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

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- 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

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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

Policy Drivers – Social Class

- 1997:   Dearing Report: Higher Education in a Learning Society

- 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

- 2005:   White paper: 14 – 19 Education and Skills

- 2006:   £40 million to support part-time 'non-traditional' students

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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

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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

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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 though 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

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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
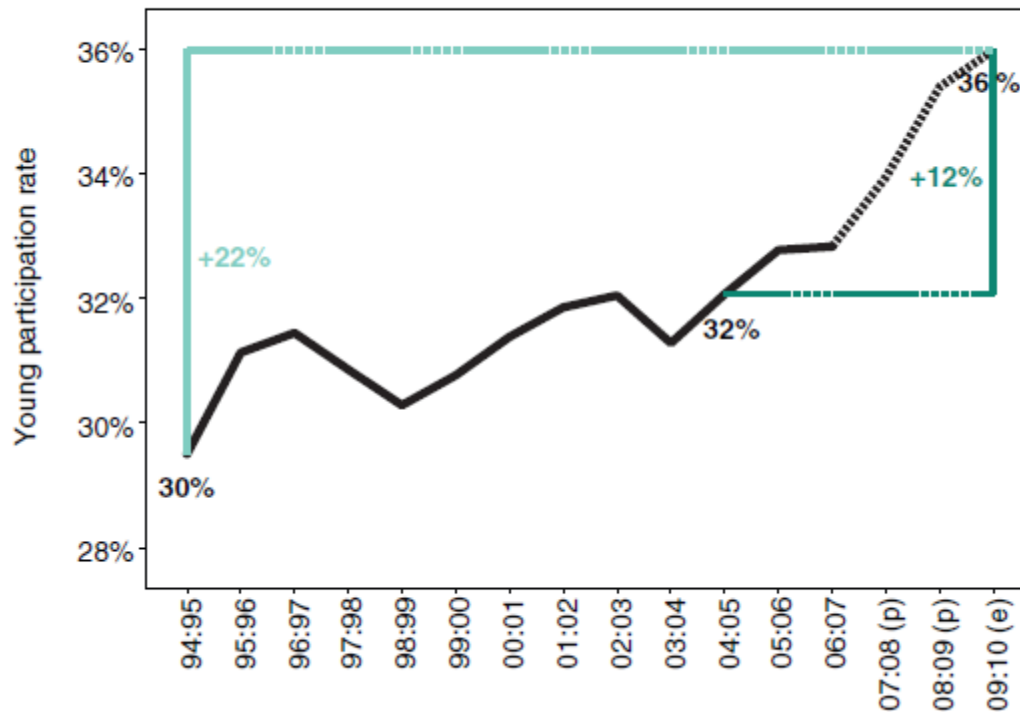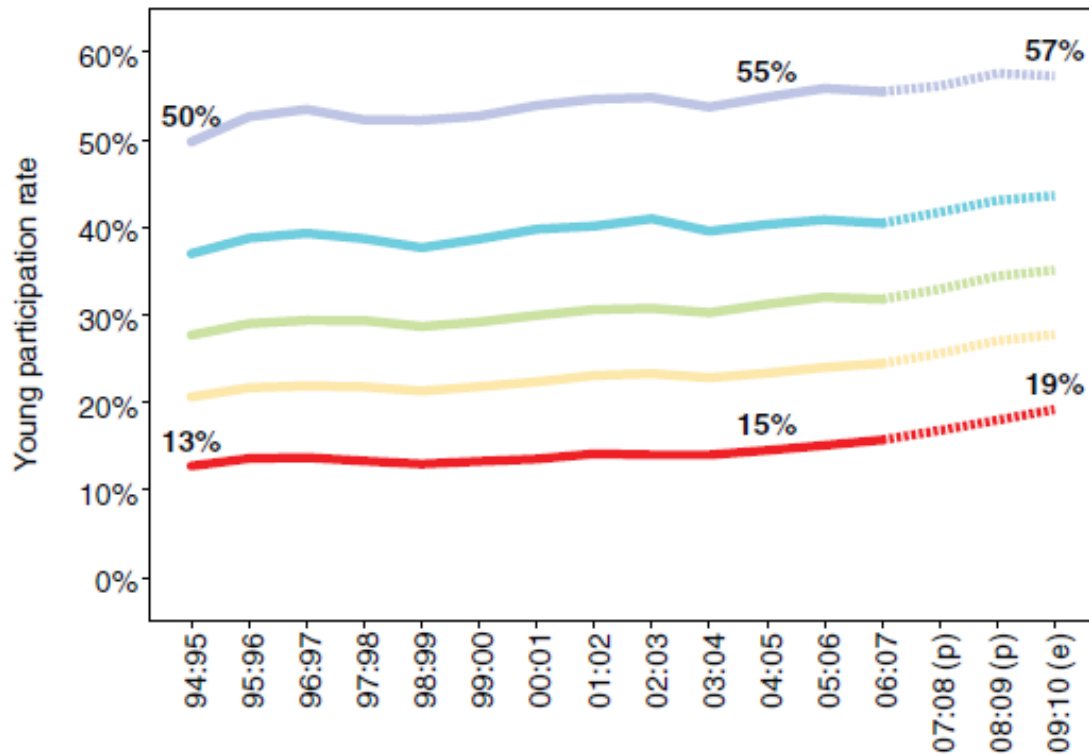

Source:

HEFCE 2010/03:

Trends in young participation in higher education

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Participation by social class – 1994 - 2009

Figure 2 **Trends in young participation for areas classified by HE participation rates (POLAR2 classification, adjusted[4])**
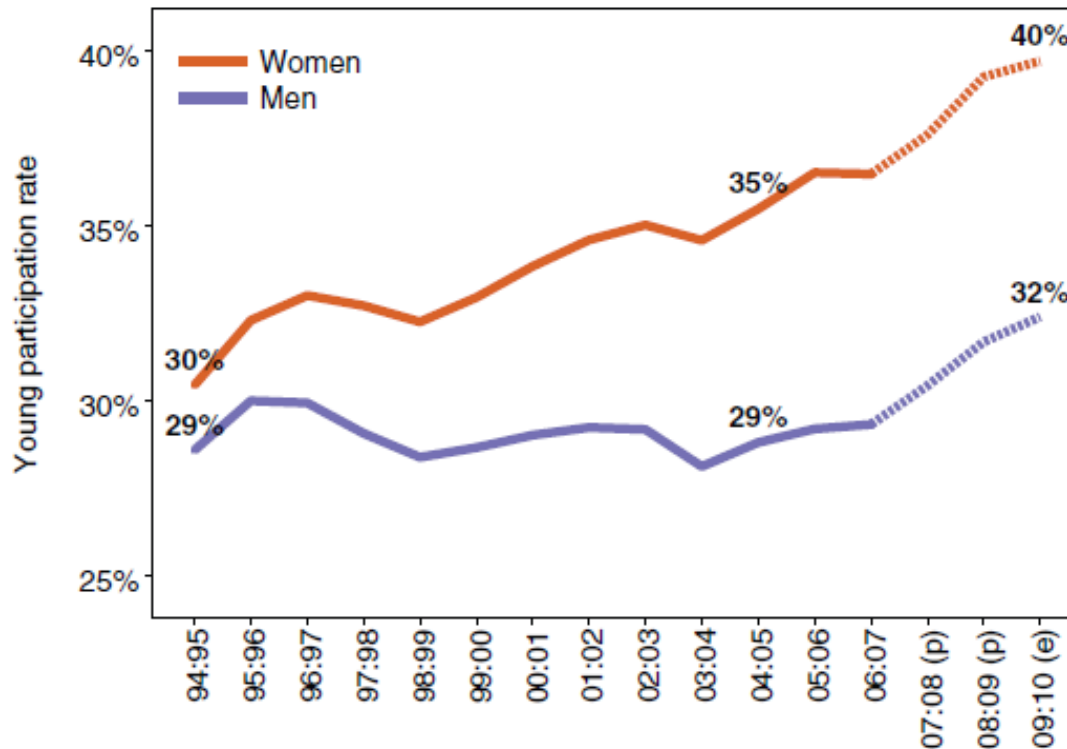

Source:

HEFCE
2010/03:

Trends in young
participation in
higher education

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Participation by gender – 1994 - 2009

Figure 6 Trends in young participation by sex

Source:

HEFCE 2010/03:

Trends in young participation in higher education

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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

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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

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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
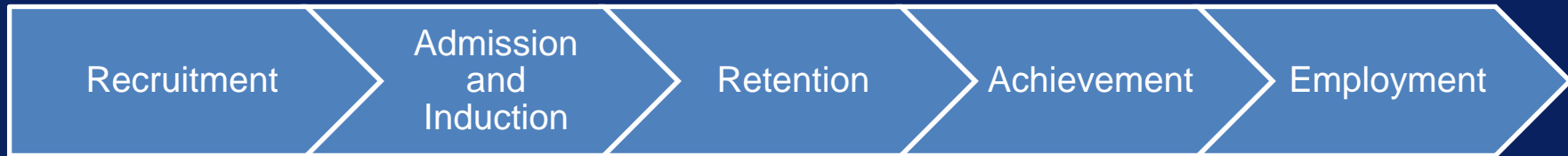
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Managing Student Identities

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What managing diversity has meant for HEIs in practice

- A lengthened 'Student Journey'

Recruitment	Admission and Induction	Retention	Achievement	Employment

- 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

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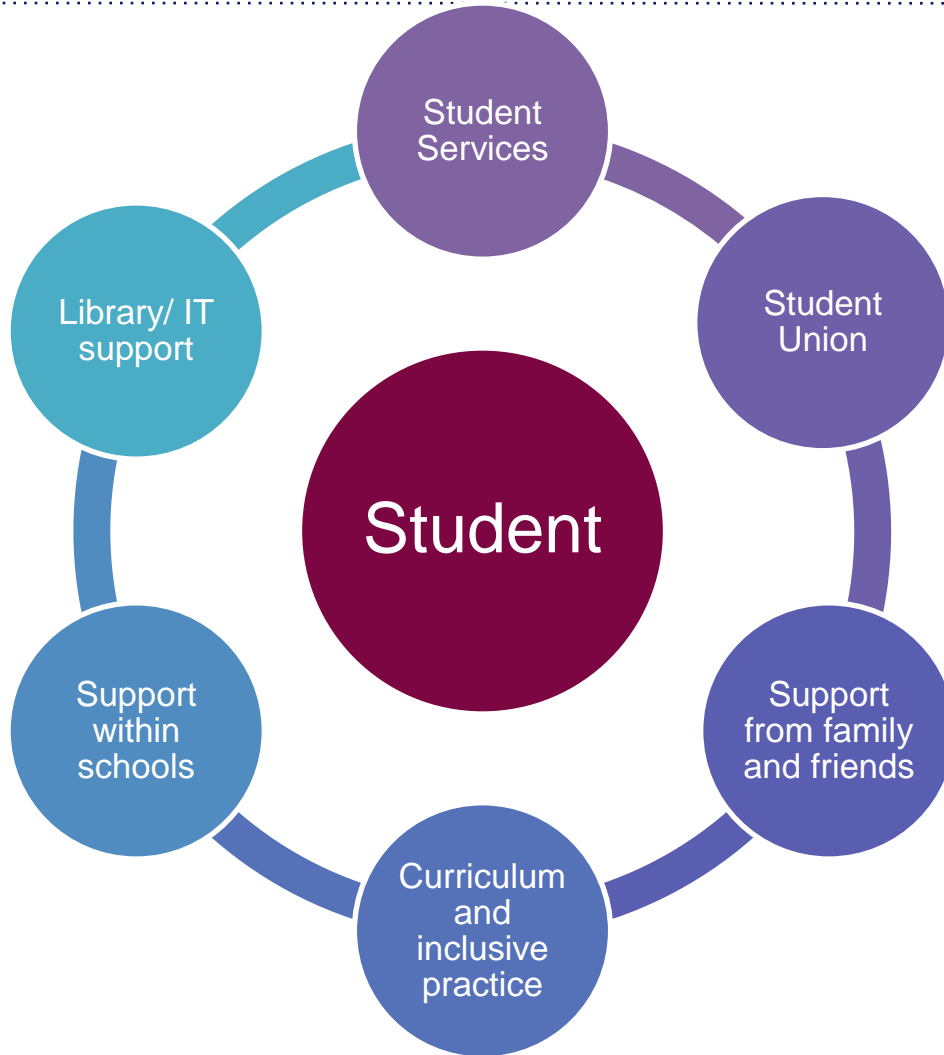
Who are Student Services?

- 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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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