Action on Access

The National Co-ordination Team for Widening Participation

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Department for Employment and Learning

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Widening Access to part-time study for under-represented groups and improving retention rates: Reflections on policy and practice

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Action on Access

Action on Access is the national coordination team for widening participation in higher education, funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, and the Department of Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland.

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Action on Access seeks to influence policy and practice and support those working to promote and enhance widening participation

- Working with institutions and key stakeholders
- Collaborating with partnerships, including Aimhigher
- Promoting inclusion, equality and diversity

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Presentation Plan

- Background
- A case study (Mainstreaming & Sustaining WP)
- Where next? (reading the tealeaves!)
- Concluding Points

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General Background
WP Policy Context

- Lower socio-economic classes continue to be under represented.
- Need to raise expectations, attainment and progression to HE for learners from these groups.
- Need to maintain and enhance student success.

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General Background
WP Policy Context

- Need to address skill/educational needs of adult population.
- Retention is a key component for WP work in HEI's.
- Emphasis on a strategic approach to WP for HE providers.

Specific Background
WP & P/T

"Start the dialogue with HE by recognising that one of the strengths of the sector is its diversity, and that there are already institutions taking a lead on part-time provision and flexible learning opportunities. In supporting the principle 'equal but different', acknowledge the risk such universities take in terms of reputation and of funding. They are expanding the widening participation arena and taking on the recognised extra costs associated with 'non-traditional' learners and the additional costs of flexible curriculum delivery."

King, C., (2008) *Part-time studies and Higher Education*

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Background
Mind the Gap!

"Diversity of and flexibility found in part-time provision make the data notoriously difficult to capture accurately and interpret"

HEFCE, (2009) *Part-time First Degree Study*

"There are particular difficulties with data about part-time studies, due to the inherent flexibilities in the patterns of study"

National Audit Office, (2007) *Staying the Course: The Retention of Students in Higher Education*

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Background
Student Success and Study Mode

- The NAO report on retention appears to show from its statistical analysis that:
  - A full-time first degree student is much more likely to continue their studies into a second year than a similar part-time student.
  - A part-time student registered with a HEI but taught in a FEC is more likely to continue than a similar student in a HEI.

SOURCE: National Audit Office, (2007) *Staying the Course: The Retention of Students in Higher Education*

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Background
Funding

HEFCE Fund for Widening Participation:

- Widening participation allocation £352m in 2008/09:
  - Widening access: £95.4m
  - Improving retention: £243.7m
  - Widening access and improving provision for disabled students: £12.9m

Background
Funding

- Aimhigher – 2008-2009
  - Core funding: £70.8m (jointly from HEFCE and DIUS)
  - Aimhigher Associates: £3.5m
  - Summer Schools
- Vocational Progression:
  - £105m invested in 30 Lifelong Learning Networks

Mainstreaming and Sustaining WP Case Study

Programme Features

Rationale:

- The programme offered a focused programme of events and institutional visits to stimulate reflection and dialogue about developing, integrating and sustaining WP in institutions.
- This programme preceded the HEFCE request for all relevant HE providers to submit widening participation assessments by June 2009.

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Mainstreaming and Sustaining WP Case Study

Process:

- Working sessions and institutional visits programme (Jan 08 – Dec 08).
- Workshop based with institutional teams (HEFCE inputs).
- Institutional teams working between workshops.
- WP policy paper (WP Strategic Assessments).

Who participated?
Applications and Participants

Table 1: Applications and participants by institutional type

Institutional type	Applications	Participants
Russell Group	5	3
Other pre-1992s	3	0
Post-1992	12	5
Post 2004	10	4
Small and/or specialist	4	2
FE colleges	3	2
Total	37	16

Mainstreaming and Sustaining WP in institutions

Issues and Proposals

Interim proposals:

- Fed into HEFCE WPSA policy development.
- Disseminate output materials and tools.
- Work with HEFCE and OFFA to produce programme of support .
- Develop in consultation, appropriate models for WP financial planning.
- HEIs connecting P/T and retention within WPSA

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Where next? Institutional Strategic Assessments

"Too little is known about the widening participation activities and expenditure of institutions"
National Audit Office, (2008) *Widening Participation in Higher Education*

"An important driver behind our request…is the evidence it will provide of how widening participation has become part of policies, processes and cultures in many institutions"
HEFCE, (2009) *Request for Widening Participation Strategic Assessments*

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Where next?

Strategic Assessments will be developmental - a basis for:

- Continuous improvement
- Showing measurable progress
- Dialogue with HEFCE & OFFA
- WPSAs to be submitted by June 2009
- Sector wide meta-analysis of WPSAs with feedback
- Support for P/T provision and retention

Concluding Points

- Through WP outreach, HEIs can better align patterns of learner needs and local opportunity structures with flexible provision and student success

- Flexing HE is critical to further progress on social mobility and the WP dividend

WPSAs will give an opportunity to locate part-time and student success in an institution wide strategy and annual assessment of WP

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