the HE CARD scheme are barred from joining other compact schemes offered by other HEIs, but the fact that HE CARD includes many of the local HEIs means that investing time and energy in HE CARD is particularly worthwhile from a school's point of view.

326. On the other hand, Birmingham University runs its own access scheme ('Access to Birmingham', or A2B), which offers UCAS tariff points credit for eligible applicants who complete an HE access module, and it is highly likely that some of the schools that are in membership of HE CARD also submit students to Birmingham through the A2B route.

CARD and school transfer

327. Where a young person in an 11-16 school joins CARD, then inevitably he or she will need to move institution to undertake 16+ study.

328. This is acknowledged to be a tricky point in the process, particularly if the young person moves from his or her 11-16 school to the sixth form of an 11-18 school that is not itself involved in CARD. Although the Aimhigher office continues to track the young person concerned, the new school may not continue to make CARD-related activities available, or accredit them, if it is not a member of the programme.

329. Aimhigher encourages 16-19 institutions to maintain the CARD memberships of young people they acquire. Institutions are required to support access to events, provide opportunities for HE visits and support young people through the CARD process in order for them to complete their goals.

330. Membership statistics for the HE CARD scheme can be found at Appendix 1.

Section 3 – Content

Activities offered

331. Activities offered to HE CARD members include visits to HEIs, residential experience programmes, student life workshops, 'touring' drama productions in schools exploring PSHE, study and progression issues, and talks from HEI staff (both academic and admissions staff) about HE, its benefits, and the processes involved in applying to it.

332. Some of these activities form part of Wolverhampton's general support for applicants, and

²⁰ HE CARD Staff Handbook, paragraph 6.2.

are open to any interested student from anywhere in the country. Others, particularly the school-specific events and drama productions, are offered specifically to schools in membership of CARD.

333. Schools are free to regard events offered in their school as open to CARD members only, or for a wider audience.

334. Similarly, events are in principle available for pupils from Year 9, but in practice some (particularly those aimed at the mechanics of university entrance) may be more appropriate for those in later years.

335. Individual CARD learner members are not required to attend any particular event, but must build up a portfolio of events attended in order to meet their 'Experience' target. Each learner journey will be developed in relation to their particular needs.

Support for (ex) HE CARD students at university

336. HE CARD is seen as a way of supporting students to make a commitment to going to university, not as a separate entry route. Although Wolverhampton can identify which of its applicants have completed the HE CARD programme from their UCAS application, it does not regard these applicants as a 'special cohort', and does not provide anything different by way of support for them once they enter the institution.

337. That being said, the University does have a sophisticated approach to identifying and supporting any new students who it judges may be at some risk of failing to engage with, or make the most of, their opportunities. Its 'Start Right' projects are designed to support such students in acquiring skills in managing both the academic and the social aspects of HE study. There is no formal link between HE CARD and Start Right, but in the way of things there is likely to be some overlap in membership between the two. Data to confirm the extent of such overlap is not currently collected by the University, but it would be straightforward to do so.

338. More generally, the University has no evidence of (ex) HE CARD students making either greater or less use of support services once they are at university. To the extent that individual records are kept of access to these services, it would again be straightforward to cross-reference these to former CARD membership.

339. It is important to bear in mind the distinction between the large number of students who have completed the HE CARD programme on the one hand and the very small number of students who have actually made use of the HE CARD guarantee on the other. The vast majority of HE CARD students do not need to take up the guarantee: they can secure a place without it. Participation in the CARD process increases the 'attractiveness' of students to potential HEIs.

Support for school staff

340. The University offers teachers in CARD schools support with the UCAS applications process. There is no suggestion that the support it offers CARD schools is denied to other schools should they ask, but it is fair to say that the provision of this support to CARD schools is likely to be more proactive.

Section 4 – Admissions process

Admissions under guarantee

341. One of the features of the HE CARD programme is that its primary functions are to encourage young people to apply to university on the one hand and to give them the skills necessary to succeed on the other. Very few CARD members actually need to make use of the guarantee of a place²¹. Two students made use of the guarantee in 2006 and none in 2007. It is worth noting that the full CARD process (from age 14 years) has yet to be completed by students in participating schools.

342. There is, however, a process which students can use if they do need to take advantage of the guarantee. If a student fails to receive an offer from any of the institutions named in their UCAS

²¹ To be fair, students are strongly encouraged to describe their HE CARD activities in their UCAS personal statement, and this may influence the offer of a place to them: this is in a sense 'making use of the HE CARD' even if the guarantee is not needed.

application, or does not get the grades he or she needs for CF and CI institutions, then he or she completes a separate HE CARD application form and sends this to the Aimhigher office. Once the student's completion of the CARD goals has been checked on the database, the form is sent simultaneously to all HE CARD HEIs, who must make offers of places to the student within four days. The student chooses the offer he or she prefers and normal UCAS procedures re-start at this point.

343. A telephone helpline is provided to assist with this process.

344. It is not a requirement of CARD that all 11 HEIs make an offer of a place to the student. However if none of the HEIs make an offer then the CARD Helpline will contact all institutions again, and will continue to contact institutions until at least one makes an offer. This eventuality has yet to occur.

Exceptions

345. The guarantee is an offer of 'a place', not necessarily at the institution of the learner's choice nor necessarily on his or her chosen course. To underline this point, the programme literature identifies a number of professional courses where a place cannot be guaranteed. In every case, these professional courses are subject to external validation, and the external bodies set appropriate entry qualification criteria. Individual HEIs have little or no flexibility to vary these criteria. However, students' participation in the CARD process increases the likelihood that they will be successful in their application to join a particular course at a specified HEI.

346. No other exceptions are made.

347. However, the first of the three HE CARD goals is 'successful completion of a programme of study that results in appropriate qualifications that are required for entry onto your chosen course of higher education study'.

More general admissions

348. Admissions tutors at Wolverhampton (and indeed at all regional HEIs, including those that are only associate rather than full members of the

programme) are specifically asked to take note of when an applicant mentions HE CARD in his or her UCAS application. No particular specified advantage (e.g. UCAS tariff points credit) is given to such applicants, nor is it clear that institutions routinely check that a learner has completed the HE CARD goals when he or she claims to have done so²². However, when a learner has indicated that he or she has completed CARD, and when he or she has talked about CARD activities within the Personal Statement, institutions can have more confidence that the learner in question will to an extent have prepared for HE study.

349. Of course not all learners do notify the University of their HE CARD status. Specific information on learners holding the HE CARD guarantee that are known to have enrolled on programmes at Wolverhampton is as follows:

2006	30 HE CARD students enrolled	26 progressed to Year 2 of their programme
2007	Five HE CARD students enrolled	

350. The retention rate for CARD students in 2006 (86.7%) is consistent with the University's standard retention rate for Year 1 to Year 2.

351. Despite the low numbers of students currently enrolling through HE CARD, the University expects that in due course anything up to a third of its applicants will have encountered HE CARD. The numbers in the table reflect the fact that the entire CARD process (from age 14 years) has only been completed by relatively few learners but is expected to grow very significantly.

Choice of programmes

352. Although the distribution of HE CARD students across the ten Schools of the University varies slightly from that of the student body as a whole, the difference is not statistically significant²³. There are therefore no grounds to conclude that the HE CARD students have a different profile of subject choice from their peers.

²² In contrast to the guarantee route, see above, where a specific check is made.

²³ $\chi^2 = 11.15$ with 9 degrees of freedom. 10% significance level is 14.68.

Section 5 – Impact of the HE CARD programme

Impact on the HEI

353. For Wolverhampton, HE CARD is about extending its reach into the local student group that it sees as central to its mission. Widening participation is at the focus of the Wolverhampton agenda, and HE CARD is a critical part of this activity.

354. Students coming into Wolverhampton through HE CARD will not be in any sense unusual. The only difference between CARD and (local) non-CARD students might be that the latter's school had not yet joined CARD.

355. Thus while CARD is central to Wolverhampton's widening participation agenda there is no sense (as there might be with compacts elsewhere) that the CARD students are spearheading any shift in the balance of participation in the institution. They are simply helping the University to meet the local need for higher education, particularly among historically underrepresented groups.

Impact on HE CARD students

356. Necessarily only a few students were interviewed, and their accounts were anecdotal. Nevertheless, we heard accounts from one school's students in particular that activities supported through CARD had completely changed their lives²⁴.

357. The students concerned had dismissed HE as 'not being for them' and were well down the road of disaffection and discontent with school. However, they had been nominated by their school as having the capability to benefit from HE, and had been enrolled on CARD. The combination of the activities offered through CARD, and the promise of an HE place if they completed the CARD portfolio, restored their motivation.

358. The students reported being particularly affected by a visiting drama company, who had put on a workshop/play focusing on choices at 14 (HE study, dropping out, pregnancy, drugs, etc). This workshop had had a major effect on these streetwise teenagers. Presented with the opportunity to change, and the knowledge of the guarantee if they did change, these three students began to invest in study, make sensible decisions about their future education and at the time of the interview were predicted good GCSE grades.

359. There are two points that can be made about the two parts of these students' experience.

360. First, events like theatre workshops and role-plays have the potential to lead young people to re-evaluate their lives.

361. Secondly, it can be argued that a place at university is available to any student with discipline and ability, if he or she is prepared to complete the necessary school-based study. Although some universities are highly selective, there are always some places in the West Midlands that are not filled, well into the start of the academic year. A 'guarantee' is really not necessary.

362. But this is not how these young people and their parents perceive it. For them, the guarantee is hugely valuable in convincing them that effort at school will be rewarded, and that they are good enough to go to university. Parents in particular were (by report) highly impressed that the HEIs thought sufficiently well of their children to guarantee them a place, and responded by providing every encouragement at home for successful study.

Students within HE

363. It was not possible to identify and arrange interviews with existing students who had completed the HE CARD route during our visit. The programme is still relatively new and there are not many from which to choose. However, there was no evidence that their views would in any way dissent from the views given above.

24 The other group of students were more 'conventional', in that they had probably always intended to go on to HE and did not doubt that they had the ability to do so. For these students, the benefit of the CARD programme was largely in the structure that it gave to finding out about HE and making the best, rather than just fairly good, choices about what to study and where.

Impact on the partner schools/colleges

364. The member of staff from a partner school broadly confirmed the account above.

365. Challenged over whether the HE CARD scheme acted to narrow student choice (i.e. to one of the 11 HEIs, rather than more widely throughout the UK and abroad), the member of staff felt that it did not. Many prospective students were only 'looking locally', and the combination of HE and a move away from home at 18 would have been daunting. The kind of student who would be prepared to move away to study would almost certainly have decided in advance that HE was for him or her, and would not need CARD to formulate that choice.

366. Even for these students, however, CARD was of benefit in forcing them to structure the process of choosing and planning for HE. Schools were free to accredit visits, taster days or other activities these students undertook at any HEI, so that students could complete their goals. And while HEIs in other parts of the country might not recognise the CARD label, they would respond to detailed descriptions of students' CARD activities incorporated in personal statements.

367. The amount that schools have to 'do' once they become members of CARD will vary, as noted in paragraph 373. However the school interviewed did not find the additional activities burdensome.

Impact on admissions and academic staff

368. Admissions tutors are fully informed about the scheme, and a two-sided A4 'flyer' ('Keep your eyes peeled for a HE CARD Student!!') has been prepared by Aimhigher to circulate to all staff responsible for admitting students to courses. This flyer stresses the benefits that follow from the programme, and argues that HE CARD students will be 'an asset to your course':

'...you will have students who have demonstrated their ability to study, their commitment to their work, and who have gained prior experience of HE – ideal preparation for success in HE'.

369. Colleagues delivering or supporting taster events, open days, etc will also be fully aware that their events are being used to support participants' CARD portfolios where appropriate.

370. Wolverhampton admits that colleagues who are not generally involved in admissions may not be so familiar with the programme, and intends to ensure that its details are more widely known. However, it is not the intention that HE CARD students receive any special treatment when they are in the institution, so there is no reason for an individual lecturer to know which of his or her students completed HE CARD.

371. Staff within the University appear supportive about the programme and the programme's managers have received no queries or complaints.

Section 6 – Marketing

Selection of schools

372. The HE CARD programme is open to all schools in the member authorities, providing the schools undertake to deliver the required inputs. These involve: facilitating access to the activities and on-going support (HE and work related) that students need to follow to achieve their goals; providing appropriate endorsement for activities undertaken for inclusion in the students' logbook or Individualised Learning Plan; and using their judgement to confirm that the goals have been completed.

373. 'Facilitating access to activities' in this context may involve arranging visits, hiring transport, arranging supervision and follow-up activities, etc for the young people concerned. If more activities are needed, schools can design and arrange their own.

374. Schools complete and send to Aimhigher a short registration form to confirm their commitment, and to identify a school-based contact.

375. It is largely the responsibility of local authorities, and Aimhigher, to encourage schools to join the programme. None of the HEIs have the staff resource to promote the scheme to any great extent, though they will refer to it when they have contact with appropriate schools.

Communicating information about the programme

376. Aimhigher publishes learner, staff and parent handbooks about the programme, and works in collaboration with local authorities in advertising the programme in schools.

377. Since young people are always invited to join the programme, rather than simply applying, it is not thought necessary to publish details about the programme to the general public. If as a learner you are not in the CARD programme, then either your school is not in CARD (in which case you are not eligible) or it is and did not choose you.

378. Within Wolverhampton University, staff who need to know about CARD are fully informed – principally admissions tutors and staff.

379. Within the management structure, widening participation is a personal interest of the Vice-Chancellor and her senior team, and they receive regular reports on progress.

Section 7 – Management and data collection

380. Wolverhampton does not yet have dedicated staff assigned to supporting HE CARD; it forms part of the responsibility of a number of individuals, and is integrated with more general student recruitment and widening participation activity.

381. Staff at Wolverhampton did invest time in the design of the programme, and still attend management and other regional meetings connected with CARD to a greater extent than their status as one of 11 institutions in the programme would imply.

382. Aimhigher West Midlands has played a role in supporting the regional dissemination of CARD and from the summer 2008 this function will be carried out through West Midlands Aimhigher Areas.

383. Four of the six Aimhigher Areas in the West Midlands have agreed to continue to develop and sustain the CARD initiative along with other inter-area activities such as the Aimhigher Learning Pathways System (ALPS) which has been developed and

managed by Aimhigher Black Country. ALPS is a database of courses including those offered by HEIs and supports guidance activities in relation to learning opportunities and hence works effectively with CARD.

384. Data collection within HEIs on the operation of HE CARD is in its infancy. Aimhigher does maintain database records of all HE CARD participants and completers and Wolverhampton is informed via UCAS forms of when individuals who have completed CARD apply to it. As yet there is only limited systematic analysis of this data (e.g. in terms of recruitment, retention, and attainment of CARD as opposed to non-CARD students)²⁵.

385. It is early days yet for such data in any case, as the first really large ‘wave’ of HE CARD members is only now in Year 12 at school. The University accepts that in the years to come such information and analysis will be extremely useful in demonstrating significantly better retention and attainment from CARD students. This will help to shape future modifications to the programme.

386. In the meantime, senior staff are kept fully informed of the CARD programme and receive regular reports on it both in its own right and within its widening participation context.

Section 8 – Future developments

387. It is not proposed to amend the operation of HE CARD at this point, at least until a number of cohorts of young people have passed through it. However, in the Black Country (four Local Authorities) the Learning and Skills Council is leading work on extending CARD to include progression routes for all young people in school as well as for those primarily considering the HE route.

388. Black Country Aimhigher, in conjunction with the Black Country Consortium, is also exploring ways of developing the physical representation of HE CARD and creating a SMART application. At present, students are given a card, which is credit card size and plastic, to denote their membership of the scheme.

²⁵ A first analysis of the available data was kindly carried out by the University in response to this case study visit, and the available information has been incorporated in this report.

Appendix 1 Membership Statistics for the HE CARD scheme, 2005-06 to 2007-08

Sub-region	Number of member schools [†]	Membership (Years 10 to 12)		
		2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Black Country	20	532	740	590
Hereford & Worcester	6	640	496	80
Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin	17	461	744	217
Staffordshire & Stoke on Trent	34	873	1133	786
Totals	77	2,506	3,113	1,673[‡]

[†] With member students in one or more of the three years during which the scheme has been operating. Schools do not necessarily have members every year. The total includes three FE colleges.

[‡] To date. Recruitment is continuing.

Membership breakdown	School year		
	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12
2005-06	1,129	0	1,377
2006-07	2,095	133	885
2007-08 (to date)	1,024	27	622
Totals	4,248	160	2,884

List of abbreviations

A2B	Access to Birmingham (the University of Birmingham scheme)
ALPS	Aimhigher Learning Pathways System
CAF	Compact Application Form
CARD	Choose A Real Deal (the West Midlands scheme)
HE	Higher education
HEI	Higher education institution
HELM	Higher Education Learning Module
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
MIS	Management information systems
NTE	Non-traditional entrant
QES	Quality Enhancement Strategy
SAF	Supplementary Application Form
UoB	University of Birmingham
WP	Widening participation

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