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Interpretations and Practice of Widening Participation within an Institution of Higher Education.

Nicola Jane Lightfoot

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements of Sheffield Hallam University
for the degree of Doctorate in Education

April 2007
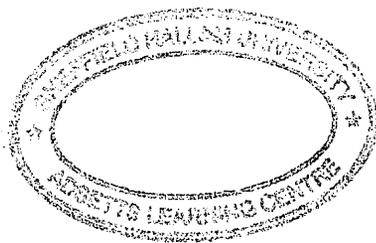
Abstract

The interpretations and practices of widening participation are explored using a case study of an academic School within a post-1992 University. The research is based upon the assumption that there are no shared understandings of the agenda and that policy may be reinterpreted by stakeholders. Consequently individuals' interpretations and practice of widening participation were explored. Semi structured interviews with apposite staff were used to uncover their understandings of the agenda. The individuals held a range of posts, as it was believed important to explore differing perspectives of the agenda, but all were identified with the decision making process attached to widening participation.

The research uncovers the multiple and complex factors which affect the interpretation and practice of widening participation. The role of government is important to that practice as it is argued that the University and School engage with it in a reactive manner. The impact of government policy is complex, and is seen to operate in both a direct and indirect manner upon the Institution. What is evident is that the relationship of government and the higher education institution is contested and that the practice of widening participation within the Institution is in part an outcome of this.

Through the data the role of the university and academics was identified as important to the interpretation and practice of widening participation, as was the binary divide. However for both academics and Institution there were more pressing and important priorities which side-lined the agenda. In particular widening participation appeared to challenge perceived academic roles and purposes. The agenda was not seen as being a defining function of that role and hence was not owned by academics; a consequence of this is the way that it was interpreted and practiced.

The implication for practice is that government needs to acknowledge the culture of higher education during policy construction, in order for it to be owned. In addition there is a need for academics to reflect upon their own practice and to reject instrumental constructions of the agenda. Rather, they need to engage in a redevelopment of their role which affords the learner an opportunity to contribute to the meaning of higher education. It is at this level, it is concluded, that the agenda can become transformative and move beyond quantitative definitions.

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Acknowledgements.

Author's Declaration

I confirm that this thesis is the sole work of the author.
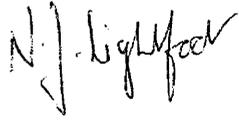
Nicola J. Lightfoot

Chapter 1

Introduction

This research explores the interpretations and practice of widening participation within an institution of higher education. It is constructed on the assumption that the concept of widening participation does not have a consensual meaning, and that the agenda which has been attached to widening participation is a central government policy initiative which has been individually transformed by universities. Explanations for and illustrations of this transformation or interpretation are explored through research within a particular institution.

Widening participation is a complex and confused concept, even prior to any interpretation by stakeholders. In part this confusion is bound up in the lack of ownership of the concept and the degree of priority attached to it by institutions. This has made external indicators of widening participation important as a means of identifying the concept. The confusion is exacerbated by for example alterations to the mode and means of data collection and the resourcing associated with the agenda, particularly as data collection can be associated with funding for Universities. However defined, Government is disappointed at the progress being made. The latest data (HEFCE, 2006) shows that the Higher Education Initial Participation Rate (not taking into account changes in the population size) for entrants from lower socio economic groups and from low participation neighbourhoods has fallen from 42.3% (2003-04) to 42.0% (2004-05).

The importance of widening participation is however more than an understanding derived from data collection and measurements of progression over time, a meaning

centred upon quantity. It is a qualitative concept, concerned with equality of outcome rather than just of opportunity and with the experiences and constraints placed upon potential applicants with certain backgrounds when applying for and entering university. Widening Participation is associated with social justice, the notion of the reduction of inequality both in terms of access but also experience of higher education. These issues are affected by the apparent continuance of an elite and binary system of higher education and government policies which accentuate these inequalities rather than reduce them. If education is to be considered the main route to improved life chances then the implications of continued inequalities in higher education is a reduction in social justice. A more radical social justice approach is also required to ensure that inequalities are not then supported within academia.

The role of this research was to explore and illustrate the external and internal pressures on an institution and academics which lead to their understanding and interpretation of widening participation. It was not expected that there would be a shared understanding within the institution, but individual ones, which had been determined by individual circumstances (Chapter 4). What has become evident is that widening participation is not a concept which is 'owned' by the institution, nor by academics; rather it has been able to be manipulated to achieve alternative priorities at the same time as engaging with the agenda of widening participation. What therefore became evident through data collection and the research process was the importance of the institution and academics in determining the meaning of widening participation. It follows that it is also important for widening participation that institutions and academics review and challenge their interpretations of the concept, and if required transform their practice.

From a personal perspective my initial interest turned upon the role and relationship of government policy in determining action, an initial scepticism about its ability to do so and the often consequential absolution of responsibility by government once the policy had been instigated. Personal interest and motivation however has moved beyond this abstraction to practical reality after becoming a university lecturer quite soon after beginning the doctorate. I started from the idea that an academic's practice can be pivotal to widening participation, the notion that responsibility for widening participation cannot solely be that of the government. Through the research I sought explanations for current practice so that I might deduce or arrive at alternative approaches. In addition the research shifts the focus from outcomes, for example students' differential experiences, to process within a higher education institution. The illumination of this process within a university, the means and mode by which interpretation and practice are arrived at, could also have consequences for participation.

The structure of the dissertation reflects the multi-layers and variables which influence the interpretation and practice of widening participation, which act as both catalysts to action but also recipients of action. Contradictorily recurrent themes reverberate throughout. The ability to categorise or independently and uniquely identify variables, for example funding, is limited. In addition through the data there were other themes which recurred or alternatively were constructed, most prominently the role of the academic.

Chapters 2 and 3 contain the literature review. Chapter 2 considers the historical evolution of the concept at a government policy level, and its relationship to other government policies in operation at the time, exposing some of the consequent

contradictions in aims. Theoretical tools are introduced and used to explore the nature and meaning of widening participation within these policy documents. Chapter 3 focuses upon the role and purposes of higher education and academics. Through this analysis the implications for widening participation are explored.

The Research Design is explained in Chapter 4 identifying the importance of trying to capture individual perceptions of widening participation and a justification for the particular nature of this research. The research design emphasises the importance of context; since this is the context within which the researcher is employed the implications of this are also discussed.

There are four data chapters and the importance of certain themes or priorities for those interviewed, the respondents, is evidenced through them. Chapters 5 and 6 look at University and School interpretations of widening participation held by the respondents. They were never directly asked for a definition of the concept, nor were they lead to one by the interviewer (Chapter 4). University interpretations and practice and the School's engagement with them are discussed in Chapter 5, whilst those interpretations and practices which originate within the School are explained in Chapter 6. The importance of funding to the agenda, which echoes through the data chapters, is the focus of Chapter 7. Evidence is presented about the role of funding in promoting action, the variety and characteristics of different funding types, and explanations of respondents' attitudes and preferences for certain types of funding. The implications for widening participation are explored in the conclusion. The final data chapter (Chapter 8) reviews the role and purpose of higher education from the perspective of the respondents. The data outlines the impact of the environment on university activities, especially that of the Government, both directly through funding and indirectly, for example through the

creation of competition. The origins of the University and its implications for the pursuit of the agenda are also examined here.

The data chapters have within them implicit and sometimes indirect perspectives about the role of academics, for example: the characteristics of university students; the responsibility for learning; prioritised activities; and beliefs about how academics should be managed. These themes are brought together and analysed in the Discussion (Chapter 9) together with themes identified directly in the data chapters, for example the role of the government. The discussion chapter also considers the implication of the prevalence of research in this area which concentrates upon the student, as participator or non-participator. Final conclusions are also offered, drawing out implications for practice.

Context

As part of the validity and rigour required for this research, and to aid understanding, background details are important. Due to ethical considerations the Institution and participants are anonymous and one consequence of this is the absence of references for material published by the Institution. However some contextualisation is important.

The case study Institution is set in the heart of a region of social, economic and educational disadvantage, geographically in the centre of England. It was originally a Polytechnic but received university status in 1992. It is one of the larger universities in terms of student population. Details published by OFFA (2006) in relation to their Access Agreement, indicate that the University has a good reputation for widening participation activities and using HEFCE benchmark indicators (2002-03) is successful,

in that it does better than average in a majority of the national indices for under-represented groups in higher education.

The University is organised into schools, which provide student programmes. The School within which the research was undertaken was the Business School, which is divided into undergraduate and postgraduate provision. This research focuses only upon undergraduate provision (see Chapter 4). Each school has its own internal structure and posts. However common to all is the role of the Teaching and Learning Coordinator. This individual is responsible for disseminating good practice from School to University and vice versa. They are an important communicator of whole university initiatives, for example those surrounding induction and retention.

Within the University the structure of widening participation provision is very complex and is increasingly associated with funding streams. The general structure outside of individual Schools is shown below.

The Steering Group have control over the distribution of income. In reality the Heads of Student Support Services and Widening Participation have the main financial power. The income distributed is not necessarily clearly within the remit of a given individual; both Student Support services and Widening Participation for example, share administrative staff.

The Widening Participation team is made up of a Head and four other members, who are typically associated with a specific strategy, for example the Student Associate Scheme and Partnerships for Progression. Due to the precarious nature of government funding for these activities numbers in the team tend to fluctuate.
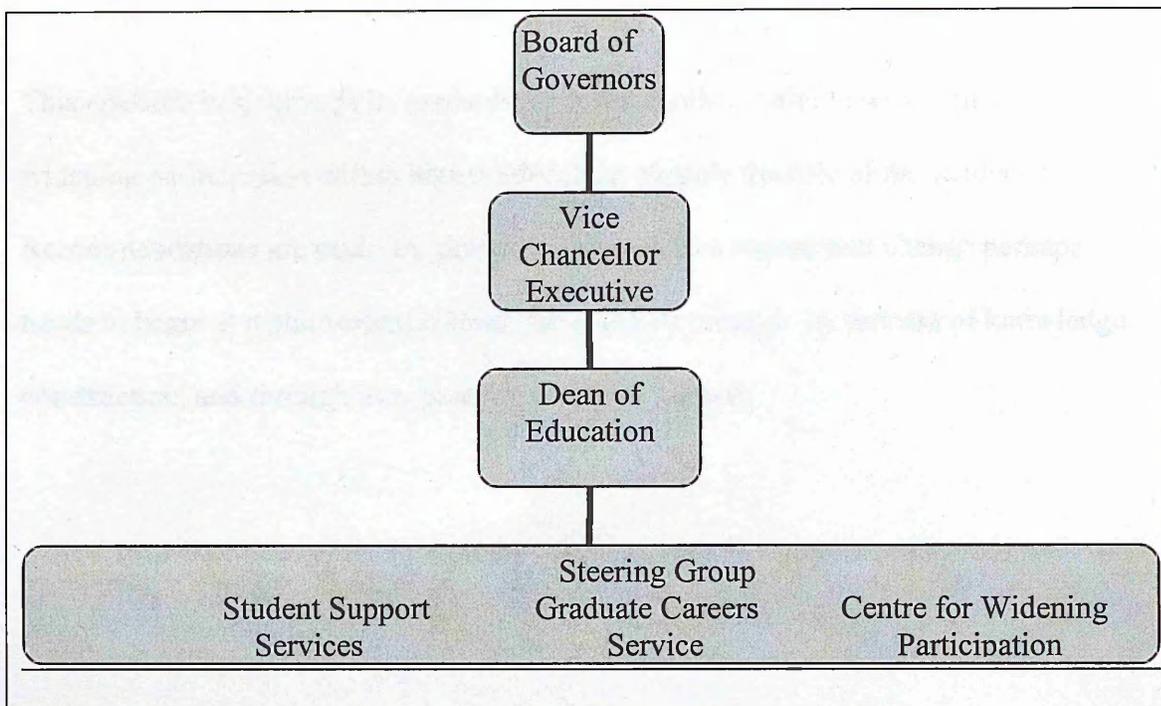
Figure 1 University Structure of Widening Participation

 Within the School the initial contact with regard to widening participation is the Dean, then the Teaching and Learning Coordinator and finally academics. Within the Business School, prior to the appointment of a Teaching and Learning Coordinator, a programme leader volunteered to be responsible for the agenda. Originally the Widening Participation team asked Schools what they wanted; this did not work very well as few responses were received. The role of the team now is to provide Schools with projects they may wish to opt into and/or support Schools with activities they wish to pursue, for example open days and induction. Schools then bid for money. All Schools are involved to a greater or lesser extent; the Business School is seen as being very active.

The individuals in the sample were identified in discussion with the Head of Widening Participation and have a range of roles within the University (See Appendix A: Roles of Respondents with Regard to Widening Participation).

This research has, through its methods, exposed another variable which affects widening participation within higher education, namely the role of the academic. Recommendations are made for practice, although it is argued that change perhaps needs to begin at a philosophical level, for example through the process of knowledge construction, and through this, practice will be reformed.

Chapter 2

The Meaning of Widening Participation: Government Policy

Introduction

This chapter charts the history of the concept of widening participation, so that issues can be placed within a wider context. There will also be an analysis of how policies directed towards higher education, and influences, are linked to other governmental activities. An analysis will be made of how widening participation has been interpreted, revealing a multiplicity of meanings and interpretations.

In analysing the *The Future of Higher Education* White Paper (DfES, 2003), Jones and Thomas (2005) developed three conceptualisations of widening participation: the academic; the instrumental or utilitarian; and finally the transformative. The first strand or conceptualisation, the academic, suggests that:

'...policy seeks to attract gifted and talented young people into higher education by raising aspirations, increasing motivation and by ensuring relevant information...is available.'

(Jones and Thomas, 2005:616)

The second strand, the instrumental or utilitarian approach, acknowledges more barriers to entry, for example structural barriers, and possibly the need to change curricula. This approach, however, is tied closely to the needs of the labour market: the role of higher education, as perceived by the Government, in addressing the requirements of the economy.

The final strand, the transformative, focuses on the wider views of the under-represented groups and is epitomised by:

'...the idea that higher education should be changed to permit it to both gauge and meet the needs of under-represented groups.'

(Jones and Thomas, 2005:619)

Resulting in the need for institutions to review their:

'...processes of knowledge production and transfer...their internal structures of power and decision making.'

(Jones and Thomas, 2005:619)

These conceptualisations or strands are models which by their nature are generalisations. However, over time they allow a benchmarking of change to take place.

Greenbank (2006) adopts HEFCE's (2001) student life cycle model to analyse the interpretation of widening participation. Simplistically put, the model conceptualises different stages of student interaction with higher education: raising aspirations; preparation for higher education; admissions; the first term, continuing support; and finally, successful progression into employment. The focus of policy or influence by government can be analysed using this conceptualisation. This student life cycle model reflects the increasingly explicit nature of widening participation policy and practice. A linkage to Jones and Thomas (2005) can be seen through the focus on who has responsibility pre or during university, but there is no analysis as to why, unlike the

former model. The differences are a result of author choice, in how they analyse the concept.

In determining the beginning of widening participation, for this piece of research, the literature suggested possible indicators. Collini (2003) suggests that the first shift in access to higher education took place in the second half of the Nineteenth Century, when the curricula of the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge were reformed, reflecting a shift in influence and purpose. Others (Greenbank, 2006; Chitty, 2004; Archer et al., 2003a) have adopted a more policy orientated approach, suggesting that increased intervention and interest by government towards higher education may be thought of as the beginnings. This could be argued as apposite as it reflects a 'positive' intervention by government to manipulate the intake of students and also to affect higher education institutions. The nature and degree of intervention changes over time, but the presence of government does not. Therefore, for the purposes of this review, the Robbins Report (Ministry of Education, 1963) is taken as the beginnings of the issues surrounding widening participation. By definition a policy approach assumes that this is a government-driven initiative; the data collected suggests as much. The choice of any start point is bound up with perspectives of what widening participation is and how it can be achieved. There are no clear origins; however an historical policy perspective does allow a transparency of approach and so is adopted here. It should be noted that discussions are limited to higher education in England.

The Robbins Report, 1963

The Robbins Report (Ministry of Education, 1963) was commissioned by the Government of the time and reflects the beginnings of the economic imperative thereafter associated by governments with higher education, and a 'stronger role' for

governments in general. There were, as well, social aspects. For example, Archer (2003) suggests that widening participation was linked to the need to reform the grammar school system, and to make use of a greater 'pool of ability'. The Report acknowledged the inequalities which existed in the system, explicitly those of gender and social class, and suggested that these could be explained by the experiences of individuals earlier in the education system and by social deprivation. However there was also the suggestion that there were barriers within higher education.

The Report is acknowledged as leading to the expansion of the system. Some writers (Miller, 1995) have stated that this was taking place already, but Robbins made this explicit. Ross (2003) argues that the Report indicates that higher education was seen to take place within universities. However the then Labour Government established the binary principle, creating two sectors of provision, independent and public sector controlled. Weaver (1994) suggests that the polytechnics, controlled by the public sector, were intended to offer a different form of higher education and to a different type of student. These origins, and the differing rationales, echo into the future, as discussed later. Whilst there was growth in the system, the social and economic class characteristics of the student population remained unchanged (Reay et al., 2001; Ross 2003).

Collini (2003) argues that additional reasons for the expansion at that time included the vast growth of scientific research and the political ideology of government. The former can be linked to a wish to increase economic competitiveness and to regenerate a post World War II economy. The latter, it is argued, reflects a welfare model of liberal education. Higher education institutions were the bastions and definers of culture and the disseminators of that, to an elite minority. The expansion reflected the Keynesian

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Welfare model post World War II, of a land fit for heroes, and a belief in the need for government to address the imperfections of the market, leading to the expansion of public sector services. There was though within this, a need to retool and regenerate the economy to prepare for the future demands of a global economic market (Collini, 2003).

There was an acknowledged wish to enable greater access by all to higher education, but much of the reform or catalysts for change were seen to be outside of higher education. Using the conceptualisations of Jones and Thomas (2005), the Government of the time was using an academic model of widening participation through the notion of reform of the school sector. Particularly, there was a focus on changing the attitudes of non-participants through a less hierarchical compulsory education system, i.e. the comprehensive system. An instrumental model was also implemented through the establishment of public sector institutions, for example the polytechnics, and the expansion of scientific research within higher education to meet the needs of the economy. There were overarching themes of providing greater opportunities to those who were willing and able, without changing higher education, and notions of reskilling a labour force to meet market demand.

Ashworth et al. (2004) suggest that the meaning of widening participation as a 'binary term' relating to teaching only institutions on the one hand and research intensive institutions on the other, had not yet evolved at this time. However it could be argued that the seeds of differentiation had been sown through the differing heritage of institutions.

The Conservative Government, 1979

The arrival of the Conservative Government saw a major transformation in higher education, which in part reflected the shift in political ideology at that time. The notion of the economic imperative was prioritised with the Government's ideology of laissez faire. This approach was felt within many public sector services as:

'...a calculated assault by Tory Governments on institutions which they perceived as expensive, self-absorbed, arrogant and liberal.'

(Collini, 2003: 5)

Ross (2003) suggests:

'Discourses of disadvantage and social exclusion were largely muted: virtually silenced in the case of social class and in terms of the ethnic minorities addressed on a sporadic basis in response to outbreaks of urban unrest...'

(Ross, 2003:63)

Chitty (2004) indicates that the watchwords for this period included: entrepreneurial culture; accountability; and value for money. Hoggett (1996) illustrates the contradiction of this time:

'...several elements of hands-off control systems (e.g. the development of structured markets, the linking of resource allocation to performativity, the new forms of operational decentralisation)...[had] to some extent been dwarfed by visible elements of centralisation (e.g. the deconstruction of the autonomy of local government, the development of the quango state) and the extended use of

hands-on systems of performance management creating a form of evaluative

state.'

(Hoggett, 1996:29)

This period of time sees the agenda of participation being subsumed, (until the Kennedy

Report (FEFC, 1997) and Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997)) within a framework of

structural and financial change, which implicitly affected participation. It also enabled

the relationship of government to higher education to be a more direct and arguably

controlling one.

For higher education the results of this regime (Collini, 2003) were dramatic: a savage

funding cut in 1981; the introduction of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in

1986; and the *Education Reform Act* in 1988. The Research Assessment Exercise was a

manifestation of accountability and performativity in its attempts to measure the amount

of research taking place, and to fund in the future with regard to this past activity. It

could be argued that this, along with other structural changes, brought about the binary

division within higher education and possibly, widening participation. The RAE created

a new division between institutions. Those which were successful in the RAE became

associated with research; those which were not became associated with teaching and

learning. The status of both activities was not seen as equal. The *Education Reform Act,*

1988, was fundamental to the restructuring and alleged unification of the higher

education system. It abolished the legal status of tenure and reformed the means of

funding the sector, giving government a more direct means to influence higher

education, through the University Funding Council.

The *Further and Higher Education Act,* 1992 completed the process of 'unification' removing more institutions from local authorities and enabling more institutions to become universities. It also established the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE).

One result of these structural changes was the introduction of concepts into the academic literature, such as 'new managerialism' (Reed and Anthony, 1993; Deem and Brehony, 2005): the idea of 'new' ideology and practices being brought to bear upon public service organisations, management and delivery. Authors also wrote about whether or not this was pertinent to higher education (Deem, 1998). A second was the concept of 'quasi markets' (Le Grand and Bartlett, 1993), with increased emphasis on choice and competition between diversified and specialised forms of provision. Simkins (2000) in a review of educational reform and managerialism compared the experience of schools and colleges. He is at pains to state that these influences, whilst generally shared, have not been experienced or resulted in the same outcomes for different organisations. It is clear however that there has been an impact on educational institutions and that the terrain in which they operate has changed.

The Dearing Report, 1997

The role of higher education became an issue, with concerns about funding, and in 1996 a Select Committee was commissioned (NCIHE, 1997). Trow (1998) and Robertson (1999) conclude that whilst objectivity may be an aim, inquiries of this kind always take place within a political atmosphere and thus are influenced by it. Whilst the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education reported after the general election, and the arrival of New Labour in office, it is worth remembering that the impact of the change

in the political environment is difficult to discern. These influences can perhaps be felt in the timbre of the document:

> 'Higher education needs to demonstrate that it represents a good investment for individuals and society.'

<div align="right">(NCIHE, 1997: para 18)</div>

The language of widening participation also became established during this era, although Greenbank (2006) indicates that shortcuts were taken and that the process of collecting views was limited, with neither lecturers nor students being consulted. The language was created externally to higher education. The Dearing Report, using the student life cycle model (HEFCE, 2001), concentrated on pre arrival at University, exemplified by raising aspirations and the admissions process. It also recommended the expansion of sub degree programmes, and the creation of routes between these and further programmes. Linked to this was the belief in the importance of collaboration for example between schools and colleges, and higher education.

There appears to be little evidence of a 'transformative' theme (Jones and Thomas, 2005). Rather the emphasis, for widening participation, is pre University, apart from the development of a wider portfolio of programmes, which may be considered as instrumental in its preparation for the labour market. Fielding (2001) relates this unwillingness to ask universities to change, to a failure in policy to address the political and cultural instrumentalism of the issues. He questions whether there is a real wish, by academia, to 'include' in terms of ownership of knowledge and culture, arguing rather that the process of higher education is a form of colonisation. The issue of widening participation is being addressed as a quantitative rather than a qualitative one (Ball et

al., 2002; Forsyth and Furlong, 2003; Reay et al., 2001). The laissez faire ideology is evident through a review of funding within the document and the recommendation of a flat rate student contribution to their tuition. It did conclude that means-tested grants should be maintained, towards student living costs, and discussed a system of student loans. There is a notion of enabling equality of opportunity rather than of outcome, the responsibility lying with the student for participation, therefore using an individual dysfunction model (Thompson, 2000), and not an institutional one.

The (New Labour) Government's position, articulated through HEFCE, was: to introduce funding supplements to promote recruitment of certain categories of students, the beginning of the 'postcode premium' reflecting regional disparities in participation; the promotion of collaboration, particularly with Further Education Colleges through Foundation Degrees; the introduction of strategic planning and target setting; and the publication of data. The means of accountability, target setting and data publication, were very clearly linked to private business activities and were introduced into many public services (Simkins, 2000). Tuition fees were also introduced but the recommendation concerning maintenance grants was not. Whilst the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997) concentrated on the earlier parts of the student life cycle, HEFCE, through the promotion of 'good practice', emphasised the need for universities to concentrate on the whole student life cycle (Greenbank, 2006). An evaluation of these policies will take place later in this chapter.

The Kennedy Report, 1997

The Widening Participation Committee, which produced the Kennedy Report (FEFC, 1997), was set up by the Further Education Funding Council in 1994:

'The Kennedy report particularly addressed the issues for widening participation arising from structural changes being experienced by further education as a consequence of attempts to marketwise the sector.'

(Jary and Jones, 2003)

The Report is noted for its revitalisation of discourses surrounding access (Burke, 2002). It noted the contradictions in Government policy, suggesting that a competitive culture was counter to collaboration and increasing access. The Report recommended the creation of new learning pathways to enable wider opportunities to further education for adults. It also promoted the redistribution of funds to access initiatives and to address specifically, socio-economic deprivation. It is argued that Kennedy subtly changed the brief of the Committee so that it was possible to report on the impact of structural changes upon further education (Jary and Jones, 2003). However, the subsequent Green paper *The Learning Age: a renaissance for a new Britain* (DfEE, 1998) failed to implement any of the Report's key proposals. Instead it emphasised the links between education and employment and the consequent individual financial benefits.

It could be argued that the Kennedy Report was attempting to be transformative through its suggestions of new learning pathways, and its heritage appears to be in a more radical, adult access school of thought (Burke, 2002). However its focus of attention was the further education sector, and as stated above, few of the key proposals informed government policy at the time.

New Labour, 1997

New Labour came to office as the Dearing and Kennedy Reports were being published, however these had been commissioned by the previous government. The role of New Labour with regard to widening participation and higher education has been acknowledged by some as different from before, creating:

'...an additional rhetorical impetus and determination to push this [widening participation] still further, and expand higher education into new areas.'

(Hale, 2006: 93)

Others have not been as generous with their praise, suggesting that the other aims of policy have made this very difficult (Hayton and Paczuska, 2004). These contradictions and their implications for the reinterpretation of widening participation will be explored later. What is evident is that HEFCE at the time was concerned with: developing widening participation via holistic student life cycle practices; the promotion of good practice; the use of incentives or supplements for those institutions which attain targets; and the use of strategic planning (Greenbank, 2006). However, the Government did not adopt all of these strategies as good practice.

The role of government policy in bringing about change is important to this agenda, given its external origins. Taylor (2003), in a paper concerning the effectiveness of government policy on higher education, uses a 'stick and carrot' analysis to discuss government's attitude to universities, post 1979. This is an important issue with regard to the commitment of both government and universities to the agenda, the certainty of outcome and the relationship between the two. The influence and intervention of government on universities has been ever increasing, as it has for education in general.

These interventions and their analysis therefore grow in importance. Taylor suggests that there are two types of 'stick': 'authority tools' and 'capacity tools'. The former imposes requirements through the legal authority of government, the latter through the allocation of resources, normally via student numbers. He argues that authority tools have been used sparingly although increasingly, for example the unification of the higher education system (1992), tuition fees (1998/99), and the *Higher Education Act* (DfES, 2004). For Taylor this reflects the growing importance of higher education as an agent of change for government. In addition he suggests that 'no other form of policy instrument could have succeeded' (Taylor, 2003:94). The other drive to employ authority tools is government's wish to reduce the financial dependence of universities.

The second form of stick, the capacity tool, is much more prevalent; it has been used to affect student numbers. Taylor suggests that in order for it to be successful there should be no option but to comply, and this is where it differs from incentives.

> 'For Government the capacity tool served to encourage universities to look for alternative sources of income; for institutions, the incentive was to replace "lost" Government income and to reduce their dependence on Government funding.'
>
> (Taylor, 2003:96)

This reflects a further focus to be found initially in Conservative government policy, but more heavily emphasised during the present Labour Government's time, that of reduced budgets. As well as stating the importance of ideology, Collini (2003) suggests that funding is a major lever on universities' behaviour. Within the realm of widening participation at this time, the funding supplements associated with HEFCE's pronouncements can also be thought of in this way.

There are three types of 'carrots' suggested by Taylor (2003): 'incentive tools' which rely on positive and negative reward mechanisms; 'symbolic and hortatory tools' (motivation to adopt policy related actions is reliant on beliefs and values held); and 'learning tools' (which assumes policy is implemented on the basis of experience and problem solving). Incentive tools, it is argued, are commonplace and the RAE is a good example of such, as are performance indicators and funding supplements, although these also relate to the competitive environment in which the institutions operate. Interestingly, Taylor suggests that the outcomes from the use of incentive tools can be less certain and may depend upon:

'...local interpretation and/or individual procedure or preference.'

(Taylor, 2003:100)

The symbolic and hortatory tool is associated with the rise of the 'entrepreneurial university', reflecting the ongoing structural changes within both the public sector and higher education, emphasising the continued laissez faire approach, or as Burke (2002:27) terms it 'culture of responsibility'. The final set of instruments, learning tools, is the university continually seeking to improve its performance and to respond to policy requirements. Again, similar to the other carrots, there is a need for the institution to engage and there is more scope for interpretation on an institutional basis.

The outcomes from the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997), as evidenced by HEFCE, appear to fit within the 'carrot' criteria with the notion of the capacity tool also playing an important part in a scarce financial environment. The structural changes instituted, for example tuition fees, are clearly sticks and potentially it could be argued reflect the

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relative priorities of the different agendas. In other words reduced financial dependency is instituted by the Government in a more proactive and determined fashion than widening participation. In addition the consequential structural changes and their impact on widening participation are not addressed in the same manner. This is the source of much contradiction between differing aims.

The Labour Government has continued to address widening participation in many of the same ways as in the past. Jones and Thomas (2005) suggest that policies such as *The Excellence Challenge* (DfEE, 2000) have retained an academic theme in their interpretation of the issues, with its attempts to raise the aspirations of potential participants. This is confirming of an individual dysfunction approach, where explanations of low achievement are placed with the individual not with the system. Equality of opportunity is focussed upon, with a belief in a common experience of educational provision. Greenbank (2006) argues however that HEFCE has endeavoured to move away from this perception, by suggesting that higher education institutions need to change not just their curriculum but also their culture, for example through their admission procedures. To Jones and Thomas (2005) this remains a utilitarian approach rather than transformative, as it:

> '...has had little to say about changing the format and structure of traditional three year full time degree programmes.'
>
> (Jones and Thomas, 2005:619)

Rather they suggest that there have been bolt-on activities such as student support services and mentoring. Ultimately they go on to argue that there has been little evidence of any transformative approaches to widening participation in higher

education, having to cite an Australian University as an example of such activities taking place.

The Future of Higher Education, 2003 and The Higher Education Act, 2004

The White Paper *The Future of Higher Education* (DfES, 2003) outlined the Government's medium and long-term strategies for higher education. It introduced the idea of variable tuition fees and this issue came to dominate discussion surrounding the paper. Greenbank (2006) suggests that it was a reaffirmation of existing policy, for example the raising of aspiration through Aimhigher and Partnership for Progression (DfES, 2003). The Paper endeavoured to codify previous policy and agencies, and to foster greater collaboration. It also re-emphasised the use of data and benchmarks, but with some changes to the indicators used. There was a movement away from postcodes and towards, for example, whether students were first generation entrants. It heralded the return of maintenance grants for some and the establishment of The Office for Fair Access (OFFA), which according to Jary and Jones (2003) was created:

'...to acknowledge the problems these policies will cause for WP.'

(Jary and Jones, 2003)

There remains little that is transformative, although Jones and Thomas (2005) suggest that OFFA's role may be. However, they go on to suggest that:

'...it is increasingly clear that they [OFFA] will create very few changes to the internal workings of universities...OFFA tends towards the academic model of success.'

(Jones and Thomas, 2005:627)

The White Paper appears to be heavily focussed on pre university elements of the student life cycle, indicating a deficit model of non-participation. Again using Taylor's (2003) models, many of the policy approaches are 'carrots'. The discussion concerning Foundation degrees in the document might be thought of as transformative in part, but is more likely to fall within an instrumental or utilitarian approach, as it heavily emphasises the vocational/employment elements of these programmes. These programmes also raise the issue of widening participation being seen by the Government as quantitative rather than qualitative. Foundation degrees, with their reduced duration and their vocational focus, appear to be a qualitatively different higher education experience for students. Greenbank (2006) argues that this White Paper (DfES, 2003) is not supportive of the HEFCE holistic student life cycle model, because of its lack of emphasis on the student whilst at university. He states that ultimately the Government has retreated from a 'student potential' model of access, suggested by HEFCE through the reform of admissions procedures. This is supported by the influence and recommendations of Schwartz's (Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group, 2003) review of admissions procedure.

The *Higher Education Bill* first came to the House of Commons in 2004. It did not have an easy passage through either House. The majority of universities supported the concept of variable tuition fees, reflecting the 'success' of previous Government policies to create entrepreneurial cultures, and the scarcity of financial resources. The failure of the Government to promote transformative approaches to widening participation within institutions suggests that, using Taylor's (2003) model of policy effectiveness, there was insufficient motivation, either carrots or sticks, to adopt such interpretations. In fact there were greater incentives to adopt variable tuition fees,

evidencing a 'learning tools' approach, which suggested the need for finance. Passage through both Houses saw changes to the Bill, including a dilution of OFFA's powers, supporting the predictions of Jones and Thomas (2005), and in fact its powers to influence universities appear to be diminishing further.

The policies that have been implemented by the present Labour Government are thematically similar to those of the previous Conservative administration: not transformative; early elements of the student life cycle focussed upon; and an individual dysfunction model adopted. The mode of implementation is also similar, as is the means by which consultative evidence was sought, in that not all stakeholders' opinions were collected. Similar to other areas of the public sector and education particularly, there are increasing policy interventions and these policies appear to be confused and contradictory with regard to their stated aims. The role of political ideology and social change can be seen as important and a major explanation of intervention, not meaningfully with regard to widening participation, but rather with regard to the role of higher education.

> '...the government appears to lack the political will to implement policies that are more radical.'
>
> (Greenbank, 2006:161)

Contradictions

Whilst acknowledging that policy is interpreted and reinterpreted differently by institutions, post 1979 there has been a similarity of approach, a continuance of the methods and meanings used by government. At times government has not kept pace with developments elsewhere in the sector with regard to this agenda (Greenbank, 2006). The contradictions to be explored are borne out of these similarities of approach.

One of the major sources of contradiction is the pursuance of alternative aims by government, and in a more determined fashion, not just within the higher education sector but more generally.

Kennedy (FEFC, 1997) had already outlined the contradictions of marketisation with access, and others have pursued this theme. Coates and Adnett (2002) suggest that some of the failures of marketisation have been because it has not been fully incorporated into higher education. Thus the benefits of competition have not been achieved, for example because HEFCE rather than market forces determine student numbers. In addition they state that similarly to the impact of marketisation on secondary schools, the outcomes have been distorted by a failure to fund the higher costs of non-traditional students, which means that:

'HEIs face the same incentives to favour traditionally qualified entrants and those with fewer problems that we noted in the secondary schooling system.'

(Coates and Adnett, 2002:13)

There is an acknowledgement, in the literature, that marketisation fails to recognise the barriers faced by certain categories of students:

'This economic rationale does not necessarily fit easily with a social justice agenda because the easiest, most 'profitable' way of increasing participation to the target level might not be the way that will best tackle social inequalities.'

(Archer et al., 2003b:196)

The Government has justified some of the contradictions. The means by which it has legitimated tuition fees is by discussing the graduate premium and also the promotion of widening participation. However it has failed again to collect evidence to support its conclusions (Jary and Jones, 2003).

The key feature of Government ideology is choice. The rhetoric surrounding the justification of choice may have changed, with the present Government suggesting that the welfare state has failed to address social justice issues (Burke, 2002), rather than just being inefficient. However, there remains a faith in the power of the individual to make choices in a similar manner to each other, for example all have the same abilities and resources to access opportunities. There are strong arguments that this is not the case (Reay et al., 2001). Others have argued that in creating these rules of engagement with access, and in the remedies put forward, for example raising aspirations, there is an underlying wish to change the nature of the working classes:

> '...the government's focus upon changing working class cultures and patterns of decision making represents, at least implicitly, a desire to make working class groups more like the middle classes.'
>
> (Archer et al., 2003b:195)

There remains the notion of individual responsibility to access, a deficit model of non-participation, which has recurred throughout this policy agenda.

The contradictions also remain for universities, on the one hand giving them independence and yet constraining them, particularly by the use of financial levers. This changing role will be discussed further in the next chapter.

A further contradiction set up by marketisation and policy, is the simultaneous promotion of collaboration and competition. This is exacerbated by benchmarking, and the publication of data. Ashworth et al. (2004) analyse the impact of league tables on higher education, and their association with quality, arguing that league tables do little more than confirm readers' views regarding the status of universities. Others remark that benchmarks and data production override any other approach to widening participation, inhibiting more radical approaches to the issues of non participation:

'...they create a tension between simply aiming to achieve project targets (on paper at least) and identifying real, effective and practical ways to help overcome the obstacles faced by non-traditional students.'

(Hayton and Paczuska, 2004:3)

The achievement of targets rather than thoughtful interaction with the issues in part reflects other elements of Government policy, for example the entrepreneurial institution and financial cutbacks. This financial scarcity also contributes to the lack of radicalisation of the agenda as Ashworth et al. (2004) argue:

'...widening participation in academic excellence, as we define it, is a very costly option – it cannot be done on the cheap and requires significant public investment.'

(Ashworth et al., 2004:9)

Both the economic environment of higher education and the developing entrepreneurial culture within institutions means that decisions concerning widening participation are

not taken in isolation from other factors, particularly economic survival. Therefore the nature and processes of engagement and interpretation are those which are seen as being efficient with regards to the range of other priorities which are being pursued. Using Taylor's (2003) analysis, the policy methods used have not driven universities to address the issue of widening participation and any explicit policies have been associated with 'voluntary' choice. Again, though, not all institutions, as with individuals, respond in the same way.

Further support for the policy approach adopted is the stepping back from a punitive OFFA. Some have stated that the appointment of a past Russell Group vice chancellor will ensure that attacks on university independence are minimal (Greenbank, 2006). The Russell Group is an association of twenty major research intensive universities of the UK. It does not appear that the Government wishes to tackle universities with regard to this issue and supports, nominally, the independence of higher education. It has provided an environment of opportunity of choice and this appears, to the Government, to be sufficient with regard to this agenda.

Another source of contradiction linking to choice, and to be explored further in Chapter 3, is that of student experience of higher education and their attitudes to tuition fees and student loans, and the implications for equality of opportunity. As has already been noted, it appears that the issue of widening participation is being addressed as a quantitative phenomena rather than a qualitative one, and there is concern about the developing binary nature of higher education. Some have argued that this is a reconstruction of inequalities (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; Ashworth et al., 2004) with the concentration of research funding in elite universities and the status of universities further supported by the nature of their intake. In effect a scenario arises

where higher education is not experienced equally, and ultimately the nature of the institution attended becomes a means of constructing the worth of academic outcomes. Burke (2005) has suggested that credential inflation is another means of creating inequalities. This perhaps is twofold through the financial constraints of achieving further degrees and also the notion that the graduate premium is diminishing, with a greater number of occupations requiring degree level entry. There is concern that widening participation will become the domain of certain types of institutions and this will have implications for those institutions but also for those who attend them (Archer et al., 2003a).

Another source of contradiction is the positioning of education as a servant of the 'economic imperative' as opposed to a liberal education. Hayton and Paczuska (2004) describe it as the shift from promoting liberal education, to one which prepares individuals for the world of work. Ozga (2000) suggests that for education in general the diverse aims associated with education have been a problem for government. As such, the identification of the 'economizing agenda' is the solution, the notion that this sector should not be treated any differently to any other. This enables the government to depoliticise agendas and absolve itself of responsibility, leaving decisions to individual and institutional choices. However, the impact of this is again qualitative for students' experiences but also a fundamental shifting of the purposes of higher education. This economizing agenda is also associated with the hierarchical and differential structure of higher education.

Ultimately the contradictions which arise are from political ideology, apparently borne out of social change, and the need to address apparent weaknesses in the ability of the economy to compete on a global stage. Government interventions have attempted to

address some of the ramifications of other policies, whilst not wishing to undermine them. There are also contradictions internal to the institutions themselves and these are not identical. However there appears to be issues concerning for example the politicisation of admissions and positive intervention to affect participation, which link to discussions relating to independence and the role of universities. Perhaps these issues account for the nature of the Government's interventions, for example the use of incentives. The Government does not wish to attack the principle of academic independence through the use of sticks.

Conclusion

In this chapter widening participation has been defined by the policy context and the contradictions therein. The next chapter will address the construction of meaning from the perspective of higher education itself. The notion here is that it has been both constructed and reconstructed by policy, and not just that which appertains directly to the agenda itself. It appears to have been determined by the wish to institute other changes, for example marketisation, the economizing of education, whilst endeavouring to create a belief in the independence of individual agents. Widening Participation is reactive for the Government in the sense of trying to redress the impact of other policy, and also 'voluntary' in terms of the means of operationalising the agenda. However it needs to be recognised that the degree of choice is not one which is shared equally between agents.

The specific nature of the widening participation strategies have tended to emphasise academic and instrumental themes (Jones and Thomas, 2005), emphasising the raising of aspirations and achievement prior to entry, and some structural barriers, for example the nature of the programme offer. This analysis links to the HEFCE (2001) student life

cycle model, used by Greenbank (2006), as much of the concern appears to be focussed on the early stages of this life cycle, rather than on higher education. It has been noted however that HEFCE has increasingly endeavoured to create a more holistic approach to the student life cycle. There is though, within the policy, little evidence of a transformative, or as it might be described, a radical approach to the agenda; what takes place within higher education institutions has not necessarily changed. It might be argued that the Government has excused or even condoned this behaviour, and its policy developments have not necessarily adopted such a transformative response to the issues.

Non-traditional students are therefore working in an environment which apparently provides equality of opportunity, but fails to acknowledge the constraints and perceptions which they have of participation. Also, they may experience a qualitatively different higher education than others; the policy does not address this, rather seeing the agenda as a quantitative one. Theirs is an experience which does not include them in terms of policy generation nor in terms of defining what education is. This inequality, or reconstructed inequality, is created through increased differentiation between higher education institutions, and a process which benefits and asks applicants to adopt middle class cultures and decision making approaches.

The next chapter will explore the response of higher education to government policy and the consequent interpretation and construction of widening participation within the sector. As Bowe et al. (1992) suggest:

'...it would be politically naïve and analytically suspect to begin from the assumption that it has been possible to make that exclusion (e.g. of practitioners) total; either in terms of policy generation or in terms of implementation.'

(Bowe et al., 1992:8).

Chapter 3

The Ethos of Higher Education

Introduction

The aims of this chapter are to review the literature which concerns itself with the culture of higher education as it relates to the institution, and the academic staff who work within it. The significance of this is that through an analysis of the roles and purposes of higher education and academics, and the pressures and conflicts which arise, there can develop a greater understanding of the interpretation of widening participation. Questions arise, therefore, concerning the culture of higher education, as reflected in institutions and staff, affecting the interpretation and engagement with the widening participation agenda.

There are however a number of issues which need to be kept in mind. There are no shared understandings of what higher education is, or means, to those who work within it. There are multiple factors which affect an institutional view of its role and purpose and these are not shared equally between institutions, not even within pre or post 1992 universities. The literature however does identify trends and common external pressures but acknowledges that for example:

> 'Policies are ... operational statements of values, statements of "prescriptive intent." They are also... essentially contested in and between the arenas of formation and implementation.'
>
> (Bowe et al., 1992:13)

Thus there is a need to contextualise literature as there is no generic experience or view to be had. Institutions have the ability, to different degrees, to manipulate or reinterpret that which they are given externally, should they wish to do so. In addition the literature is bound up by myths about what higher education used to be and should be, for example based on ideas of collegiality (Collini, 2003). The same is true of academic identity:

> '...the importance of academic identity has been built up predominantly within idealist or essentialist conceptions of academia and of higher education as necessarily self-regulating systems...'

> (Henkel, 2000:16)

The issues of academic identity and management are affected by the sources of such literature, with academics writing about what it is to be an academic.

The chapter will begin by focussing on the institution and understandings of its role and purpose, and the factors which have affected these, and then on academic staff. Neither the institution nor academics operate in isolation from each other. There are also notions of whether an institution can have its own identity, particularly for higher education, or whether it reflects the activities of its members. In these times, though, most have mission statements, suggesting an independent identity for the institution. The idea of the university as a corporate entity is explored by Naidoo and Jamieson (2005). They suggest that such developments result from external pressures placed upon the institution.

The linear nature of writing requires a beginning but this should not negate the dynamic relationship between institution and individual, nor ignore external pressures.

The Characteristics of Higher Education Institutions

In order to review the role and purpose of higher education it is necessary to consider the sources of such definitions. Such sources have and continue to be a major influence on the development of what takes place in a university. The meaning of higher education appears to revolve around the characteristics of self-regulation or academic independence, the control and defining of knowledge, and the ultimate goal of survival. It is evident from the literature that 'significant others' most importantly government but also the consumer, through the marketisation of higher education (Naidoo and Jamieson, 2005), have begun to become stakeholders in what it means. These 'significant others' do not necessarily always contradict traditional views of higher education (Ashworth et al., 2004) but some writers argue that they are increasingly controlling of them (Maton, 2005; Nixon et al., 2001; Watson, 2002).

There may be some justification for an historical analysis of the meanings of higher education. However, this approach is diminished by the view that the diversity of institutions is such that it would have limited purpose. In addition, such approaches may romanticise the past. Collini, (2003) argues that even the Oxbridge Colleges, the ideal of academic autonomy, were affected by government agencies in the Nineteenth Century, and also made to address their agendas. It would appear to be the case that meanings of higher education have always been influenced by external factors, particularly by those who wielded power at the time. The interesting issue is that these influences have become more explicit both in the construction of definitions:

'We see a higher education sector which meets the needs of the economy in terms of trained people, research and technology transfer. At the same time it needs to enable all suitably qualified individuals to develop their potential both intellectually and personally, and to provide the necessary storehouse of expertise in science and technology, and the arts and humanities which defines our civilisation and culture.'

(DfES, 2003:21)

and indirectly through changes to the environment within which higher education operates. According to Ball (1994) these influences would be:

'...not simply structural or technical – it [the reform process in the UK] is also cultural and ideological.'

(Ball, 1994:71)

It is this latter aspect which is of concern, as there need not be any reason for universities to adopt external views of their role if they contradicted their own, and if they did not wish to do so.

Maton (2005), with others (Nixon et al., 2001; Collini, 2003), argues that government influence has been central to the determination of meaning for higher education. For example in the early 1960's, universities were funded via the University Grants Committee, staffed by academics and distributing block grants for a five year period. Their role was supportive and minimal to higher education institutions and in a similar

fashion to Adam Smith's (1776) 'invisible hand' the view was taken that institutional independence would best serve national economic progress.

The expansion of student numbers in the 1960's, allegedly reflected a different type of student population and was symbolic of a period of change for higher education. Some have argued, however, that this has been over stated, both in the 1960's (Maton, 2005) and in more recent times (Archer et al., 2003a).

Nixon et al. (2001) suggest that other factors have also played a part in redefining higher education: reduced funding; changes in curriculum; changes in the conditions of academic work; changes in the structure of accountability; and professional accreditation.

> 'Comparing the terms of policy debates in the early 1960's with those of today shows that a discourse of pastoral concern for the education of new students has given way to one of income generation, social participation and economic rationalism.'
>
> (Maton, 2005:700)

Maton suggests that there has been the loss of the ideology of knowledge for its own sake, replaced by the commodification of knowledge by both students, instrumentally to gain superior employment opportunities, and by higher education to gain revenue. Others (MacDonald and Stratta, 2001; Clegg and McAuley, 2005; Henkel, 2000; Nixon, 2001) have written at greater length about specific elements of government policy and their impact on higher education. In particular the role of externally driven quality

assurance has also impacted upon the professionalism of academics (discussed later). These policies have been closely linked to changes within higher education. Henkel (2000) discusses the appearance of these policies as being linked to the massification of higher education. No longer could informal discretionary approaches to quality cope with the scale of the student population but nor could it address the increased culture of accountability. Quality assurance processes also fed into Government requirements concerning production of data, league tables and benchmarking. The consequence was:

'...the justification for academic autonomy and academic control of higher education had been weakened.'

(Henkel, 2000:233)

Henkel (2000) and Barnett et al. (2004) however suggest that old traditions still remained, for example the primacy of knowledge fields.

MacDonald and Stratta (2001) suggest that the Institute for Learning and Teaching (ILT, established in 1999) also challenged the traditional values of concern for subject disciplines and research, over teaching and learning. They argue that it has shifted the responsibility of learning from the student to the interaction between student and lecturer. Optimistically they argue that this could benefit non-traditional students; however they do acknowledge that membership is not mandatory. Archer et al. (2003a) argues that the academy is still founded on a belief that the student population is white, middle class and male. Nixon (2001) is more damning suggesting that it merely reflects the culture of accountability rather than any 'higher' agenda.

The Quality Assurance Agency (established 1997) has also been discussed. Clegg and McAuley (2005) suggest that it is a means of deprofessionalising the occupation and also of regulating knowledge. This notion of knowledge control is developed differently in MacDonald and Stratta (2001), where their interviews with tutors suggested that there would be a:

'…tendency to revert to the status quo, rather than engage in a radical rethink about what constitutes knowledge in HE…'

(McDonald and Stratta, 2001:256)

This maintenance of the status quo is also evidenced by research literature which concentrates on structural constraints within the system (Osborne and Young, 2006) rather than an analysis of knowledge construction within higher education. There remains an absence of Fielding (2001) and Apple and Buras's (2006) plea for a sharing of the ownership of knowledge, through its construction.

There appears to be a battle taking place between higher education addressing policy, particularly when it manifests itself through inspection and data production, and an endeavour to retain some notion of control, for example as cited above, of subject disciplines or, more fundamentally, knowledge. There are also recurrent themes of policy mechanisms being used for means other than those they appear to address, for example control of the profession and accountability.

Another impact of institutional inspection has been, for some writers, a greater propensity for academics to work departmentally in addressing the requirements of inspection (Henkel, 2000). There are mixed messages about whether in fact academics'

association with their department or institution has become more important in the light of external pressures (discussed later in this chapter). There are then notions of reductions in both institutional independence and also academic staff independence. Clegg and McAuley (2005) suggest that these quality assurance mechanisms, and other forms of control, have supported the movement of institutions being perceived as founded on the primacy of the individual, to one of a 'corporate entity'.

There is also within the literature, reference to government policy supporting the traditional values of higher education mainly through omission: that in fact it is not all change. Maton (2005) discusses two types of autonomy, based on Bourdieu's work (1959-1999): 'positional autonomy' - for example if bodies occupy roles within the system (field) of concern, higher education, and originate from other systems outside of higher education, then there is a reduction in positional autonomy; and 'relational autonomy', where the principles of working within a system are derived from another system. For the current debate there appears to be evidence of a reduction in relational autonomy, for example through regulation and inspection. However Maton argues that positional autonomy within higher education remains relatively strong:

'Governments have been reluctant to impose extra-field agencies on higher education and there is comparatively little direct occupation of positions within higher education by agents from external fields.'

(Maton, 2005:700)

Interestingly he does recognise the relative nature of autonomy and, like Collini (2003), he suggests that there is a need to recognise that certain eras within higher education

were exceptional rather than the norm, and thus the present is not that far removed from the past.

There remains though, contested ground with regard to student support, as to whether any significant change has been made, and the role of the Government in that. Ashworth et al. (2004) and Leathwood and O' Connell (2003) both suggest that the Government has done little, and has even exacerbated the situation. Archer et al. (2003a) and Reay (2003) suggest that widening participation has been seen as something which takes place outside of the academy, and involves an agenda of wishing to change working class culture to that of the middle classes. For all of these writers a crucial negative effect of the changes to the environment of higher education is the binary divide, which has 'naturally' evolved in higher education through the structures and policies of government.

The 'Binary Divide'

As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, the nature of the changes have not been experienced identically by institutions of higher education. The frameworks, particularly funding, for example the RAE, but also data production and benchmarking, have served to divide the sector. The implications of this have been that inequalities are experienced by institutions, their staff and students, and that this is also a self-promoting situation. This analysis is of particular import to widening participation:

> 'The debates about the nature of higher education are underpinned by codes
>
> through which the internal and cross-sectoral stratification of universities mirror
>
> the wider stratification of society in terms of gendered, class and racialised
>
> inequalities.'

Non-traditional students experience a different higher education from other participants and this is partly concerned with the institutions that admit them (Reay, 2003). At play here is a continuance of the arguments surrounding equality of opportunity versus equality of outcome, and the Government's apparent support of the former. For example Ashworth et al. (2004) discuss the process of benchmarking which takes place with regard to admissions and widening participation, and the implications for access. However, there is also a structural change driven by government mechanisms, which has created a situation of a divided and diverse sector with potentially different remits which, in turn, possibly affects the experience of students. Ashworth et al. (2004) suggest that it is the term 'widening participation' which has become binary because of the restructuring of higher education, rather than higher education itself.

It is argued that non-traditional students are heavily concentrated within the post-1992 universities (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003). Their explanations for this include, from the perspective of the institution rather than the student: access and widening participation policies; the reputation of many new universities; frequent resistance of pre-1992 universities to such students; the nature of the student cohort already present in the institution; and the availability of popular courses in newer subject areas. These explanations need not show a divide in the sector; however the reasons for them and consequent reputations of the institutions appears so to do. Potentially these institutions may have been driven to recruit non-traditional students, to change curriculum and to amend delivery, because of the changes to the structure of the higher education system. This is to suggest that they may not have wished to recruit these students. This is a moot point, as much of the literature focuses on the end point for example the concentration

of non-traditional students in certain institutions, rather than the process by which it occurred (Gorard et al., 2006; Watson, 2006)

Ross (2003) sheds some light upon this point, arguing that during the 1960's and 1970's polytechnics gained prestige from expanding their provision and also by changing that provision to more closely ape that provided by the universities. This suggests that there was, even at that time, a wish to gain the same 'status' as universities or be seen to be operating in the same manner as them. There does appear to be importance attached to status and reputation, and this has become even more important with increased competition between institutions. As Ashworth et al. (2004) state, a strong university brand or reputation is sufficiently powerful for consumers to deny any evidence to the contrary. Therefore it might appear that the recruitment of non-traditional students, if not pursued equally by all sectors of the higher education environment, and most particularly by the 'elite' institutions, may lead to a conclusion that a university may not choose to do so voluntarily. An indirect consequence of this debate is that a university may not see inclusion or widening participation as an important part of its role. Reay (2003) supports this analysis:

> 'The consequences [of a hierarchical ordering of higher education] are increasing class and racial segregation within higher education in which university schemes for widening access and participation are having little impact on wider processes of polarisation and pathologisation.'
>
> (Reay, 2003:57)

Polarisations occur in relation both to the sectoral divide of institutions and also non-traditional student experience and the pathologisation of such students in relation to

participation, retention and outcome. Reay's paper describes potential non-traditional students as discussing the merits of institutions, one suggesting that she would not wish to attend a university which would admit her. Whilst there are other factors at play here concerning identity, it also reflects the perceived credibility of the institutions discussed.

The main structural changes which have brought this about, as far as the literature is concerned, are the funding arrangements associated with research and teaching (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003; MacDonald and Stratta, 2001). It is argued that the concentration of research funding in certain institutions (through the RAE) tends to lead to a divide between research institutes and teaching institutes. There is though further complication to this, as those institutions that do well in Teacher Quality Assessment (TQA) as well as the RAE tend to be those which do not admit a significant proportion of non-traditional students (Ashworth et al., 2004). There is a growing divide, partly derived from the prestige of research institutions and the significance of this for their reputation, and also by the importance placed upon HEFCE-produced indicators by the sector and its clients, for example the TQA. Leathwood and O'Connell (2003) argue that the implications are that the concentration of research funds in elite universities reinforces their reputation, and thus the divide within higher education. Ultimately, for these authors, the status of a university is determined by its student intake.

The implication for the role of universities seems to be one of differentiation. The role of the Government through its restructuring and funding mechanisms and the role of potential students through their decision-making is determining and supporting of this differentiation. It would appear that part of the characteristics or meaning of a university are linked to research and recruitment, and possibly teaching is seen as a less important activity.

The role of accountability through inspection, funding arrangements and data production is also associated with the way that universities are internally organised. These changes to the organisation potentially illustrate what higher education is or should be.

Managerialism

It could be argued that the new external structure that higher education institutions face has created the need for new organisational structures. This has been touched upon earlier with the suggestion that universities at times appear to work more collectively to fulfil external requirements. Potentially, this may lead to a new organisational structure and is likely to involve shifts in power for those within that structure:

> '...away from the academic class to those controlling its resources (government and managers) and those benefiting from its facilities (students and employers).
>
> (Farnham, 1999:12)

Certainly for some, the organisational structure has been a defining feature of higher education, although again romanticised at times. The collegial model is clearly linked to the role of the academic, and debates about professionalism. However, as Tapper (1998) suggests there is no one version but there do appear to be characteristics, for example the importance of consensus decision-making, a self-governing collective and a limited hierarchy of seniority and expertise (Middlehurst, 1993). This view appears to be in agreement with others' perceptions of the academic role:

'Scientific and artistic productivity depends upon freedom to follow

serendipitous leads...[a belief in the] power of academic democracy and ...the

view that good ideas come from the bottom up.'

(Ramsden, 1998:26.)

More recently, the literature surrounding the organisation of higher education has

become associated with the idea of 'new managerialism' (Deem, 1998; Deem and

Brehony, 2005). Higher education is not perceived as being alone in this change nor the

influences which have brought it about. Deem and Brehony (2005) suggest that within

the literature there are issues surrounding whether this is an ideological shift, or a

particular form of regulatory governance of public services by state agencies. The latter

is described as 'new public management' as it is used by a variety of political parties.

The authors tend towards the ideological in their analysis of what is taking place:

'...[new managerial ideology] legitimises and seeks to extend the "right to

manage" to public service organisations previously the domain of trusted

autonomous professionals using considerable discretion.'

(Deem and Brehony, 2005:220)

The argument is that the 'newness' associated with the concept concerns the

legitimation of management and not the management theories themselves. The external

influences associated with this development surround the new modes of control or

governance associated with not just higher education but other sectors of the public

services. Ball (1994) discusses these influences on the schools sector, and the

similarities to higher education are notable:

'...if the market operates as a disciplinary system, in which there are "strong forces at work – arising from the technical, administrative and consumer satisfaction requirements of organisational success" (Chubb and Moe, 1990:37) – then to describe schools working inside this system as autonomous seems at least misleading.'

(Ball, 1994:109)

The marketisation of higher education appears to have been fundamental in bringing about change. Deem and Brehony (2005) support this conclusion pointing to the specific elements of: funding mechanisms; the use of performance indicators; the integration of other public sector services in higher education, for example health care training; and the acceptance by newer members of staff of the culture. This, it is argued, has familiarised academics with the language of targets and accountability. It is institutional responses to these external changes which have brought about new means of management, and in fact the use of the vocabulary itself. In addition it is noted that there is no one approach to new managerialism, although it is defined by Deem and Brehony (2005:220) as being connected to the state regulation of, and manager power over, such services and their employees. The reaction to this trend differs amongst institutions and groups, reflecting differing interests. Within higher education the suggestion is that the legitimation or palatability of this approach has been through managers having academic and occupational status (Deem and Brehony, 2005; Clegg and McAuley, 2005).

Again some notion of autonomy might be thought of as being maintained ('positional autonomy', Maton, 2005). However it is also acknowledged that for those not working

within a relevant subject discipline there is little knowledge of, or training in managerial techniques.

Clegg and McAuley (2005) support the idea that these theories need to be contextualised and have become, in their general terms, romanticised (collegiality) and demonised (managerialism). They suggest that there is a need to rise above this simplistic, black and white debate and consider the positive and diverse potential of such developments. Optimistically Deem and Brehony (2005) suggest that there is the opportunity for the promotion of teaching and learning, student centredness and widening participation. However the attitudes of academic staff are potentially restraining of these developments.

The Role of the Academic

There are a multiplicity of views about what it is to be an academic, and thus also the interpretation of widening participation. There are also links between the role with regard to the institution belonged to, for example the experience of academic life in a RAE-benefited institution vis a vis one which is not. However, this does not dispel or negate academic staff perceptions of what their role should be, which is potentially more important, to them and the agenda, than what their role actually is. There are then ideal types, romanticised visions, myths and fiction surrounding what the role is. There is though consensus about the effect of external influences on that role, many of them the same as above.

As has been discussed above, the concept of collegiality has been associated with the academic role (Middlehurst, 1993; Ramsden, 1998) with its links to academic autonomy

and professionalism. Henkel (2000) suggests that the outcome of such mythologised approaches is:

> '...the idea that the essence of higher education is its development, nurture and transmission of a particular and intrinsically exclusive conception of knowledge. Accessible only to an intellectual elite, it is mediated by strong internal control, organised within a framework of disciplines.'
>
> (Henkel, 2000:16)

Whether this view is realistic or not, the literature gives it great credence in relation to academics' views of their role. Barnett et al. (2004) suggests that knowledge fields are used to form academic identities and organisational structures and curricula. He also argues, contrary to the debate above, that it is the knowledge field, not artificial conglomerations such as the department, school or faculty with which the academic associates. It is this to which loyalty and allegiance are due. There is though a creeping perception of the diminution of this view due to external pressures. However this is where definitions and the battle for autonomy take place. Nixon (2001) supports this idea with a belief that with the demise of what he calls subject disciplines, possibly through the need to be marketable, and attempts by government to regulate knowledge through the QAA & ILT (MacDonald and Stratta, 2001), there is a consequent loss of autonomy. Nixon argues that academic freedom is now dependent on institutional differences constrained by accountability and reward systems. There are then synergies between institution and academic staff.

Maton (2005) also discusses the role of external influences on knowledge although in yet another change of terms he discusses 'culture':

'Marketisation...increasingly forces academics to pay ritual obeisance to both

the two rival gods of culture and economy, making the divided self that was

historically the experience of actors in dominated positions in higher education

increasingly the norm for actors across the whole field.'

(Maton, 2005:701)

Collini (2003) discusses this dualism when he suggests that there are two public debates

about the purpose of higher education. The first is 'cultural declinism' associated with

falling standards and reduced autonomy. The second is the challenges and opportunities

of the new regime of partnerships with industry and accountability. Similar to the

literature surrounding the institution the same battles, unsurprisingly, are being fought

by academics, with regard to the impact of the QAA and TQA on practice. Similarly to

the institution the enthusiasm for the battle is determined by survival reflected in self-

interest. For example the impact of the RAE on the practice of academics has created a

lot of attention from the academic sphere. Henkel (2000) suggests that greater

allegiance to the institution is associated with mutual dependence. She also suggests that

the accountability culture and the commodification of knowledge has led to a

weakening of academic autonomy and control, and Collini (2003) argues that these

'traditional educational values' were also at odds with the political landscape of the

times. There is no room in a market democracy, where the consumer is sovereign, for

elitism and selective admissions: all wants are perceived as being equal.

Nixon (2001) suggests that the conclusion is a continuing dialogue between the public

and professionals with regard to the ends and purposes of learning. He argues that

ultimately, similarly to there being no one type of higher education institution, there is

no single academic profession. Some members have faired better than others from the process of competition.

Notions of deprofessionalisation therefore, have come from these external challenges and the ability of members to 'weather the storm' during the battle for the control of practice. The ability to do so appears to be partly dependent upon the nature of the institution to which that member belongs, linking to the concept of the binary divide discussed above.

Both Clegg and McAuley (2005) and Nixon (2001) call for a new professionalism, where learning is at the heart of what the profession does, rather than knowledge. Nixon argues for a professional identity based on the relationship between the academic and the community they serve. He describes a reorientation of academic freedom to 'freedom for others'. He argues that instead of a self-protecting inward stance, a view outwards is required. This would appear to change dramatically the interface between academic and student and thus have implications for the practice of widening participation. This would possibly not just be in terms of teaching and learning, but also in the transformation of what is and who owns knowledge, as it implies changes to who are the gatekeepers of that treasured concept.

The Academic Role and Widening Participation

The implications for widening participation, of these views of the role of the academic, have been discussed minimally, in terms of content and focus. Giddens (2000) suggests that, due to the relatively small quantities of funds associated with widening participation, it has not been institutionalised. Although, given the debate above, this does not appear to be sufficient in itself to demand action by academics. More

influential factors appear to be the nature of the institution belonged to, and the motivation of individual members of staff.

The notion of the supremacy of knowledge fields, to academics, suggests that unless the agenda fits within one it will not gain any credence. This is supported by literature on perceptions of the role and make up of the student body. As discussed (see Archer et al., 2003b) it is argued that there is a stereotypical student as far as universities are concerned. There are accusations within the literature of stereotypical views of the students' role. MacDonald and Stratta (2001) undertook a small-scale exploration of the experiences of non-traditional students in a Higher Education Institution. As a consequence of their findings they undertook interviews with some of the tutors involved with these students. Those interviewed expressed an unwillingness to see non-traditional students as a distinct group, supporting Archer et al. (2003b) in relation to generic perceptions of students, held by tutors. Emphasis was placed instead on the similarities and the integration of such students. The expressed justifications were twofold: the need to treat all students equally; and the absence of structures to identify and facilitate any targeted group. The latter point, it could be argued, is exacerbated by the increased modularisation of university programmes (MacDonald and Stratta, 2001) leading to increased fragmentation of contact between tutors and students. However the researchers suggested that:

'The response appeared to be underpinned by a rather traditional view of the student, someone whose learning is their own business…it did not require any radical change on the part of tutors or the institution to deal with the new situation.'

(MacDonald and Stratta, 2001:253)

There are echoes here of the debates above re the centrality of knowledge rather than learning, in terms of the academic role. Notions of self interest should also not be ignored; in other words this is the way that the academics wished it to be. This reference reiterates the notion that teaching and learning are not owned nor valued by the institution unless affecting external audits, inspection and potentially the survival of the institution.

Bhatti (2003) suggests that in fact there are more complex explanations for the interpretation and engagement with widening participation, by academics and institutions. She proffers the idea of institutions acquiring resources as an important determinant, although she goes on to suggest that these funds do not always contribute to support for widening participation within the institution.

According to McDonald and Stratta (2001) those staff who worked with non-traditional students used their own strategies 'which are neither congruent with that of the student expectations or the institutional mission.' (p257). The suggestion appears to be and is supported by the literature already discussed, that students, the client group or consumer, have a role in determining definitions of what academics do, and possibly reinforcing traditional views of such. Again teaching and learning does not appear to be an institutionally valued activity as it is not a defining activity of what academics or universities do.

Cryptically MacDonald and Stratta (2001) state:

'Whether it is desirable to celebrate staff responses as resistance, or to suggest that management is ineffective, depends upon the definition of a desirable outcome.'

(Macdonald and Stratta, 2001:257)

The 'resistance' referred to appears to be the accommodation of non- traditional students, and perhaps a greater focus on teaching and learning, which does not necessarily support or benefit the institution as personified by 'management'. Alternatively it could suggest that a degree of autonomy, possibly counter to managerial wishes, is taking place. Finally it might suggest that these widening participation activities are not managed, possibly because the benefits of doing so are insufficient and not congruent with what academics do. Ultimately the latter is supported by Government perceptions of where the issues lie, as discussed in the last chapter, the concentration on pre university entry activities.

These findings concerning support for non-traditional students and the academic role are confirmed by Bhatti (2003). Her research explored the experiences of undergraduates from non-traditional backgrounds, some on degree programmes which built upon the students' own experiential knowledge, and involved interviews with lecturers. She states that tutors did not feel that their work with these students was appreciated by their colleagues. The explanations for this reflected the economic efficiency of such activities and their contribution to the RAE, suggesting that such activities do not fit the self interest of some academics. The tutors on the programme, based on the students own knowledge, suggested that they would be unsurprised if the programme closed. Whilst there maybe a number of factors at play, cost benefit analysis and marketability perhaps, there is also one of who controls knowledge.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the meanings of higher education and the academic role, in order to analyse the implications of such for the widening participation agenda. There are similarities: both revere independence, suggesting that this is the most suitable characteristic with which to pursue their activities; both are concerned with the control of knowledge; both have perceptions of teaching and learning which appear to place it below the development of knowledge. Both concepts, the higher education institution and the academic, are fraught with differences and peculiarities when put in context but both are concerned with self interest, perhaps best characterised by survival. The roles of both the higher education institution and the academic have been influenced by external pressures, instigated by the increasing intervention of government in higher education, but also the enabling of other sectors to affect what they do. External pressures, for example governmental and client, do not necessarily contradict what academics perceive their roles to be. Interestingly the identity of institution and academic is being defined in a more open forum than in the past; it is no longer the preserve of the academic. Writers in the field are at pains to suggest that the actual impact of these influences is often exaggerated and that universities and academics have always been affected by external influences.

The role of the institution or sub-institution, school or faculty, might appear to be becoming increasingly important as a result of the external pressures. Again though individual differences, both institutional and personal, have to be acknowledged. The symbolic battleground for change appears to be associated with economic rationalism, which pervades the public sector, versus the pursuit of knowledge. There are contests surrounding: the organisation of staff; student recruitment and support; curricula; and

quality assurance, in order to address the new regime of economic rationalism. Not all institutions are challenged. There are issues of financial independence which appear to determine the degree of influence that the external pressures have. There are also olive branches offered by external agents by omission; that within the policy there is scope for apparently traditional approaches to be retained. There is also an acceptance, between stakeholders, about the need for some type of academic independence but without a justification being given.

Widening participation is on the sidelines in these contests. Potentially it could be served by some of the changes, particularly those which focus on teaching and learning, but this will depend upon the acknowledgement by both institution and staff, of a diverse student body. It is apparent that there is, for both institution and academic staff, a blindness to the issue. It is not on the radar as it is not sufficiently important for a multiplicity of reasons. If as Nixon (2001) suggests, a new professionalism takes place which emphasises academic freedom for all, then there is an increased likelihood that widening participation would become more of a priority.

It is not surprising that challenges are rebutted and the importance of alternative issues are emphasised by institutions and academics. As with most other organisations the defining characteristics of both appear to be survival and self-interest and the preservation of the status quo.

Chapter 4

Research Design

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain and justify the methods used and to discuss the parameters within which any claims to knowledge are made. The approach adopted is informed by the work of Ball (Bowe et al., 1992; Ball, 1994) and perceptions about the way that policy becomes understood and applied in a context. In an attempt to understand how the policy becomes interpreted and implemented, there is an acknowledgement that policy is not a given, but rather that it can be divided into two: that which enables the reader to act, and that which renders the reader obsolete (Bowe et al., 1992:10). These two are determined by, for example the context of influence, the context of policy text production and the context of practice. Ball (1994) suggests that these determinants do not act uniformly within an institution, that all members of the institution behave in the same manner to the policy, but rather that there are layers within the institution which have, to a greater or lesser extent, freedom to act. Ultimately interpretations of policy are:

'...the outcome of conflict and struggle between 'interests' in context.'

(Ball, 1994:21)

An outcome of this approach is that the 'responsibilities' of policy need to be explored more deeply. The focus shifts from the individual institution and its apparent failure to implement policy 'successfully', to that of all levels of the policy process. For example, it may shift to the government, and its role in the creation of dilemmas and contradictions which affect the policy.

Honey (1990) confirms this approach:

'Critical social research does not take the apparent social structure, social processes, or accepted history for granted. It asks how social systems really work, how ideology or history conceals the processes which oppress and control people.'

(Honey, 1990:6)

There is, at the heart of this research, a wish to understand how policy on widening participation has arrived at the outcomes that it has, for a particular institution at a particular time. As Ozga (2000) suggests, policy is:

'…a process rather than an output.'

(Ozga, 2000: 42)

Policy cannot be understood as a definitive statement of what takes place, but rather it is contested and transitory in its nature.

Planning the Research Design

The approach adopted is qualitative, in as much as the researcher is involved in interpretation, and there is a belief that the social world is not amenable to measurement and prediction. As such the justification for the approach is based on 'fitness for purpose', the selection of the most appropriate method(s) to gain the required data (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). The characteristics of the approach are centred on the importance of context. Context is the determinant of the observed, the parameters of the

claims to knowledge made, and evidence of the rigour of the research undertaken. For example descriptions of the context within which the research was undertaken acknowledges that the 'truth' is multifaceted, complex and hard to discern. To understand the context is to endeavour to ensure that these issues are to the fore, that the reader understands the specific instance within which the research was undertaken and can thus assess the 'trustworthiness' of the data. In addition the context acknowledges the role of the researcher and their interpretation of the data, as there is a belief that there are no consensual truths, and so interpretation necessarily takes place. Maxwell (1992) describes this as 'descriptive validity'.

The purpose of this study was to illuminate the factors which influence the interpretation and practice of widening participation within a higher education institution. The acknowledgement of context means that any claims to knowledge are made only for this Institution, and in particular the School within which the research was undertaken, and at the time the research was undertaken. Whilst the approach can be critiqued in relation to generalisability there are approaches which have been adopted to ensure rigour, for example a detailed description of the context (see Chapter 1), a clear audit of the methods used, and the selection of the sample. This enables the perceptions of widening participation to be considered from a range of angles, and in some respects allows those interpretations to be tested.

The context of the study is further narrowed by the assumption that, as discussed earlier, there will not necessarily be a consensus of understanding or approach either within a university or in a particular school within that university.

The research design was informed by the work of Pawson and Tilley (1997). My interest in their work was based upon their position that reality is not shared but complex: the notion that a program is embedded within a social system, and that such systems are active and open suggesting that at the system level there is constant change and infinite interpretations. The term 'program' can be understood as policies and strategies. This theory supports the ideas outlined in the Introduction that policy is not a given but is transformed:

'Programs are ideas. Ideas have their time and place. It is this conjunction that researchers must capture with the notion of context.'

(Pawson and Tilley, 1997: 71)

The authors suggest a theoretical approach which results in a context, mechanism and outcome pattern configuration model for a given program, leading to an enlightenment of 'why a program works for whom and in what circumstances' (Pawson and Tilley, 1997: xvi). They argue that the process begins and ends with a theory which allows this enlightenment. The initial theory is constructed through the identification of 'mechanisms', factors which influence the outcomes of the given program. The final theory is a refinement of the initial theory.

Theirs is an emerging theory and has been critiqued particularly with regard to their dislike of experimental methods (Farrington, 1998 and Julnes et al., 1998). There is also the dilemma, one which is struggled with in this piece of research, of ignoring and oversimplifying some contextual conditions, through the construction and testing of an initial theory, and then the ability to generalise the findings. Pawson (2002) states:

...there is always an implementation chain, running through policy makers, practitioners and subjects. There is always negotiation about the precise delivery of the intervention. There is always borrowing of programme theory from parallel initiatives. There is always the historical legacy of previous reforms.'

(Pawson, 2002:485)

The credibility of this approach therefore resides upon the notion that there is the possibility that a tool for wider critical purposes will be achieved and Pawson (2006) develops this idea further:

'...[a] process of thinking through the tortuous pathways along which a successful intervention has to travel...considerations that should inform those [policy community] decisions.'

(Pawson, 2006:170)

Using Pawson and Tilley's approach an initial background interview was undertaken in order to begin to identify both 'mechanisms' and the context to be used for the research. The background interview was undertaken with the Head of Widening Participation within the Institution, in order to uncover the relevant structures and also to decide upon a relevant context within the Institution. Initially discussions centred on policy, potentially concentrating the research upon an individual piece of legislation. However, focusing the research upon an individual piece of legislation was soon thought to be non-beneficial, as policy appeared to be evolutionary and complex, and so the parameters of the study would be too difficult to maintain. It was also considered whether students should be part of the study, to include their perceptions of meaning

and practice of widening participation within the institution. Again, though, the parameters of the study would become too large, contradicting the tenet of achievability of the research. In addition this appeared to be an area where there had already been a large amount of research. Ultimately the decision was made, on the basis of achievability and also with regard to the interests of the researcher, to concentrate upon the institutional interpretation of policy, and further, upon a single school within the University.

The Research Design

The School was selected on the basis of willingness to participate, but more importantly on it being a school with a strong reputation for action in this area. Therefore whilst any findings are particular to the School, they could be considered to reflect best practice within the Institution. Finally, the School is divided into postgraduate and undergraduate activities. As many of the policy statements referred to undergraduates and were associated with HEFCE funding, this area of the School's activities were concentrated upon.

The Sample

As stated above, there is an assumption that no one actor controls the policy or agenda of widening participation, nor are they necessarily controlling of others' actions with regard to the agenda. Rather, the approach to understanding and implementation is one of negotiation and evolution both within and outside of the institution. So, there is a need to understand those individuals or roles which may influence the interpretation and practice of widening participation (Appendix A: Roles of Respondents with Regard to Widening Participation). There is also a need to understand the structure(s) within which a university school operates in relation to the agenda. This approach to the

selection of the sample is informed by Pawson & Tilley (1997). The authors suggest that:

'...a program is its personnel, its place, its past and its prospects.'

<div align="right">(Pawson and Tilley, 1997:64)</div>

An understanding of the different 'layers' through which policy passes is therefore a fundamental issue in the selection of a sample.

The selection of those to be interviewed (Figure 2) was made as a result of the background interview. It was discussed at the beginning of every interview to confirm or deny its validity for the participant. The reality was that all agreed with the structure presented in as much as it was the most accurate description of what took place, although comments were made on its apparent hierarchical nature, for example what it meant to be below or above others in the hierarchy. However, it functioned as a means to identify those individuals or roles which, for this particular School, could be thought of as important to the research area.

Of the Steering group, only the Head of Widening Participation was interviewed. This was thought to be acceptable as she could relate what took place there; it would also assist the efficacy of the research process. The researcher was given no access to the Board of Governors; their role was likened, by the Vice Chancellor, to that of the Queen in 'rubber stamping' decisions. They were not seen as being proactive in designing and implementing School based policy.

Board of
Governors

Vice Chancellor
(VC)

Dean of Education
(DE)

Steering Group
Head of Widening Participation (HWP); Student Support Services; Graduate Careers Service

Dean of the Business
School
(DB)

Researcher Business
School (RB)

Teaching & Learning
Coordinator (TLC)

Head of
Undergraduate
Programmes (HUP)

Programme Leader
(PL)

Manager of Undergraduate Support
Services
(MUSS)

Figure 2. The Sample

(Abbreviations in the Figure identify those individuals interviewed.)

The Researcher in the Business School was on part-time secondment at the time the research took place, undertaking research of her own into the experiences of widening participation students within the School. It was felt useful to the research to include her within the sample.

The Teaching and Learning Coordinator role within the University is one which is used to disseminate university-wide strategies, priorities and good practice, and as such it was thought important to include this role within the sample. A single programme leader (Programme Leader) was included, again to explore a different level. Whilst there were other programme leaders who could have been included, they were not; the notion was to explore and illuminate not to arrive at a definitive view of what takes place. The individual concerned, however, was the leader of the largest undergraduate programme within the School, and incidentally had represented the School on widening participation committees prior to the establishment of the Teaching and Learning Coordinator.

Interviews

The decision was made to undertake semi-structured interviews as the means of collecting the data. This reflects the relatively small size of the sample and the wish to collect detailed or 'rich' data from each individual. It also acknowledges the assumptions that the interviewer may not be aware of what she does not know and the need to enable participants to discuss their interpretations of the agenda (Cohen et al., 2000). The belief that differing perceptions would be held about widening participation, meant that it would be important not to constrain the responses of participants.

Questionnaires would have led the respondents too much, through closed questioning, or may have been too vague. Thus responses may not have been forthcoming or tangential to the focus. The aim of the research was to understand the interpretations of widening participation and practice, and so a questionnaire, or a more formal interview structure with an agenda of questions which were not to be strayed from, would not allow the development of individuals' views. The interviewer did not wish to introduce the issue, to assume a shared understanding, by dictating the terms of reference:

'...the more one wishes to acquire unique, non-standardized, personalized information about how individuals view the world, the more one veers towards qualitative open-ended, unstructured interviewing.'

(Cohen et al., 2000: 270)

The research questions were constructed as a result of background reading (Alexiadou and Brock, 1999; McIlroy and Westwood, 1993; Thompson, 2000; Scott, 1995; and Thomas and Cooper, 2000), and the initial background interview with the Head of Widening Participation (Appendix B: Questions Used to Collect Data by Interview). At the same time using Pawson and Tilley's approach (1997) an attempt was made to elicit and formalise a programme theory to be tested, i.e. to create a 'variable book'. Whilst this was undertaken I became concerned about a number of issues. This approach appeared to contradict the justifications of using a semi-structured interview; it appeared to constrain the ability of the data and participants to speak; it appeared to place greater importance on the initial background interview in determining the theory to be tested via interviews; it appeared to be denying of the importance of the context; and finally it increased, in my view, my intervention in the interpretation of the data. The latter is especially cogent if as Pawson and Tilley (1997) argue:

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'…the researcher's theory is the subject matter of the interview and the interviewee is there to confirm or falsify and above all, to refine that theory.'

(Pawson and Tilley, 1997: 159)

My consequent unwillingness, as I construed it, to 'lead' the interview to test my theory may not be a significant departure from Pawson and Tilley's (1997). My research was relatively small scale, I was not undertaking a vast number of interviews which would make categorisation or constraining of data a more important issue in terms of achievability. I felt that I could afford to and should refine my theory whilst analysing the data, otherwise I would be ignoring important and emerging themes and contexts.

Pawson (2006) discusses the dilemma of time on evaluative research: evaluation taking place after the intervention has begun. In some respects I would argue that the issue of time is exacerbated by the initial construction of a theory; however the benefits of such, for example achievability of the research, are acknowledged. Thus my unwillingness to lead the interview to confirm my theory is to minimise the impact of time on my research as it has enabled the data to evolve the theory during the research. In many respects this does not deny the research methods adopted, as ultimately a new theory has been synthesised from the research, perhaps however in a different time span to that suggested. What is now required is further research or 'review', paying regard to what Pawson (2006) states as the 'open system predicament'.

The decision was made to ask the same questions of all participants, regardless of role. The rationale for this was the need not to prescribe responses through assumptions of understanding about the agenda. However it was acknowledged that some respondents

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may not be able to answer some questions, but it was felt important that the decision about whether this was the case remained with the respondent and not the interviewer. Asking the same questions to all was an attempt to minimize the interviewer's presuppositions. In addition the use of a semi structured interview meant that there was some flexibility to follow up points made by respondents and/or to marginally amend the focus of the interview. This approach has tensions: the comparability of responses; a fragmented rather than holistic approach; the need for the interviewer to ensure that the overall focus is maintained; and the role of the interviewer in determining and interpreting what is of importance. A strict time limit of 45 minutes was adhered to, in order to be sympathetic to and show consideration for the interviewees. This constrained the range of issues discussed, however the time limit was arrived at through a piloting of the questions, which showed that it was feasible to answer the questions in that time.

The questions were organised around a need to promote responses concerning:

- An understanding of responsibilities and importance

- An understanding of meaning and practice of widening participation

- An understanding of the motivators to address the agenda.

These were the initial 'known' presuppositions of the interviewer, concerning the issues. The interviewees, however, were never directly asked for their understandings of widening participation, as their perceptions of the issue are the crux of the research. It was important that the questions and interviewer did not prejudge the issue, nor constrain the respondents.

The identified individuals were initially contacted using the University email facility, given details of the duration of the interview, the reasons for it, the potential audience and the ethical approaches to be adopted. They were made aware that whilst anonymity was sought, an individual's identity might be evident by their role. Their agreement to participation and the recording of interviews was sought. Prior to starting the interviews, the questions were piloted and amended to ensure clarity. All the individuals approached agreed to take part in the research. Participants were offered sight of the questions prior to the interview but only two accepted the offer. The interviews were undertaken at a mutually convenient time and took place within a period of five months, during 2004. One participant, the Vice Chancellor, did not wish to have the interview recorded and so notes were taken. The reason for not wishing to be recorded was not discussed with the Vice Chancellor; it may have been due, however, to an unwillingness to go 'on record'. The perception may have been that the relative power and formality of recorded statements would have been greater than my notes.

Encompassing Diverse Views

Due to the range of roles of the participants, it was thought important to ensure that all participants were valued, and their understanding of the agenda acknowledged and empowered, through equal consideration by the interviewer. It was important that no respondent's contribution was thought of as more important than others, nor allowed to control the agenda of another's interview. Consequently the dissertation has not focused centrally on contrasting the hierarchical perceptions held of the agenda, and the intention is not to dwell upon them here, apart from their role in supporting the approach to sampling, in that there is no shared reality. Those interviewed did not share an interpretation of the meaning and practice of widening participation, and this is evident in the data chapters. Those in management positions tended to have a more

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holistic perspective, compared with those in non-management positions. However, to have collated them as such would have undermined the ethics of valuing individual participants' interpretations, and my belief in individual's differing realities and influence on the practice and interpretation of widening participation. Perspectives about whole university provision were sought from all respondents rather than from just those in management positions. The purpose was to uncover the reality for participants rather than describe and accept individual views as being the 'truth' for others. This was also the case for management views of what took place at programme level.

A key research principle was to value respondents contributions. A dilemma of this approach perhaps is the validity of the information provided by respondents. A remedy might have been to use documentary evidence as confirmation. However the Head of Undergraduate Programmes stated that no documentary evidence was kept. In addition, the use of documentary evidence as a means of validating what has been said is not appropriate. It cannot be used to deny or confirm as it may not have been constructed or 'owned' by the respondents; its use would have been as an alternative and possibly equal source of evidence.

Ultimately in analysing the data the position taken was to value all respondents' views as of equal worth; inclusion or exclusion of data was not decided by respondent but rather through the process of data analysis discussed later in this chapter. Contradictions between respondents of interpretation and practice were described as such; consensus was not sought nor denied. The process of organising the data chapters was not used as a framework within which only supportive data could be included.

Researching in One's Own Institution

The positionality or context of the researcher is of importance, perhaps more so when research is undertaken within one's own institution (Hull, 1985). The research was undertaken in a school within the University with which I had had no prior contact. I had been employed by the Institution for two years in a non-managerial role. Since a central tenet of the research was to raise data from differing perspectives, the subjectivity of the researcher was kept to the forefront at all times (see Data Analysis). Hull (1985) outlines some of the dilemmas of insider research suggesting that evidence could be supplemented by:

'...understandings of the situations I had built up over time and carried in my head. These comprised a black market record of events and on the spot interpretations.'

(Hull, 1985: 30)

The benefits of such research however may be access: the greater access afforded to a member of the organisation. However, research within one's own institution relates to issues of power. Whilst wishing to value and treat as equal worth individuals' opinions there is the issue of the relative powers of individuals to affect others i.e. whilst interpretations may be arrived at individually they may be to a greater or lesser extent influenced by the balance of power between individuals (Griffiths, 1998). My use of the University email facility will have identified me as a member of the University but my role will have been unknown; it could however have been sought by the potential respondents. Non-participation in research undertaken by a member of the same institution may be perceived as difficult. It may be associated with judgements about whether the non-participant is an enthusiastic and engaged member of the organisation.

Contrasted with this may be perceptions that the insider research may be potentially threatening, especially if the researcher appears to be a line manager. Whilst all individuals approached agreed to participate there are concerns regarding their perceived 'freedom' of choice to do so, and to 'speak'.

My employment in a different School and lack of managerial role alleviated some anxiety for some participants; others remained wary. An offer to read individual interview transcriptions was made, but in no case accepted. Some participants were concerned about the future purpose of the interview and their perceived inability to reflect the position of the University. I ensured that the participants understood the purpose of the research and also endeavoured to reassure them about the importance of their contribution. These 'reactions' to the interview were insightful with regard to the agenda, particularly ownership of it. They also reflected the issues surrounding research undertaken within the researcher's own institution: the need to ensure that participants understand the purpose of outcomes, and the notion of dual identities (the individual as employee and as researcher). These issues are of concern when data interpretation takes place, for example the presuppositions of the researcher, and in ensuring the legitimacy of participants' responses. In addition the issue of insider research went some way to confirm my emerging view that restricting the interview and analysis of the data to my initial theory would be to restrict the conclusions which emerged and to increase my intervention in the data collection and analysis. Pidock (2001) argues that this is a dilemma of such research; the alleged prior knowledge of the researcher making questions too directive in order to elicit relevant responses.

Ethics

Given the nature of the piece of work and the importance of individuals' perspectives, ethics were an important issue.

Regard was paid to the *Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (BERA, 2004). Informed voluntary consent was sought. The participants' rights to anonymity were outlined and issues in relation to the limitations of this were explained. As this is a case study and individuals have particular roles, which it is important to explore, proposed participants were informed that anonymity maybe weakened. This was a particular issue for this piece of research as the researcher was an employee of the Institution and also the nature of the interview process would perhaps involve participants presenting negative images of the Institution. It was also important therefore to outline the potential audience of the research.

Participants were offered sight of the transcribed interviews and also the right to refuse to answer questions, in an attempt to confirm the reliability of the data but also to ensure that anxieties were reduced in relation to the data to be used. At this time, the role of the researcher as an interpreter and additional variable in the context, would be evidenced and could be challenged by the participant.

All of the participants were adults and their consent was deemed to be sufficient, although the concerns stated above remained. There is within the research process the potential for 'abuse'. Participants were informed of the approximate length of time of the interview in order not to 'waste their time'. Attempts were made to represent all opinions rather than to assume that some were of more importance than others.

Questions were constructed to enable engagement to ensure that the contribution was valued and acknowledged.

Data Analysis

Transcriptions of the interviews were made; these did not contain any non-verbal communication as it was not the intent of the researcher to interpret these (Appendix C: Exemplar Interview Dean of Education 11/8/04). A dedicated computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software package, NVIVO (v.2), was used to assist in the interpretation of the data. The reason for the use of this software rather than manual coding was because the tools therein were thought to inform the process.

There are practical dilemmas of using the software, for example decontextualisation of sections coded and also of the isolated nature of the text being reviewed at any one time, as the limits are those of the monitor view. The software enables a number of reports to be created, for example by code, and also an over all view of the document(s) codes. One of the concerns here is to acknowledge that the software might, simplistically, enable a quantitative analysis of the number of 'hits'/node/interview(s). However it is questionable how meaningful this is, as the number of hits reflects the number of independent text extracts highlighted, i.e. prevalence, rather than necessarily the importance of the issue. In addition this might have more to do with the coding procedure than the interviewees' perspectives. More important than the number of 'hits'/code for analysis, was my interpretation of the importance of the data identified, in relation to the themes created. The role of the interviewees was not used to determine the importance of the response.

The coding procedure was initially started by using a manual coding process of a set of codes which had been created (Appendix D: 11/06/2005 Code Identification Reference Table: WP Research (Perspectives of Interviewees) #1 and Code Review Procedure). The validity of these codes was checked through the use of a third party.

This initial coding process raised issues concerning the degree of focus of the questions and the role of the interviewer; for example the interviewee is never directly asked what their understanding of widening participation is. Their understanding was illustrated through the interview and the subsequent selection of data by the researcher. The researcher's perspective therefore plays a central role. Attempts to overcome this included a review of the coding by interview transcript and also by code or node report (Appendix E: Exemplar Node Reports) and the use of a third party to ensure that similar material was being coded. The number of codes was also considered at this point, requiring a compromise between manageability and the identification of specific issues. The original number was amended as the coding process evolved.

The codes were then inputted into NVIVO and an initial coding of the data was undertaken. A meeting then took place with the third party to check and evaluate the use of the codes. From this meeting the codes were edited (Appendix F: Code Editing and 20/7/2005 Code Identification Reference Table: WP Research (Perspectives of Interviewees) #2).

There are always within the coding process concerns about interpretation and the false categorisation of data (Bathmaker, 2004). This is combated in part by the researcher being immersed in the data and also by the use of a third party to challenge decisions re coding, both of which took place.

Themes

Post coding, an attempt to theme the data was undertaken. A number of different themes with sub categories were created, all of which clearly identified specific codes and consequent data to each theme. What became apparent was that the specific allocation of codes to themes obscured and denied the emerging theme of the role of the academic. It also failed to recognise the structure of provision between the whole University and the School. The decision was made to construct the themes by using the codes but not being constrained by them. In reality this meant that the themes chosen use the same codes and that some codes have been reframed into alternative themes. For example codes which captured data concerning teaching and learning and the priorities of individual staff have been used to discuss perceptions of the role of the academic. In addition interview transcripts were reviewed again for any data which may not have been caught by the coding process but was deemed relevant.

There are limitations to attempts to codify themes, particularly when they emerge as part of the research process. It was felt that the themes and structures identified within the respondents' responses were more important than the original codes for collating the data and more deserving of holistic discussion. An example of this is the specific role of the academic which emerged when reviewing the data.

Table Three shows the themes that were created using a 'bottom up' or inductive process i.e. data driven. The themes were not created by fitting them into an existing coding frame but rather by my developing concerns and understanding of the issues presented by the data. The resultant themes are thus my interpretation of the important issues, in conjunction with reading of the literature.

Themes 1 and 2 are constructed through the data revealing the relative responsibilities for widening participation. The data clearly divides between understandings of whole university provision and the provision which does or does not take place at programme level within Schools. The latter two themes develop an understanding of what took place at University and School level by considering specific issues about the environment of higher education. It became apparent through data analysis that the issue of widening participation was both subsumed and interlinked with other issues for the university and academics. The latter two themes are my interpretation of the dominant themes which occurred in the data. Potentially my approach has involved intervention at the end of the data analysis process rather than at the beginning through the construction of a theory to be tested (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). This has enabled me to consider the data in a more open manner and potentially, given the complex nature of widening participation, construct a 'clearer picture'.

Figure 3: Thematic Analysis

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                    ┌─────────────────────┐
                    │  Interpretations and │
                    │   Practice of WP     │
                    │ within an Institution│
                    │  of Higher Education │
                    └─────────────────────┘
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1. University Interpretations and Practice	2. School Interpretations and Practice	3. Funding	4. Roles and Purposes of Higher Education
*Context *Govt. policy & WP provision *Individual Champions *Admissions and perspectives on university entrants *School's engagement with whole university provision	*Whole cohort approach *Retention and achievement *Challenges to academic practice *Recruitment	*Scarce Resources *Sources of *Funding *Commercial Culture of the School *Commercial Culture of the University *Alternative priorities *Defining the agenda *Recruitment and Selection	*Roles and Purpose of HE *Independence *Academic Practice *Relationship with Government *Origins of the University
RESPCOM; RESPSTRUC; DEFNACT; DEFNALL; DEFNSTUD; MOVVIS; MOVGOV; MOVPRIIND+VE; MOVCEN; MOVELOC-VE; MOVFINGOV	DEFNALL; DEFNSTUD; MOVT&L; INT; MOVSELECT; MOVPRILOC; MOVPRIIND; MOVLOC+VE; MOVFINGOV; FUTCON; MOVREC	MOVGOV; MOVFINLOC; MOVFINCEN; MOVFINGOV; MOVSMT; MOVPRIIND-VE; MOVPRO; MOVSUC; MOVREC; MOVSELECT	DEFN; MOVGOV; MOVHIST; MOVLOC+VE; MOVPRO; PURPHE; HEIENVIRO; HEI; MOVT&L; MOVPRIIND

All Codes both +ve and –ve versions, unless stated otherwise.

Conclusion

The piece of research has been constructed to uncover and illuminate the issues concerning widening participation for a given university school, within a higher education institution, at a particular time. The claim to knowledge is not that of representation or generalisability of the issues but rather of concepts or processes. A university in whatever context will experience pressures and constraints which affect its practice and interpretation of widening participation. These need not be identical; what is generalisable is the importance of research into the explanations of practice and interpretation; research that enables individuals to speak in their own voice, and acknowledges the absence of consensual understandings. The claim to knowledge is, therefore, that by this process a greater understanding of interpretation and practice may be achieved. The implication of this for others is derived from the clarity of the research process and context and thus the ability to compare, if thought appropriate. In the event this is not deemed appropriate by others then the research is justified on the basis that it can:

'...draw attention to and challenge taken for granted or dominant assumptions informing policy....explore how injustices and inequalities are produced.'

(Ozga, 2000:46)

The process is justified and important even if the conclusions are particular. There is a need to be accepting of individual contexts and understandings of concepts and practice, rather than to assume mutual understandings.

As discussed above, the belief or assumption upon which the research is founded is that reality is a contextualised construction; it is defined by time, place and the individual.

The acceptance of this assumption makes any other approach less meaningful for this

researcher.

Chapter 5

University Interpretations and Practice of Widening Participation.

Introduction

The concerns of this data chapter are interpretations, driven externally to the School, of what is meant by widening participation. For the School, it will be the University that give these. They are not the sole source of practice and meanings relating to widening participation and the next chapter will look at the School's home-grown interpretation.

For the School externally driven interpretations centre around outreach work, and it is these practices that tend to attract Government funding. These are organised centrally within the University, so that the auditing of criteria for accessing funding can be achieved more easily.

This chapter will explore the context and organisation of these activities and School perspectives and engagement with them, in order to understand the School's attitude and ownership of them.

The Context of Whole University Interpretations

The structure of whole University provision of the widening participation agenda is complex and ambiguous. This is partly as a result of constantly changing Governmental funding streams, and the ease with which funding can be accessed, but also the evolution of relationships with partner organisations. Funding streams and the responsibility for them ultimately determine the structure:

'The activities that we engage in as an institution essentially reflect the division that is in HEFCE's thinking and funding arrangements for it, which is between outreach on the one hand and retention and facilitating success on the other.'

(Dean of Education)

In addition the origins of the whole University provision appear to have been accidental, with responsibility being placed with the School of Education. This enabled the agenda to be organised and developed within a subject appropriate School. The Dean of Education recounts that the University was initially involved in a three year HEFCE project and thus had a head start on other Universities. However, the accessing of this initial pilot project, and subsequent developments, centres on the interest and enthusiasm of individuals, particularly the Head of Widening Participation. The role of the Head of Widening Participation in the engagement of the University with the agenda, is central and is recognised throughout the interviews, whereas other aspects of the organisation and provision are not necessarily known or understood. The focus and enthusiasm of this individual, directly and indirectly, has shaped the organisation and provision of widening participation. Interestingly, and supporting the notion of the accidental construction of the provision, a human resources issue meant that the activities were placed within the School of Education (Dean of Education). This lead to greater coherence, for example the framework for the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) funded Student Associate scheme was supported by this. It is these contingent developments that have informed the structure of the provision within the whole University, but it is also recognised as being initially prioritised due to the geographical location of the Institution:

'…also by the situation in the immediate region where [the City] in particular, but [the County], has lower than you would have predicted progression.'

<div align="right">(Dean of Education)</div>

Other contextual factors in the development of the provision were the changing pressures being faced by schools, to increase attainment, and to score well on value added indices of student performance and OFSTED inspections, leading to their engagement with activities.

The University therefore, for a variety of reasons, became engaged with widening participation activities which have funding streams attached. The ultimate driving force for this was a coincidence of contextual factors and the vision and enthusiasm of an individual. Neither suggests positively the importance of the agenda to the perceived remit of the University as a whole. Rather the suggestion is that it is a provision that has evolved through the enthusiasm of interested parties, and its survival has been related to the ability to access Governmental sources of funding.

The continued evolution of the whole provision has been influenced by changes to funding requirements and by the development of relationships with partners:

'I think as the years have progressed its probably the shape of what you do has changed, because those people, things, schools and colleges have become very well versed. So there may not be as many requests in terms of knowledge gathering, its more to do with sorts of events and things going on.'

<div align="right">(Programme Leader)</div>

It does not appear to be a strategy which is developed or created in a proactive way; rather it is reactive to external variables. Relevant statements within the University's *Strategic Plan 2004-2010* (Case Study University, 2004) add weight to this argument, as well as others discussed in the next section:

'In conjunction with Aim higher, [Case Study University] will therefore* continue to grow demand for higher education across the region, particularly by developing its continual presence model to raise aspirations and attainment in local primary and secondary schools and, in conjunction with the Learning Skills Council and further education partners, by formulating new strands of the Admission Compact Scheme for mature students and those on Advanced Modern apprenticeship route.

* in line with HEFCE's developing strategy'

(Case Study University, 2004)

There is however the role of certain individuals who do appear to be proactive and 'champions' of the cause. Necessarily, they work within resource and structural parameters.

Government Policy and Widening Participation Provision

The nature of the widening participation provision offered by the University is complex and obscure, as the concept itself is thought to be, and this is a shared belief by those interviewed.

The confusion surrounding the agenda is partly perceived as the responsibility of the Government. The Head of Widening Participation discusses the fact that funding and the agents and processes involved are transitory, and that much of her time is spent:

'...seeing how work can be integrated from the point of view of funding.'

(Head of Widening Participation)

The respondents also suggest that the Government is not clear in its statements about what it means. The Head of Widening Participation outlined the important changes to Government policy in this area, suggesting that the Government is not willing to fund more university places. Whilst there is some commitment to changing the social mix little is stated about disability or ethnic minority students. She also stated that monitoring requirements were diminished with a need for an Access Agreement, rather than a separate widening participation strategy.

The confusion of the agenda with mass participation, is also present throughout other interviews and the *Strategic Plan 2004-2010* (Case Study University, 2004), see above. The Dean of Education was particularly exercised by the changes to funding associated with student numbers:

'Then they [HEFCE] say we will fund additional numbers, and this is where you've got an absolute nonsense here in widening participation terms, if widening participation means totally increasing numbers, because they've only given additional student numbers in the last two or three years...'

(Dean of Education)

The Dean of Education appears more willing to define widening participation as 'growing student numbers.' He suggested that, in fact, with participation rates rising this would inevitably mean the inclusion of more students from non-traditional backgrounds.

The University does not have a specific policy relating to widening participation because they have not been required to write one by HEFCE, but also because of the complexity of what is meant by widening participation. It is argued by those interviewed that the structure for provision is one which spans a range of activities some of which are known and others which are not known nor are sought. The latter are those activities that take place at course level. It is recognised that the University needs a more standardised approach, not to the activities, but to the planning processes which Schools use to determine practice. This reflects the voluntary nature of engagement with the agenda and is considered later in this Chapter. There is a real feeling that this agenda is too ambiguous and also too diverse to be able to capture it within a policy document. Perhaps there is also a notion that, at present, current practice is sufficient to meet HEFCE requirements and thus a more detailed and rigorous approach is not required. Nor perhaps is it deemed to be sufficiently important to attempt to construct such a policy.

The role of Government policy, and more particularly funding as a means of identifying widening participation and establishing provision, is important and is developed in Chapter 7.

Individual Champions

At a whole University level the perspective is that:

'...in terms of formulation of widening participation policy it really depends what we are talking about to do with widening participation, because clearly there are things that happen almost at the level of individual courses sometimes for visionary reasons and sometimes for pragmatic reasons because there is trouble in recruitment. And it's silly to pretend otherwise. The extent to which the thing is driven at course level or within school level or so on, will depend to some degree on the personal commitments of individuals in those key positions.'

(Dean of Education)

As noted above, there is a dependency upon individuals to construct and operationalise the activities; it cannot be assumed that they would take place otherwise:

'You've got particular courses where the course leader is probably more of a champion of that, than other course leaders. That to me is something that I'm quite happy to allow to evolve and emerge rather than saying 'well should all course leaders have the same kind of mindset, in terms of their approach to recruitment.'

(Dean of the Business School)

This view is further developed by the Head of Undergraduate Programmes who suggests that:

'It won't work unless it is a collective thing and the nature of this organisation is such that if I did try to dictate something which nobody else could see the point of then I'd get nowhere.'

The suggestion seems to be that this is not an agenda which is prioritised by the majority of staff, and that to push it forward regardless would be self defeating within the culture of the Institution.

This pragmatic approach to the development of widening participation by the Dean of the School echoes that of the Dean of Education who is responsible for the whole University approach. The justification for this individualised course approach is that:

> 'The way that's done ought to reflect the kind of nature of the cohorts that they recruit.'

> (Dean of Education)

This approach relates mostly to issues surrounding achievement, progression and retention. This was an area which had a more centralised, whole university, provision in the past. However:

> 'It was incredibly expensive for the amount of usage, because the people there, if you have a drop in system, often these people are sitting there with nobody there, nobody coming to see them.'

> (Dean of Education)

It is wrong to suggest that funding stopped this approach; rather that cost benefit analysis suggested that the approach did not appear to be efficient. Had this been an area

which needed to be monitored and reported upon, then a centralised approach may have been continued in order for that to take place more visibly and the funding accessed.

Admissions and the University Entrant

The confusion or willingness to associate the agenda with mass or growing participation, discussed earlier, appears to be on more than one level, and affects the interpretation of what is meant by the agenda, and how it is to be engaged with. For example, the University continue to recruit individuals who have the same entry requirements as in the past. The agenda will not alter this. The School was asked, at one point, to reduce its entry requirements in one year, in order to raise recruitment, and as the Manager of Undergraduate Support Services states:

'...those students who we took with the 10, 12, 14 A' level points, was that there was a higher failure rate at the end of the year. A lot more of those were referred than the students who came in with the 16, 18 A' level points. So therefore we knew that we should never go below a certain threshold.'

(Manager of Undergraduate Support Services)

This perception of a university entrant, or who is eligible as such, is also supported by the University's Admissions Compact Scheme. The Scheme began in 1997, as a result of the Government's aim to widen participation. It aims to encourage local students, from certain socio-economic backgrounds, to gain a place at the University. Those applying through this route receive free pre-entry advice and guidance, and a guaranteed standard offer. The Dean of Education describes the concerns of others when this was first muted at a senior management level:

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'I remember a meeting at the then Executive Board where one Dean was arguing that they needed for particular courses to attract the very best students, so they didn't want the Compact, any Compact students. And we had a very robust discussion that if we were running a Compact scheme that it would be across the whole of the University.'

(Dean of Education)

The quote illustrates the view that Compact students are perceived as being of lower quality than other applicants, even though for this University their entry criteria is identical to all other applicants. It also suggests that the issue of admissions is one which is particularly important to Schools, and that their right to determine applicant eligibility should be theirs and theirs alone. For this Dean the admission criteria remained an academic decision, and this is supported within the School researched (Manager of Undergraduate Support Services, quoted above).

The explanations for the admissions offer made to Compact students raises issues surrounding approaches to widening participation from the perspective of anonymity:

'There's a sense that once they are in to the University, they don't want to be identified as having special characteristics.'

(Programme Leader)

However the Dean of Education also suggests that:

'National evidence is that actually the best predictor of retention is entry qualifications. So I'm not sure you are doing anybody any favours by dropping the entry requirements.'

(Dean of Education)

Whilst this argument makes common sense it also reflects the principle that the University is not necessarily going to support non-traditional students in any way different from any other student.

This view of the agenda is supported and developed into perspectives concerning its future:

'Is widening participation a function of the failure of secondary education, I believe that it is. There is a need to raise achievement and to consider the process.'

(Vice Chancellor)

This view also ties into perceptions of what is meant by higher education and this is discussed in Chapter 8.

The meaning then of widening participation at the University level is complex. It is a function of the role of individuals, Government requirements, beliefs about the purposes of higher education and the ambiguity of the concept itself. Ultimately what this means is that no one variable determines engagement with and the practice of the agenda. This is illustrated in comments made in the interviews concerning the relationship with funding:

'When you say do we just do it to get finance, the things we're doing with that money are worth doing... That doesn't mean that we would be able to do what we are doing now if they switched off some of that funding.'

(Dean of Education)

There does not though appear to be an ownership of the agenda, or rather, a belief that the agenda sits easily within perspectives of the remit of the University. The dilemma of this is that the agenda may not be embedded, but constructed within parameters which are externally driven, rather than philosophically or from a justice perspective. The agenda does not appear to be of sufficient intrinsic 'value' to survive independent of these external factors.

'I think the answer is 'yes', I think it does matter as to what is driving it but I'm equally open to the view that an organisation can be a little schizophrenic in this. It can respond to all things, in terms of its actions and its words. But actually squaring the actions and the words can be quite difficult.'

(Dean of the Business School)

The School's Engagement with Whole University Provision

This section explores the School's engagement with whole University initiatives. The School is seen as being 'really forward on this' (Head of Widening Participation) therefore their engagement can be thought of as one of the strongest within the University.

The stated belief of the respondents is that the University is driving the agenda and that there is no particular School agenda:

'We are not as far as I'm aware taking any initiatives on our own, outside of the wider University agenda.'

(Head of Undergraduate Programmes)

This comment also raises a side issue within the School, of staff knowledge and understanding of what is taking place, and this in some ways echoes what takes place at a whole University level. The role of individuals or 'champions' remains central to School engagement with whole University activities, and has the consequence of possibly restricting knowledge by others of what is taking place:

'I recognise that some of that weakness [developing strategies at an individual level] is my error, in that I have gone forward with running it how I've run it. But that does mean that we don't have a clear... if somebody was to come in and audit and say what events have you done I haven't got a clear thing saying well these are the things that we have been involved in.'

(Programme Leader)

This self-deprecation however ignores issues of whether others would engage with these whole University initiatives. The evidence suggests that engagement is low from others and the Programme Leader suggests a number of reasons for this: work load (teaching and research); not influential to career progression; and easier to do it yourself. The result is that staff engagement with widening participation activities is perceived as being dependent upon:

'...people ... believ[ing] that there is good in doing it, or it just won't get done. Which is why it is often a small pond that you're fishing in.'

<div align="right">(Programme Leader)</div>

The Head of Widening Participation in a poignant response also echoes this:

'Never [been] pinned to peoples' hearts...it's about chipping away... repetition.'

<div align="right">(Head of Widening Participation)</div>

Key figures within the sample support the limited engagement with whole University initiatives. Both the Teaching and Learning Coordinator and the Head of Undergraduate Programmes are unclear about whole University responsibilities for the agenda, the amount of monies spent on widening participation activities, and whether the School itself contributes toward any such activities. Other evidence of an absence of a whole School approach to University provision is the recording and auditing of activities:

'No, its probably not officially documented in terms of...I suppose the closest we would come to documentation is if we have notes that come out of the Undergraduate Management Group...But sometimes it would just happen that if a Family Supper was to fall between two meetings ...so certainly wouldn't be a full log of the sorts of things that we do, or the sort of activities that we do.'

<div align="right">(Programme Leader)</div>

The Family Suppers are organised by the Partnerships for Progression team within the University and aim to let young people and their parents/carers know what higher education involves. These evenings allow the whole family to find out as much as possible about the benefits and costs of staying on in education and discover how and why students go on to study at university. Childcare facilities are provided to encourage families with young children to attend.

The Head of Undergraduate Programmes notes that this absence of official documentation is in direct contrast to the agenda for international students, which is widely documented and clearly structured both within the School and the University.

Other than for the 'champions', there are multitudinous alternative priorities and limited resources. This means that independent sources of finance are required to action activities. As for the nature of the activities actioned by available University funding, there appears to be an ad hoc approach. In one year, activities that were already taking place were used to claim external funding. In the next year the Researcher in the Business School was contracted to undertake research into Widening Participation within the School, but from the perspective of student experience and inclusive of international students. There are then similar attitudes to the whole University approach: of confusion surrounding what is meant by the concept; the inclusion of international students; and also a reactive rather than proactive approach. The latter point is illustrated by the example given below:

> 'So her [Researcher in the Business School] post which is just ending, is a short-term secondment on widening participation which was specifically activated by the sudden discovery that money was available from the Centre for a short-term,

one year project. About £23/24 000 which we needed to find some way of spending, basically. It wasn't clear until this time last year; it was as close as that, there was money available for 03/04.'

(Teaching and Learning Coordinator)

This illuminates the nature of the responses made but also shows the ambiguity and muddled approach of Government, assuming that the Centre reacts quickly to central Government funding.

The School as a whole are clear about their role, which is to react to requests, and the Programme Leader, a 'champion', stated that she would refer any requests made directly to her, to the Centre. Their meeting of requests is explained through the approach that the Centre takes to Schools. Initially the Centre asked Schools what they wished to do, as part of this agenda; however the Head of Widening Participation and the Head of Undergraduate Programmes state that this was unsuccessful. They now bring a 'menu' of activities to Schools, which Schools can choose to opt into or out of. The structure used in informing the Schools of requests is unclear. Originally, there were widening participation representatives within each School, likely to be the 'champions'; this has been superseded by the Teaching and Learning Coordinator role. However, for this School the representative [Programme Leader] is more knowledgeable of what is taking place than the Teaching and Learning Coordinator. Again regardless of structure, the role of the individual remains central to engagement with whole University activities in this area.

The attitude of the Centre to Schools' engagement is also referred to:

'I think it has been handled carefully and sensitively. I think the people who've

been tasked with working with the Schools, faculties as they were, have

probably done a good job in showing it to be important and that it could work

and to be fair not dumping on us in the sense of saying 'Well, yes this is an

agenda you've got to do it, you've got to organise it, get on with it.'

(Head of Undergraduate Programmes)

It would appear that the Centre has acknowledged how best to operationalise activities

rather than pushing them through and this is supported by the Dean of the School:

'Interviewer: In some respects that also reflects the degree of centrality or

importance of the agenda, doesn't it? The fact that it is evolving naturally rather

than being pushed or forced...

Dean of the Business School: Yes, definitely. There's no push and force.'

(Dean of the Business School)

Conclusion

The whole University has introduced a raft of activities which are mainly concentrated

upon outreach work. It is acknowledged that these have occurred because of the vision

of an individual, and other contextual factors, for example the geographical location of

the Institution. It is therefore seen to be addressing HEFCE requirements; however this

is in a reactive rather than proactive manner. The types of activities developed are

associated with work outside of the University, hence outreach, rather than changing

practices within. This informs understandings of where the agenda is seen to lie by the

University, and perhaps also by the Government, as funding criteria will be used to

identify 'good practice'. This is further supported by the idea that specific Programmes

are voluntarily left to develop their own responses if they so choose. Schools are also left to engage with the Centre's activities, although sufficient disengagement might lead to a whole University push to do so. Ultimately, the approach is seen to be one with which it is possible to engage as a School, and also reflects the degree of importance given to it by the School. In the event more 'push' was forthcoming from the Centre:

> 'We would have taken umbrage at that and thought well we're not dealing with this, we'll comply, we'll do whatever we have to do without attracting undue attention to ourselves.'
>
> (Head of Undergraduate Programmes)

There appears to be little internal creativity except that pursued by individuals, and as has already been recognised, they are constrained by resources and the School's attitude.

Chapter 6

School Interpretations and Practice of Widening Participation.

Introduction

This data chapter reviews the internally derived understanding and application of widening participation. Unlike the previous chapter the understandings exhibited by the respondents are not given by the whole University but are home-grown. In many respects they are a product of the perceived context within which the School operates, and reflect the priorities of the School in that context. The approach is seen as one of adaptation and melding of 'domestic' School concerns or priorities with their interpretation of widening participation. Perhaps more precisely the interpretation can be seen to be a redefining of their present activities, a reframing of what they are already doing, to address their perceptions of what the agenda is. There are two themes: recruitment; and retention and achievement. These are melded into a whole student cohort approach which does not perceive widening participation as different from the concerns of, and support required for all students. This approach is supported by staff concerns and beliefs about their roles. There are notions that these interpretations of the agenda are the ones which enable all staff to engage with it. Further explanation of the School's interpretation of widening participation is entirely based upon the 'freedoms' left by the whole University as to the School's approach, which in part reflect the 'freedoms' left by the Government in its policy towards the University.

A Whole Cohort Approach

The approach of the School supports the interpretation of the agenda by the respondents; the School is described as being renowned for its 'student centeredness':

'...I think that would extend to widening participation, in the sense that we would try hard to address the needs of all our students and therefore widening participation students would just be an extension of that culture.'

(Teaching and Learning Coordinator)

This is further developed by the concerns of the School as identified by the respondents:

'We are enthusiastic about bringing people in from different backgrounds and particularly local people and giving them opportunities.'

(Dean of the Business School)

'I think that we are concerned that there's a diverse range of students on all of our programmes.'

(Manager of Undergraduate Support Services)

The two quotes above are from the Dean and an administrator suggesting a shared view of this perspective of the School. There is therefore a vague or loosely held idea of what is meant by widening participation, particularly focussed here not on activities, but on the characteristics of students.

The activities undertaken are those that support all students once they are within the School. This reflects the priorities of the School and the changing context within which it operates. The notion that these activities would take place anyway is supported by the 'anonymity' of the students and their circumstances:

'I guess if you found a member of staff and pointed out to them, did you realise little Jimmy, in the corner, is the first one in his family to go to university and came from a really difficult part of [this City] or something and yet is doing actually quite well, the tutor would probably say 'oh really', without realising. I think that is quite positive.'

(Head of Undergraduate Programmes)

This in part echoes the discussion earlier (Chapter 5) about Compact students. However there is a hidden agenda to this view of 'equal opportunities' derived from anonymity, and that is the role of the School and particularly its role once the students enter its domain:

'Clearly there are egalitarian motives behind widening participation and I guess those, rather like motherhood and apple pie we can't deny, I don't think we can or at least I don't think we should deny, the possibility of opening our doors to people **who are able to succeed*** whatever their background, whatever their culture, whether or not they have ever had a family member go to university.'

(Head of Undergraduate Programmes)

(* author's emphasis)

There is a belief that students are eligible to come to university if they possess the necessary characteristics and skills. These are not, in the main, developed or created at university.

The theme that, once students enter the University they are all treated the same, will be returned to. It is echoed in discussions about international students, although these

students have a separate clique of administrators associated with them, perhaps linked to the funding associated with their recruitment.

The role of international students is important to this debate from a number of perspectives. Firstly, they are incorporated into definitions of widening participation for the School and this links to the perception of the agenda being the development of a diverse student population. Secondly, they are a reflection of the priorities or context within which the School operates. The Dean of the Business School links both of these themes:

> 'It's inevitable the way government policy is going in the UK, and the way this University is going in terms of broadening its international profile, that widening participation, in a non formal sense, is a bigger agenda than the actual formal policies and initiatives...'

> (Dean of the Business School)

The interpretation of widening participation by the School is therefore associated with a mutually beneficial approach of, where possible, addressing alternative priorities at the same time. From this perspective the role of widening participation is one that is being reacted to rather than a proactive stance being taken. This can be seen through the alternative priorities of the School, with which widening participation is associated, and a redefining of widening participation to accommodate these alternative priorities.

Retention and Achievement

The context within which the University exists sets the agenda. This will be discussed in the funding chapter (Chapter 7) and will be revisited in Chapter 8 on the role and

purposes of higher education. Here, that agenda is adopted at a micro level in relation to the School. With all agendas there are freedoms and parameters set, but here there are also overarching pressures on the School: 'success', and survival, both of which are determined by whole University objectives, for example retention figures. Within this framework there are also staff priorities; these at times clash and solutions are created out of compromise and alternative approaches to given agendas. What is clear is that the School perceive that they have an initiative overload, and thus prioritising takes place. The process of prioritising will be discussed in Chapter 7, with reference to the use of cost benefit analysis to determine the efficacy of pursuing an agenda. The outcome is that for this School, at this time, widening participation is not as important as other agendas, but at times can be melded with them. As cited above, the importance of retention and achievement for the School is seen to incorporate the widening participation agenda. Retention needs to be audited by the whole University and is part of HEFCE's evaluation of University performance. It is therefore unsurprising that this is also important to the School:

> 'Retention is a different thing altogether, and the Business school is paying quite a lot of attention to its retention statistics and reasons why retention might not be as good as we want it to be...I prefer to call it...student performance or student achievement. So if student achievement is not great, is that because we are opening our doors to other sorts of students?'

> (Teaching and Learning Coordinator)

This statement ties into notions about the responsibility for the development of students' skills and that it is not necessarily the responsibility of the School. The Teaching and Learning Coordinator discusses in his interview that student support would be addressed

as a whole University, rather than a School issue. It is also an example of the widening participation agenda becoming important for less direct reasons, such as the impact it might have on the 'success' of the School.

Challenges to Academic Practice

This prioritising of agendas by how they challenge the operation of the School is reflected in the role of international students. They are prioritised as a source of funding but also because they create challenges in the classroom to staff, retention and achievement. Those challenges are more identifiable with this category of students; they are more 'visible', and thus prioritised:

> 'There is a much bigger agenda item in this arena, which is about international students. That's much more in your face so to speak because staff members …Imagine a staff member walking into a classroom, and on the Monday have got widening participation [students] in there; he might not even know that. Why would you know? They don't look different do they? But on the Tuesday class it's full of international students you'll know that for sure, because of the language, the appearance. And that international student challenge is much more up the agenda for us because it's very much something which is being confronted on a daily basis by staff members.'
>
> (Teaching and Learning Coordinator)

This notion of challenges to staff, in terms of the 'success' of their practice, is one that raises widening participation up the School agenda, as well. The Teaching and Learning Coordinator illustrates this:

'If we had evidence to say that we had 'x' percent of widening participation students and they were all failing, we knew that for sure, then suddenly it would come up the agenda wouldn't it? It'd be a big deal.'

(Teaching and Learning Coordinator)

It would appear that there are no intrinsic concerns about the student. Although this may seem to be a harsh statement, there is no additional intrinsic concern about non-traditional students. They do become of concern, as all students would, if they are deemed to be failing. The more holistic agenda of performance indicators and the purpose of higher education come into play here, as the alternative priorities. The role of the School is to recruit students who are able to succeed within the School's environment. This is supported as an important issue through the research undertaken by the Manager of Undergraduate Support Services in tracking a cohort of students who had been granted entry onto programmes with a lower than normal entry offer:

'Well, the main reason we started to do it was because that academic year we took an influx of students with below our entry criteria, because at clearing we were told to take a lot more students…it wasn't just for Compact students but we just thought whilst we had got this huge spreadsheet…we could add in those students who came through the Compact scheme.'

(Manager of Undergraduate Support Services)

The tracking was instigated by a concern about 'success'. The afterthought of identifying Compact students suggests that student backgrounds are not of concern, but rather the ability to succeed with recruited students is.

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The Teaching and Learning Coordinator develops this further in his discussion:

'...we have recognised that the needs of our students are increasing, partly because of widening participation and because of other things as well...'

(Teaching and Learning Coordinator)

Whilst there appears to be a view that non-traditional students are 'invisible', they become prioritised as a partial explanation for the need for greater student support. Non-traditional students therefore become prioritised when they challenge staff, in terms of their success rates and practices. They appear to have a spectral quality, as staff don't know who or where they are but know of them, and have consequent beliefs about their role in what is taking place within the School. This is summed up by the Dean of the Business School:

'Dealing with a widening participation agenda on a relatively small scale, is one agenda. Dealing with a widening participation agenda on a big scale, that is something really core to your business, represents a whole different kind of agenda.'

(Dean of the Business School)

There is then a notion that on a grander scale there would need to be changes to staff practices, and that the environment of the School would need to change in order to support and enable achievement by these students. Interestingly the School does not offer lower entry criteria to any category of students, yet there appears to be a perception that a more 'diverse' student body would change the shape of what is taking place. Perhaps this also relates to the ethos of the School rather than just the practices.

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Staff perceptions of their role within the context of higher education support the notion of not treating what might be classed as widening participation students any differently to their other students, but also support the notion of 'success' being important:

> 'The basis of all admission it seems to me, is the applicant capable of succeeding and do they have the ability, the willingness whatever to succeed on a higher education programme?...If a candidate doesn't have the ability or the enthusiasm or the willingness then they oughtn't to be here, they didn't ought to be wasting our time teaching.'
>
> (Head of Undergraduate Programmes)

This is also further reinforced by the notion that few if any changes have been made to the teaching and learning practices of staff:

> 'I don't see much evidence of teaching practices being altered or changed because we sense we are addressing a more diverse group of students.'
>
> (Teaching and Learning Coordinator)

As the Teaching and Learning Coordinator for the School, his statements are weightier since part of his role is to audit and develop new practices within the School. Retention and achievement are an important priority for the School within the parameters of staff practice. At present, there appears to be no priority placed on changing that practice to facilitate learning by a more diverse student body, rather that entry criteria need to be changed if there is a problem.

Recruitment

The importance of recruitment relates to issues of success being a priority for the School, but also to perspectives concerning the role of higher education. Recruitment is important to the School as it affects its survival; it is an important element of the University's performance indicators, and also impacts on funding. The link to widening participation is that the agenda will again be prioritised as mutually beneficial if recruitment is an issue for the School:

> 'I think the whole recruitment [agenda is changing], and to an extent obviously widening participation is part of that recruitment. That's only part of the agenda of course. I would say it would have been tackled as a recruitment issue rather than as a widening participation issue.'
>
> (Dean of the Business School)

The view here is that this would be the perspective for the School and also for the University. This is supported by the Dean of Education, who suggests that for some institutions the agenda will be much more important if they are not strong recruiters, whereas for other institutions it need not be part of their agenda as they are selecting institutions.

> 'I view that [pursuit of self interest] as fairly pragmatic actually...there are some places that just have to be more alert to, if you like, to their markets...If you're Luton it would be stupid not to have a very clear commitment to widening participation.'
>
> (Dean of Education)

For this Institution the agenda is of some importance because of its geographical position and the poor progression statistics of the inhabitants of that geographical location.

The School is not clear as to whether they are selectors or recruiters; respondents hold different views. What is clear is that if the School perceives itself as being a recruiter then widening participation will become more important:

'It's back to this thing again we are a lucky faculty. We are a good faculty, I think. We've got a good history, so we don't have to chase students. So what's the problem?'

(Teaching and Learning Coordinator)

'It could be in your research you may well find Schools for whom widening participation is more prominent partly because they are struggling to get student numbers. In other words it becomes a crude...it could well be, well we need the students and we are going to bust a gut to get the students anywhere we can.'

(Head of Undergraduate Programmes)

The view appears to be that the agenda will become prioritised when it becomes associated with the need to recruit; recruitment however of those willing and able to succeed. The sentiment is again that the agenda is not a priority and will only become one when it supports or negatively affects another priority, in this instance recruitment but in others, retention.

Conclusion

There appears to be a secondary or derived engagement with the widening participation agenda, which is retrospective: that which is made to fit what is already taking place rather than being operationalised to address the agenda. The links to other priorities within the School turn upon retention and achievement, linked to 'success' performance indicators, and recruitment and funding. There is no long-term view taken; rather the external context of the School appears to affect its engagement with the agenda. There are champions who are prioritising this issue above others, but these are the minority and nor are they seen to be role models for other members of staff. Finally there does not appear to be a positive engagement.

It would seem that I have discussed a politically sensitive area with those interviewed, and they are making what they do fit that agenda and justifying their approach on the hoof, in the main:

> '...I suspect it's not something that anybody would be foolish enough to say, "well we ought not to be spending money on this or wasting our time doing it".'
>
> (Head of Undergraduate Programmes)

Explanations for this are the initiative overload that the School feels itself to be experiencing and the competitive context within which higher education takes place. There is also an undercurrent that this is not the role of Universities or academics, particularly if they are able to recruit and retain sufficient numbers to survive. The context of higher education is the focus of Chapter 8.

Chapter 7

Funding

Introduction

From examination of the data, the role of funding would appear to be fundamental to engagement with the agenda of widening participation. However the relationship is complex and ambiguous. The relationship is not purely one of funding determining action, rather there is a base level at which funding operates, that of determining the success and longevity of the School and University, and thus the issue of funding is more holistic. The University and School are motivated by funding but not necessarily the funding associated with the widening participation agenda, and thus other sources and variables affecting funding impinge upon the agenda, for example international students. This chapter will analyse the role of funding, both specifically and generally, and explore its relationship with the agenda.

The perceptions of the respondents with regard to funding are based upon the importance of the Government as a source. This is not to suggest that the Government is central to the role and purpose of the Institution over and above the need for funding. What it does mean is that, for this particular University, the Government is central to its financial security and thus the Government has a lever to affect what the University does, through its distribution of funding. The respondents discuss funding from a number of perspectives, for example funding specifically associated with the widening participation agenda, although this is difficult to discern due to the mechanisms for its distribution both internally and externally to the University. Student numbers are also deemed to be important for funding, and for engagement with the agenda. The nature of

the student cohort, for example international students, also reflects alternative funding priorities.

Scarce Resources

The School and University are perceived to be in a situation of scarce resources and reliant upon central Government funding. Fundamentally therefore without more funding and specifically directed funding for the agenda, then engagement would not take place. However intertwined within this is a notion of what the priorities and agendas are for the School and the University. Monies would need to be taken from other areas to increase engagement with the agenda and this would not necessarily be acceptable, as it is perceived that there is insufficient funding elsewhere; the 'elsewhere' is of a greater priority:

'...you've either got to take them [resources] from somewhere else, which means you're taking them from some other purpose and I don't think...its difficult to identify areas we think are over funded.'

(Dean of Education)

The sentiment of insufficient resources and alternative priorities is also discussed at the School level:

'We haven't got the resources to do it, we have always felt ourselves to be at the back end of the queue, in terms of getting resources out of the centre [the University]. We haven't got time to worry about this.'

(Teaching and Learning Coordinator)

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There are also issues about the 'misuse of funds' (Dean of Education), if there were

excess funds elsewhere. However this is described hypothetically, as the general belief

is that there are no available funds but also that some funding is ring fenced, having a

specific purpose.

Sources of Funding

The role of the Government in directing funding to specific purposes is core to the

University's engagement with the widening participation agenda, and any agenda, as

HEFCE is seen to be central to the University's financial well-being:

> '... [we] have no choice but to work within the Government's policy, because
>
> that's actually what shapes HEFCE's funding arrangements, and widening
>
> participation has been an absolutely key plank.'
>
> (Dean of Education)

The importance of Government funding to the Institution, and the consequent

restrictions, has been identified in the *Strategic Plan 2004- 2010* (Case Study

University, 2004). The aspirations contained in the Plan are to generate more

independent funding:

> 'The higher education sector is dominated by government funding and control.
>
> As government funding has shrunk the level of control has increased. In order to
>
> fuel our ambition and to create an innovative and inspiring culture, we need to
>
> earn the freedom to implement change…This will enable us to invest in teaching
>
> programmes, to attract leading research teams, and to nurture and support new

research talent. These are all critical to the continuing development of the University.'

(Case Study University, 2004)

The *Strategic Plan* 2004-2010 (Case Study University, 2004) appears to outline the issues with regard to funding: a) there is insufficient and b) it is controlling and restrictive, if the sole source is the Government.

This was also referred to as being important at School level:

'...[if] we were really concerned about the long term survival of the University and we were looking well what are we going to do. OK third stream income is ok for the likes of the Law School and the Business School, we can do that, and are doing it already. We can increase it to 50% but that's not the whole University. That's when initiatives concerned with getting new sorts of students in, starts to become much more prominent.'

(Head of Undergraduate Programmes)

There are contradictions within the data concerning the need for funding in order to engage. Both at University and School level, the respondents suggested that non-specific sources of finance were also being used, their own money as well as ring fenced Government funds. This also reflects the reinterpretation of the agenda, in that independent funding may be used when the agenda is defined as a whole cohort issue of, for example student support and recruitment:

'I know for a fact in terms of some of the things that go on around recruitment and bringing students to our programmes, some of those initiatives are led by

staff where we're resourcing that agenda of which there might be a widening

participation spin off as it were…that are not actually explicitly funded by the

university.'

<div align="right">(Dean of the Business School)</div>

However it is also acknowledged that if independent funds are used at School level then

they are likely to be an inconsequential amount. Those respondents in managerial posts

explained that they did not know how much is spent (Head of Undergraduate

Programmes) nor does any financial planning take place with regard to the widening

participation agenda (Dean of the Business School).

The Vice Chancellor also supported the notion that the University is spending a

proportion of its third stream income on the agenda, but he identified the major tranche

of money as central Government sourced.

The role of funding then, is central to the preservation of the University and for this

University the major source is governmental. Without funding or a sufficiently buoyant

financial position then it is unlikely that engagement would take place. Even then there

appears to be an evaluation of the costs and benefits of the initiative which impacts

upon the importance of funding as a motivator to engage.

The Commercial Culture of the School

The School researched is a Business School and thus it could be thought that they are

more likely to adopt a financial framework to decision making, and this is supported:

'So all the decisions we take are corporate ones and all of the decisions we take have an eye on the revenue, the income stream and resourcing side of things.'

<div align="right">(Head of Undergraduate Programmes)</div>

The process of evaluating new initiatives from the University is an example of this approach:

'If you're running something as a business, then you have to... And in that context, when initiatives come along, the way the Business School would look at something would be I suppose, again this is a bit of a personal point of view on the way that the School executive works, but we look at a an initiative from the point of view of, well do we have to do it? Is it a good idea? What are the revenue and cost implications of it etc?'

<div align="right">(Head of Undergraduate Programmes)</div>

The commercial culture of the School appears to be experienced at a decision-making level, as well as at a subject discipline level. It is suggested, however, that this approach may not be the same for all members of staff, and possibly reflects the role and responsibilities of their position:

'My personal culture is one of looking at the whole thing and looking at the bottom line and looking at the revenue side of things. Now if you were...Programme Leader is a programme leader so she's quite close to that as well, but even Programme Leader would probably have a slightly different line.'

<div align="right">(Head of Undergraduate Programmes)</div>

There appears to be a cost benefit approach adopted and this is further evidenced by, for example the reinterpretation of the agenda to a more mutually beneficial stance of student support and achievement. The School is receiving double the benefit from supporting the agenda: it appears to be supporting the agenda whilst pursuing its own priorities, which it would have done anyway:

> 'Many of those activities would anyway have happened, not to pin it down to pounds. So what we were saying is we were already doing this stuff anyway, it is to benefit widening participation students, so somebody is offering us some cash to do it, great.'

> (Teaching and Learning Coordinator)

The Commercial Culture of the University

There is further support of a commercial culture, from the perspectives held concerning the whole University adoption of widening participation initiatives. The amount of funding allocated to the agenda is not deemed to be sufficient in the present climate to be of concern and the strategy within the University appears to be beneficial, again for very limited resources. Therefore there is no reason to stop implementing the strategies. The benefits at a whole University level are linked to Government requirements, both strategically and financially, but also there are distinct marketing benefits from pursuing the agenda, for example raising the profile of the institution. The importance of the profile of the University is shown in the advertising of media coverage of HEFCE benchmark reports in the monthly staff publication:

'...the latest set of performance indicators from the funding body prompted positive coverage for the university in the national media, with special mentions in both *The Times* and the *THES.*'

<div align="right">(Staff Monthly Publication, 2004)</div>

There are also other benefits to the strategy which may be considered to be peripheral to the adoption of the agenda but are more closely linked to the aims of the strategy and those are the demographics of the local geographical context:

'...the situation in the immediate region where [the City] in particular but [the County], has lower than you would have predicted progression. Not just through to 18 but post 16 and attainment at every measured stage...So the environment was absolutely ripe for that...'

<div align="right">(Dean of Education)</div>

However the regional importance of the agenda is counterbalanced by the need for the University to present a national and international profile (Vice Chancellor).

The commercial culture of the School appears to be shared at a whole University level and is thought to be of increasing importance:

'...I'm not sure whether the previous regime, such an overt business view was taken of the University. I suspect it probably wasn't. I suspect that the new regime has gone the other way and is, I don't know my personal impression is maybe they are overly concerned with resources and costs and so forth at the moment.'

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Whether this perceived importance of commercial viability reflects the increased competitive pressures of the market place, or the wish to become more independent of Government funding is not discussed by the respondents, but there is a clear role of commercial criteria in identifying future plans.

Alternative Priorities

A range of alternative and more important priorities other than those associated with the widening participation agenda were discussed, for example challenges to staff and their practices. Some priorities however are clearly associated with funding:

'The Business School has HEFCE students, partly because we have to. In terms of their contribution to the bottom line, the profitability of the Business School, HEFCE students contribute very little. There's no money to be made out of HEFCE students…From an ideal point of view, what you would say is well we could do with cutting down the number of undergraduate students by 50%…Focus on programmes where there maybe the possibility of some contribution….Into the third stream area, like the corporate income, and things like that…'

(Head of Undergraduate Programmes)

The alternative priority here is to find more profitable sources of revenue other than HEFCE students but also independent revenue, which reduces Government control. The main identified source of income discussed by all respondents was international students. At times some respondents endeavoured to subsume them within the widening

participation agenda (Researcher in the Business School, Manager of Undergraduate Support Services) but they were also discussed as a major source of revenue:

'... and certainly there is a push towards recruiting and there are targets for their recruitment. Obviously they [the School] are keen for financial reasons to recruit them.'

(Researcher in the Business School)

The place of international students within the debate is manifold: there is the attempt by some to include them within a definition of the agenda, as. 'a diverse student population' (Manager of Undergraduate Support Services); there is the impact and challenges which they present to staff; and finally there is their role as a source of finance. The last point speaks volumes about the central importance of funding to the Institution, in terms of the relative time, resources and commitment allocated to the recruitment of international students, in comparison to the widening participation agenda:

'It's an interesting comparison with international students because if you look at the structure of the University and the committees and the dialogue and the meetings and the agendas, international students, you'll struggle to find a committee, agenda and minutes that don't mention them.'

(Head of Undergraduate Programmes)

It would be too simplistic to suggest that funding is the priority of the Institution. However it appears to be central to decision making and the priority given to different initiatives. Its importance perhaps is that it is fundamental to the survival of the

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Institution. However some sources of funding have more importance than others: when they are sourced independently of government, and the quantity of revenue exceeds the costs of fulfilling the strategy.

Defining the Agenda

An important role of the funding is in defining what is meant by widening participation, within certain contexts. This is however problematic with regards to the means and criteria used by the Government to distribute such funding, and then the interpretation placed upon those criteria, most specifically by the School.

As already discussed the University is dependent upon central government funding and thus sees itself as required to follow the criteria laid down. There is also a willingness to adopt the criteria as a means to organise what is meant by the agenda within the University, as described in Chapter 5.

This is not without its own problems however, as the belief is that the Government is unclear about what it means by the agenda. This confusion is evident within the data:

'The basic thing at the moment is overt, the Government is encouraging the sector to widening participation, we might term it grow, but actually there is no funding to grow.'

(Dean of Education)

It is evident that here mass and widening participation are interchangeable terms. Whether this is supportable does not detract from the confusion and the perceived intent of the Government as reflected by funding. More importantly the responsibility for the

development of the agenda is perceived as the Government's; it is they who are creating confusion. There does not appear to be an internally owned definition of what is meant by widening participation. The confusion is exacerbated by the diverse range of funding streams which appear to operate, and the wide range of agencies used to distribute such funding, for example the Learning Skills Councils and the Regional Partnerships. The Head of Widening Participation stated that she spends a lot of time 'seeing how work can be integrated from the point of view of funding.'

A final source of confusion and discontent is that the Government keeps changing the criteria by which funding is allocated:

> 'It depends how you view that policy because in fact what you call finance for widening participation, because the Government play the mirrors and smokescreen trick last year and they announced a substantial increase in the funding for widening participation. What they actually did was take funds from the normal funds for teaching and learning, identify it as widening participation money and gave it back.'
>
> (Dean of Education)

There were few comments upon the whole policy context of the Government, perhaps because of its transitory and ambiguous nature, but also because the ultimate focus appeared to be on attaining the funding. So whilst central government funding appears to determine what the University does with regard to the agenda, it is a complex relationship particularly as there is a lack of clarity at University level about the Government's position.

This role of specific funding in defining activities is echoed at the School level:

> It's only when funding starts to appear that you say actually we can argue this as being part of the widening participation agenda.'
>
> (Teaching and Learning Coordinator)

The School has been creative in making proposals for University funding for activities, albeit that some of these activities would have taken place anyway (Teaching and Learning Coordinator).

The role of funding in defining the agenda is most clearly seen with regards to outreach work, and these activities are typically defined at the whole University level. The School engages with these positively but there is an inference that these activities would not be organised within the School if not offered centrally. This reflects the relative priorities of the School within the context of limited resources.

However there is a reinterpretation of the agenda to fit School priorities, and thus a greater willingness to use School funding:

> 'Unless we were driven to it by external funding we would probably not address this as a separate issue, we would think, "well, look these are all students. So let's think about students who are not achieving. Let's talk about students who are challenging to academic staff."'
>
> (Teaching and Learning Coordinator)

Funding, be it central Government or University, is used to define the agenda and the agenda is at times at its clearest when this scenario occurs. There is also a more proactive and creative redefining of the agenda which is not as clearly dependant upon external funding to the School. It is questionable whether these activities can be clearly seen to be identifiable with widening participation. It would appear that an externalised definition of widening participation and the consequent activities demands external funding for the School, whereas internal definitions which relate more closely to internal priorities and challenges are more likely to be locally funded. At a whole University level the relationship is unclear. There appears to be the supplementing of external funding by University funds, however not to a large degree, and there is an acknowledgement of the side effects of doing so, which include a positive profile and marketing advantages. The process of cost benefit analysis makes engagement with widening participation worthwhile but perhaps within limits.

Recruitment and Selection

The link between recruitment and funding is that it is part of the financial environment within which the Institution operates. In addition it is associated with interpretations of the agenda, for example the Dean of Education's perception of Government policy as 'growing' student numbers, and the idea that the expansion will be such that it will require recruitment of non-traditional students.

The Dean of Education, who has a managerial role, explained the mechanism of allocating funds to universities, the notion of student target numbers, differential funding bands, and a plus or minus five percent tolerance on those numbers before the allocated funds are changed. His conclusion was that in terms of capitation per student the optimum position was 95% of the target numbers, as the original funding allocation

would be maintained. As well as reflecting the financial perspective taken to the issue there are also notions of the need to recruit to a certain target number in order to obtain the allocated Government funding. Any recruitment below 95% will produce a clawing back by HEFCE of some of the funding.

Thus whether the School perceives itself as a recruiter or selector becomes important to the School if funds are allocated by recruitment, but also to the University in terms of gross recruitment figures. The debate also goes some way to understanding the market for higher education and the segments of the market which may be or become important to certain institutions. The majority of the respondents perceive the School as a selector, therefore from a viability perspective there is no need to consider a wider range of intake or widening participation students:

> '...School's for whom widening participation is more prominent partly because they are struggling to get student numbers. In other words it becomes a crude...it could well be, well we need the students and we are going to bust a gut to get the students anywhere we can. If we can get them through attracting them from schools that don't normally do business with us, then fine.'
>
> (Head of Undergraduate Programmes)

Universities appear to be driven to enter new segments of the student market in order to achieve their target numbers and the allocated funding. Some members of the School do not perceive that they are in that position whilst the Manager of Undergraduate Support Services suggests that in fact they are in such a situation:

'Our numbers have actually gone down this past year by about 1000 applicants, so your statement that we are a selecting rather than recruiting School may not be accurate.'

(Manager of Undergraduate Support Services)

In addition there is speculation that the market is becoming more competitive and thus recruitment issues may be more pertinent:

'...lots of traditional universities, typically haven't run business and management programmes in the past, are now starting to run business and management programmes. So the whole thing about bringing in and widening access is set against a context of a bigger recruitment agenda, that we are trying to achieve various target that the University is setting us.'

(Dean of the Business School)

Whether or not the School is a recruiter or selector does not detract from the fact that the Dean of the School is aware of changes in the student market and also the importance of this to both the School and the University. Whilst the link to funding may be indirect there are recurring features: both the terminology and analysis is within a business framework. The notion of the widening participation agenda appears to be secondary, or less important, if no recruitment needs to take place. Finally the importance of recruitment links to the financial viability of courses and thus funding. It is not beyond the realms of possibility that the School may be willing to fund more widening participation activities and outreach work if they feel that their recruitment is falling; again it becomes a mutually beneficial agenda. However if there are less 'costly' means by which to recruit or raise revenue then the logic of earlier arguments suggests

that this will be pursued by, for example recruiting more international students, and offering more post graduate programmes.

Conclusion

It is not surprising to see the central importance of funding to the University and the School. The duplication of the issues throughout this chapter is testament to the central importance of funding. However, there do appear to be more complex factors involved. The University does not perceive all funding in the same way; most importantly Government funding is seen as controlling possibly because it is ring-fenced. Third stream or independent funding appears to have a higher priority and this is also seen as important to the School (Head of Undergraduate Programmes).

The Head of Undergraduate Programmes also seemed to be suggesting that a form of evaluation does take place about the means by which funding can be sought and that some methods of raising revenue are not seen in the same light as others. This also supports the earlier notions of not all funding is seen as of the same worth.

The commercial culture is not just prevalent within the School, which is unsurprising given the subject disciplines, but also pervades the wider University. Whether this culture reflects the changing higher education environment or is symptomatic of education policy is difficult to discern. Ultimately, there is an inherent awareness of the importance of funding for the survival of the University and therefore its dominance is not surprising.

The relationship between funding and the widening participation agenda is within this more holistic funding framework. External sources of funding are required for those

activities, which are not deemed to be mutually beneficial, for example outreach work. However for certain Schools, and over time, this may change and funding may not be required as the side effects or benefits may outweigh any costs if, for example recruitment becomes an issue then there is likely to be a greater willingness to use internal funding. However for the present widening participation funding is perceived as lower order funding as it is ring fenced, and if the requirements of such funding are too onerous then it may not be accessed anyway. The more that the agenda can be seen as addressing both School and University priorities the more likely it is that funding contributions will be made by them. However if alternative strategies achieve the same priorities for the School and University and are less costly, or less restrictive in terms of what the funding can be spent on, then this may be seen as a more attractive strategy and adopted.

Chapter 8

The Role and Purposes of Higher Education

Introduction

The previous three data Chapters have, beneath their analysis and consequent conclusions, perceptions of the role and purposes of higher education. This is affected by both the environment within which the University and School perceive itself to be operating, (for example the impact of Government policy) and the beliefs about their role and purposes, and consequent constraints placed upon them and their responses to such constraints. This environment is ever changing not just in relation to new Government policies, although respondents rarely discussed specific policies, but also in relation to the nature of the competition within the market and the effect on recruitment. Within this ever changing environment is the perception of what academics believe they should be doing, and their attempts to preserve what they believe to be their and higher education's purposes.

Many of the environmental changes have been discussed in previous chapters, for example the importance of funding (Chapter 7). The prioritising of independent, non-Governmental, sources of funding is a result of Government policy, and the wish to remain free or independent of the Government as much as possible. The importance of retention and achievement reflects the monitoring processes instituted by agencies of the Government. The consequent merging of whole student agendas and the widening participation agenda, also shows the response of the University to these changes. The degree of importance of the widening participation agenda is also a side effect of the environment, for example the impact of the geographical educational context and the

competition from other institutions. These have been reviewed but should also be seen as important to this discussion.

The role of this chapter is to develop those themes more holistically, whilst recognising that this is a case study of an individual institution. Specifically it will: review perceptions about the role and purposes of higher education and their effect on the agenda; pursue an analysis of the relationship of higher education with the Government; and consider the nature and origins of this particular University and its traditions with respect to the agenda. Again all of these aspects link together.

Role and Purposes

The importance of these ideas, as held by the respondents, is that they will shape the practice and view of what they do. The views held were expressed at times in a philosophical, abstract manner and at other times were expressed as more operational, practical issues.

The more philosophical definitions can be attributed to senior management in the main, which is not surprising. The debate is whether or not universities are created to develop individual rather than societal benefits, although this is an artificial division, given perceptions of individuals contributing to society. It is however important to consider, in the light of the relationship of institutions with Government and as a more societal view might suggest, the greater willingness and belief in pursuing Government objectives. A tension exists between notions of independence, which are linked to the tradition of academic independence, and the reality of survival within the marketplace. Both the Dean of Education and the Vice Chancellor recognise the role of universities as social agencies or the need for them to be socially responsible; for the Dean of

Education this does not take place in isolation from Government initiatives. The Vice Chancellor expresses this in the context of the widening participation agenda:

'I would like to see widening participation substituted by socially aware/responsible universities. I would like to belong to a socially responsible university.'

(Vice Chancellor)

There is little expressed by anyone except the Dean of Education on the individual liberal agenda of higher education, the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake to develop the mind. The Dean of Education describes his conversion to the perspective of higher education being socially responsible, as being based on the amount of funding coming from central government, and the need for accountability as a result. However he suggests that higher education institutions have always been agents of social change:

'They're agents of social change possibly now in more direct ways through widening participation but they have been agents of social change in indirect ways through the kind of research activities which give rise to innovations that inevitably have social consequences.'

(Dean of Education)

There is, therefore, a notion that the role is changing. This is the view expressed by the Dean of Education and the Vice Chancellor, and they are aware that there are pressures for them to become even more directed in their role as agents of social change. Thus arises the tension between contesting perspectives of what is meant by social responsibility. Perceptions of Government views will be discussed later but the view

from within the Institution is one which supports a holding on to independence. On a base level this is shown through a belief that the University has accepted its role as a social agent and has not been led to it by Government policy:

> 'I don't know if they [higher education institutions] need to be shown their responsibility...on the whole I think it's fairly well accepted. I can't imagine anyone contesting that because fundamentally they are educational institutions...'

> (Dean of Education)

Independence

There have been views given earlier about the role of funding in ensuring that an activity takes place and that without it, it is unlikely to do so. In other words there is no intrinsic belief that higher education should follow government policy. Thus independence is determined by the need for government funding and as has been seen in Chapter 7, a priority is to find alternative sources. It also reflects the fact that universities will not all share the same views or experiences of the higher education environment.

There is also expressed the need to be 'seen to be, of course, responding to those [Government] initiatives.' (Dean of the Business School), which could be interpreted, as it has for this Institution, as a reactive, derived approach to widening participation. Yet a degree of independence is constructed through the interpretation of the response. The Government may appear to be colluding with these views of the importance of independence through their monitoring and auditing procedures which, as discussed in Chapter 5, are addressed, but rarely is the initiative taken any further. Thus the

Government may sidestep the autonomy issue by not constructing indicators which are too onerous, or prescriptive for the University, and so the independence of higher education is not challenged sufficiently.

Certainly the outlook for an autonomous institution is not seen as being good and the implications are described within the Institution's *Strategic Plan 2004-2010* (Case Study University, 2004) as restrictions on creativity.

Institutional independence is therefore an important issue, but within a framework for higher education which is more supportive of social responsibility. However the latter could also be a consequence of greater competition within the higher education market, and thus a greater willingness to comply with government requirements in order to gain funding.

Academic Practice

From a more practical or operational perspective of higher education, its role can be seen through the explanations of academics' non- or 'limited' engagement with the agenda. This is supported through the alternative priorities that academics have, for example research (Programme Leader). The Dean of Education supports this in a more holistic manner in discussing resources:

> 'I suspect that within a university deciding at any point to take money coming through to support academic purposes you'd have a hell of a job with the academic staff persuading them that we shouldn't be using that for more research but we should be using it for outreach work in schools and the community.'

The background is however one of perceived scarce resources, which suggests that staff might pursue the agenda if resources were more available. However further analysis of the data suggests that there are strong views held about who higher education is for. Thus resources may be used to further the agenda only in a mutually beneficial way with regard to perceived views about the role of staff and their purpose. This is expressed at its strongest with regard to admissions. As has been discussed earlier those students admitted to programmes, and the setting of entry criteria, are fiercely protected by staff members, for example the decision concerning Compact students (Chapter 5). But there is also, throughout the interviews, the notion that higher education is for those students willing and able to succeed:

'If they [staff] were having students thrust upon them who were plainly incapable of studying or totally unenthusiastic and were difficult to teach, and if they were having those thrust upon them because of some sort of agenda that they couldn't see the point of, then we have much more difficulty.'

(Head of Undergraduate Programmes)

The 'difficulty' discussed could relate back to the Head of Undergraduate Programmes' earlier view that decision-making within the School, needs to be seen as a collective if it is to work. There are themes within these perceptions of the criteria required for entry, and the fact that they are non-negotiable, except perhaps if target recruitment numbers are falling and thus a 'survival' issue becomes a priority. One theme is perceptions of the characteristics of non-traditional students: that they are academically inferior to 'traditional' students. Another is that the institution and staff have no responsibility to

offer any 'grand' degree of support to these students or to change their own practices. There are some suggestions of whole University support services being available. The fact that it is whole University rather than a School approach, raises the question of where responsibility, or perhaps more pertinently, liability lies for that provision. Teaching and learning approaches have not been modified to take into account changes in the student cohort; rather staff describe having 'challenges' to their approaches.

These views are supported and justified, partly through the ethical issue of allowing students to enter programmes for which they are academically unsuitable (Dean of Education) but also from the view of the effectiveness of delivery. Traditional students enable, for both staff and students, a 'more consistent and manageable educational experience.' (Dean of the Business School). The description of traditional students does suggest that this category excludes more than non-traditional students, and can be seen as the continuance of A' levels as the major indicator of academic ability, or more clearly the ability to succeed on a higher education programme. This view informs where responsibility for the agenda lies:

'It's actually attainment in the secondary schools and youngsters staying on post 16 education and training, if they are not going to do that, its pointless talking about moving to HE and that's where the focus really needs to be.'

(Dean of Education)

The Dean of the Business School perceives the impact of a large-scale recruitment of non-traditional students on staff as:

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'...some very big behavioural questions and issues for maybe a large number of academic staff about whether they would subscribe to that kind of world.'

(Dean of the Business School)

The feeling appears to be, then, that it is not the role and purpose of higher education to undertake 'remedial' work to enable students to attain in the absence of traditional entry criteria, nor to accommodate or enable alternative teaching and learning practices that would support non-traditional students. This debate though takes place in ignorance of what these alternatives may be for this School, as they are able to recruit traditional students and believe that this enables greater success. This appears to be a self-fulfilling prophecy: practices and structures are set up to support this type of student and success is achieved. While ever the Government supports this through its mechanisms, for example auditing procedures, then there is no motive for the University to change; in fact it is sensible for it to continue as before. Again the Government, through their auditing techniques, are colluding with the University in accepting this state of affairs. The reporting of HEFCE's findings about the University can evidence the role of the Government, and its agencies, in measuring and dictating what is meant by success. The national press also seizes upon these descriptors of 'success'. Within this climate it is unlikely that there is much incentive to move away from the tested and tried position of the University re admissions nor its teaching and learning practices. The importance of the media and performance indicators can be seen, developed further here:

'[This University] has been singled out for praise for surpassing HEFCE 'benchmarks' in key areas such as improving graduate employment and reducing student drop-out rates. The latest set of performance indicators from

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the funding body prompted positive coverage for the university in the national media, with special mentions in *The Times* and the *THES*.'

(Staff Monthly Publication, 2004)

There are contradictions to this approach of 'business as usual': there is the role of individual champions who progress the agenda; and there is slight movement in relation to entry criteria and the development of relationships with Further Education colleges (although this reflected changes to funding arrangements for the provision of Foundation degrees). The fundamental perception is though, that this is an agenda which does not necessarily sit happily within understood views of the role and purpose of higher education. This is supported by: perceptions of the academic characteristics of non-traditional students; and by the reinterpretation of social responsibility within traditional frameworks of academic activity, for example through research and greater emphasis on developing the employability skills of the graduates. Again the translation of social responsibility is one that is negotiated and interpreted to be mutually beneficial to the Institution.

The Relationship with Government

The relationship of the Institution with government is a particularly complex one which on one level informs their behaviour by complying. This term does not reflect the attempts to reinterpret agendas and policies to make them mutually beneficial to the perceptions, that the Institution holds, about their purpose. Secondly there is the pursuance of independence from the Government which reflects in part a belief that the Government misunderstands, or is endeavouring to reposition universities and their role. The context of this debate is particular to institutions, especially with regard to their ability to independently fund their activities. There does not appear to be a belief that

there is an obligation or shared view between the two agents of what should take place. Rather there is a contestable relationship where different agendas are pursued and outcomes are negotiated in a changing context. The consequence of this is an 'accidental' or secondary pursuance of the widening participation agenda. The explanations for this are varied.

As has been discussed above, the role of the Government in setting performance indicators is an important one, but ultimately these are pursued in a derived manner:

'...in one respect everything the University does is set within a widening participation context by default, because that's the theme in Government policy and HEFCE funding policy.'

(Dean of Education)

Funding appears to be the goal, and the University monitors, and consequently modifies its behaviour to obtain this funding:

'The present structure [within the University] is likely to be changed as HEFCE, during its inspection argued that widening participation needs to be more embedded in faculties.'

(Dean of Education)

It is not solely the pursuance of funding and, as has been discussed, some funding is more attractive, some less. However the fulfilment of government criteria is also seen to be a means of raising the profile and attractiveness of the institution, for potential stakeholders. There is also the notion that widening participation is a politically

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sensitive area and that its pursuance would not necessarily be simply advertised as being associated with the pursuance of a Government agenda (Dean of the Business School); it is too 'correct' for that.

The respondents' discussion about the role of government is illuminating in terms of the University's acceptance of their policies. There is a strong belief that government distrusts and misunderstands universities and thus government policies are seen in a negative light:

'...the whole thing of initiatives coming from Whitehall, are looked upon a bit cynically. What is it that we are expected to do now, kind of thing?'

(Head of Undergraduate Programmes)

This informs their engagement with the Government's policies:

'I would suspect that the vast majority of universities, in terms of assuming widening participation/diversity agenda, are probably being driven all the way by short term triggers than they are by necessarily saying philosophically, 'this is what we are about as an institution', I'm not saying they are not saying that.'

(Dean of the Business School)

Thus the suggestion is that 'compliance' takes place, depending upon the individual circumstances of the University, for example funding, and the nature and advertising of the agenda in the public domain. This derived approach by the University, in responding to the agenda, is echoed in beliefs about why the agenda was pursued by the Government:

'..might view the history of the thing [widening participation]..being part of Government wanting to get more control of higher education and one of the ways you do that is by introducing it under the banner of something that is so morally worthy that no one can actually credibly object...I think that's what's happening , but I don't think that's why they set out to do it.'

(Dean of Education)

This accidental and unplanned approach by Government is also reflected specifically in the policies put forward with regard to widening participation, for example the constant changes of agencies with which the University has to work, and the sources of funding. There is also confusion, which reverberates throughout the data, concerning what is meant by widening participation. The failure of the Government clearly to define what the agenda is, enables reinterpretation, especially in the light of instrumental pursuance of the agenda:

'There is some commitment to changing the social mix; however there is little about disability and ethnic minority students. The issue of funding and OFFA suggests the drive to 50 percent participation has diminished. Also there are changes with HEFCE's requirements at the moment, don't need [a] separate widening participation strategy; the Access agreement will suffice. This has reduced the need for monitoring.'

(Dean of Education)

The confusion of mass and widening participation appears to be, for the respondents, one supported by Government policy. There is aggrievment when the Government does

not appear to support that interpretation of the agenda believed by the University, to be the Government's:

> 'It was introduced without ever costing it at all…They are faced if they say it to the electorate, we want to grow HE and what this means is an extra 3p on the rate of income tax, and so on, they are not going to be there to do it.'
>
> (Dean of Education)

There appears to be no evidence of the Government disabusing the University of their interpretation of the agenda as mass participation. The relationship with Government in a direct manner is confused. There is a need to undertake or comply with certain agendas, especially if they are inspected and/or publicised. However the scope for reinterpretation is present, which appears to be supported and codified into a belief which, if contradicted, causes aggrievment. There does not appear to be a belief of the University being a tool of government. All of this debate however is cast within a dialogue which will not deny the importance of the agenda for its own sake, but does suggest alternative meanings and explanations throughout.

The role of the Government can also be seen as indirect in the construction of the marketplace within which Universities operate. The experience of this marketplace is particular to the institutions and their ability to retain independence. A clear example of this is recruitment:

> '…there are some places that just have to be a lot more alert to, if you like their markets…selecting universities have, to varying degrees both between

institutions and areas within institutions , commitments, that in a sense, they

don't actually have to have, need to have, but choose to.'

<div align="right">(Dean of Education)</div>

The role of the financial situation of an institution appears to be a powerful influence on whether an institution needs to comply with government policies. There are exceptions, however, where policies are pursued where they need not be. An example is the role of individual champions, but it appears the probability of such exceptions is low. There appears to be an acceptance that engagement is ad hoc.

The perception of the role of government is likely to be coloured by dependency, distrust and a defensive stance, which reflects the power relationships which operate. There is a view that widening participation takes place in an uncertain context, accidentally constructed by Government, and that for universities this agenda has numerous subtexts at work which cloud its pursuance. There is also the idea that all universities are different, the power relationships differ and so does their heritage.

The Origins of the University

Universities' experiences of external factors differ, possibly relative to their power in terms of market profile and funding. There is another area of differentiation which was discussed by the respondents: the heritage of the University. The University being researched is a post-1992 institution with a polytechnic background. It is argued that this affects engagement with widening participation:

'...number two [reasons for engagement with the agenda] would be a more altruistic approach, in the sense that this was a polytechnic, let's not forget that.

Poly means many and it has always served, and hopefully continues to serve as wide a base of population as possible.'

(Teaching and Learning Coordinator)

This heritage is seen as an explanation for engagement with the agenda. Its approach and programmes are suited to the agenda:

'The new university heritage in vocational areas has a connection with the real world. Thus widening participation is easier to sell into the heritage of the university.'

(Vice Chancellor)

This suggests that the widening participation agenda is 'easier to sell' to staff. It also shows the reinterpretation of the agenda to that of a mutually beneficial one, which is that the Institution is already offering vocational programmes, already student centred and therefore addressing the agenda in this way will be acceptable.

There are a number of comments within the data which suggest that this heritage is being seen as less important. One such comment is that traditional universities (i.e. pre 1992) are offering programmes which were previously the domain of new universities, and hence the diminishing of vocational separation. Another, is the aim of some new universities to be seen as the same as traditional universities in what they do. This is seen in the Vice Chancellor's careful discussion, below, of the Institution's role as a regional university; given the poor progression statistics in the area. This would automatically make them address widening participation, however:

'There is a need to meet regional demands: however this cannot be taken too far, as the University will lose diversity of its student population. To be solely regional is wrong; there are though regional links between the widening participation agenda and the background.'

<div align="right">(Vice Chancellor)</div>

Again there are contradictions at play partly to do with the brand imagery or profile presented to the public, of the University. These contradictions are possibly played out in the wider marketplace of not wishing to be associated with a certain agenda, or not reducing entry requirements, so that the perception is that this is a high quality university. These criteria of quality appear to be given by traditional universities and thus new universities may be keen to ape them, especially in an increasingly competitive market. It would be beneficial to widening participation if, as the Dean of Education suggests:

'I suppose I have difficulty in conceiving of working in an educational institution that at some level, somehow [doesn't] have some kind of commitment to social justice.'

<div align="right">(Dean of Education)</div>

If traditional Universities were to address the agenda as well, or more convincingly, then it is likely that it would become associated with different imagery, which perhaps would enable it to be pursued more for its own worth.

Conclusion

There appears to be a contest taking place at the moment over perceptions of what is the purpose of higher education. Within this, widening participation appears to be the innocent victim, a symbol of control by the Government, but also seen by staff as a symbol of a shift in the role of higher education. The conclusion is that, for some universities, it is a necessary agenda for alternative reasons than those of social justice. As the Dean of the Business School suggests, this is an important issue as it impacts, or more importantly does not, on the practice of higher education. The role of this Government, with regard to this agenda, appears to be on one hand to give sufficient 'space' for it to be pursued instrumentally and on the other to be unwilling to address the 'loopholes' that have occurred. The higher education system appears to be fighting other demons, which are particularly felt by new universities. Traditional universities are, if they wish, relatively free of Government control in this area, or that is the perception. If all universities addressed the agenda honestly this would enable it to gain greater kudos, and at least reduce one barrier to engagement. Ultimately, however, it is not necessarily seen as the raison d'etre of higher education nor those who work there, and so will remain dependent upon individuals to champion its pursuance.

Chapter 9

Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore the interpretations and practice of widening participation for one institution. The Literature Review has revealed the concept of widening participation to be both complex and contestable. As there is no shared view of the concept the approach adopted has been one of exploring individuals' views. The literature supports this approach as there is no consensus within it of the meaning of widening participation. The negotiated construction of the meaning of policy, due to the freedoms of interpretation within it (Bowe et al., 1992), means that the individual views of stakeholders or key players is important.

The Role of Government: Funding

The data shows that widening participation is most clearly seen to be present and acted upon by respondents when the relationship to Government-controlled and managed sources of finance is evident. This could be the submission by the University of their own data to HEFCE in order to enable them to access funds. Respondents are not engaging with or contributing to the development of the concept in a direct way. Rather, they are fulfilling external requirements in a derived manner in order to achieve indirect benefits, for example funding and promotion. There are exceptions to this rule, in particular the role of the individual champion. However, the control of the higher education institution, both directly, of resources for example, and indirectly as with academic identity suggests that the scope of activity for these individuals is severely constrained. An example of indirect control through academic identity is the prioritising by academics of certain types of practice, for example research.

The relationship with funding however is a complex one as not all financial resources are seen as being of the same importance to the University, for example HEFCE funding versus third stream income. Nor are available resources seen as being mobile between activities, as with ring fenced funding and academics' priorities with regard to their practice and consequent views of where resources should be allocated. What is clear is that respondents consistently argue that there are insufficient resources available to operate in a manner that they see as being conducive to perceptions of their role. Scarcity of resources as an explanation for engagement cannot therefore be seen in isolation from the other stresses and strains being placed on the individual and the institution.

The 'financial imperative', initially instituted by the Conservative Government (1979-1996) and the historical evolution of the management of higher education, has lead to a heightening of the importance of this issue (Collini, 2003; Ross, 2003). That is not to suggest that financial resources have only just become important, but rather that there has been a change in the manner of allocation, a cultural or ideological change (Ball, 1994). Universities, similar to many other public sector organisations (Simkins, 2000), have been isolated or fragmented from the generic higher education collective by the means of resourcing. As a result the experiences of institutions has differed. An example cited within the case study is traditional universities poaching courses which had previously been seen as the domain of post 1992 universities. Responses of individual institutions are therefore bound up in their own circumstances, their own struggle to survive, and their own perceptions of their place or position in the higher education market.

The Role of Government: The Higher Education Environment

There are structural changes which have taken place within the public sector, as a result of governmental policy, which have changed government's relationship with institutions in this sector. Chitty (2004) and Hoggett (1996) discuss these in terms of ideological shifts, with the watchwords of the era being entrepreneurship, accountability, benchmarks, 'quasi markets' (Le Grand and Bartlett, 1993) and performance management. Contrary to Hale (2006) the data supports Hayton and Paczuska's (2004) analysis that there has been little change in approach, to the agenda, under New Labour, because the higher education environment has become increasingly competitive, diverting institutions away from any New Labour wish to develop widening participation. There have been other priorities.

There are other structural shifts within the higher education environment, for example the RAE, QAA and TQA. The impact of these shifts has been one of fragmentation both within higher education and within institutions. The interviewees, however, discussed financial issues at length and also showed the identification of the School as a separate revenue and cost centre. The Institution appears to have accepted and adopted the financial imperative. Indeed some respondents are supportive of this culture due to the large sums of money being allocated to higher education.

Whilst the reasons for this change in ideology may be seen as the need to reduce and account for public sector expenditure, it is also a result of the expansion of the higher education sector (Collini, 2003) and government attempts to be more controlling of it. There was evidence of policy fatigue, the introduction of too many new initiatives; however these new initiatives are not necessarily accepted. The School and the University appear to be 'negotiating' with Government policy concerning funding. They

appear to be doing so from a perspective of what is beneficial to themselves for their own survival. Again though, this is not as straightforward as it seems. There is a willingness, perhaps at a base level, to comply. An example is the reinterpretation of widening participation to include international students within a definition, which is a plural, diverse student body. At a more philosophical level there is acceptance of equality of opportunity rather than outcome (Thompson, 2000) as this serves staff perceptions of what university students are. It was also accepted that universities are agents of social change, but in a more indirect manner than that suggested by the Government. There is a reframing of institutional activities to 'fit' initiatives and to appear to be complying with the agenda.

Taylor (2003) suggests that the ability of the University to negotiate practice and understandings of Government policy turn upon the policy tool used. 'Authority tools', or compulsion, have been used in ways that the University has found acceptable, for example status change (*Further and Higher Education Act*, 1992) and tuition fees (1998/99). Both have served to support survival, through the resultant marketing profile of the institution and potentially greater financial resources. 'Capacity tools' have been more conflictual, especially those associated with student numbers. For example if widening participation is interpreted as mass participation then the means by which these capacity tools operate contradict the stated purposes of government policy, as funding associated with student numbers has been reduced. The use of 'carrots' (Taylor, 2003) appears to be the realm where the University is able to reinterpret or voluntarily engage with government strategies. However, their ability to do so is dependent upon their individual circumstances, for example whether they are recruiters or selectors of students. For this Institution, widening participation is seen as a policy implemented by the use of 'carrots', particularly 'symbolic or hortatory' tools. There is no compulsion

within the Institution to adopt the agenda, rather it is left to individual champions. For other institutions in more dire financial predicaments it would be an 'incentive tool', drawn to engage with the policy through the need for financial resources. The case study Institution's attempts to prioritise third stream income suggest that it is unwilling to be incentivised to act upon this agenda through financial resources. Taylor's (2003) analysis is useful in exploring the reasons why the University has engaged or not. It must not be forgotten however that widening participation is associated with ideals and social justice. Thus it is not simply resources which influence decisions, but also the willingness to 'do the right thing'.

Taylor's (2003) analysis is then too simplistic, but is helpful in characterising the University as reactive rather than proactive. There are multiple reasons, other than Government policy, associated with engagement. Greenbank (2006) suggests that the Government lacks the motivation to pursue the policy meaningfully; they have failed to acknowledge the 'multiple reasons'. Within this research, the policy was insufficiently important to be considered over and above the derived benefits and costs at a given time.

The relative absence of institutionally framed literature (Gorard et al., 2006) and the concentration on student experiences (Forsyth and Furlong, 2003; Reay et al., 2001) in this area, supports the notion that there is no motivation to understand the institutional constraints and mechanisms which create the outcomes in relation to widening participation. More sympathetically constructed, the conclusion may be reached that it is easier to explore and illustrate individual rather than institutional responses to policy. The literature does explore the multiple contradictions within the policy, for institutions, but tends to be focussed on outcomes rather than processes, or alternatively how the

policy is engaged with. This research argues that the processes through which policy is engaged, are particular to institutions and as important as other research perspectives.

University Interpretations of Widening Participation

In a context where it is perceived that there are insufficient funds available, and where targets and benchmarks prevail, then it is logical for institutions to admit those students who it thinks are most able to succeed. Coates and Adnett (2002) suggest that this is a rational approach to the pressures faced by an institution. However the implications of the work of Reay et al. (2001), Archer and Hutchings (2000) and Archer et al. (2003a), with its concern with the social and economic background of students and their differential experiences, appears to be too radical for the Institution, other than the acceptance that there are insufficient funds to support strategies. It does not appear to be the case that the experiences of individual students are of concern, or should be. Students on entry are treated identically.

Hayton and Paczuska (2004) identify the issues most realistically as:

'...a tension between simply aiming to achieve project targets (on paper at least) and identifying real, effective and practical ways to help overcome the obstacles faced by non-traditional students.'

(Hayton and Paczuska, 2004:3)

The 'targets' themselves are being identified with resources and the ability of the institution to behave or practice in the manner it sees fit, not with the needs of the student.

The Institution will attend to student needs in relation to the provision of programmes, for example Foundation and vocationally orientated degrees, if this aids recruitment and is associated with resources. Ozga's (2000) arguments of the failure of the market to appropriately allocate resources are not borne out, on one level. The heritage of this Institution and the subject discipline of the School are supportive of the relationship between the economy and education. However, the competitive landscape within which the Institution operates, does not promote collaboration between institutions, particularly Further Education Colleges. This Institution has regard to the funding associated with the programme rather than student requirements, perhaps to learn at a local College.

Greenbank's (2006) contention with regard to the Government being unwilling to commit fully to the agenda is not supported by this research. Instead a more instrumental perception is taken of the Government changing its mind through policy and thus creating confused views of what they require and how to achieve it. However the research does support the view that there is little philosophical commitment to widening participation by Government.

The analyses of Jones and Thomas (2005) and Greenbank (2006) therefore at this external structural level appear to be irrelevant to the Institution, as it is following the Government's lead, willingly or having no choice but to do so. Their analyses of Government approaches to widening participation hold true for the Institution as well, as it does not appear to be departing from Government guidelines. The interpretation being used is externally driven when associated with external sources of funding. The physical organisation of the agenda, within the Institution, reflects Government funding

priorities, for example outreach and raising achievement. Governmental funding streams and data collection requirements appear to be determining action.

Origins of the University

The *Further and Higher Education Act* (1992) completed the unification of the higher education system. For the case study University, this meant that it changed status. The previous history of the Institution may mean that the agenda is more easily accepted. Weaver (1994) argues that the heritage of polytechnic status does affect the institution. However it can be seen from the data that this Institution is concerned to be seen as 'more' than this. It appears to be selecting (vocational expertise) and partially deselecting (role as a regional university) elements of that past in order to position itself in the market as a 'quality' institution. This confirms Ashworth et al.'s (2004) analyses of the power of 'brands', and the ability of potential students to ignore evidence which contradicts their own view of 'good' universities. The University is concerned with its image, and whilst acknowledging that there are positive public relations to be received from widening participation it does not appear to wish to wholly associate itself with this agenda.

The research shows that the heritage of the institution has become less important, due to a diminishing of the vocational divide as traditional universities have moved into certain subject areas to gain students. Again this supports Kennedy's (FEFC, 1997) view that competition does not breed collaboration. It does not however diminish views of a binary divide. The divide operates using different, possibly less explicit criteria. Respondents did not directly discuss the effect of the RAE on the institution, however it is evident that the achievement of targets set by HEFCE are important in contributing to the status of the University. The perceptions of staff concerning admissions also support

notions of improving quality, allegedly both directly and indirectly. There is no explicit association of widening participation with lower status. However examples provided by respondents of institutions which may find themselves more engaged with the agenda suggest this, particularly as the discussion is associated with recruitment. It has not been possible to confirm Leathwood and O'Connell's (2003) view that quality is perceived by the Institution as determined by the academic characteristics of the student intake. There does appear to be a view that if recruitment is not an issue then there is no reason to address the agenda, but the role of admissions and entry qualifications is clearly seen as important.

Returning to Taylor's (2003) model of policy implementation, widening participation implementation can also be seen as a 'learning tool'. Some institutions are 'learning or problem solving' the nature of student intake, as a result of prior experience and potential market strength, and choosing to stay away from non-traditional students as these are perceived as 'lower quality' entrants. The case study shows a University which understands that there are divisions within higher education between institutions, and is repositioning itself through its activities and recruitment.

The external factors, mainly created by Government, have served to both define the agenda for this University, at a whole university level, but also explain and support the University's stance towards it. Greenbank's (2006) adoption of HEFCE's student life cycle model rings true; practice associated with this agenda takes place outside of the Institution in the main. The irony is that as Greenbank (2006) states, it is actually the Government's view of the student life cycle model which has been adopted. He argues that HEFCE's suggestions are becoming more radical. There has been no philosophical transformation of the University's activities, but rather an accommodation or

compliance when necessary. Using Jones and Thomas's (2005) model there has been no transformative practices as these have not been called for. There is no University policy statement for widening participation, as this is not required by Government. Ultimately funding has been one of the most important factors in determining when it is necessary to comply; the compliance has then been partial or derived. The literature helps to explain why at an institutional level this is possible, but fails to address why the agenda is not seen as one which is inherent to higher education. The latter is explained more on an institutional basis, turning amongst other things upon academic identity, and institutional self determination, or what it means to be an institution of higher education from the perspective of control.

Role and Purposes of Higher Education

The Literature Review discussed the myth of institutional self determination within higher education. Whether it is a myth or not, it appears to be believed and is important to this Institution, although there is a reframing of past practice to accommodate present Government requirements, for example the university as an agent of social change.

However, the data collected supports Collini's (2003) discussion of increased student numbers drawing higher education into the 'web' of government control, partly because of the increase in resources associated with an expanding higher education sector, but also because of the changes created by larger numbers of students. The latter changes, for this institution, have been associated with challenges to staff practice as the characteristics of students have changed. There is no perception that staff practices need to change, however. This is the case for widening participation as well, in that it is able to be accommodated at its present scale, but in the event that it became larger scale then the challenges for staff would be too great. There does not appear to be a perception that

staff should change teaching and learning practices, rather that if necessary the admissions policy should change to accommodate staff practices. The variable is admissions not staff activity, within the parameters of financial survival.

Ball's (1994) view that changes have been ideological from the perspective of priorities, not activities, is supported by the concerns expressed by staff when their practice is challenged. Their perspectives are also confirming of Maton's (2005) view that pastoral concerns for students have given way to targets and income generation. Whilst higher education has been subject to externally created change, the belief in self-regulation is retained and fought for. This University has as a stated aim, to reduce its dependence on Government sources of finance so that it can be more self-determining. Henkel (2000) suggests that in part this relates to ideas of academic identity and self-regulating systems and the data supports this.

Academic Practice

Whilst there have been changes, wrought by numerous factors (Collini, 2003; Nixon et al., 2001), the impact on the practice of academic staff and the institution has been minimal. There has not necessarily been an assault on academics' views of what it means to participate in higher education. Henkel (2000) suggests that the justification for independence and self regulation has been weakened and this is supported by the research by the prioritising of funding in order to survive, and the dominance of Government sources of funding. Maton's (2005) view that there has been the commodification of knowledge appears to be the case for this Institution, although this may have been influenced by the fact that those interviewed had managerial roles in the main. As widening participation is not associated with a particular subject area, the 'preciousness' of subject knowledge and its control was not evident either.

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What does appear to be happening is that the School is interpreting current practices in a way which encompasses widening participation. This is hardly surprising as staff will endeavour to justify their activities. The issue which is more relevant is that it appears to be condoned by Government, through the ambiguous nature of their policy. The retrospective application for funding, described in this case study, is the strongest evidence of the reinterpretation of the agenda. There are other instances, for example the inclusion of international students. Greenbank's (2006) conclusion of a lack of Government commitment is evidenced by this Institution's ability to address the agenda retrospectively, suggesting that the policy is nothing new. An alternative conclusion is that the Government wishes to pursue other priorities, for example the reduction of public sector expenditure, or even that the Government supports notions of academic independence or believes that this is a battle for another day. Whichever conclusion is drawn, the failure within government policy to take into account the culture of higher education has meant that widening participation can be seen as an option and also be addressed using the means of least resistance within that culture.

The role of subject knowledge in defining academic activity appears to be retained (Henkel, 2000; Barnett et al., 2004) although later discussions re management might suggest that it has diminished. The notion that widening participation is not identified with a subject discipline is one of the explanations for its lack of importance to academia. In the event that it had been associated with a subject there might have been greater commitment and ownership of the agenda. Alternatively there could have been more direct opposition to the agenda if academics had not agreed to its inclusion within their subject. Greenbank (2006) states that there was little courting of stakeholder opinion with regard to reform; it would appear that opposition would be the more likely

outcome. The likely effect of 'forcing' agendas on staff and the commending of those associated with the University-wide provision of widening participation for not doing so, is clearly seen in the data. There are procedures which need to be adhered to if acceptance of agendas is to be forthcoming, one of which is discussion prior to decision making. There are also domains where challenges to academic beliefs will be more strongly rebutted. Widening participation does not appear to be sufficiently credible to be rebutted in its current format for this School, because it is not challenging those areas of academic practice which are considered to be sacrosanct.

MacDonald and Stratta (2001) discuss the impact of Government intervention in teaching and learning. This was not discussed by respondents, again suggesting that it was not a high priority, or alternatively that similar to Nixon's (2001) analysis it is associated with survival, and thus engagement is derived. Using the QAA as an example, Clegg and McAuley (2005) suggest that it is an attempt to deprofessionalise the occupation. However, MacDonald and Stratta's (2001) analysis seems to be more appropriate to this Institution. There are no great demands being placed on academics to change through the QAA; they are insufficiently challenged to perceive it as an attack. This may reflect that the focus is perceived to be concentrated on teaching and learning rather than subject knowledge. The former is not as important as the latter, to academic identity.

The Institution then, appears to feel insufficiently challenged to change practice within the classroom, although individual academics may choose to do so. However, there have been changes of practice elsewhere, with regard to organisation and control. Henkel (2000) suggests that structural changes have brought about a shift in the primary unit of academia, from that of the individual, to departments (or Schools for this

University). Faced with a wealth of audits and targets the department becomes centrally important in addressing them.

Again one could argue, and confirming Maton's (2005) discussion of autonomy, such changes have been insufficiently challenging to perceptions of academic independence. The accommodation of departmental structures could be perceived as a compromise, or the best solution, which in the current environment enables academics to continue with their original practice. Maton (2005) suggests that institutions have retained 'positional autonomy' through, for example management being recruited from within their own ranks. This is the case for this Institution.

There is a degree of challenge which needs to take place before radical changes occur. At present widening participation policy does not challenge the respondents sufficiently to radically change their practice. What is happening is in the first instance practice is being redefined, as and when necessary. If this does not have the required effect then minimal changes are made to practice, to the point where equilibrium is achieved between the required resources and original practice. The Government has not 'attacked' institutional behaviour on this front, at this time. The implications are again then that there is little or no reason to change. Gorard et al.'s (2006) review of research in this area concludes that there has been little change in teaching and learning, rather a student 'deficit model' has been adopted and this is confirmed by this research. Both Gorard et al. (2006) and Watson's (2006) 'thought piece' appear to be accepting of minor structural changes, for example in delivery, rather than a transformation of academic practice.

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The case study confirms Archer at al. (2003a) and Reay's (2003) analyses that widening participation appears to be something which takes place outside of the academy, both practically and philosophically The Government have enabled this to take place through their focus on the pre entry student life cycle elements, and the absence of challenge to this Institution to see the agenda in any other way.

Deem and Brehony (2005) discuss factors which have brought about institutional change, most of them concerned with Governmental relationships with higher education. Their analysis also supports that of Maton (2005) that any changes in management have been more acceptable through the use of academics, 'like minded people', in those roles. The introduction of new blood or radically new ideas to academia has not been forced, and thus the conclusion of the authors concerning changes in practice appears to be optimistic. There has not been a sufficient catalyst for change, or challenge within the case study Institution. Accommodation of 'new' management practices appear to have been accepted as they have been associated with survival.

Academic Identity

In many respects academic identity is associated with the institution; there is a binary divide or even a fragmented experience of what it is to be an academic (Nixon, 2001). It would appear that the institution serves the academic; the academic contributes in the most mutually beneficial way to the survival of the institution. The case study shows the compromise or negotiations present. Henkel (2000) suggests that this compromise is borne out of mutual dependence. There is little evidence in the data about structures impinging upon individuals, but the central concerns expressed surrounding recruitment suggest that financial survival of the University and School is important to individuals.

For this Institution academic identity is associated with research and individual academic freedoms, and this was used to explain limited staff engagement with widening participation activities. Staff responses to widening participation, within the School, are focussed upon the challenges created by the student cohort and these perceived challenges contribute to deciding when there has been too much change. Staff retain a realm of autonomy, perhaps enabled by the alleged success of the School. At the time of writing (2004-05) there appears to be no motivation for this School to engage in Nixon's (2001) outward perspective. The common denominator appears to be, whilst students are recruited in sufficient numbers and whole University agendas are engaged with appropriately, remembering that they are not particularly onerous, then the status quo can be maintained. The notion of Maton's (2005) 'divided self' was referred to by those in managerial positions as an explanation for the acceptance of financial imperatives. There is also though, the acknowledgement that this is a Business School, and as such there is a greater cultural acceptance of the language and practice of the economic imperative.

The view of the student cohort held by respondents appears to confirm the literature (Archer et al., 2003a), although international students are seen as particularly important as a source of third stream income. There has been discussion of the efficacy, for the School, of recruiting traditional students with a strong profile in order to ensure retention and progression, and reduced challenges to staff practice. MacDonald and Stratta's (2001) study supports the findings in this Institution. Non-traditional students were treated the same as all other students. This was justified by: a) the strong student support structures in the School; b) the notion that such students are difficult to identify (note comments about international students being much more obvious); c) ethical

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considerations that such students do not want to be identified. There is an individual dysfunction model being used, as the respondents suggest that learning is the province of the student. Failure to succeed is seen as a failure of the student, or pressure placed on admissions to recruit below the typical entry requirements for the programme. Similar to perceptions of equality, meaning equality of opportunity, there is constant reiteration in the findings that if students are willing and able to achieve then there is no problem. The impetus here is with the student. Bhatti's (2003) study is also supportive of the data, with its discussion of the scarcity of funding, not necessarily directly associated with the agenda; there is also the notion of receiving funding for activities which would have taken place anyway. What is not present in the data, or was not uncovered, is the notion of certain staff being considered as lower status due to their role in widening participation. Possibly this is because such activities take place in this Institution outside of the School. There does not appear to be any activity organised within the School solely for non-traditional students.

The notion of a lack of encroachment on individual academics practice, other than that which is justifiable for survival and in domains which are not considered to be sufficiently important, means that widening participation is pursued by individual champions. There is no pressure from the University or the School to pursue such activities but there is an acknowledgement of staff that do so. Such champions are in an isolated position with regard to colleague support, when it involves their resources. This independence and isolation, with regard to what takes place, is justified from the perspective of individual programmes having specific characteristics. Without the motivation and enthusiasm of certain individuals then, the profile of the agenda would not have been as 'high' as it was. Individual champions however are acknowledging of the structural constraints and sympathetic to the notion that academic identity is not

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necessarily associated with widening participation activities. Bhattis' (2003) pessimistic conclusion about the continuance of certain programmes which focus on traditional students' experiences, in her case study institution, might appear to be a sign of the future for this School and individual champions. It signals inherent problems because if it is insufficiently important to others then it will disappear.

Conclusions

The Research Process

The research began with an intention to understand the role of Government in widening participation, and in a naïve way to try to ascertain the Government's commitment to the agenda. There was an innocence which suggested that widening participation was a definable entity which could be discussed clearly and consensually with others. It was thought that the Government would have defined the concept and in addition ensured that it was being pursued as per the definition, if they were committed to the agenda. Then, from reading Ball (1994) there was an understanding that this would not be as easy as it sounded as there was the opportunity for stakeholders to 'manipulate' or 'reinterpret' policy. However, if the Government were serious about the agenda they would surely not allow this to happen. The progress of this research has indeed suggested that it is not as straightforward as it seems, and in fact is an impossible task. Governments do not act in isolation of others, nor are they necessarily the deposit of consensual views; and widening participation issues are very rarely what they seem.

This work has used models (Jones and Thomas, 2005; Greenbank 2006) to assist in the interpretation of widening participation. These models have tended to focus on the student rather than on the practice of higher education, with the exception of

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transformative interpretations. What is evident is that these models are able to categorise the vast majority of activities which were discovered to be taking place. The focus was the student and in the main pre entry to university. Rarely has the focus of the literature, particularly for this agenda, been institutional. More recent reviews of the literature (Gorard et al., 2006) have supported the student-centred nature of research in this area. Naively, yet again, this did not appear to be a problem as it was thought that the issue was the success of government policy and its implementation. An institutional perspective would suggest a role in the implementation and interpretation of widening participation policy.

What has become apparent through the research is an acceptance of the role of academia in the pursuance of the agenda, and indeed their commitment. As the Research Design states, the role of academia, whilst not considered initially, was included due to its importance: i.e. a new theory was created during the research. One of the dilemmas of the work has been that it would be very easy to lay the 'blame' firmly at the door of the Government and the ambiguous, piecemeal approach that they have taken. However what is clear is that the issues are many and complex, and in one way are specific to the institution, as interpretations and reactions to policy initiatives are borne out of the context of the institution. However, elements of the environment in which an institution is operating may be experienced by other institutions; for example the need to survive in an increasingly resource deprived, mass participatory, and competitive environment.

Greenbank's (2006) comments about the lack of stakeholder feedback on reforms, if addressed, may have ensured a more focussed and realistic policy approach. It does not appear that this would have been the case however as there is a more fundamental, prohibitive contest taking place, concerning institutional and individual autonomy.

Much of the analysis above revolves around a central focus of perceptions of what should take place in academia. This is acted out in a landscape of accountability, competitiveness, areas of institutional autonomy and scarce resources. What appears to happen is a negotiation or 'dance' both between and within the organisations involved, concerned with the defence or promotion of their respective self interests.

The Role of Government

Government can be perceived as wishing to make universities more financially independent, and yet they are increasingly controlling through audits and target setting. The widening participation agenda could be construed as another attempt to control. However it appears to be insufficiently supported by mechanisms of control, to be such. Using Taylor's (2003) model there is nothing of the 'stick' about the mechanisms used to implement widening participation. It appears that it is only controlling to those institutions who are suffering financial hardship or who are dependent on HEFCE sources of finance. What is controlling for this Institution with regard to Government policy is the requirements in relation to receiving finance. This could ultimately lead to the conclusion that Government are not concerned with widening participation. In their defence the ambiguous nature of the term enables the Government to tick some boxes for some people. Jones and Thomas (2005) suggest that academic and instrumental perceptions of the agenda are more successfully addressed than transformative ones. It can be surmised that the Government has identified these as the most important elements of the agenda. Alternatively they support or are unwilling to challenge university domains of perceived independence, for example knowledge ownership, and to a lesser extent teaching and learning. Evidence has been presented for the latter view: the lack of obligation to undertake TQA and the nature of QAA. It is also the case however that the Government has been successful at effecting change, particularly with

regard to the prioritising and management of finance. Ultimately though, there appears to be a shared view with academia, of the need for the retention of some degree of institutional independence; hence there appear to be omissions and loopholes within Government policy which allow a sidelining of the agenda for some schools, and some universities as a whole. As has already been stated, some countries particularly Australia, have taken a much more forthright approach. The likelihood of the Government using 'stick' policies in this area would mean a major cultural change. Whilst Collini (2003) suggests that all has been romanticised in the past, there still remains a high degree of independence within the sector, although it is not shared equally.

The Role of the University

The role of the University in the interpretation of widening participation is paramount. As has been described above there is no reason, from the perspective of Government control, why they could not move away from academic and instrumental perceptions of the agenda, if this is how they perceive them, to the transformative, where according to Jones and Thomas (2005) the needs of the under-represented are acknowledged, respected and valued. But the risks are too high of doing so and in some respects those risks are created not just by the institution, and those who work there, but also by government and potential students. The risks for the institution and staff are a redefining of what it means to be academic. This is not just from the perspective that following government policy might suggest a reduction in academic independence, which is allegedly central to the practice of academia. It is also from the perspective of academic identity. It has been argued (Henkel 2000) that subject knowledge and its control is the defining feature of academic identity. If a more transformative definition of widening participation suggests, similarly to Fielding (2001) and Apple and Buras's (2006),

sharing of ownership of knowledge and culture, then this is a fundamental attack on that identity. Adult education has been more open to such processes (Simon, 1992); however it may well not have the same status and traditions as higher education.

There is support from stakeholders for the University's position. The Government has changed the environment of higher education to ensure competitiveness between institutions. The result appears to be fragmentation, not in terms of accepted practice, but in the ability to survive. For academics this appears to be defined by maintenance of the status quo in relation to academic practice. Generously, Government policy may have intended to promote a diverse, market-orientated sector; however the sector has not necessarily shared this view. The risks are too great of becoming associated with: teaching and learning rather than research; attracting non-traditional students; and introducing new programmes which reflect students' experiences rather than academics' definitions of knowledge. Non-traditional students are associated with lower quality; they diminish the marketability of the product. Unfortunately, McDonald and Stratta (2001) suggest that non-traditional students do not want this either. They wish to attend what they perceive as a university which is supportive of academia's perceptions. However, their views may change once they are through the door. The issue then, for the institution, is how radical or independent they are, both philosophically and financially, to adopt a more transformative approach. This is where it is important for 'traditional' universities to adopt this agenda, to be transformative. They are the market leaders; they have more power to define what higher education is. If they become more radical then they are legitimising other universities to be so. The competitive market therefore has not bred diversity, but ultimately reduced the practice of higher education to its lowest common denominators, principally research and secondly the ability to attract academically 'strong' students.

The Future

The future for the agenda requires a separation of the academic identity from knowledge: rather a reverence for teaching and learning as much as for research. In a competitive environment this requires a move away from reductionist models of resource allocation to a more trusting perception of the work academics do, and a willingness to wait and have data provided in a qualitative rather than quantitative manner. This cannot be done purely by financial incentives. If nothing else, it is evident that academics are defensive of their roles. However if the institution creates resource spaces within which academics and students can work together, then optimally a more shared and engaging approach could be developed. The future of the agenda is dependent on philosophical engagement; 'carrots' and 'sticks' are insufficient on their own. As Nixon (2001) and Nixon et al. (2001) suggest, there is a need for the transformation of academics' perspectives first, towards a prioritising of learning, and a willingness and belief in a partnership between academic and learner in the development and negotiation of knowledge. Changes in the former may be easier initially, the latter changes appear much more radical. It would also appear that these transformations need to take place from the inside out; no credibility is attached to government interventions. Managers of higher education do not appear to be incentivised however to 'push' such changes. Deem and Brehony's (2005) work suggests that this is partially associated with the purposes of this 'new' management: the need to address the external framework based upon the mechanisms of financial survival. The role of individual champions continues to be important, but the means by which the agenda moves beyond the individual remains of concern. Nixon (2001) and Clegg and McAuley's (2005) perspectives above take us full circle. If the climate of higher education changes then, for survival, the institution may have to change to

accommodate new student cohorts. As discussed, this University is contingency
planning against this possibility by its attempts to increase third stream funding. There
is also unlikely to be anything transformative attached to such financial challenges.

Implications for Practice

The links to the practice of others could be thought to be constrained by the research
methods employed. This is a case study which has continuously referred to the
importance of context in determining practice and interpretation. It is important to
ascertain how it can be meaningful to other practitioners. In part the meaning to others
needs to be determined by others. This has been supported by the details provided of the
research process and context, so that similarities and differences can be identified. In
addition the research suggests that it is 'best practice' for this kind of research to be
undertaken using a case study approach. The next step is to continue to review the
theory both within the case study Institution and others.

The higher education environment is fragmented and as such the interface between
external and internal factors will be individual to the institution. What the research does
illuminate are important issues or even tenets, for example survival in a competitive
financially constrained environment, and issues of academic identity and the challenges
made upon it. The impact on practice therefore is to endeavour to identify challenges, be
they the same or different, and to promote activity and the work associated with
widening participation. The dilemma is how to make these activities mainstream, how
to associate them with credibility, over and above merely associating them in a derived
manner with the survival of the institution. Fundamentally as Ozga (2000, p46)
suggests, its contribution is three fold:

- To challenge assumptions informing policy and to illuminate the effect of policy in practice;

- To illuminate how inequalities and injustices occur;

- To aid educationalists in making changes and to challenge common sense assumptions about desirability.

Implications for Government

Governments, when creating policy, cannot afford to ignore the culture of the organisation within which it is to be implemented. This is particularly so for higher education where the values of discussion and research are important. It is difficult to imagine that an institution or sector will be accepting of a policy when they have not been consulted, even if there is agreement with the aims of the policy. Consultation should be not just with managers but also with practitioners. The use of policy instruments which have worked elsewhere assumes that organisations work and are motivated similarly; the profit motive for higher education does not appear to be as strong. There are non-financial benefits which are also being sought but are ignored by Government, for example academic independence. The constant deluge of reform does not assist the credibility of the Government's plans either but shows a lack of understanding and forethought. Thus financial incentives are insufficient, nor is compulsion appropriate; an externally originated policy is unlikely to succeed as there is little credibility attached to the Government's perceived understanding of the sector. What does appear to be appropriate is policy based on research findings which address the concerns of academia. An institutional perspective is required. Research data collected giving student origins and barriers to entry, whilst important, fails to recognise that for some institutions recruitment is not an issue and for others there are non-financial costs associated with such students, for example perceptions of status and

independence. Finally a long term plan needs to be constructed so that institutions are also able to plan and feel secure with any commitment they make to the agenda. Ultimately the quasi market is not conducive to such long term planning.

Implications for Higher Education Institutions

Institutionally there is a need to give status to widening participation. The collection of data by HEFCE does not necessarily support this, with its emphasis on quantity of output rather than quality. There is nothing to stop data being collected using an added value approach, which acknowledges pre and post entry achievement. However this is supportive of the idea that achievement for those with lower entry qualifications is more difficult, and potentially avoids the need for the institution to consider its teaching and learning practices. Institutions can however be less conservative in their practice. The role of traditional universities in promoting a more radical approach is central. Unfortunately higher education has become associated with brands which are perceived as reflecting differential quality. If those institutions with high brand loyalty, selectors, adopt and promote a more radical approach to widening participation then it is more likely to be associated for others with accepted practice in higher education. This conclusion is to accept the nature of the environment within which higher education takes place. Risks associated with radical practice are 'expensive'; some institutions can afford them more. Institutions can appoint staff who will promote the agenda and also can raise its profile, initially appealing to those areas of academic activity which are prioritised by staff. Admissions procedures, increasingly centralised and formulaic, need to be placed within the School. It is only at ground level that more flexible and meaningful decisions can be made. Admissions procedures should not be operated on a least cost basis.

At School level similar issues and considerations apply. Some Schools have stronger reputations than others, often associated with recruitment and entry qualifications. Such Schools could take the lead in promoting the legitimacy of the agenda. There is a need for Schools and institutions to reject an instrumental approach based on their survival. Schools, supported by the institution, need to take what they perceive as 'risks' with their admissions and practice. These need to be planned for, and staff consulted and their fears need to be discussed and if possible addressed. There is a real need for a collective response; this cannot just be associated with individuals as it will become marginalised. Credible leadership is required in advocating the agenda and also concerning the practicalities. This means that staff need to work in a less isolated fashion, and that communication needs to be clearer. There is no evidence that changing the patterns of teaching and learning will be detrimental to the traditional student cohort.

Implications for Academic Practice

The primacy of the individual academic means that the breakthrough for this agenda will take place at this level, if at all. It is at this level that a philosophical advocacy of the agenda can be addressed. This is required if the practice of the agenda is to become transformative, if it is to move beyond the mere counting of non-traditional students as they enter and leave the institution. Academics need to look outwards if they are to move beyond their own self interest and this is what is needed for this agenda to develop. Widening participation needs to be associated with what takes place within the institution and this remains fundamentally determined by academics. A belief that academic identity is more than the control of subject knowledge, rather the shared determination of that knowledge with students, will create greater access. This is also an acknowledgement that another barrier to entry for students is the practice of higher

education. As soon as a partnership is created between academic and student, then this will necessarily impact on the teaching and learning methods used. If knowledge is being sourced from both then, for example a didactic approach becomes redundant.

Whilst the assumption that students can contribute to the knowledge base may sound radical, it is not unknown to include other stakeholders. Universities have worked with industry and have addressed some of their concerns. Possibly, however, students do not have sufficient 'power', for example financial resources. There is though evidence that the creation of knowledge is political, it takes place with regard to other stakeholders, as evidenced by research projects sponsored by industry and Government. It could be argued that there is no such thing as inherent knowledge which is created in isolation of its context. The argument for the involvement of students is therefore an extension of what has gone before. If the role of higher education is to create independent learners, surely not too radical a thought, then students need to contribute and academics need to take those contributions on board. The development and facilitation of those contributions are the important skills to be acquired through higher education. Inclusivity needs to begin with what is at the heart of academic practice; the creation of knowledge. This is not the sole preserve of academics and attempts to make it such deny these freedoms to others. Without philosophical support for widening participation then higher education will simply colonise non-traditional students, it will make them in its own image. This self perpetuating cycle is what is denying radical changes to higher education.

There is a need for academics to change their view of university entrants and consequent support for them. The notion that students will arrive with the required skills to succeed on university programmes is at best naive and is excluding of many non-

traditional students. Not having the necessary skills on entry does not mean that the student is unable to achieve them and be successful. This does not contradict the role and purposes of higher education as it is likely that activities already take place which support student skills development. There is a need to consider the totality of our practice and how it relates to other colleagues. Is there a scaffolding of skills development through the programme? Are we aware of what our colleagues are delivering and require from students on their modules? Do assessment techniques develop and support skills progression and have we prepared students for the requirements of such assessment? Bringing academics together to discuss these issues and to consider their approaches is a beginning, and a collective rather than individual response will create a more coherent and long term approach to the issues.

This research has agreed with and accepted the conclusions of Reay et al. (2001) that the choice process experienced by non-traditional applicants to higher education is qualitatively different to more traditional counterparts and a consequence of this can be a reconstruction of inequalities within higher education. It has endeavoured to explore why, not from the students perspective but from an institutional perspective. It has added to the debate by illuminating explanations for an institution's behaviour towards the agenda, which is as important as governmental and student behaviour, in endeavouring to uncover what is taking place. Given Gorard et al.'s (2006) recent review of the literature, this is a departure from previous research. The institution has been included but from a perspective of how it can become more accommodating through its delivery of programmes (Osborne and Young, 2006). The conclusions drawn by Gorard et al (2006) about the nature of research in this area reveal a focus on structural barriers within higher education. These do not tend to challenge, in a substantial manner, the nature of what takes place in higher education. There appear to

be few attempts to analyse the impact of the ethos of higher education on widening participation, to move beyond structural changes to the delivery of programmes.

Thorough this case study, I am not arguing that the focus of previous research has been misguided. Rather, that there are other variables at play in widening participation. The research has shown that the higher education institution, and those who reside within it, are interpreters of widening participation and as such are centrally important to its meaning and practice.

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Appendix A: Roles of Respondents with Regard to Widening Participation

Title	Role
Vice Chancellor	Accountable to the Board of Governors
Dean of Education	University-wide brief for Widening Participation within the Senior Management Group. Prepares proposals with the Head of Widening Participation to be presented to the Senior Management Group, no decision making powers, these are made at the next level.
Head of Widening Participation	Role concerned with, Progression for Partnerships (School route), Active Community Funding, Widening Participation projects and School funding.
Dean of the Business School	Passes on and filters whole university widening participation initiatives onto members of the senior management team of the School.
Head of Undergraduate Programmes	Member of School Management Team. Receives and is responsible for widening participation initiatives for undergraduate programmes within the School. These are communicated to members of the School through the Undergraduate Management Group (made up of programme leaders).
Teaching and Learning Coordinator	University wide post involved in the communication of good practice in teaching and learning and of university wide initiatives. Increasingly important as a means of disseminating initiatives. Each school within the University has a Teaching and Learning Coordinator.
Programme Leader	Business School's representative within the Head of Widening Participation Group (this is increasingly being replaced by the Teaching and Learning Coordinator's). Communication and filtering of widening participation initiatives also come to the Programme Leader and may be disseminated by her at the Undergraduate Management Group. At times direct contact point for local school and college requests for advice
Manager of Undergraduate Support Services	Manages the Undergraduate Office, Placement and Employment Service Office, deals with quality issues as well. Manages staff who deal with undergraduate applications. Has attended local school and colleges who seek advice re. application process, with the Programme Leader.
Researcher in the Business School	Seconded from the Careers Service in the Business School, for six months, to undertake a research project. The project is a statistical overview of what is happening re widening participation; in terms of who are the students; what courses are they undertaking. The report will be presented to the Undergraduate Management Group.

- Check decision making diagram – any amendments?
- What responsibilities e.g. feedback, are there to any other level?
- What WP activities are taking place within the Business School (question need to problematise what is meant by WP activity)?
- Who is responsible for them?
- What are the aims of the strategies employed within the Business School? (Any documentation to support)
- When were these policies implemented? Have they come about due to the Government's strategy* or were they taking place before? If so have the motives changed? (* 1997 Dearing Committee's push on HE? Discuss whether agree this is a pivotal moment?)
- What are your reasons for participating in WP strategies within the Business School? Why is the Business School spending money on this?
- Why do you believe the HEI is pursuing these strategies (your perception)? Why is the HEI spending money on this?
- What do you believe is possible for this agenda?
- What are your perceptions of the constraints on the agenda?

Interviewer OK the first thing I'd like you to have a look at, I've tried to construct a structure of the sample.
Dean of Education Right.
Interviewer For the widening participation strategies in the way that they flow through the University. Do you think that's a fair reflection? It's then concentrating on [this] Business School.
Dean of Education I think its well…Where does it start?
Interviewer Well, that's questionable really. I'm putting the ultimate power…
Dean of Education I think you've got a mix here of the formal and what actually
10   happens, and they don't work
Interviewer And also it's not necessarily a flow down is it?
Dean of Education Well absolutely not. The formal lines of responsibility certainly is that the Vice Chancellor is accountable to the Board of Governors and I've got a University wide brief for widening participation, the boundaries of which have never been terribly clear. I mean when [the previous Vice Chancellor] was here, he in a sense oversaw widening participation but I had a strategy level, but I had a lead role to do with policy development. Particularly with the Head of Widening Participation and then Head of Widening Participation for a lot of the implementation, particularly obviously on the outreach work. Now the way it is now, under the new management system in the
20   University, I've got a brief within the Senior Management group for widening participation, but I wouldn't have decision-making responsibilities, that would be the Senior Management group. I prepare, working with the Head of Widening Participation and whoever else, proposals, but the decision would be by the Senior Management group, or ultimately if he wanted to exercise that decision in the sense of some sort of veto, by the Vice Chancellor. He's a member of the group, but issues like that come to the Senior Management group, only almost in a reporting sense to the Board of Governors. They don't actively approve, as they do a whole range of policies. It's a bit like the Queen's role with legislation in many cases.
Interviewer School Board of Governors and the headmaster?
30   **Dean of Education** Yes, I would think it's a more remote relationship than that, actually, between a school and the head. But certainly in terms of formulation of widening participation policy it really depends what we are talking about to do with widening participation, because clearly there are things that happen almost at the level of individual courses sometimes for visionary reasons and sometimes for pragmatic reasons because there is trouble in recruitment. And it's silly to pretend otherwise. The extent to which the thing is driven at course level or within school level or so on, will depend to some degree on the personal commitments of individuals in those key positions. The overall kind of university position, I'll bring this back to this, is that in a sense we, along with almost every other university, have no choice but to work within
40   the Governments policy, because that's actually what shapes HEFCE's [Higher Education Funding Council of England] funding arrangements, and widening participation has been an absolutely key plank. If you wanted to capture what Government policy about HE was about over the last three/four years you just have to say widening participation, its sort of almost the key issue. That's backing off at the moment. Beyond just the pragmatic need for the University to work within the funding council requirements, and I mean you'll be aware that fairly recently HEFCE considered making the giving of any money to the University contingent on acceptance of its widening participation policy. It didn't actually implement that but that was one of the things it was considering, which showed how central they were sort of driving. Now

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50   to bring us back to the sort of decision making, in one respect everything the University does is set within a widening participation context by default, because that's the theme in Government policy and HEFCE's funding policy. We're required to prepare, well we're not at the moment, we are required to report annually on what we are doing in relation to it as part of the Annual Operating statement. We are required to account for the funding that is earmarked for widening participation, which probably comes under a number of different headings and that's the kind of thing, to varying degrees, that gets picked up in kind of QAA [Quality Assurance Agency] institutional audit type activities. So you can't get away from it. Now it seems to me that universities then, within that general framework, handle the issue differently and the totally cynical view

60   would be that they do it entirely in the way that actually best serves their personal survival and status interests. And I think to a degree that's true. I view that as fairly pragmatic actually, because it's not the only thing they do for those reasons and there are some places that just have to be a lot more alert to, if you like, to their markets, to use the current sort of jargon. If you're Luton it would be stupid not to have a very clear commitment to widening participation. Now having said that Oxbridge, Nottingham and places like that, selecting universities have, to varying degrees both between institutions and areas within institutions, commitments, that in a sense, that don't actually have to have, need to have but choose to. That's an awful sort of ramble round but if I come back to the structure here I think if your trying to capture what actually happens its jolly

70   difficult because it isn't one thing. There are all sorts of different levels and strands to what goes on where the decision-making comes at different points. So if you work in relation for support for students with disability, all the policy formation for that comes from [Head of Student Support Services] and her crew and it will come through and get sort of agreed and then back again and they tend to be the implementation team as well. There may be issues to do with marketing strategy of the University as a whole which might be shaped directly by the Vice Chancellor, almost telling the marketing team that we need to capture this sort of image in the recruitment work, in order to target particular kind of constituencies. At the moment we don't have a widening participation policy. Although actually I think we are doing more than ever to do with widening

80   participation and the reason we don't have one, partly because its more embedded now, within the overall strategy, because we didn't have one before. And secondly because HEFCE hasn't required us to do a new one yet. They backed off. We were all meant to have a new one written but because of all the developments around OFFA they've actually held back from asking that to be written, because it would be stupid to write it a few months later [before] OFFA's regulations are published. That's an awful ramble round and to come back to this: I think it's a jolly interesting thing to try to do.
Interviewer I think it's difficult to do. I talked to Head of Widening Participation before I began, we looked at different ways that I could do it and it seemed one of the easiest ways to view it was to look at the streams of finance because then you can see

90   how they flow. There's so much more going on than is associated with finance but then that's interesting in itself because that's going on in spite of policy, isn't it?
Dean of Education It depends how you view that policy because in fact what you call the finance for widening participation, because the Government play the mirrors and smoke screen trick last year and they announced a substantial increase in the funding for widening participation. What they actually did was take funds from the normal funds for teaching and learning, identify it as widening participation money and gave it back again: and that's by far the biggest chunk of Widening Participation money. Well that's because, I mean, its not because... they did it because they wanted to announce they were doing new things, but in a sense what every institution then had to do was put it

100   back where it had come from initially because otherwise it was a very substantial

reduction in core funding for teaching and learning and clearly a whole range of things that people do in departments and at course levels are focussed on retention, successful progression through to an award. The way that's done ought to reflect the kind of nature of the cohorts that they recruit. Needs will differ between different programmes and institutions, recruiting from different kinds of strata of society.

Interviewer What you seem to be suggesting is it's an anomaly. It's extremely hard to formalise, you can't even say it's got anything to do with policy. Do you see what I mean?

Dean of Education I can't say that it's got nothing to do with policy, no.

110   **Interviewer** Part of me would suggest that a lot of this activity that goes on at [this Business School], is that they look after their students, they have a very good reputation for looking after their students, widening participation is within that. You could say that's a difficult one. I know what you're saying but is that truly really widening participation?

Dean of Education You've got to define what widening participation is?

Interviewer It's extremely vague.

Dean of Education Absolutely and getting more so.

Interviewer That questions what are they about when they are pursuing that policy?

Dean of Education In a sense I think that's fairly straight forward, what happened on it.

120   It's part of a commitment to social justice; I don't have a problem with that plus a justified belief. I was going to say but think I probably shouldn't say that because a lot of the time they are talking about widening participation no matter what age, they actually focussed all their indicators on youngsters. The justified belief is that a young person's educational attainment reflects not only the school that they go to, but also the background that they have come from, and those two aren't themselves independent, and that the consequence of that is that there are plenty of young people from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds and certainly from backgrounds where there isn't a cultural history of going further, at the family level or more broad social or community level, going through to HE, who have the ability, whatever that means, to move on and benefit

130   from HE. Interestingly it is exactly the same belief that informed the introduction of the 11+, which actually fundamentally was an egalitarian idea. The fact that the mechanism did other things was a separate issue, but I mean the belief was that there were people of all sorts of parts of society for whom routes through to success in education, for some of those groups were much harder than for others, were nothing to do with them and their ability to benefit. So I think that that kind of commitment is there. There was also and still is, but I think now to a lesser extent, a belief among ministers and probably more widely within government… a belief that universities actually discriminated against applicants a) from the public sector and b) from disadvantaged groups/otherwise disadvantaged groups. Remember, there was the celebrated case, I can't remember what

140   her name was, Sarah something or other, Gordon Brown got very upset about. I mean what that reflects is that there is, I think, an extraordinary misunderstanding of what HE is about. You occasionally catch ministers, Margaret Hodge did, talking about universities interviewing their applicants and making sure of the concept. That doesn't happen across the great, great, greater part of HE, because their experience was in many cases Oxbridge, where there are interviews and so on. There is an assumption a) that that is the kind of priorities and b) that all universities are selecting. Well they're not. I mean that the basic statistics are that there is more capacity than there is demand in the sector, that maybe in different subject areas. But I mean just in terms of volume of places it is the case that pretty well anybody who wants to go to university and reaches

150   the attainment level can get there. So I think there was a lot of sort of, in the early stages when they set out on this, they saw the blame as actually lying with the universities'

selection processes, and I think they now understand that actually it isn't like that. It is much more complicated, it isn't just a result of stuck up snobbery and prejudices in the university admissions systems. Then they set this ludicrous 50% thing, which came off some bodies past they sort of thought of it or something, and then there was an awful lot of shuffling around, 50% of what doing what, and there was an awful lot of slippery language being used around. They began to realise the costs of actually doing that, let alone any question about whether it was a sensible strategy in its own right, so they backed off that and now they're talking about working towards 50% and it's shifted

160   from as if they were doing full undergraduate degrees to some experience of he, whatever that means. The foundation degree gets shuffled in or dusted off and the old Diploma in HE gets shuffled in. All sorts of interest groups chuck in their two penneth to shaping up that kind of concept and it ends up in some kind of muddle. I think they are in the position now where they would absolutely love to back off from it, but politically can't. Set up all sorts of initiatives around the place, some of which have been very successful and very good, but some of them are an outrageous waste of public money and I put Aimhigher at the top of my list. Aimhigher is dreadful, just dreadful, and my understanding is that the Secretary of State has serious concerns about whether its doing what it should be, even looking in the right direction.

170   **Interviewer** There is a whole notion about whether policy can actually bring about these… can policy direct institutions to certain behaviour?
Dean of Education Just as policy it can't, you have to have some kind of implementation tools as a Government basically to make people do it.
Interviewer So carrot or stick?
Dean of Education Yes absolutely.
Interviewer That brings us back to the relationship between English universities and the Government.
Dean of Education Absolutely
Interviewer The notion of our independence vis a vis the Government and them trying

180   to capture us ………
Dean of Education Yes, we are in very different positions of course in different institutions. I think its worth in this context remembering that actually some of the very old institutions would now be called beacons of WP, like Birkbeck are absolutely set up to begin with, and a college in each of Oxford and Cambridge was set up specifically with different entry requirements and targeted at recruiting people from what we now call non traditional backgrounds. If it were the case universities were completely autonomous but government gives them money in a completely unconditional way then a policy couldn't make anything happen other than through an old chaps network. Having a word with George kind of stuff, which I'm sure happened at some points. But

190   no, I mean, you've moved from an elite system to a kind of mass HE and it's with phenomenal amounts of money going into it. I mean, we grumble about it in terms of the amount per student but its still very substantial chunks of money going in and it seems to me outrageous if there wasn't some accountability for that, actually. I cannot see how one could defend not having some accountability for use of public money.
Interviewer Its interesting as well because if you read Stephen Ball this has happened in schools and it is just coming our way.
Dean of Education I think there are different issues to do with when you get to talk about the curriculum or research. They are beginning to steer the curriculum in the sense of, there's a lot of things where we are able to bid for additional student numbers

200   and they set it up now so you don't stand any chance if your not meeting criteria that they are saying and among those are linked to the regional development plans and the regional development agencies analysis of skills shortages, and things like that. So in

that sense they are trying to steer parts of the curriculum. When Howard Newby [Chief Executive of HEFCE] was up here just recently, he said he had asked Clarke to give HEFCE planning powers whereby they could, like the Learning and Skills Council, actually tell HE institutions 'Ok we are funding you for these numbers x% of them must be in this subject area, y% in this area and so on'. Clarke declined to give them that. But if you're on about a system that is actually supposed to be linked to employment and to the economy and all that kind of thing, the evidence is quite clear that leaving it to

210   market demand doesn't do that at all. I mean, we've got stacks of engineering departments closing down all over the place, engineers can easily get jobs. Yet [in HE] huge growth still, well business is tailing off a bit, but in media and cultural studies and areas like that or in daft areas like forensic science where there is about two jobs in the country for forensic scientists…

Interviewer If you look at it globally engineers are being trained in other parts of the world, it's a global market place.

Dean of Education Well isn't it outrageous that we have nurses who are trained in South Africa and come and work here. I think it's dreadful that we depend on that sort of exploitation.

220   **Interviewer** What do you think are the aims of the strategies for [this University] in general, the WP strategies?

Dean of Education I ought to able to reel these off, oughtn't I? If I look at what we do and you infer from that what are we actually trying to do. The activities that we engage in as an institution essentially reflect the division that is in HEFCE's thinking and funding arrangements for it, which is between outreach on the one hand and retention and facilitating success on the other. We've got in both those areas incredibly good work going on. On the outreach stuff has shaped an outstanding team. We had a head start over other universities as we had a three-year HEFCE project before mainstream funding for WP was going everywhere and Head of Widening Participation was part of

230   that team and the only really successful bit of it. That's helped not only by the Head of Widening Participation's imaginativeness and total focus but also by the situation in the immediate region where [the City] in particular, but [the County], has lower than you would have predicted progression. Not just through to 18 but post 16 and attainment at every measured stage, it's a very odd thing [this] City, I think. So the environment was absolutely ripe for that because it was also the time when schools were beginning to be much more alert to attainment, value added and all that kind of thinking was coming more into the schools sector and OFSTED. So we built a really good programme of activities and so on there, that's very well regarded within the immediate region and has served as a model for other universities and indeed has informed government advice and

240   policy and so on. We've also benefited from the fact, what was actually not a policy decision, but at least not a decision because we thought it would be a good thing to link that [WP activities] with education faculty, which isn't the case in most places. That was done actually because there was a serious HR [Human Resources] issue in that early project team, some people needed to be separated out. I was asked to take on managing that part of the project which is something I'm really glad happened, though as I say for unfortunate reasons. But that meant, particularly some of the outreach work in schools, particularly when the TTA started funding things like the Teacher Associate Scheme we had got a structure to just grow the thing without having to set up a whole range of new activities. It's about raising attainment and aspirations, picking up people

250   and their families in the [local] conurbation.

Interviewer Could you do it if there was no funding associated with it?

Dean of Education No. You have to have funding to do these things so you'd have to take it from somewhere else. Although we are a charitable institution, no if we are not

funded to do that: a) we couldn't afford to b) it would be an issue about whether we were misusing funds given to us for one purpose to pursue another.

Interviewer So is the link to policy, in some respects the notion that the funding is associated with the policy? If you are seen to adhere to policy, it's because funding is available?

Dean of Education I don't see how you can implement any policy without some funds?

260 **Interviewer** I'm sure there is this consensus somewhere of an agreement and consensus of policy e.g. of the university seeing its role in society as being wider?

Dean of Education There is that absolutely. If you're going to employ people to do things you have to pay them and you have to have some funding for that. There may well be other things that we can think of that we would like to do, because its just good and worthwhile things to do and consistent with being an educational institution and with our place in the... whether its local, regional, national kind of framework, which is to do with those sorts of things. But without the resources to do it you've either got to take them from somewhere else, which means your taking them from some other purpose and I don't think.... its difficult to identify areas where we think we are over
270 funded.

Interviewer Maybe that's the issue, if resources were more buoyant then perhaps we would not need to be driven to these things by funding. We might take them on.

Dean of Education I suspect that within a university deciding at any point to take money coming through to support academic purposes you'd have a hell of a job with the academic staff persuading them that we shouldn't be using that for more research but that we should be using it for outreach work in the schools and the community.

Interviewer Is the link to finance then not just the notion that we would be getting money from government if we are ticking their boxes but also the notion that this will enable us to recruit more individuals and thus we will be getting money from that?

280 **Dean of Education** It doesn't work like that. We don't get more money for recruiting more individuals.

Interviewer Don't you get money per student?

Dean of Education No, absolutely not. The Teacher Training Agency funding works like that. They set us very precise targets course by course, initial teacher training courses. If they set us a target of 100 and we get 100, we get 100 students worth of funding. We get 98 we get 98 students worth of funding. If we recruit 105 they punish us next year by reducing the number of students we can have and don't fund us for the extra 5. The way HEFCE operates is, we have basically notional student numbers but the way those are constructed do relate roughly to the funding bands for different
290 categories of student of which there are four now. But we only operate three of them because the top one is medicine. Within that you've got a 5% tolerance each side of a target number. In other words you can go up 5%, over the target number and you don't get any extra money. You can go down 5% and you don't get any less money. The way it's operating now, is if you go down more than 5% they claw back money, you can actually be in a position where you can be short, let's say by a 1000 students and not have any financial penalty. If you're short by a 1010 you can have a £1 million, £2 million claw back. They don't work it on an absolute per capita basis they just have these bands, if you trip outside your band. The only way, if we can push our numbers to the top of that 5% tolerance level, if we want to, but in effect what we are doing is
300 reducing the amount of money per student. If we go over that at the moment the way it's operating we won't get any more money. So there is no incentive to increase your numbers, other than when they announce additional funding for additional student numbers. Then they say we will fund additional numbers, and this is where you've got an absolute nonsense here in WP terms if WP means totally increasing the numbers,

because they've only given additional student numbers in the last two or three years; only really quite a small number and linked to foundation degrees and they have to be done in partnership with FE colleges. It's the point you were making before: how are they actually going to target this? So they are saying they want it out there in the FE colleges but that's been the only way, opportunity to grow student numbers. We could do some shifting internally between saying that we want to shift student numbers from this area to that area. We can do that as long as we watch these different funding bands because we could get into a lot of trouble. If we shift a lot of engineering students, notional places, into history, english something like that, which is the bottom funding band per student, we could get into an awful lot of difficulty there and lose huge amounts of money within that overall envelope. The basic thing at the moment is overt, the Government is encouraging the sector to WP, we might term it as grow, but actually there is no funding to grow.

Interviewer Only if the university falls below this 5% tolerance.

Dean of Education Then you'd want to recruit. Yes absolutely if you're frightened of triggering, going below that, blimey you'd want to expand.

Interviewer You might want to operate on that −5% level...

Dean of Education You want to get as close to that as you can, with minimising the risk of going over it.

Interviewer That as you say is a total contradiction isn't it?

Dean of Education Yes, absolutely. You can't expect all these things to run in the same direction.

Interviewer On one level if the policy was being taken seriously and there was commitment to it, there needs to be more thinking about it and less contradiction.

Dean of Education It was introduced without ever costing it at all. Some politicians, ministers...

Interviewer It's a dream?

Dean of Education Yes it's a dream. It's a vision. They are faced if they say it to the electorate, we want to grow HE and what this means is an extra 3p on the rate of income tax and so on, they are not going to be there to do it.

Interviewer I also think that sadly your notion of grow HE is what they mean by WP, which is not necessarily a definition. It's not a social justice definition?

Dean of Education No it isn't. It could be almost now, because you can grow HE. The growth that happened in HE over the last 25 years was actually increasing the proportion of middle classes and you are now at a level actually there aren't anymore kids there to go through because its 90 something percent of middle class kids who do complete A' Levels or equivalent go on to HE. So any growth in a stable demographic context will have to come from other groups. Although what we've got at the moment is not a stable one, we are about to go into a declining number of youngsters. No, sorry, we've got a bulge within schools coming through. So actually to even sustain the current level of participation for the age group the system has got to grow. If it doesn't the participation rate will inevitably be falling causing political embarrassment. So they're a bit conscious of that, which is partly why they are also... the language is softening. I haven't heard a minister using the expression WP for probably a year now. They are really backing off it, plus Charles Clarke didn't particularly rate Margaret Hodge who was identified with it and set off the Aimhigher nonsense. I mean really badly thought through policy, cost I don't know how many millions just setting up new bureaucracies around the place before they began to do anything. I think they are backing off it. I think quite rightly because priorities, if you're talking about limited resources, ought to be around post-16 progression. If you look locally it's a major issue. It's actually attainment in the secondary schools and youngsters staying on post-16

education and training, if they are not going to do that, its pointless talking about moving to HE and that's where the focus really needs to be.

Interviewer What do you think is possible for this agenda? Or do you think this agenda is playing out ...

360 **Dean of Education** I think it will take a different sort of form. I think the general principle of wanting to take steps to reduce and remove avoidable barriers to educational progression which are clearly more prominent for people from disadvantaged backgrounds, whether that's in terms of family culture and expectations and so on or at a socioeconomic level... I think that commitment will remain, in many ways it's there as far as health is concerned because in many ways we're talking about the same sort of issues, the same communities don't progress to HE, have the worse health records. These things do link together and a lot of the inter agency stuff is quite right to be working in that way. I think that commitment will stay, I hope. But the tools for doing that as far as the involvement of HE is concerned, I think are changing and for

370 good reason, because to the best of my knowledge there isn't robust research evidence, but the anecdotal evidence is certainly pretty strong and our experience here is pretty strong, that one of the most potent, if not the most potent, things you can do as far as outreach work is concerned is to do with existing students going out and being involved with youngsters and their families. Now that scheme, whether it's student associate TTA funded, the Aimhigher version, the variety of mentoring schemes that are around, the payoffs from that just seem to be win, win, win. The schools think it's great; they are keen to be involved with it, the students get a hell of a lot from it, as well as those schemes are funded so they get paid. They enjoy it, they are doing something worthwhile, it enhances their cv. Anecdotal evidence is, those that have done it with us,

380 prospective employers are impressed by this and it has that direct impact with youngsters who might not otherwise meet people from university, who don't seem that much different from their older brother or sister. That is really good. There's more stuff about to be announced to do with science education with another stream of funding to support, focussing on science undergraduates working in schools. We know the impact on attainment, from what the schools' say, is conspicuous in the secondary schools.

Interviewer Are you saying that they may focus funds onto those strategies that appear to be more successful and others will fall by the wayside?

Dean of Education I know they are thinking that. Yes.

Interviewer And do you think that possibly it's an attempt to step back from being as

390 directive and controlling of universities?

Dean of Education No

Interviewer That agenda is still there?

Dean of Education I think so, yes. Universities now are important social agencies. The reality is that successive governments of different parties grew HE without really thinking about it all. They carried on with the same kind of funding model, with the same kind of operating ways of relationships between governments and the universities, that had operated in the 1950's. Which was kind of non-interventionist, run by good chaps kind of stuff. There were various initiatives, like Wedgie Benn was Minister of State for Higher & Technology or something, 'white hot heat of technology', under the

400 Wilson government, and all the Colleges of Advanced Technology sort of suddenly became universities, Salford, Brunel and places like that. There was a bit of intervention then, but nevertheless that was growing places to become universities, and they grew the whole thing, really without thinking about the funding. They just rolled on, on the same basis because year on year it wasn't that much of an increase, but over time we've moved from an elite system to mass HE. I think when you've got it at that kind of level of provision, with that proportion of youngsters going through, it's inevitable, and I

think I'd have to say that I think it's right that there should be accountability and a greater degree of control of government of the universities than would be the case years ago.

410 **Interviewer** I wondered, and the argument has been used in other nationalised industries and other public sector services, if you're demanding this budget off us, we are in a new environment you need to be accountable, because this is a massive amount of money. I wonder though whether there is something else about it, the notion that in our society universities are important in directing our society. They have a role to play they need to be shown their social responsibility.

Dean of Education I don't know if they need to be shown their social responsibility. I certainly think they have social responsibility, but on the whole I think its fairly well accepted, I can't imagine anyone contesting that because I mean fundamentally they are educational institutions, whether that's about the generation and dissemination of

420 knowledge and understanding. They are not government employees, so the relationship is more of being a quango than of being a direct arm of government. I don't fear the direct intervention of governments in this country of any conceivable persuasion, looking to intervene directly in the academic activities. In other words directly of what is taught or what research is done. Other than as far as research is concerned in terms of through the funding, the Research Funding Council of making judgements about how to distribute limited resources, i.e. to support some things and not others. And sometimes that will be in relation to priority areas, so that within the Medical Research Council's budget if it is Government policy because they are aware in terms of international comparisons we've got a real health problem to deal with condition x, y or z, then that

430 seems reasonable that research funding will take a tilt that way. As far as curriculum is concerned though, I think it's right, I wouldn't have said this a few years ago, but I do think now because of what I accept is a contested relationship between skills and the economy, by the economy I'm not just talking about GNP I'm talking about well-being, then I think government should look to steer to a greater degree than is actually happening at the moment, the range of opportunities that are available to students that are in universities as far as the choice of subject areas is concerned.

Interviewer Why the change of opinion?

Dean of Education Because I think I grew up with, operated with, the kind of liberal view that education is just about the individual and now don't think it is just about the

440 individual.

Interviewer Perhaps the notion is that universities are agents of social change, maybe economic change, and that notion needs to be taken seriously, as well as the roles with the individual and that, then, is the relationship between the university and the Government?

Dean of Education Yes. They're agents of social change possibly now in more direct ways through WP but they have always been agents of social change in indirect ways through the kind of research activities which give rise to innovations that inevitably have social consequences. A lot of science research is much more conscious of that kind of thing.

450 **Interviewer** This seems to be more instrumental and more directed and wider; to me the research element is accidental, less interference from government, whereas now government is saying you have a role to play we wish you to play this role.

Dean of Education Yes. That's part of the general inclusion agenda. Yes.

Interviewer At the moment they are saying we can't force you to do it, we can make it attractive if you do it and if you don't do it you will not be able to get access to x, y and z.

Dean of Education Yes. Absolutely.

Interviewer Do you think they may turn around later on and, say, be more forceful?

Dean of Education No. I think they have been down that road with the initial proposals
460   for OFFA and have actually come across a lot of the both conceptual and moral
difficulties that it raises. They have also been acutely aware of the legal challenges,
which have come from all sorts of directions. I think it's raised awareness across the
whole debate, what went around that during the passage of the Act raised awareness in
HE, not consistently as your obviously finding. It astonishes me that colleagues across
the University don't really know the white paper and the education act; it changes the
whole context of operating ...
Is this what you want to talk about?

Interviewer Yes because what you're giving me is more a sense of... you are further up
the hierarchy, although I don't see it as a hierarchy. We've already discussed that and in
470   fact my tree is not a tree. Do you have any delegated powers, does the Vice Chancellor
give you delegated powers, or does it all have to be put through the senior management
team?

Dean of Education I've got delegated powers to do with for instance... that's not
powers that have been formally delegated to me, but a lot of operational stuff. The Head
of Widening Participation has a lot of operational stuff and people in her team will do it
and they will pick it up sometimes and I'll get involved in things to do with organisation
of that team, like posts come available and thinking in terms of how to use that
resource, whether to simply go for straight replacement or whatever. The Head of
Widening Participation's role is going to be changing over the next year, she won't be
480   involved in that kind of thing. I've happened to talk to the Vice Chancellor about it but
not because I needed his approval to do it.

Interviewer I'm left with this notion: would the University address or report... are we
just jumping through hoops to gain finance or do we actually have a ...

Dean of Education No, the funding that we've got through WP... When you say do we
just do it to get finance, the things we're doing with that money are worth doing. They
are important things to do. We don't just get the money and then be able to use that for
something else, and we're not just doing this to be able to cream off a surplus from it to
be able to do other things. We use the money to do outreach work and to engage in a
number of initiatives to do with improving retention once students are on, and
490   supporting those with disability. No those are important things to do.

Interviewer Are they important to the new Vice Chancellor?

Dean of Education Absolutely. Yes, no question about that. That doesn't mean that we
would be able to do what we are doing now if they switched off some of that funding.

Interviewer The money is ring fenced for those activities, so in fact you can't use it for
anything else...........

Dean of Education We have to report on what we've done.

Interviewer The reporting, actually, isn't that arduous.

Dean of Education No it isn't. I mean its one of the most dry forms you could ever
have to fill in. It's absolutely dreadful; fortunately the Head of Widening Participation
500   does it. I just sign it off that bit it of it that goes to the contribution to the Universities
Operating Statement. It's pretty, pretty arid, but having said that they have picked up on
the one we sent in last year, that we hadn't accounted for how we had used some of the
increase in funding we'd been given. They came back to us. Actually there had been
some money that hadn't been identified as having been WP, which hadn't come through
from it. If it did we would have been able to have done some more work with it. We do
have to report on it and somehow somebody has the job, the dreadful job, of reading
these forms.

Interviewer Do you think any of the Universities commitment to this is to do with its heritage of being a polytechnic?

510 **Dean of Education** Yes. I mean the polytechnics on the whole were closer to their immediate communities than the old universities are. Not least because they were local government organisation and particularly in areas where they were in urban contexts and controlled by Labour councils and so on. Then there was a stronger focus. I think that legacy is there, yes. I don't think it's a straight kind of deterministic, kind of just something that is just hanging on there. I suppose I have difficulty in conceiving of working in an educational institution that at some level, somehow have some kind of commitment to social justice.

Interviewer There's also that interesting thing of looking at [this Business School], and their cultural background. When you say that we settled in the Faculty of Education, 520 optimally that would be a very sympathetic environment. Whereas if you might have settled within [this Business School] it might have been different.

Dean of Education If you were within a department in a university which was very focussed on research and it was one of these departments, which I have never actually come across but I hear exist, that almost treats teaching as an irritation and they just want to get on with their historical research, or something like that. Yes, if they don't think about what they are contributing to and through their students, they may well possibly not have any sense of being part of the broader community. No, I'm probably generalising too far from my shared background with you on that. But it's not one that I find any difficulty with here. I've never heard anybody within the University arguing 530 against it. Although there was some reluctance to begin with, with the Compact scheme in some parts of the University. I remember a meeting at the then Executive Board where one Dean was arguing that they needed for particular courses to attract the very best students, so they didn't want the Compact, any Compact students. And we had a very robust discussion that if we were running a Compact scheme that it would be across the whole of the University.

Interviewer Someone was saying that they don't offer them any lower grades.

Dean of Education No. That was a policy decision we took as a university that we were about raising aspirations and attainment. But we were not going to change the entry requirements. Which is one I think I'm still happy with, because one of the things we do 540 know is that students who come through on the Compact scheme, the last thing they want is to be identified as a Compact student when they are here. Absolutely the last. They don't want to feel they got in because they had special treatment, through the back door. They want to feel they got here because they got here. They are here on the same terms as everybody else. I think that's right. We would much rather put the energy into supporting and raising attainment, removing the barriers, anxiety, lack of knowledge, so they can see their way through, know what they are coming to. They are probably better prepared for coming through and succeeding than other students who come through. Indeed the retention rates are marginally better compared to other students. National evidence is that actually the best predictor of retention is entry qualifications. So I'm not 550 sure you are doing anybody any favours by dropping the entry requirements. If you expected that, back down the system, it would be absolutely crazy the net effect if you started producing lower thresholds. If you had any kind of selective system ...

Interviewer The policy needs to concentrate on schools and post-16 and raising achievement and that may then lead naturally to an organic growth, rather than trying to create an artificial situation. Do you think that any of our approach to the strategy, is to do with OFFA and wanting to charge ...?

Dean of Education No. It might have been, but the way OFFA's ... I think we want to judge the higher fees. I don't think there is any question about that. I think it's very

interesting about how that might work. At one stage, it looked like yes OFFA was only
560 going to approve institutions charging higher fees if they had got their WP policy and
their kind of access arrangements clear, and then approved by OFFA. I haven't actually
seen the final version as it went through in the Act, but it's clear that OFFA is receding
and receding. It's very interesting, I went to a meeting of six local MPs, to do with the
passage of the bill and Kenneth Clarke, who was the only Tory one there, he was
extremely interesting actually. He said the reality is that successive governments just
haven't thought about HE. It's been neglected and the funding mechanisms haven't
been really altered, it's got to be rethought. And then he said also that he thought that
this OFFA thing was absolutely bonkers and he hoped it was going to end up with one
person in a room with a telephone and maybe a part-time dog to help ...He thought it
570 was absolutely crazy.
Interviewer In some respects you could see OFFA as being a reaction to all the issues
about putting the fees up and social justice, I know we'll have a regulator, like the
privatised industries. It was very much a knee jerk reaction.
Dean of Education Absolutely. Once the report that Stephen Schwartz's group have
been working on... It's the kinds of things they've been looking at, other kinds of
indicators of attainment or potential to succeed in university and that universities might
use in entry. The awareness of openness to legal challenge if we start using other
measures, which inevitably would, and almost would be designed to produce a different
outcome, in the sense of producing a higher proportion of applicants, and we are really
580 only talking about the selecting universities where this is an issue. The vulnerability to
legal challenge on the use of the measure, if you can't demonstrate its robustness will be
huge. Certainly the public schools have been lobbying all that. Whatever the
Headmaster's Conference is called now, they have lobbied on that and of course they
are pretty well connected. There is actually an important point there. If we are going to
have a fair system and we are going to introduce new entry measures, we have got to be
clear they are fair and they do what they really set out to be doing.
The interview, the trust that people put in interviews, is so susceptible to all sorts of
personal agendas.
Interviewer Using points systems for admissions is fairer?
590 **Dean of Education** It's totally transparent, whether it's fair in the sense of being the
best predictor of ability to succeed in a degree, has to remain a continuing open
question. But we ought to be trying other things; you can't just go and introduce them.
In the States they use these SATs. We ought to do a decent scale trial by asking people
who we are taking, or who are applying, to do those as well. Absolutely not using them
in the process. Obviously you can't track those who didn't get in but you have to track
those who come through and see whether it shows any relationship.
Interviewer Are we saying we will only recruit those who we can predict will have a
high degree of success. This notion in education where people are damned so early,
aren't they?
600 **Dean of Education** Well I don't think it's terribly early. The point is, we don't want to
have high drop out rates in the first year. They are not doing anybody any good.
Interviewer But then again should we turn around and say look statistics suggest that
you won't make it, so we are not going to offer you a place?
Dean of Education If you are in a selecting university... I mean we wouldn't do that
because... well we might on some courses, in many of [researcher's] courses we are not
in a position to be selecting. We do say to some people, sorry even though we've got
space actually your profile isn't good enough.
Interviewer It's ethics isn't it, saying to someone you might be wasting your time?
Dean of Education Absolutely.

interesting about how that might work. At one stage, it looked like yes OFFA was only going to approve institutions charging higher fees if they had got their WP policy and their kind of access arrangements clear, and then approved by OFFA. I haven't actually seen the final version as it went through in the Act, but it's clear that OFFA is receding and receding. It's very interesting, I went to a meeting of six local MPs, to do with the passage of the bill and Kenneth Clarke, who was the only Tory one there, he was extremely interesting actually. He said the reality is that successive governments just haven't thought about HE. It's been neglected and the funding mechanisms haven't been really altered, it's got to be rethought. And then he said also that he thought that this OFFA thing was absolutely bonkers and he hoped it was going to end up with one person in a room with a telephone and maybe a part-time dog to help …He thought it was absolutely crazy.

Interviewer In some respects you could see OFFA as being a reaction to all the issues about putting the fees up and social justice, I know we'll have a regulator, like the privatised industries. It was very much a knee jerk reaction.

Dean of Education Absolutely. Once the report that Stephen Schwartz's group have been working on… It's the kinds of things they've been looking at, other kinds of indicators of attainment or potential to succeed in university and that universities might use in entry. The awareness of openness to legal challenge if we start using other measures, which inevitably would, and almost would be designed to produce a different outcome, in the sense of producing a higher proportion of applicants, and we are really only talking about the selecting universities where this is an issue. The vulnerability to legal challenge on the use of the measure, if you can't demonstrate its robustness will be huge. Certainly the public schools have been lobbying all that. Whatever the Headmaster's Conference is called now, they have lobbied on that and of course they are pretty well connected. There is actually an important point there. If we are going to have a fair system and we are going to introduce new entry measures, we have got to be clear they are fair and they do what they really set out to be doing.
The interview, the trust that people put in interviews, is so susceptible to all sorts of personal agendas.

Interviewer Using points systems for admissions is fairer?

Dean of Education It's totally transparent, whether it's fair in the sense of being the best predictor of ability to succeed in a degree, has to remain a continuing open question. But we ought to be trying other things; you can't just go and introduce them. In the States they use these SATs. We ought to do a decent scale trial by asking people who we are taking, or who are applying, to do those as well. Absolutely not using them in the process. Obviously you can't track those who didn't get in but you have to track those who come through and see whether it shows any relationship.

Interviewer Are we saying we will only recruit those who we can predict will have a high degree of success. This notion in education where people are damned so early, aren't they?

Dean of Education Well I don't think it's terribly early. The point is, we don't want to have high drop out rates in the first year. They are not doing anybody any good.

Interviewer But then again should we turn around and say look statistics suggest that you won't make it, so we are not going to offer you a place?

Dean of Education If you are in a selecting university… I mean we wouldn't do that because… well we might on some courses, in many of [researcher's] courses we are not in a position to be selecting. We do say to some people, sorry even though we've got space actually your profile isn't good enough.

Interviewer It's ethics isn't it, saying to someone you might be wasting your time?

Dean of Education Absolutely.

610   **Interviewer** I still have this notion though of saying the statistical probability of you surviving is poor. There are still people who can do well.

Dean of Education Absolutely and there will be people who don't. If you want to recruit from a substantial number of applicants and I suppose if you want to get the maximum value from that, I suppose I do operate on the assumption that … I mean Primary BA, 1500 applicants for 120 places, we take those with the higher grades plus the experience for the professional courses. Partly because that's transparent but also because overall, not just statistically across the whole centre, drop out rates are higher from those with lower entry qualifications. That feels ok to me because, particularly on professional courses, teachers don't want to waste time training those who aren't going

620   to make it through.

Interviewer None of it is cut and dry.

Dean of Education No, no.

Interviewer Because the person you just turned away might be brilliant.

Dean of Education Maybe but we can't know that. We've talked a lot about the aims and we focussed on the outreach stuff; the other part of course is the retention. We've got that running very well, student support service stuff, [Head of Student Support Services'] team excellent, particularly in the sort of disability and mental health stuff. Where I don't think we've got it organised well and operating anything like consistently, is to do with the level of support within [University] schools, [University]

630   colleges within the course level: at the level of kind of study skills, support, personal tutoring kind of activities. Frankly the funding isn't there to give the staff time for that sort of thing. But the indications are, do you know F? He runs sort of study support activities and it's through him we've got all those leaflets and things, produced by Leicester I think it was originally. But we've also got a number of people around the University, employed by what were the Faculties, doing study support. I think that kind of thing we haven't got well enough, just yet.

Interviewer Is that mainly a part of School's producing plans which slot within the University strategic plan and then you might get more standardisation?

Dean of Education Yes, and I don't know whether its standardisation, because there

640   may well be different needs within different areas, but there should be consistency in the degree of kind of planning that's going on for provision.

Interviewer Will WP be in this?

Dean of Education No that will come.. Well in the most general sense it's to do with retention and enabling students to succeed, but we'll probably develop that more through the academic management side of things. So it's likely to come from CASQ and CAP type of set up. What we've got going on at the moment, and for the last two years, is a variety of things, I'm reasonably comfortable about that, popped up to deal with locally identified needs. And I think what we need to do now is to take a view of what's happened there and what's been working really well. Not to do with just specific

650   kind of interventions but the way in which a facility is made available and actually operates. I mean we had a quite expensive centralised system where students were able to refer themselves, an open access, drop in kind of thing. It was incredibly expensive for the amount of usage, because the people there, if you have a drop in system, often these people are sitting with nobody there, nobody coming to see them. We then tried to do more targeted provision and lighter touch stuff, leaflets students can be given or pick up themselves if they need to. We've got somewhere; it's built into courses where there is a clear study skills element that's part of the curriculum, even an assessed module. There's elements of that within the undergraduate programmes, we've got. So there is a variety of stuff around like that. One of the aims of the Strategic plan is that all courses

660 should have that focus within some part; I think it's referred to as life skills. Often it's just an awareness of what you're doing.

Interviewer It's hard to gauge the importance of it to the university of WP, a) because it's virtually impossible to define... Part of me thinks that if you're not asking for it to be monitored then there's a willingness for it to come and go. If you ask for things to be monitored then it's a hidden agenda

Dean of Education I think it's much too broad a concept now to be of any use. I don't think you can monitor WP if by that you mean something more than the demographics of your recruitment. If you mean that fine, we can monitor that. But we need to do more on that than we do, with surfacing the data that is already there to do with the

670 background entry characteristics, race, ethnicity social stuff. It's beginning to be looked at.

Interviewer There is quite a bit being done

Dean of Education It's beginning to be looked at.

Interviewer [Head of Database Management]

Dean of Education Yes that's right. Since he's been with us we are getting much better at using that software that we bought in, using WP funds. What it isn't good at doing is linking into other University systems and I don't mean that just in a formal technical sense, it's actually in other people beginning to use that sort of data. But we won't need that for too long because actually the development of the Data Warehouse and of

680 Banner, as that's getting more sophisticated, that will mean that data will be in there and we'll be able to use that ourselves. We need to get better at looking at holding up data to be able to, just as a reflection within courses within schools to see the picture of what we are doing, working with. Coming back to your point I mean I think there are aspects of, that one would talk about as being dimensions of WP, that we should develop on in terms of both our activities and our monitoring. But if you come back to your basic point, about should we be treating that as one whole thing, I think not any more. It's just so kind of broad; it's like trying to say we should be accountable for education, for our area what we are doing is education.

Interviewer But then is there not a need to evaluate the activities that we are doing to

690 see whether or not they achieve the outcomes that we wanted them to?

Dean of Education Yes, Yes.

Interviewer Where would you begin?

Dean of Education We haven't had it since [the previous Vice Chancellor] died, but we always used to have performance indicators for the University on a whole range of issues, which was a book of statistics produced. And we had a section in there to do with WP, although actually some of the other indicators were WP as well...simple straightforward demographic things to do with recruitment. That kind of thing was used for monitoring at that really quite really high level of the institution, You could drill down into it in terms of faculties and to different courses, I don't know that we ever

700 used it terribly well but the data was there and was formally considered by Academic Board and by the Executive Board every year. I think this conversation is making me more and more aware of how useless the term WP is. Other than at the level of capturing a spirit, which is much more than a commitment to inclusion actually

Interviewer I'm not even sure that's the spirit? I don't know that it does mean that for the Government. To me it's a wider debate about education policy, Government policy, manipulation, and roles of universities.

Dean of Education Yes, yes. I suppose the total cynic, and I mean I'm not and I don't believe this because I mean conspiracy theories always attribute far more intelligence and foresight than is humanly possible virtually to have, might view the history of the

710 thing, the recent history being part of Government wanting to get more control of HE

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and one of the ways you do that is by introducing it under the banner of something that is so morally worthy that no one can actually credibly object, where actually what your after is control. I think that's what's happening, but I don't think that's why they set out to do it. I think why they set out to do it was less thought through.

Appendix D: 11/06/2005 Code Identification Reference Table: WP Research (Perspectives of interviewees) #1 and Code Review Procedure.

Category of code	Subcode (unless otherwise stated relates to wp)	Identifying words/themes	Code Abbreviations	Rationale for Code
Background Interviewee		'I am..'; 'I would..'; 'I'm responsible..'	ROLE	Interviewee's perceptions of their role in relation to the initiative.
Responsibility Structure	Documentation/ Communication	Presence of and knowledge of formal docs.; minutes; plans; agendas; WP activities taking place	RESPCOM+ve	Reflection of the importance designated to the agenda, knowledge/presence suggests of importance
		Absence of and knowledge of formal docs.; minutes; plans; agendas; WP activities taking place	RESPCOM-ve	Reflection of the importance designated to the agenda, absence suggests of little importance.
	Responsibility Structure	Clear understand-ing of the structure relating to responsibil-ities of involved personnel (e.g. structure of sample discussion)	RESPSTRUC+ve	Reflection of the importance designated to the agenda, understanding suggests importance. NB Validates sample chosen.
		Unclear/no understand-ing of the structure relating to responsibilit-ies of involved personnel (e.g. structure of sample discussion)	RESPSTRUC-ve	Reflection of the importance designated to the agenda, lack of understanding suggests of little importance.
Definitions of WP	By Activities	Family suppers; FE	DEFNACT	Reflects understanding/import

		Colleges; Schools; Compact		ance of
	By Students	Increase in numbers; under-represented background; ethnic minorities; international students	DEFNSTUD	Reflects understanding/import ance of. [Cross over with other codes i.e. INTSTUD]
	General	Broader philosophical explanations	DEFN	Reflects understanding/import ance of.
Motivations to engage.	HEI Centrally organised & instigated.	University process assists positively.	MOVCEN+ve	
		University process makes School undertake the initiative; sanctions; processes to check imple-mentation.	MOVCEN-ve	
	Business School organised and instigated.	Independent-ly motivated to engage.	MOVLOC+ve	Is this truly a motivator, suggests motivation but doesn't provide a reason for.
		No independent motivation.	MOVLOC-ve	No reasons provided for non engagement occur in alternative code(s)
	Vision of defined personnel (Defined = interviewed)	Typically Head of Widening Participation, maybe more general.	MOVVIS	
	Government policy	Role/responsi bility of HEI's to adopt Govt. policy.	MOVGOV+ve	Perceptions of relationship of HEI's to govt.
		Not the role/ responsibility of HEI's to adopt policy, independent.	MOVGOV-ve	
	Source of Finance from Bus. Sch.		MOVFINLOC	Supports level of motivation.
	Source of finance from the HEI	Centre, Head of Widening Participation.	MOVFINCEN	Supports level of motivation.
	Source of finance from Govt.	HEFCE; more general.	MOVFINGOV	Supports level of motivation.
	Enhances profile	Regional	MOVPRO	

	of University	university; national acknowledge ment		
	Supportive senior management team	VC, Dean; may include evidence of support eg document- ation.	MOVSMT+ve	
	Unsupportive senior management team.	Evidence of lack of support.	MOVSMT-ve	
	Successful/low maintenance	Targets being achieved; why get rid of it as its working.	MOVSUC	
	Recruitment of Students	Engage with policy to attract more students.	MOVREC+ve	
		No recruit- ment needs; selecting.	MOVREC-ve	
	Impact on Teaching and Learning styles.	Positive impact on T & L	MOVT&L+ve	
		Initiative accepted if no change to T&L.	MOVT&L-ve	
	Survival External	External pressures, environment within which all hei's exist.	MOVSURVEXT	
	Survival Internal	Business School adopting policy to ensure viability within institution.	MOVSURVINT	Overlap MOVPRILOC?
	Alternative priorities Business School	Business School seen as having other priorities.	MOVPRILOC	Overlap MOVSURVINT?
	Alternative Priorities Non defined staff.	Explanations of staff engagement	MOVPRIIND+ve	
		Explanations of staff dis- engagement	MOVPRIIND-ve	
	Historical/ heritage	New university; ex polytechnic	MOVHIST	

International Students	International Students	General, perspectives on link to.	INT	The frequent occurrence of issue suggests that perceived link, purely investigative.
Future of WP	Developments; organisation of	Embedding; redefining	FUTORG	
	Constraints	Agendas which may push this aside.	FUTCON	

Code Review Procedure

The following issues were reviewed: were both coders coding the same data by code descriptor; were some codes deemed to be ambiguous or not valid: either too few 'hits' in the data or the validity of what the code was extracting was deemed not to illuminate issues related to the question asked. Interestingly this initial review also raised awareness about the importance of reliability in the coding process, both in the standardisation of the use of codes between data extracts but also in terms of why it was taking place, and the pitfalls of coding.

NODE CODING
REPORT

Node: DEFNALL Created: 21/07/2005 - 08:40:03 Modified:
23/07/2005 - 10:54:11 Documents in Set: All Documents

> _Document_ 1 of 9 Manager of Undergraduate Support Services edited
> interview

Passage 1 of 4 Section 0, Paras 83 to 84, 180 chars.

83: Researcher Teaching and Learning Coordinator put it that ultimately the Business School
is student centred. That's the bottom line. Widening Participation is part of that, being student
centred.

84: Manager of Undergraduate Support Services I agree with that,

> Passage 2 of 4 Section 0, Para 116, 591 chars.

116: Well the main reason we started to do it was because that academic year we took an
influx of students with below our entry criteria, because at clearing we were told to take a lot
more students, 200 more students. So we took a lot of students with, at that time I think our
entry was 18 points, and we took students with 12, 14, 16 points. So that was the main reason
we were doing it, it wasn't just for Compact students but we just thought whilst we had got
this huge spreadsheet with all these 800 student names on that we could add in those students
who came through the Compact scheme.

> Passage 3 of 4 Section 0, Paras 129 to 130, 196 chars.

129: Researcher You're saying it's not a Compact issue, it's more of a low-grade issue?

130: Manager of Undergraduate Support Services It was more of an entry versus exit issue
that we were thinking about. Not just simply from a Compact point of view.

> Passage 4 of 4 Section 0, Para 132,447 chars.

132: Manager of Undergraduate Support Services I don't think any of the administrators
would think this is a Compact student or this is a disabled student or this a student from a
certain postcode area and therefore I'll give them a bit more than what I'm going to give
Joe Bloggs. I think that also happens in the selection, we are not going to think that this
group of students, this pile of applications here are from certain postcode areas. We are
going to treat them exactly the same.

> _Document 2 of 9_ Head of Undergraduate Programmes Edited Interview Passage 1
> of 4 Section 0, Para 13, 370 chars.

13: Again, the students that actually come here, if when they get in class they turn out to be
reasonable students who are more than reasonably committed and more than able to progress
to the

next year and graduate, then the actual staff will teach them Whether they're particularly conscious of someone coming from an under-represented background or not, is a moot point.

13: Widening participation students are not like that. I guess if you found a member of staff and pointed out to them, did you realise little Jimmy, in the corner, is the first one in his family to go to university and came from a really difficult part of [this City] or something, and yet is doing actually doing quite well the tutor would probably say oh really, without realising. I think that's quite positive.

15: I would think that most people in the University would agree with that sentiment. The basis of all admissions it seems to me is, is the applicant capable of succeeding and do they have the ability, the willingness whatever to succeed on a higher education programme? That is the most important question that one can ask. If a candidate doesn't have the ability or the enthusiasm or the willingness then they didn't ought to be here, they didn't ought to be wasting our time teaching.

17: things like marketing, including events designed to attract applicants or help applicants decide whether to come to this area. In February for example we have open days, which help decide to put us as a first or second choice and things like that. Those sorts of events and brochures and all this kind of stuff, and maybe visits to schools, then we have a marketing manager who is pretty instrumental in determining and has done extremely good work.

Document 3 of 9 Teaching and Learning Coordinator Edited Interview

12: Researcher Was the justification retrospective?
13: Teaching and Learning Coordinator Some of it was, yes. Some of it was.
14: Researcher In your opinion those activities would have taken place anyway?
15: Teaching and Learning Coordinator Many of those activities would anyway have happened, not to pin it down to pounds. So what we were saying is we were already doing this stuff anyway, it is to benefit widening participation students, so somebody is offering us some cash to do it:, great.

23: What I would say, my perception is that the Business School has always treated, has always been known for treating its students very well. We've been known, as I think most of our students would say, we are pretty student centred. They would have some whinges but compared to other places they would find we try to give them some attention. Now, I think that would extend to widening participation, in the sense that we would try hard to address the needs of all our students and therefore widening participation students would just be an extension of that culture.

29: Retention, is a different thing altogether, and the Business School is paying quite a lot of attention to understanding its retention statistics and reasons why retention might not be as good as we want it to be. I think we are at a relatively early stage of understanding. I prefer to call it, not retention because it's very negative, Freudian kind of word, [but] to call it student performance or student achievement. Because the worry is that student achievement is not as great as we would like it to be. So if student achievement is not great, is that because we are opening up our doors to other sorts of students?

29: We have done some analysis; again Manager of Undergraduate Support Services will help you with this, in recent years over what's the relationship between poor student achievement, particularly in the first year, and other factors. Most of the analysis, as I understand it, has been about A' level scores and other kinds of attained qualifications. It hasn't been about postcodes, ethnicity, or disability or anything like that. I might be proven wrong again. My perception is we have not even addressed that question.

51: So I suppose what's happened is that as we have recognised that the needs of our students are increasing, partly because of widening participation and because of other things as well, we have put in place new structures, new processes, new posts. But I don't think anybody would have, hand on heart, said that's because of the Government's widening participation agenda.

51: 2002/03 I think we would have done it anyway, it was recognised at the margin kind of increasing support for students. Support for students has been on our internal agenda and the widening participation happens to coincide with that so we can now argue that some of this funding.. we are dong the activity so lets take the money.

52: Researcher The motives haven't changed then, in terms of [this Business School's] view of widening participation strategy? [This Business School] is student centred, always has been, always will be. The funding has enabled you to take that a little further. That's it really?

53: Teaching and Learning Coordinator Yes, and I think it's a bit off the radar

53: Other things are more critical, international students and students who don't perform well whether they are widening participation students or whether they are A' Level students. Those are our concerns

53: Unless we were driven to it by external funding we would probably not address this as a separate issue, we would think 'well, look these are all students. So let's think about students who are not achieving. Let's talk about students who are challenging to academic staff Let's not think about where they are coming fro~ they are just challenging The only thing we might think about where they are coming from, literally, is if they are international students,

<div align="center">

Document 4 of 9 Dean of the Business School_edited Interview Passage 1 of 3
Section 0, Para 32,326 chars.

</div>

32: I know for a fact in terms of some of the things that go on around recruitment and bringing students to our programmes, some of those initiatives are led by staff where we're resourcing that agenda of which there might be a widening participation spin offs as it were   that are not actually explicitly funded by the University.

<div align="center">

Passage 2 of 3 Section 0, Para 40, 121 chars.

</div>

40: I consider our attempt at broadening our student base internationally is also part of the widening participation agenda.

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Passage 3 of 3 Section 0, Para 40, 282 chars.

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40: It's inevitable, I think, the way government policy is going in the UK, and the way this University is going in terms of broadening its international profile, that widening participation, in a non formal sense, is a bigger agenda than the actual formal policies and initiatives that ...

<div align="center">

Document 5 of 9 Programme Leader edited interview Passage 1 of 5 Section 0, Para 23, 328 chars.

</div>

23: I would have to say the majority of it has been driven from the meeting of requests, but then within and a different way of, sort of, widening participation is making sure that when the students are in here we are supporting them In terms of actually doing a lot of the outreach work, that does come very much from Head of Widening Participation' s group.

<div align="center">

Passage 2 *of* 5 Section 0, Para 29, 345 chars.

</div>

29: Then further to that we've been ensuring that we ... lots of students are here, that we are trying to be aware that we have a wide variety of students within the undergraduate, not just the Compact students and the widening participation students but the international students. That we are making sure that. ... that's a diverse population of students.

<div align="center">

Passage 3 of 5 Section 0, Paras 41 to 43, 329 chars.

</div>

41: Programme Leader I suppose that ....
42: Researcher That's regardless of Government policy?

43: Programme Leader Yes, I think the difficulty I would have is that I have certainly found that in my experience that some of the students that come through, perhaps the Compact scheme who are first generation, they don't necessarily wish to be acknowledged as being any different.

Passage 4 of 5 Section 0, Para 43, 834 chars.

43: I think that there is that tension that some of the students when they come here want to be treated exactly the same as other students so that our widening participation support shouldn't be about a certain selection of students it should just be about trying to support an students, regardless of the way that they have actually come in. We certainly don't identify the students that have come through certain groups, we could identify the Compact students for example, but I think we find in our group, we discussed this at that Admissions Conference recently, actually the Compact students feel very strongly attached to the Compact team who have helped them progress their application, who've maybe been to see them when they were at school or college, so they don't feel the need for

the faculty to give them additional support.

Passage 5 of 5 Section 0, Para 43, 288 chars.

43: It's probably more ensuring that people have support if they need it, but its not specialised support for special groups. In the same way for international students, there is international support and they know how that operates but you're not constantly identified in your seminar group.

Document 6 of 9 Dean of Education edited Interview Passage 1 of 5 Section 0, Para 12, 558 chars.

12: So if you work in relation for support for students with disability, all the policy formation for that comes from [Head of Student Support Services] and her crew and it will come through and get sort of agreed and then back again and they tend to be the implementation team as well There may be issues to do with marketing strategy of the University as a whole which might be shaped directly by the Vice Chancellor, almost telling the marketing team that we need to capture this sort of image in the recruitment work, in order to target particular kind of constituencies

Passage 2 of 5 Section 0, Para 14, 682 chars.

14: Well that's because, I mean, its not because ... they did it because they wanted to announce they were doing new things, but in a sense what every institution then had to do was put it back where it had come from initially because otherwise it was a very substantial reduction in core funding for teaching and learning and clearly a whole range of things that people do in departments and at course levels are focussed on retention, successful progression through to an award. The way that's done ought to reflect the kind of nature of the cohorts that they recruit. Needs will differ between different programmes and institutions, recruiting from different kinds of strata of society.

Passage 3 of 5 Section 0, Para 48,155 chars.

4 B: The basic thing at the moment is overt, the Government is encouraging the sector to WP, we might term it as grow, but actually there is no funding to grow.

97: We would much rather put the energy into supporting and raising attainment, removing the barriers, anxiety, lack of knowledge, so they can see their way through, know what they are coming to.

126: Coming back to your point I mean I think there are aspects of: that one would talk about as being dimensions of WP, that we should develop on in terms of both our activities and our monitoring. But if you come back to your basic point, about should we be treating that as one whole thing, I think not any more. It's just so kind of broad; it's like trying to say we should be accountable for education, for our area what we are doing is education

13: Very talented people from poor backgrounds have got through. The new approach is to develop access courses to degree courses eg a foundation degree in law, to the full degree.
14: My personal preference is to give support eg the foundation degree is an opportunity to excel and succeed, rather this approach than drop entry grades.

This Node codes no other documents in this set.

NODE CODING REPORT

Node: DEFNSTUD Created: 21/07/2005 - 08:39:51
Modified: 23/07/2005 - 10:48:56 Documents in Set: All
Documents
> *Document* 1 of 9 Manager of Undergraduate Support
> Services edited interview *Passage* 1 of 2 Section 0, Para
> 52, 101 chars.

52: Because it's important, isn't it, that there is a diverse range of students on all of our programmes.

> *Passage* 2 of 2 Section 0, Paras 68 to 69, 469 chars.

68: International students, do you see them as part of the agenda, because they are something very specific to Business School? When I talked to the Researcher in the Business School she said that they had been put into her research agenda as an important aspect of the Business School. Do you think they are an important aspect of widening participation?
69: Manager of Undergraduate Support Services Yes, because they bring all different things to the Business School that you might [not] say that the normal student brings. Cross cultural issues.

> *Document* 2 of 9 Head of Undergraduate Programmes Edited Interview *Passage* 1 of 3 Section 0, Para 13,96 chars.

13: So we have had more applicants, we've accepted more people from an under-represented background

> *Passage* 2 of 3 Section 0, Para 15, 397 chars.

15: Clearly there are egalitarian motives behind widening participation and I guess that those, rather like motherhood and apple pie we can't deny, I don't think we can or at least I don't think we should deny, the possibility of opening our doors to people who are able to succeed whatever their background, whatever their culture, whether or not they have ever had a family member go to university.

> *Passage* 3 of 3 Section 0, Para 27, 252 chars.

27: We've got Asians, people either from Asia or from whose families originated but then when it comes to well what about people from under represented areas, from relatively low socioeconomic areas, families where they don't send their kids to university.

Passage 1 of 3 Section 0, Paras 18 to 19, 310 chars.

18: Researcher Or non traditional students'

19: Researcher in the Business School Yes, exactly. However you want to define those, and of course they are a mixed bag They don't necessarily fit together, do they? There is no necessary or any connection to a disabled student, or a mature student or a student with non-traditional qualifications, or whatever.

Passage 2 of 3 Section 0, Para 23, 117 chars.

23: One of the HEFCE cohorts of widening participation students, are first generation students into HE, as you'll know.

Passage 3 of 3 Section 0, Para 34, 141 chars.

34: I was by definition a widening participation student from a reasonably low-income family with no experience of higher education in the past.

Document 4 of Teaching and Learning Coordinator Edited Interview Passage 1 of 1 Section 0, Para 47,173 chars.

47: I'm holding separately the Government definition which follows the funding, which is about postcodes, ethnicity, disability and maturity and then there is the reality of it.

Document 5 of 9 Programme Leader edited interview Passage 1 of 1 Section 0, Para 37,104 chars.

37: its trying to be much more than just getting students from certain groups, or postcodes into university .

Document 6 of 9 Dean of Education edited Interview Passage 1 of 2 Section 0, Para 22, 628 chars.

22: they actually focussed all their indicators on youngsters. The justified beliefs that a young person's educational attainment reflects not only the school that they go to, but also the background that they have come from, and those two aren't themselves independent, and that the consequence of that is that there are plenty of young people from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds and certainly from backgrounds where there isn't a cultural history of going further, at the family level or more broad social or community level, going through to HE, who have the ability, whatever that means, to move on and benefit from HE.

Passage 2 of 2 Section 0, Para 48, 579 chars.

48: Then they say we will fund additional numbers, and this is where you've got an absolute

nonsense here in WP terms if WP means totally increasing the numbers, because they've only given additional student numbers in the last two or three years; only really quite a small number and linked to foundation degrees and they have to be done in partnership with FE colleges. It's the point you were making before: how are they actually going to target this? So they are saying they want it out there in the FE colleges but that's been the only way, opportunity to grow student numbers.

Document 7 of 9 Head of Widening Participation minus
Appendix Edited Background
I Passage 1 of 1 Section 6, Para 108, 126 chars.

108 : They are associated with funding via the postcode premium although there is now a move towards the use of other indicators.

This Node codes no other documents in this set.

Code Editing

There were a number of codes which had +ve and -ve versions, for example the code concerning the 'motivator to recruit' (MOVREC). Some of these versions were removed so that the coding was simpler to understand. For example a code was created instead for institutions which were selectors as well as recruiters of students. The use of +ve and –ve versions, also appeared to overcomplicate the process and create categories which were more divisive than useful; some data did not neatly fall into either version and thus the material was either coded twice, or if only once then it might be overlooked as to its importance elsewhere. Also some of the codes which had two versions did not create sufficient 'hits' to justify the two versions and thus were amalgamated (See Appendices C and E). Some codes were not used at all on the first review, for example 'motivator: survival of the institution' (MOVSURVEXT), suggesting that they overlapped with another code, in this instance 'motivator: alternative priorities of the school' (MOVPRILOC), and so were dispensed with.

Codes were also created through continued handling and understanding of the data, an example being 'definitions of widening participation by whole student cohort issues' (DEFNALL) which was created out of a theme of interviewees not appearing to create a separate agenda for widening participation students. Other developments took place through a need to reduce the ambiguity of the codes. Here, many of the motivator codes were originally created to identify the Business School's motivation for engaging with the strategy, but there was a failure in the codes to acknowledge whole university and whole higher education issues which were raised by the interviewees. Finally codes were created to enable the pursuit of emerging issues for the researcher. One example

was the scope of the research area, and the 'role and purposes of higher education' (PURPHE) code was created to reflect this.

Fundamentally however there was a wish to retain a manageable number of codes and also to ensure that the codes captured appropriate data. Thus some of the codes created in the second edition were as a result of having data which was relevant, but was not captured by the codes of the first edition, for example 'environment of all higher education institutions' (HEIENVIRO). The approach also meant that codes overlapped with regard to relevant data. Whilst this might appear to be spreading the data too widely it was justified by the wish not to overlook any, and this explains the repeated use of some quotes.

Category of code	Subcode (unless otherwise stated relates to wp)	Identifying words/themes	Code Abbreviat-ions	Rationale for Code
Validity of Structure of Tree designed for research.		Discussion of tree.	RESMETH	Validity of approach to sample.
Respons-ibility Structure	Document-ation/ Communic-ation	Presence of and knowledge of formal docs.; minutes; plans; agendas; WP activities taking place	RESPCOM +ve	Reflection of the importance designated to the agenda, knowledge/presence suggests of importance
		Absence of and knowledge of: formal docs; minutes; plans; agendas; WP activities taking place; budgets used.	RESPCOM -ve	Reflection of the importance designated to the agenda, absence suggests of little importance.
	Responsibi-lity Structure	Clear understanding of the structure relating to responsibilities of involved personnel (eg structure of sample discussion)	RESPSTRUC +ve	Reflection of the importance designated to the agenda, understanding suggests importance. NB Validates sample chosen.
		Unclear/no understanding of the structure relating to responsibilities of involved personnel (eg structure of sample discussion)	RESPSTRUC -ve	Reflection of the importance designated to the agenda, lack of understanding suggests of little importance.
Hierarchic-al Perspectiv-es.	Comments re. other people's roles/under-standing of strategies, by the respondents.	Typically will be: bottom up &/or top down.	HIERPERSP	Suggestive of commitment?
Definition s of WP (Inferred)	By Formal Activities	Family suppers; FE Colleges; Schools; Compact	DEFNACT	Reflects understanding/importance of
	By identified Student categories	Increase in numbers; underrepresented background; ethnic minorities; international students	DEFNSTUD	Reflects understanding/importance of. [Cross over with other codes i.e. INTSTUD]

	General/ Miscel-laneous	Broader philosophical explanations	DEFN	Reflects understanding/importance of.
	By whole student cohort issues as WP.	Retention, achievement, student support	DEFNALL	Not seen as separate agenda.
Motivat-ions to engage.	BS engages as HEI centrally organised & instigated & effect	University processes and impact on BS.	MOVCEN	
	Comments re whole HEI (Case study) engagement with WP	General	HEI	
	Business School organised and instigat-ed.	Independently motivated to engage.	MOVLOC +ve	
		No independent motivation.	MOVLOC -ve	
	Vision/Role of individuals	Typically Head of Widening Participation, maybe more general.	MOVVIS	
	Role of Government policy & agencies in affecting engagement of BS with WP.		MOVGOV	Perceptions of relationship of HEI's to govt.
	Environment of all HEI's	Pressures placed on them by Govt., external factors, not just specific to WP.	HEIENVIRO	
	Roles and purposes of HE		PURPHE	
	Source of Finance from Bus. Sch.	Any discussion about using own budget.	MOVFINLOC	Supports level of motivation.
	Source of finance from the HEI	Centre, Head of Widening Participation.	MOVFINCEN	Supports level of motivation.
	Source of finance from Govt.	HEFCE; more general.	MOVFINGOV	Supports level of motivation.
	Enhances profile of University	Regional university; national acknowledgement	MOVPRO	
	Role of senior management team	VC, Dean; may include evidence of support eg documentation.	MOVSMT	

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	Success-ful/low mainten-ance	Targets being achieved; why get rid of it as its working.	MOVSUC	
	Recruitment of Students	Engage with policy to attract more students.	MOVREC	
		Selecting.	MOV-SELECT	
	Impact on Teaching and Learning styles.	Positive impact on T & L	MOVT&L +ve	
		Initiative accepted if no change to T&L.	MOVT&L -ve	
	Alternative priorities Business School	Business School seen as having other priorities.	MOV-PRILOC	
	Alternative Priorities Non defined staff.	General Explanations of staff engagement/attitude	MOVPRIIND +ve	
		General Explanations of staff disengagement/attitudes	MOVPRIIND -ve	
	Historic-al/heritage	New university; ex polytechnic	MOVHIST	
Internat-ional Students	Internat-ional Students	General, perspectives on link to.	INT	The frequent occurrence of issue suggests that perceived link, purely investigative.
Future of WP	Develop-ments; organisation of	Embedding; redefining	FUTORG	
	Constraints	Agendas which may push this aside.	FUTCON	
Interview-ee enthuiasm /attitude for agenda		Concern re questions, inability to answer.	ENTH	
	Miscel-laneous	Worthy of note	MISC	