Equality and Diversity in UK Universities: recruitment and retention of ‘non-traditional’ undergraduate students

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The University of Brighton

- Post 1992 university – mid-sized with 22,835 students
- 5 faculties:
  - Brighton Business School
  - Faculty of Arts
  - Faculty of Education and Sport
  - Faculty of Science and Engineering
  - Faculty of Health and Social Sciences
- Brighton and Sussex Medical School
- Decentralised structure
- Split across 5 sites and 4 partner colleges
- Ethos of teaching but world-leading research in specialist areas
- Importance of ‘university community’ means Equality and Diversity are core values
Presentation Outline

- Historical context
- Government Policy Drivers
- Issues/tensions for HEIs
- Government Funding and national initiatives
- Office for Fair Access and admissions policies
- HEI outreach activities
- Managing and retaining a more diverse student body:
  - Challenges and issues
  - Support structures for students and staff
  - Sample projects and initiatives
- Key learning

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Historical Context

• 1960: 300,000 attending university
• 1963 Robbins report advised expansion to HE system
  • New universities and change of status for colleges of advanced technology
  • 1970’s - Establishment of polytechnics – degrees awarded by CNNA
• 1980–1990’s: Continued growth in system, partially due to success of Access to HE courses aimed at ‘adult returners’
• 1992: End of the binary divide?
• 2002: 1,800,000 accessing HE
• 1997: Election of ‘New Labour’ – key for WP agenda

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Policy Drivers – Social Class

- 1998: Introduction of tuition fees in UK
- 1998: Government funding for WP initiatives and disability support
- 2000: 50% Target for participation in HE for 18 – 30yr olds by 2010
- 2004: Future of HE in England – tuition fee increase to £3,000
  Government had anticipated variable fees
- 2004: Schwartz report – Fair admissions to Higher Education
- 2004: Establishment of Lifelong Learning Networks
- 2006: £40 million to support part-time ‘non-traditional’ students
Growing equality legislation as a driver

• 2000 Race Relation Amendment Act (introduces Race Equality Duty), amended again 2003
• 2001 Special Educational Needs Discrimination Act (SENDA)
• 2003 Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulation
• 2003 Employment Equality (Religion and Belief) Regulation
• 2004 Civil Partnership Act
• 2004 Gender Recognition Act
• 2005 Disability Discrimination (Amendment) Act (introduces Disability Equality Duties)
• 2006 Employment Equality (Age) Legislation
• 2006 Equality Act (introduces Gender Equality Duty and sets up Equality and Human Rights Commission)
• 2006 Racial and Religious Hatred Act

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Current equality legislation

• 2010 Equality Act

• 9 protected characteristics but excluding social class (same as Germany’s Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz 2006)

• Also includes Public Sector Duties:
  • General duty to ‘promote’ good relations between and amongst protected groups
  • Specific duties regarding publishing information to show that we are promoting equalities and that we have paid ‘due regard’ to equalities in our processes and decision-making
Concerns for HEIs

• Policy targeting Russell Group universities?
• Diversity or massification?
  • Widening participation or ‘dumbing down’
• Retaining a competitive edge:
  • Students’ perceptions link high entry grades with quality
  • High offers discourage students from schools/colleges with low progression rates
• Introduction of fees - managing increased student expectations
Government funding to support WP

• National outreach initiatives, encouraging links between FE & HE
  • 2001: Excellence Challenge
  • 2002: Partnerships for Progression
  • 2004: Integrated Aimhigher brand and programme

• Additional allocation added to recurrent grant from 1998
  • Outreach to ‘non-traditional’ students
  • Student support
  • Additional funding linked to institutional benchmarks
Government funding - HEI specific (2010/11 figures)

HEFCE WP allocation*: Brighton - £1,049,314; Bristol - £441,984; Imperial College - £259,150; Oxford - £392,260; Sheffield - £1,241,495; Sheffield Hallam - £3,532,487; Teeside - £6,218,486

Further Government funding for Teaching enhancement and student success*: WP grant - Manchester - £1,397,087; TESS - £1,259,345

WP grant – Manchester Metropolitan - £2,655,755; TESS - £5,532,281

2004 - OFFA to monitor individual HEI “Access Agreements” outlining university contribution to WP.

Additional fees increased income across the sector by £1.4 billion; 26% of this spent on WP

Managing institutional WP activity

* source: HEFCE – Allocation of funds: recurrent grants for 2010/11

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Fair Admissions to University

- UK students apply through centralised system – UCAS
- Selective at point of entry
- Pre-qualification admissions system – individual HEIs set own entry requirements and selection criteria
- System ‘favours’ traditional student
- Schwartz report:
  - Establishment of SPA (supporting Professionalism in Admissions)
  - Greater use of contextual information to assess potential
  - Discounted offers for WP students
The current picture - 2011

- 12% increase in participation between 2004 and 2009 entry
- Higher growth from lowest socio-economic groups
- 10% increase in participation for females
- 3% increase in participation for males
- Increase in applications to ‘professional’ courses
- Cessation of Aimhigher funding
- Drastic reduction to teaching grant from 2012 entry
- Unsure about future STEM funding
- Indication that £9,000 fee will not be ‘exceptional’ – Arts/Humanities students will be meeting full cost from 2012
- New grant/loan arrangements for students
- Uncertain about impact on admissions to HE
National HE participation - 1994 - 2009

Figure 1: Trends in young participation for England

Source:

HEFCE
2010/03:
Trends in young participation in higher education
Participation by social class – 1994 - 2009

Source:
HEFCE 2010/03:
Trends in young participation in higher education
Participation by gender – 1994 - 2009

Source:
HEFCE
2010/03:
Trends in young participation in higher education
Some successes nationally and locally

- We have widened Access to more diverse student groups
- Students with disabilities who receive Disabled Students Allowance are more likely to complete their courses than students without support or without disabilities
- The ‘Student Experience’ concept seems to be gaining ground with improved feedback systems and transparency
But there are still issues

- Our retention rates have dropped while access has increased
- There remain achievement differences between student groups
- Some subjects areas still show ‘occupational segregation’
  - on class level (access to the Professions)
  - for other characteristics such as race and gender
Our (diverse?) student population – 2008/9

- 22,834 Students
- 38% Male; 62% Female
- 68% Full time; 32% Part-time
- 87% from UK/Channel islands; 7% EU (excluding UK); 6% Overseas;
- 44% 18-20 years old on entry; 17% 21-24 years; 12% 25-29 years; 27% over 30
- 10% declared disability (of whom 66% have Dyslexia or another Specific Learning Difficulty);
- 76% from White Backgrounds, 15% from Black or Minority Ethnic Backgrounds, 9% Refused or unknown ethnicity
Who is a *typical* Student?

- Gender
- Age
- Race/Ethnicity or nationality
- Socio-economic group
- Educational background
- Disability
- Role as parent or carer
- Sexual Orientation
- Religion/Belief

Managing Student Identities
What managing diversity has meant for HEIs in practice

- A lengthened ‘Student Journey’

- Increased emphasis on ‘the student experience’ with National Student Survey, League tables etc.

- Growth of equality and WP specialist staff

- A fairly prescriptive approach, led by previous legislation and benchmarking – requiring robust data

- Internationalisation strategies

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Challenges for Equality development

• What does success look like? Should we have targets?
• Bottom-up or top-down approach?
• Understanding root causes is difficult, and even harder to effect change
• Is it just common sense?
• Communications challenges for diverse audience
• Is targeting specific groups discrimination?
Development of staff structures to support equality

- Equal Opportunities Steering Group (chaired by Registrar)
- Widening Participation and Diversity Committee (chaired by Head of Economic and Social Engagement)
- Equality and Diversity Adviser for staff within Personnel
- Equality and Diversity Adviser for students within Student Services
- Widening Participation Manager within Registry Admissions team, and supported by Widening Participation Officers

- Central processes are supported by staff within local management teams, in schools, faculties and central departments.
- Also drawing on knowledge from research and departmental expertise as a learning organisation

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Equality and Diversity Adviser role

- Ensure that we are meeting sector and legislative formal reporting requirements
- Work as ‘change agents’ for corporate culture change
  - By gathering information from around the institution
  - By disseminating research and good practice
  - By producing overarching strategies
Supporting a more diverse student body: at an operational level

- Student Services
- Student Union
- Support within schools
- Support from family and friends
- Curriculum and inclusive practice
- Library/IT support

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Who are Student Services?

- Careers Centres
- Chaplaincy
- Counselling & Wellbeing
- Disability & Dyslexia Support
- Medical Centres
- Nurseries
- Student Advice Service (Financial and International student advice)
Sample projects

• Encouraging disabled students to tell us about their disabilities as early as possible (during recruitment) so that we can plan ahead

• Orientation programme for international students:
  • Academic issues
  • Practical information
  • Social support

• Improved student inductions and ‘Welcome Week’ activities

• Greater availability of online support information
Staff support

- Need to reflect diversity in staff community to provide role models
  - Staff recruitment procedures
  - Staff development opportunities
  - Staff support networks and discussion forums
- Generating understanding of equality and diversity:
  - Awareness campaigns, staff inductions, VC talks and corporate communications
  - Equality and Diversity Online learning package
Key things that we’ve learned

- Legislation and financial drivers have helped to focus debates
- It can be difficult responding to frequent changes in government strategy
- The key for us has been engagement with staff and students
- It’s not always the obvious ‘Equalities’ solutions that have the most impact
- The need to prioritise and to ask our community what key issues we should be working on
- Communication has been key to avoid misunderstandings
The future?

• Moving towards a more mainstreamed approach rather than specialists in silos
• The new fees arrangement will place emphasis on results and benchmarking
• Unknown elements, and shifting government policy with the introduction of new fee regime
Recently from the government…

• “Access to a university must be based on ability to learn, not ability to pay.”

• David Willetts, universities minister

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Questions