Widening Participation and Race Equality

Edited by Debbie Weekes-Bernard

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Contents

SECTION III: DOES THE INSTITUTION MATTER?

Foreword

Recent months have seen the debate about who pays for Higher Education come to the fore. Tuition fees have been the lightning rod for opposition to the coalition government's proposals for public service reform and deep spending cuts. The reforms highlight the current broader direction of the government – leading to questioning what really matters in our public services and in the context of an incredibly tight fiscal settlement, often concluding that what matters is that to which you can assign an economic value. Degrees matter as a financial investment. Universities should educate in order to add to the productivity of UK plc. Science subjects have a greater return on investment than social science subjects. We should be careful before we rush to agreeing with such a reductive vision of higher education or before rejecting the important role higher education plays in promoting race equality and good race relations.

It is against this backdrop that the coalition government's other driving mantra – that of 'fairness' – needs to be understood. Universities are set to be able to triple the amount they charge in tuition fees, but only if their admissions processes are 'fair'. For this reason, this collection of papers presents a timely contribution to the debate. What does it mean for university admissions to be fair in the context of these reforms?

There has been much discussion about the socio-economic status of potential students and concern that poorer students are failing to benefit proportionately from the expansion of and public investment in Higher Education. There has been less public concern about the race equality implications of widening participation efforts. Masked by the global figure that young people from minority ethnic backgrounds have a higher participation rate in HE than their white counterparts, issues of race and ethnicity seem to have fallen from the widening participation agenda.

In this collection of papers, the authors address what race equality has to do with widening participation; highlighting that participation is about more than gaining entry to an institution but also progress while there. They also note that different institutions have very different patterns of success in widening participation for under-represented minority ethnic groups. For example, last year the University of Oxford admitted only one Black Caribbean student. The range of views highlight the wide range of stakeholders in our HE system and we are pleased that they have felt able to share their reflections on where race equality fits into their work.

In the coming debates about the kind of higher education institutions we want, and how fairness should be incorporated into their relationship with the state and citizens, we hope that race inequalities will also be addressed. This collection is a good starting point for those discussions.

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1. Inequity and Access in Higher Education

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Introduction

The participation of students from Black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds in the higher education sector has steadily increased over the years and is testament not only to a great deal of good work that has occurred within the field of widening participation, but also reflects the levels of high aspiration that exist among these groups. BME students now make up 17.2 per cent of all those studying in the higher education sector, an increase from 14.9 per cent of all students in 2003/04,[1] and these students are more likely than their White counterparts with the same GCSE levels to attend university by the age of 19 (Hills et al., 2010). What remains of concern however is the nature of the higher educational experience for some (but not all) Black and minority ethnic students. Though they are participating, a number of questions remain as to where they are studying, the extent to which they remain in university for the full duration of their courses and what the outcomes are of their time spent within the sector. Overall a picture emerges of a less equitable higher education experience for BME groups which is masked by claims that widening participation efforts are working simply because of the mere presence of BME students within university.

This report also emerges at a time when more general questions are being posed about the scope of an expanding higher education sector. In 2003 a target was set by the then Labour Government that by 2010 half of all 18–30 years olds should have accessed and be participating within higher education (DfES, 2003). This figure, and subsequent attempts to address the low participation rates of individuals from poor and diverse backgrounds, led to increased student demand but has culminated in a cap on university places.[2] Critics of university expansion have questioned both this target and the implication at its basis that higher education be the point of aspiration for the majority of students. One recommendation within the latest review of university funding (Browne, 2010) is that the quality of careers advice given to pupils at school should be improved. This reflects other suggestions that poor attention has been given, both within schools and at the level of policy, to advising students of the possibility of following vocational study, instead of the rush to promote more academic routes. This is an issue that requires discussion, particularly in view of the persistent gap in achievement at Key Stage 4 level between some BME pupils and others. If the focus on vocational study has been lacklustre, would increased attention in this area impact favourably upon BME pupil achievement? We already know that high numbers of Black students for example, are disproportionately found participating in courses of this nature (Connor et al., 2010). However the question then to be asked is whether encouraging this trend to continue for these groups implies that higher education is not for all, which then perpetuates a system that excludes Black students from access to the rewards to be gained from a university education.

The differential rates of participation across BME groups also exposes the difficulty in attempts to increase the involvement of BME individuals in higher education generally rather than specifically. It has been suggested that the specific needs of BME students have become subsumed within generic widening participation policies (Aimhigher, 2006) and the differential experiences that BME students have both up to, whilst at and immediately following higher education participation appear to bear this out. There are certainly a number of higher education experiences which appear to affect some BME students disproportionately. More importantly, and as the key facts below highlight, the experiences of individuals within these groups differ greatly, and any attempt to devise policies to widen the participation of a generic BME learner will clearly fail.

Key Facts

- The participation rates of students from Black Caribbean and Bangladeshi backgrounds are only half the rates of Indian and Black African students (Connor et al., 2004).

- Black and minority ethnic students take a variety of routes into accessing higher education and whilst Indian and Chinese students are the most likely to follow a traditional route of GCSEs and 'A' levels, other groups have lower entry qualifications (Connor et al., 2010).

- Applicants from Black ethnic groupings were much more likely to choose an alternative route into HE – nearly two-thirds (65%) of Black students took an alternative route into HE versus an average of 35 per cent (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2009a).

- BME students are more likely to continue their post-16 study and pursue higher education entry qualifications in further education (FE) colleges than at sixth form. FE institutions teach a higher proportion of students taking vocational courses (Connor et al., 2010)

- 66.4 per cent of White students studying first degrees received a first class or second class honours qualification, compared to 48.1 per cent of BME students and only 37.7 per cent of Black students (Equality Challenge Unit, 2009).

- A higher proportion of lower second class degrees were awarded to Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi graduates than upper seconds (Machin et al., 2010).

- At least 44 per cent of all Black, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian graduates attended post-1992 universities, or former polytechnics compared to 34 per cent of other ethnic groups (Machin et al., 2009).

- Black students are the least likely of all groups to attend a Russell Group university - 8% of all Black university students attend Russell Group universities compared to 24% of all White students and 29 per cent of those categorized as 'Other Asian' (Machin et al., 2009). Further, only 2% of Russell Group university students are Black British.

- In 2009 only one Black Caribbean individual was accepted to study on a course at Oxford University (University of Oxford, 2010).

- The largest increase in the numbers of BME students attending university has occurred among Black individuals – in 1995 these students made up 3.6 per cent of all students, which increased to a share of 5.7 per cent of students in 2007 (Machin et al., 2009).

- BME students predominantly apply to and attend universities in close proximity to the family home. A third of Chinese and Indian applications, and over half of Bangladeshi applications are made to local universities while only a quarter of white UK students apply to local universities (Shiner and Modood, 2002).

- BME students were more likely than their White counterparts to have graduated from a SET (Science, Engineering or Technology) degree course – in 2007/8 18.2 per cent of BME students graduating had completed one such course of study compared to 14.8 per cent of White students (ECU, 2009).

- Despite high rates of participation and achievement for some BME groups, particularly those of Chinese descent, there are high initial graduate unemployment rates specifically Pakistani and Chinese men.

What many of these points show is that the definition of improved participation of a BME student within higher education is complex. So for example, though we note here that rates of participation of BME students have increased overall and have increased at the highest rate for Black students, participation in higher education is highest for Indian students at any level of prior educational attainment and lowest for Black Caribbean and Bangladeshi students (Machin et al., 2009).

Policy Picture

The target set by the Labour government in 2003 to ensure that 50 per cent of all 18-30 years-olds participate in learning within the higher education sector, set in motion a range of processes broadening the access of those from a wider range of backgrounds to extended learning. Those who were to benefit from widening participation programmes included individuals from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds with a poor record of higher education participation, disabled applicants, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those with no history of attending university within their families. The discourse emerging from this general movement towards greater access was the extension of higher education to all of those with an interest in attending, creating links across the broader education sector between schools, further education colleges and universities.

Between 2001 and 2008 the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and the Higher Education Funding Council for

Figure 1 Gender gaps in HE participation by age 19, by detailed ethnicity – English domiciled young people in state schools in Year 11 (year)
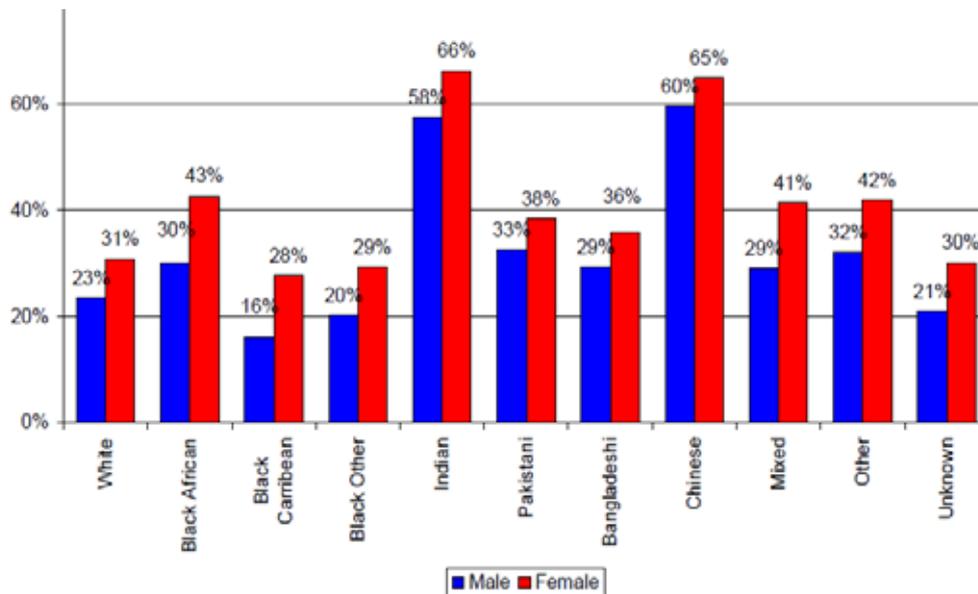
Source: Broecke and Hamad (2008)

England allocated £392 million of funding to higher education institutions for the purpose of widening participation. There has been a marked improvement in participation according to socioeconomic group with the percentage gap in rates of participation between students from upper and lower socio-economic groups decreasing from 26.5 per cent to 20.5 per cent. However the rates of participation of the most disadvantaged 40 per cent of young people within the top third selective universities has not changed since the mid-1990s (Harris, 2010).

The framework for higher education published by the previous Government in 2009, reiterated the importance of encouraging wide participation of those from diverse groups of students (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2009b), acknowledging that despite much investment in the sector, rates of involvement within university remained below that of other developed countries. Broadening the route to higher education was re-affirmed, extending the type of courses available, increasing part time, work-based and home-based study in order to encourage a wider spread of student.

However challenges to political commitment to maintain increased participation in higher education within an economically troubled climate remain. For some time now, the way that English universities are funded has failed to keep pace with the rapidly increasing student population and subsequent rise in demand for places. The argument posed by current Coalition Government ministers, and indeed Lord Browne in his recent review of university funding (Browne, 2010), for an increase in fees paid by students for their tuition, is that such rises are inevitable, if the higher education sector is to be able to compete effectively with other institutions in other countries. There is the additional concern that amount spent per student has decreased over time in view of the expansion in the student sector.

The impact of financial pressures not only on the sector generally but work on widening participation specifically is unlikely to be favourable. In March 2010 government spending on higher education was cut by almost £450 million. The cuts have not occurred equally across the sector, as those courses developed specifically under the widening participation remit have been the hardest hit (Nash, 2010). The implications for students of BME background are clear. In 2007/8 112,595 students were studying higher education programmes ratified by HEFCE across 271 sixth form and further education institutions (Association of Colleges,

Figure 2 Ethnicity and institution type
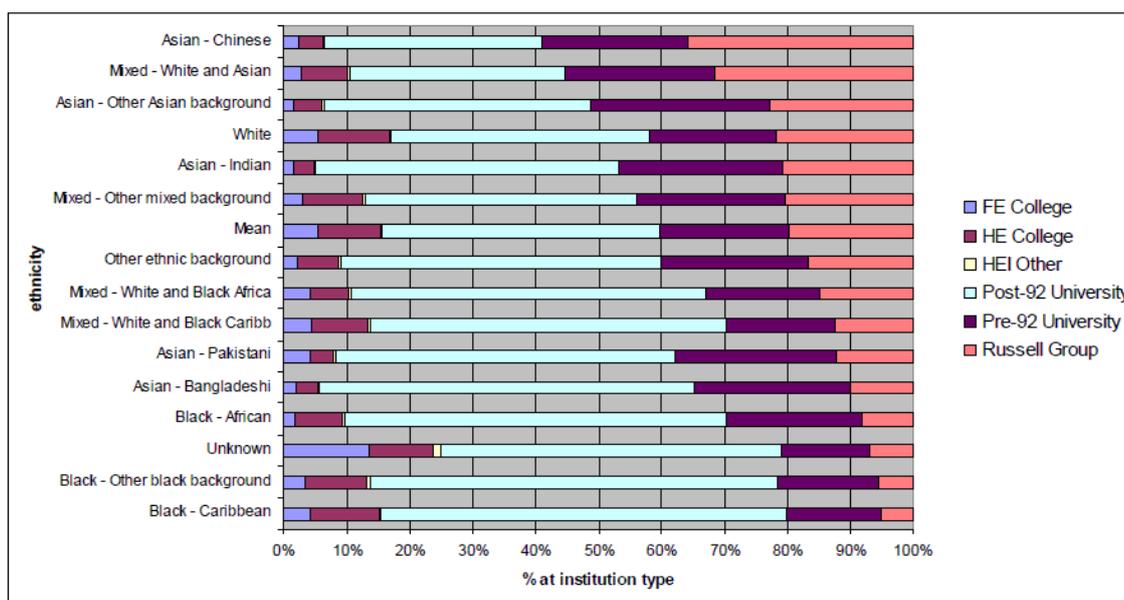
2010). The proposals put forward within Lord Browne's review of higher education funding enabling higher status universities to raise fees above a threshold of £6000, and indeed for those institutions to charge variable fees for 'priority' courses, may indeed price less popular courses out of existence. Cuts more specifically to higher education are likely to have an adverse effect on widening participation programmes which in turn will affect specific BME groups disproportionately in view of their involvement on them.

At the time of writing, the Coalition Government have committed funds to ensure that young people from the poorest households will have the opportunity to attend university apportioning £150 million a year to a National Scholarship fund in the 2010 comprehensive spending review.[3] There however remains a clear discrepancy between policies to incorporate the burgeoning wishes to attend university among non-traditional entrants and those to create a higher education sector which is more internationally competitive. Many of these issues are raised by the contributors to this report noting the relationship between class and ethnic background, but also the way that, as with educational underachievement at various key stages, gaps in both access, retention and overall outcome remain between those from some ethnic groups compared to other.

Does Higher Education Benefit All BME Individuals?

The current policy discussion surrounding the raising of student fees and future direction of higher education has posed questions about the purpose of continuing education beyond the compulsory school age. Higher education, traditionally seen as a social good, enabling the sharing of knowledge and enriching the lives as well as intellect of those accessing it, has increasingly, in the current political climate, instead come to denote the means through which personal economic prospects are improved and future earnings guaranteed (Freedland, 2010). The notion that furthering one's educational experiences can increase social mobility lies at the basis of the widening participation concept and therefore in this sense implies that higher education is no longer the preserve solely of those who are born into more privileged backgrounds. However the rising of tuition fees, and the potential for higher status universities and courses to request higher amounts than others, may only serve to price those from lower socio-economic groups out of higher education at the first hurdle (Ipsos Mori, 2010), and if not may certainly deter them from striving to access those more prestigious institutions once the decision to enter higher education is made (Sutton Trust, 2010).

The issue here, however, is that BME individuals are increasingly applying to universities, though clearly not in equal numbers, and many of their reasons for doing so already fit with a concept of higher education as a means of guaranteeing, or at least contributing to successful future earnings. Connor et al. (2004) have noted that the reasons for participating in further and higher education for BME groups tend to reflect not only higher aspirations, held by both themselves and their parents, but also an attempt to protect themselves against potential discrimination within the workplace through gaining better qualifications.

Interestingly, this research noted that BME students, specifically those of Indian and Pakistani descent, are less likely to be adversely influenced by the prospect of student debt or cost when deciding whether or not to go to university. Furthermore, Black undergraduates tend to have an older age structure than other ethnic groups, tending to be older on average when entering university. This may also reflect the routes taken into higher education for BME students, as Black Caribbean students in particular are more likely to leave school at 16 and continue their education in the further education sector gaining their HE entry qualifications at these institutions.   For many BME students therefore, participation within higher education has been based on potential financial gain, rather than wider access to knowledge for its own sake.

Graduate unemployment figures, however, suggest that despite these high aspirations and the issue of social mobility as the driver for participation, BME individuals continue to have negative post-university experiences. Much of this relates to the routes taken to higher education so that whilst White students have the greatest rates of initial employment following graduation, after three years Indian students have an 80 per cent full-time employment rate compared to 77 per cent for their White counterparts.

Given that these groups are more likely to take traditional routes of access to university, and are among the highest achieving of all ethnic groups at GCSE levels, their post-undergraduate employment rates reflect their prior achievements. Rates of unemployment for Chinese male graduates however remain high, despite their overall traditional routes both into and out of higher education, suggesting that there are other issues relating specifically to race affecting their experiences in the labour market. BME individuals,

in relation to unemployment figures, are more likely to participate in postgraduate study and Black Caribbean postgraduates are more likely to pursue career-related postgraduate courses than their peers who will follow more academic routes. The benefits therefore of higher education participation for BME individuals remain mixed and there is a clear inequitable picture which emerges.

Ways Forward

The increased participation of BME individuals within the higher education sector is certainly to be celebrated, but clearly uneven and inequitable participation in the form of route taken, qualification gained and type of institution attended requires urgent attention. Below are a number of issues for policy consideration, some of which are addressed by our contributors to this report, and which also arose in discussion in the Runnymede Higher Education roundtable out of which this report emerged:

- There are 13 higher education institutions in which the numbers of BME UK domiciled undergraduates equal more than 50 per cent of the student population. Ten of these institutions are post-1992 universities. Does the issue of ethnic segregation problematize the widening participation agenda, or is the importance of BME participation, whatever its form, the more important concern?

- Given the higher rates of graduate unemployment for certain BME individuals, should we be discouraging these students from taking alternative routes to higher education as it is possible that employers will look at these sorts of routes negatively?

- Uvanney Maylor in this report notes the poor representation of Black and minority ethnic staff within the higher education sector. The low numbers of BME staff will not be rectified however if BME students are either failing to complete degrees or to graduate with degree classifications which will enable them to compare favourably with their White counterparts in the academic labour market.

- Negative higher education experiences for BME undergraduates will also prevent a pool of qualified potential recruits growing from which can be selected potential doctorate students, researchers and lecturers

Notes

1. These figures are for 2007/8 and are taken from the Equality Challenge Unit (2009).

2. Although the latest review of higher education funding has noted that places will be allowed to expand by 10 per cent over the next four years, see Browne (2010).

3. The exact details will be announced in the response of the Government to the Browne review of higher education funding.

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SECTION I: WHAT DOES WIDENING PARTICIPATION MEAN?

2. Widening Participation in Higher Education and Race Equality

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Introduction

Widening Participation into Higher Education (HE) has been a major policy mantra for the UK government over the last decade. What widening participation means, however, has been both controversial and contested at both national and local or institutional level. Institutions have had challenging circumstances to implement policies and develop practices for diverse types of individual students.

Questions of fair access and participation within types of higher education have covered social class and/or disadvantage for either young students, leaving secondary schools or further education, or more mature students from similarly disadvantaged backgrounds. What constitutes social class or disadvantage has been highly problematic, and ranges over educational as well as economic and familial questions, such as parental circumstances and whether either parent participated in some form of higher education.

Ethnicity or race and gender have also been seen as aspects of the issue, although neither has been foregrounded and has tended to be embedded in debates about social diversity. The core policy question has focused upon social mobility, or the chances of individuals to move up the social hierarchy as a form of equity. Diversity, too, has had a range of meanings, and has not particularly been about ethnicity or race, but about social and economic backgrounds for equality of opportunity or equity. Gender equity recently has been about young working class men's access to higher education regardless of ethnicity.

Social and Educational Research on Widening Participation

In 2005 the UK government, through the Higher Education Funding Council for England, committed £2 million to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for social science research on the UK government's policies to widen access to, and participation within, post-compulsory and higher education in England in the 21st century. This research was conducted through the ESRC's Teaching and Learning Research Programme (TLRP), a major government investment in educational research. Seven projects were selected through peer review to undertake these studies of widening participation in England to a diversity of individuals comprising the economically, educationally and socially disadvantaged, in terms of poverty or social class, and also age, ethnicity or race, and gender (David et al., 2009).

The projects ranged from policy questions about changing regimes of further and higher education, to studies of young people in state schools and their transitions from vocational qualifications into types of higher education, to mathematics education as critical to demanding subjects in universities, usually Science, Technology, Engineering and Medicine (STEM), to learning experiences of working class students within universities, or of socially diverse students in HE, and why qualified people choose not to attend university.

Given that the projects were funded and based within England, our definitions of widening participation focused upon socio-economic disadvantage and diversity rather than more

multi-cultural questions about ethnicity, race or the newly emerging issues concerning international students, whether from Africa, Asia, Europe or the other nations of the UK. Diversity of institutional offerings, of different types of higher education and of subjects, was the focus of the TLRP projects. In subjects we looked at topics including the academic versus vocational divide and the criticality of maths education. The more traditional research-intensive universities are where the STEM subjects tend to predominate and where maths is seen as a prerequisite for progression to areas of higher education and to some careers. By contrast other types of institution in both further and higher education may regard vocational education and training as the preferred route over more traditional academic subjects and prior qualifications.

We also looked at the types of teaching required to meet the needs of a diverse range of students in different types of higher education and in a variety of subjects. Here too, we looked at the contrast between maths education and more vocational orientations within different institutions. Some of the projects contrasted pedagogies for subjects at a range of institutions. How each project defined and selected the individuals it would study is crucial to understanding the research and its policy implications. Our definitions of diversity and disadvantage focused mainly upon socio-economic and family backgrounds, and not specifically on ethnicity or race. Two projects used relatively broad notions of 'poor' and 'rich' family backgrounds in state schools. Another project made use of traditional social class educational and occupational split between working class and middle class students whilst a further two linked these to ethnicity and gender. Yet another two projects used more dynamic evidence of family and educational backgrounds associated with social networks and social capital.

The approaches that we used linked to a range of theories and methodologies within the social sciences. They involved quantitative and qualitative approaches, and different ways of selecting individuals and institutions for study. We used a wide range of research designs which involved economic, educational, policy sociological and socio-cultural methods. The projects evaluated the evidence about policies, practices and pedagogies in England and the broader context of transforming higher education in relation to the knowledge economy. The projects ranged from qualitative studies of the policies and practices across newly created colleges of higher

education, extending 'universal access' through dual regimes, to both qualitative and quantitative studies of differently classed, gendered and raced students accessing and participating in forms of higher education. Here there were:

1. A quantitative cohort analysis of all students in English state schools in Key Stage 4 (aged 16) in 2001-2002, and linked to those aged 18 in 2002-2003 and 2004-2005, and as they progress through universities, with a focus on differences between élite (Russell Group) and non-élite or selective modern, old and new universities.

2. A qualitative study of the socio-cultural and learning experiences of working class students in four different types of higher education, ranging from an élite, to a red-brick/Russell Group, to a new university, and a college of further education.

3. A mixed methods study of learners' transitions from vocational education and training into different kinds of academic and more vocational types of higher education.

There were also two studies that focused on diverse students accessing different types of further and higher education, and which gave major consideration to participation in particular subjects and the ways that they are taught. One considered how students' identities were framed by participation in different approaches to maths education, seeing this as a key requirement for participation in STEM subjects. The other project considered the ways in which a number of subjects were taught at university, namely biosciences, business, computing, history, nursing and social work, comparing and contrasting an old with a new university.

Finally, by way of overall contrast, there was a project that looked at 'non-participation', or why people who were qualified (at level 4) to enter higher education chose not to do so. This project focused upon what they called 'networks of intimacy' or how decisions became part of an embedded social practice, and part of people's wider social networks.

Findings and Conclusions from the Research Studies on Widening Participation

The findings from these projects have been produced as an edited book entitled Improving Learning by Widening Participation in Higher

Education (David et al., 2009). Our headline findings are about both policies and practices at institutional and individual levels, and about the implications for teaching and learning across the life course.

Our overarching finding across all the seven projects is that there remain systemic and systematic forms of inequality for individuals and institutions across subjects and levels of education. This is not only in higher education, but also from school, family, college, and other forms of learning including work. This is despite widespread commitments to equity and diversity as defining fair access or widening participation in higher education and forms of lifelong and/or vocational learning. We have also found, however, that a greater diversity of students is now participating in some form of post-compulsory or higher education. This includes students or adults across a wider age spectrum than a traditional age cohort and from a diversity of families, socio-economic backgrounds and ethnicities as well as gender... equitable or fair access to and participation within higher education is not achieved at the point of entry or transition to HE (David et al., 2009: 150-151).

From the point of view of race or ethnic equality in access or participation, some of our detailed findings reveal significant issues. For example, whilst the cohort study (Vignoles et al) found that 'state school children from poor backgrounds remain far less likely to go to university than more advantaged children' nevertheless 'ethnic minority students are generally more likely to go to university than white British students once account is taken of their prior achievement' (Table 6.1 pp 156-7). This team also comments, however, that:

… the educational achievement of ethnic minority students has improved and policy attention needs to shift to the type of HE accessed by these students.

They also emphasize that:

… policy interventions need to encourage high achieving ethnic minority students to apply to research intensive universities and ensure that such institutions are proactive in welcoming such applications (ibid p.160).

We draw the overarching conclusion that:

… recent English government policies on widening participation have indeed led to increasing opportunities for learners from diverse families

and disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. However, these policies have not led to fair or equal access to equal types of higher education that may lead to equal benefits in the graduate or professional labour markets. We could, however, see the improvement in HE participation for women, over a long time frame, and more recently for ethnic minority groups as part of an improving process (ibid p.163).

We also considered the potential direction of policy interventions and suggest that:

… policy interventions should either encourage high achieving ethnic minority students to apply to research-intensive old universities or alter the differential funding of universities so that universities are not defined solely by their research ratings in an ever more complex system of metrics (ibid p. 167).

Our overall findings, though, addressed not just questions of 'fair access' and individual group forms of access, such as ethnic minority or Black and minority ethnic (BME) group status but also how inclusive educational participation has become. So once into higher education are the pedagogies and practices equitable and do they sustain forms of social diversity through their pedagogies and practices? Here it is clear that:

- equity and diversity... processes lead to different and frequently inequitable pathways for diverse and nowadays a majority of female students into highly stratified systems of higher education (defined in terms of international league tables or 'metrics').

- Nevertheless, the pedagogies and practices of higher education themselves can lead to meaningful educational engagements across the life course. The diverse practices and critical or connectionist pedagogies within various institutional forms of HE and within various subjects, ranging from the social sciences to those requiring mathematics or forms of vocational education, also may sustain or reverse patterns of differentiation. The learning outcomes across the life course illustrate that HE can be meaningful in people's lives, authentic, practical and relevant, and as social as well as work or economic experiences.... gender is often implicit not explicit... (David, 2009: 199-200).

So we advocate developing pedagogies within and across higher education to deepen academic

engagement, and that are more inclusive given the increased diversity in the higher education population. Examples are provided of what the maths educators call 'connectionist' pedagogies which require making connections between students' ethnic, cultural or social identities and abstract concepts rather than 'teaching to the test'. Our conclusions are that there have been some modest improvements, given the massive expansion of higher education, but inequalities, in which race or ethnicity are embedded remain and need to be addressed as a policy priority.

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3. Understanding Widening Participation
Liz Thomas and Jane Berry
Higher Education Academy, Dublin

Widening Participation (WP) is concerned with addressing patterns of under-representation in higher education (HE) *and* the experience of these students in HE. More specifically, WP focuses on the rates of participation of students from groups which are historically and contemporarily under-represented in HE, and the absolute and comparative success of these students in HE and beyond. This interpretation of WP is reflected in official definitions in England. For example, the former Department for Education and Skills defines WP as:

> … *helping more people from under-represented groups, particularly low socio-economic groups, to participate successfully in higher education (DfES, 2006) [emphasis added]*

More specifically, the definition supplied by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) elaborates this understanding about the scope of widening participation to:

> … *raise aspirations and educational attainment among people from under-represented communities to prepare them for higher education, ensure success on their programme of study, improve their employment prospects and open possibilities for postgraduate study, and give them opportunities to return to learning throughout their lives.* (HEFCE: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/)

For the purpose of the discussion presented in this paper, it is useful to disaggregate WP into access to HE and student retention, achievement and success. Student retention refers to the extent to which learners remain within a higher education institution (HEI) and complete a programme of study in a pre-determined time-period. Achievement is measured by the percentage of students achieving different classes of degree. Success in higher education does not have a uniform understanding, but can be taken to include the progression of students and graduates beyond higher education. This would take account of experiences in the labour market, postgraduate education and lifelong learning.

Race Equality and Access to HE

The debate on racial equality in the context of WP focuses less on access and retention than on the subsequent attainment of Black and ethnic minority (BME) students in HE. This is because BME communities are over-represented in the student population and increasingly so, especially in relation to first degree and full-time student numbers. This is despite them being more likely to come from lower socio-economic groups than their White counterparts – traditionally under-represented in HE and the focus of current government policy to widen participation – and their sharing some similar reasons for non-participation with their White contemporaries from similar backgrounds (Broecke and Hamed, 2008), for example issues around loss of identity.

Even so, high rates of overall participation mask a picture of differential rates of access and routes of entry into HE by sub-group, variations in profile and very uneven patterns of distribution by subject, location and type of higher education institution (HEI) – although taking BME students as a whole they are far more likely to be studying locally and at a post-92 institution (most likely in London) than White students.

This, of itself, demonstrates the particularly challenging nature of the debate around racial equality and WP in HE arising both from the failure to, and difficulty of, disaggregating data on BME students and the parallel challenge of isolating the 'ethnicity effect' when trying to explain patterns of access and success, students being individuals with multiple identities, only one of which is their ethnicity.

Retention, Achievement and Success for Ethnic Minorities in HE and Beyond

The policy drive to both increase and widen access to HE has been accompanied by concerns about student retention. Significantly, BME full-time students (with the exception of mixed race and 'other' ethnicities), are more likely to continue into their second year of study than White students

(National Audit Office, 2007). This is despite being over-represented in post-92 HEIs, and being more likely to come from lower socio-economic groups and with lower entry qualifications. In contrast, part-time BME students from any sub-group are less likely to progress than their White contemporaries.

However, despite above average access and retention rates, there is a significant gap in degree attainment between BME and White students as measured by the percentage being awarded a first or upper second class degree. There is emerging evidence that this gap is widening slightly (Equality Challenge Unit, 2009) although attainment is improving across all groups. While research has failed to establish why there should be a statistically significant gap (Broecke and Nicholls, 2007; Fielding et al., 2008), a complex picture emerges with the gap in attainment between BME and White students widening with age, for males and with increasing numbers of BME students in an HEI in percentage terms. It narrows for those with higher entry qualifications, those living at home and from areas of high social deprivation. The scale of the 'ethnicity' effect is mediated further by BME sub-group and subject studied.

It has been widely recognized that this gap must be addressed if the government's commitment to 'successful participation' as part of its WP strategy for HE is to be honoured. It can also be seen as a central requirement of the equality legislation. The final report of the Ethnicity, Gender and Degree Attainment Project (2008), undertaken by the Academy with ECU on behalf of DIUS and HEFCE (with support from UUK and GuildHE), highlighted a range of issues that make this challenging for the sector and progress to date measured and partial: the potential political sensitivities around openly addressing issues of BME under-achievement; the context specific nature of the scope and scale of the issue in particular HEIs requiring tailored solutions; the possibility that the reason(s) for differential attainment may not be in the power of HEIs to change; the difficulty in proving causality and therefore in designing interventions; the ethics of targeting support and the difficulty of engaging students themselves in the solutions, to name but some of the challenges.

It was clear that while of increasing concern to HEIs, the issue has historically been subsumed by attention to broader issues of student retention and WP with a consequent and widespread lack of systematic approaches, particularly at policy level. However, the analysis of the 2009 Widening

Participation Strategic Assessments demonstrates growing awareness of this challenge resulting, for example, in some institutions monitoring the achievement of BME groups in relation to others and implementing some small scale interventions (Thomas et al., 2010). The extent of good practice across the sector is not easy to assess, however, although some highly innovative practice – especially in the areas of mentoring and student support, small group teaching and study skills support, curriculum audit and development and assessment review – has been identified in the Ethnicity, Gender and Degree Attainment project's various research strands, the Review of Widening Participation Strategic Assessments and the recent HEA/ECU programme of work with institutions to improve the degree attainment of their BME students.

Finally, research evidence demonstrates that ethnic minority graduates do comparatively worse in the labour market than White graduates (Bailey, 2003; Blasko et al., 2003; Connor et al., 2004; Hogarth et al., 1997; Machin et al., 2009; Shiner and Modood, 2002). This may be because minority groups are under-represented in the graduate intakes of many large organizations (Connor et al., 2004) which tend to favour pre-1992 HEIs which have fewer BME students (Shiner and Modood, 2002). They also find it more difficult to secure employment following graduation (Blasko et al., 2003; Connor et al., 2004), although rates of unemployment vary between different ethnic minority groups and are mediated by gender. However, once ethnic minorities have secured employment the evidence from Connor et al. (2004), Blasko et al. (2003) and Machin et al. (2009) indicates that they fair well.

With regards to postgraduate study the limited research evidence available suggests a greater tendency for BME graduates to enter postgraduate education than White graduates (Machin et al., 2004), and at higher rates than for undergraduate education (Connor et al., 2004; Wakeling and Kyriacou, 2010). Differences between ethnic groups are identified, but there does not appear to be agreement on this. However, it should be noted that institution attended, subject studied and degree classificatioon all have an impact on progression to postgraduate study (Wakeling and Kyriacou, 2010).

In Conclusion

BME students and race equality have not been a primary focus of WP policy and interventions in the UK over the last decade. This is, at least in part, because a superficial review of the data suggests that there is not an issue to be addressed. Deeper

analysis indicates, however, that 'access to what' is a matter of concern, and more recently that this has implications for labour market progression.

Recent national research examines and confirms that the achievement of BME students is also a cause for concern. Progress in the sector towards addressing this is comparatively slow and uncertain, and any positive outcomes of interventions are likely to take time to identify and assess. Evaluation is vital in this context. One of the key recommendations of the Ethnicity Gender and Degree Attainment Project was that further research should be undertaken, for example into the learning and teaching environment, patterns of prior attainment and practice in HEIs where there is no pattern of differential attainment by ethnicity.

In response to the report's findings, the Academy and ECU have been supporting the sector by dissemination of research findings and promotion of the sharing of knowledge and sector-wide debate through a series of research seminars and the hosting of a developmental summit programme for HEIs. A commentary on this programme and its outcomes will be published early in 2011.

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SECTION II: DOES WIDENING PARTICIPATION WORK?

4. Edited Extract from the January 2010 Submission by the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) to the Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance
OFFA

## Changes in participation

Overall participation has increased

1. Applicant, enrolment and participation data all clearly show that demand for and participation in higher education have followed a significant upward trend over recent years, both in terms of absolute numbers and proportionally when measured against the background population.

2. Gradual growth in participation in the 1990s and early 2000s has become steeper since the mid 2000s. HEFCE analysis shows that the young participation (18 and 19 year-old entrants) rate has increased from 30% for the 1994-95 cohort to 36% for the 2009-10 cohort, with the majority of this increase since the 2004-05 cohort. Young people today are 12% more likely to enter HE than they were five years ago (see Figure 1 on page 18).

3. These increases in young participation have occurred against a challenging demographic background. The young population increased by 6 per cent between 2004-05 and 2009-10 cohorts. To accommodate this at the same time as increasing young participation by 12% (see Figure 1), the number of young entrants to higher education increased by 19 per cent over the same period (HEFCE, 2010).

The impact of the new student finance system on participation in 2005 and 2006

4. UCAS and Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data (see Table 1 on page 19) show there was a significant rise in the numbers of applicants and enrolments for 2005-06 followed by a significant downturn in the numbers of applicants and enrolments in 2006-07, the year in which variable fees were introduced. However, in 2007-08 the numbers of applicants and enrolments exceeded the record levels seen in 2005-06 and they have continued to rise steeply to 2009-10. The larger than expected increase in 2005-06 and subsequent dip in 2006-07 is largely the result of some young people bringing forward their entry into higher education from age 19 (in 2006-07) to age 18 in 2005-06. The participation of 18 year-olds in 2005-06 was about one percentage point higher than trend, and that of 19 year-olds in 2006-07 about one percentage point lower than trend. It seems then that the fluctuations in the Higher Education Initial Participation Rate (HEIPR) around the introduction of variable fees in 2006 were related to a redistribution of students from 2006-07 to 2005-06, rather than a change in the dominant upward trend of increasing participation. HEFCE's young participation measure differs from the HEIPR by recording entrants from an actual cohort (rather than a single entry year) and does not show this fall in participation (see Figure 1).

5.   HEFCE analysis of young participation rates from the mid-90s to 2009 shows that the lower than average increases in the national participation rate that are seen at both the introduction of tuition fees in 1998 and the introduction of variable fees in 2006, may be attributed to larger than average increases in the young population for those cohorts acting to depress the participation rate. The analysis does not go on to explain why this is so, but it cautions against overstating the direct impact of changes in fee and support on a single year's participation figures. The analysis concludes that "there is no indication from the national-level trends that changes to HE tuition fees or student support arrangements have been associated with material reductions in the overall HE participation rate".[1]

Figure 1. The young participation rate for England
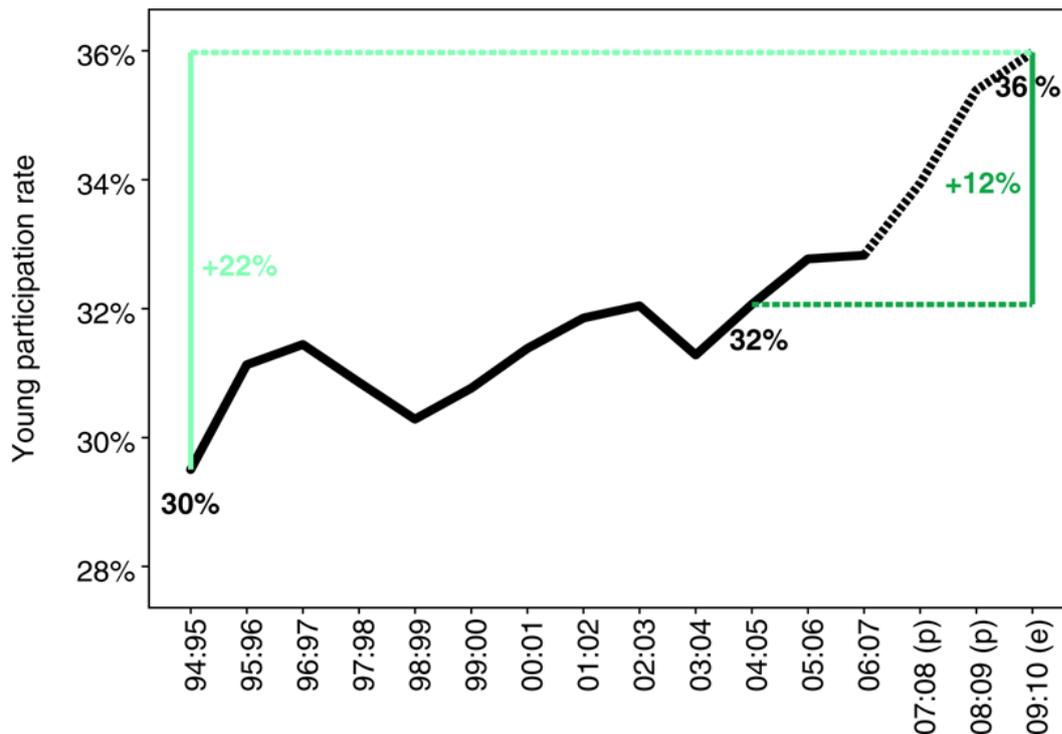
Source: HEFCE (2010): 4.

6. It is widely expected that UCAS applications for entry in 2010 will again be at record levels. This is supported by early figures indicating that applications for the early UCAS deadline of 15 October (students applying for medicine, dentistry, veterinary science and to Oxford and Cambridge) were up 10.2% on last year.[2]

Participation has also widened at record levels

7. HEFCE's recently published young participation analysis shows that "In the most disadvantaged areas there have been sustained and substantial increases in the proportions of young people entering higher education since the mid 2000s". In 2009 students from the most disadvantaged areas are around 50 per cent more likely to attend higher education than they were in the mid 1990s and around 30 per cent more likely to attend higher education than they were just five years ago.[3]

8. This pattern of increased participation in higher education of young people from the most disadvantaged areas is broadly the same whether you measure disadvantage by participation rates

themselves, or by measures of parental education, occupation (commonly classified as social class), or income (see Table 2).[4]

9. It is noticeable from the HEFCE results that young participation rates when defined by parental income are not as low as when disadvantage is defined in other ways. This may just reflect a feature of this classification[5] but is also a reminder that income level is just one - and perhaps not the most important - factor in differences in entry rates to higher education.

10. The proportion of young people from the most advantaged areas who enter higher education has also increased, typically by +5 per cent over the last five years and +15 per cent over the last 15 years.

11. However, the gap between the participation rates of the most advantaged and the most disadvantaged areas has been narrowing, both in proportional terms and percentage point terms, since the mid-2000s. This is the first time that this has happened across the mid-1990s to the present period and most likely ever.

Table 1. HESA: Full-time first year, first degree, foundation degree and other first year enrolments to English institutions 2002 to 2008

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
No of enrolments	300,080	302,580	306,045	324,645	308,735	326,625	350,550
Percentage change on previous year		0.8	1.1	6.1	-4.9	5.8	7.3

Source: HESA, annually published first statistical release on higher education student enrolments

Table 2. Trends in young participation in the most disadvantaged areas by different measures

Type of disadvantage	Young participation rate for 04: 05 (%)	Young participation rate for 09: 10 (%)	Proportional change between 04:05 and 09: 10 (%)
Low HE participation rates	15	19	+31
Parental education	16	20	+30
Parental social class	17	21	+24
Parental income	20	25	+27

Source: HEFCE (2010): 2

Slower progress on widening access to the most selective institutions

12. Whilst good progress has been made over the last five years in widening participation to the sector as a whole, there appears to have been less progress in widening access to the most selective institutions despite considerable efforts by these institutions to improve the situation.

13. As HEFCE's recent young participation analysis only looks at the core results for the sector as a whole, we don't yet have analysis on how the most selective institutions are performing on widening participation. However, HEFCE analysis has previously shown that patterns of participation at highly selective universities can be quite different from the results for the sector.[6]

14. HESA Widening Participation Performance Indicators (WP PIs) show that the most selective institutions (represented in the figures below by the Russell Group) have generally not improved against the sector average in respect of the percentage of their students in NS-SEC groups 4-7 (see Figure 2 on page 20) or in the percentage of their students from low participation neighbourhoods (LPNs) (see Figure 3 on page 20). Both of these have remained relatively flat over the period 2003 to 2007. However, the most selective institutions have kept pace with the small increase in students from state schools across the sector (see Figure 4 on page 21).

15. Acceptances from minority ethnic groups have increased slightly over the period 2005 to 2008 from 25 per cent to 27 per cent. The proportion of unknowns remains relatively stable at between 5 and 6 per cent (see Table 3 on page 22). There appears to be no indication from the national-level figures that the 2006 reforms have had an effect on this trend.

Concerns about future participation

16. It is clear that the cost to the Treasury of student support has grown significantly following the 2006 reforms and is now restricting growth in student numbers.

17. While increased and widened participation has been possible in years where expansion has been funded, restrictions in the growth of student numbers is likely to put downward pressure on the participation rate. The decreasing size of the young population over the next decade[7] is likely to limit the impact but if recent increases in attainment and participation continue, demand relative to supply could remain high.

Figure 2. Percentage of students from NS-SEC 4-7 from 2003-07
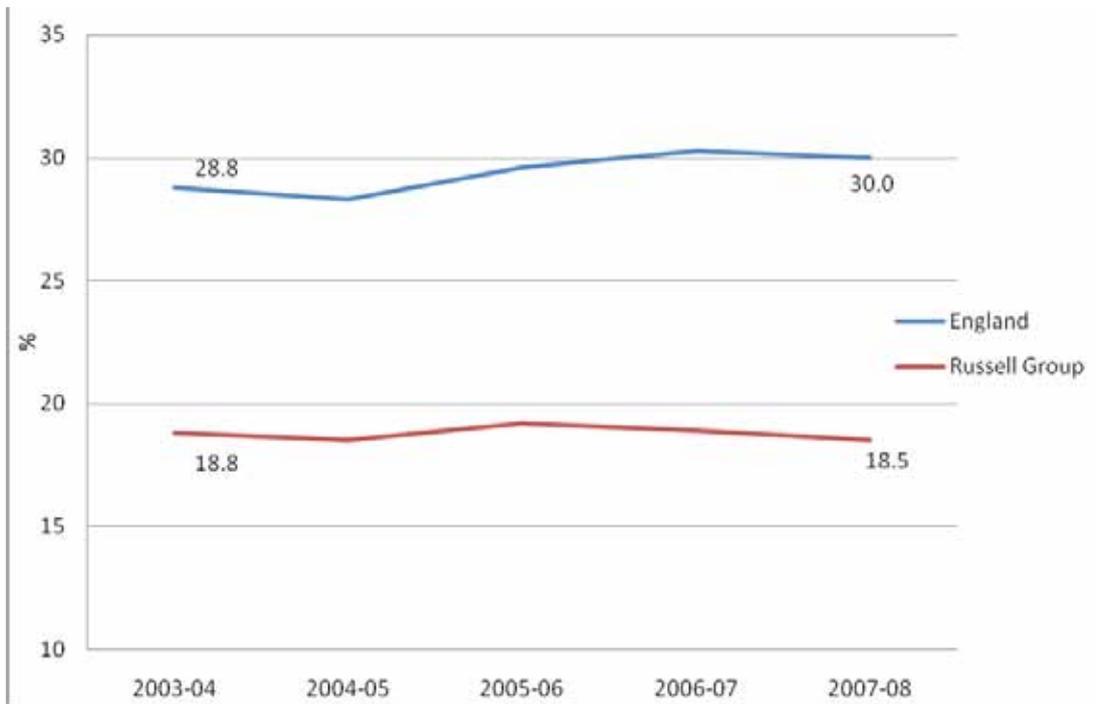
Source: HESA, annually published widening participation performance indicators.

Figure 3. Percentage of students from lower participation neighbourhoods
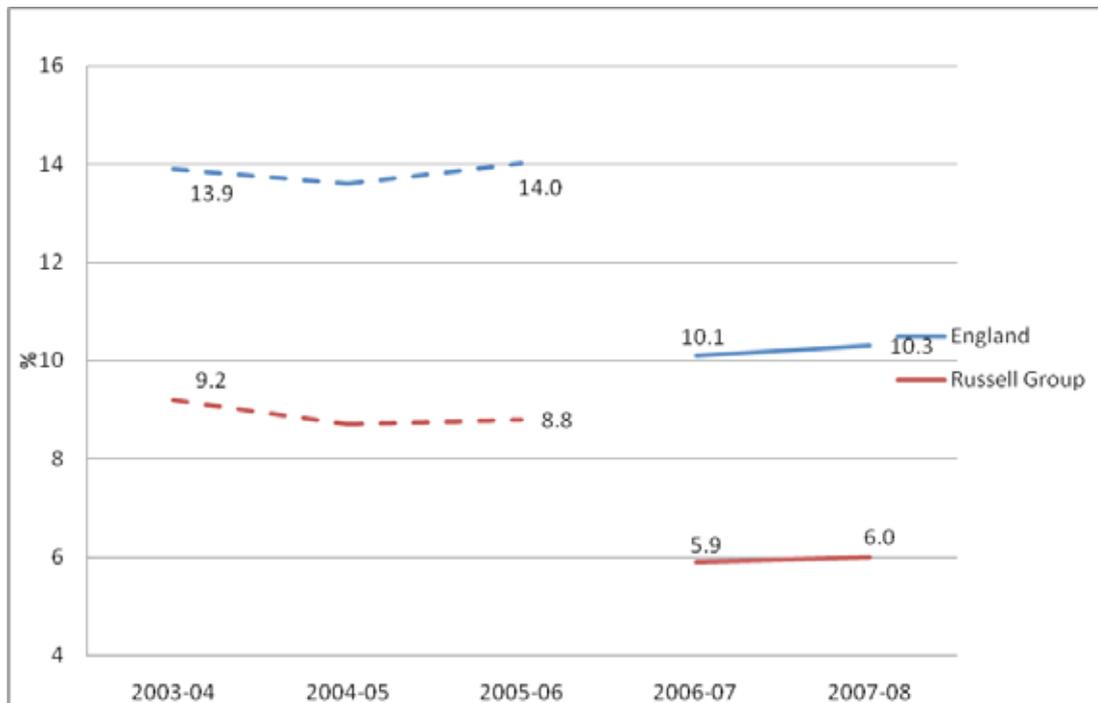
Source: HESA, annually published widening participation performance indicators

Figure 4. Percentage of students from state schools from 2003-7
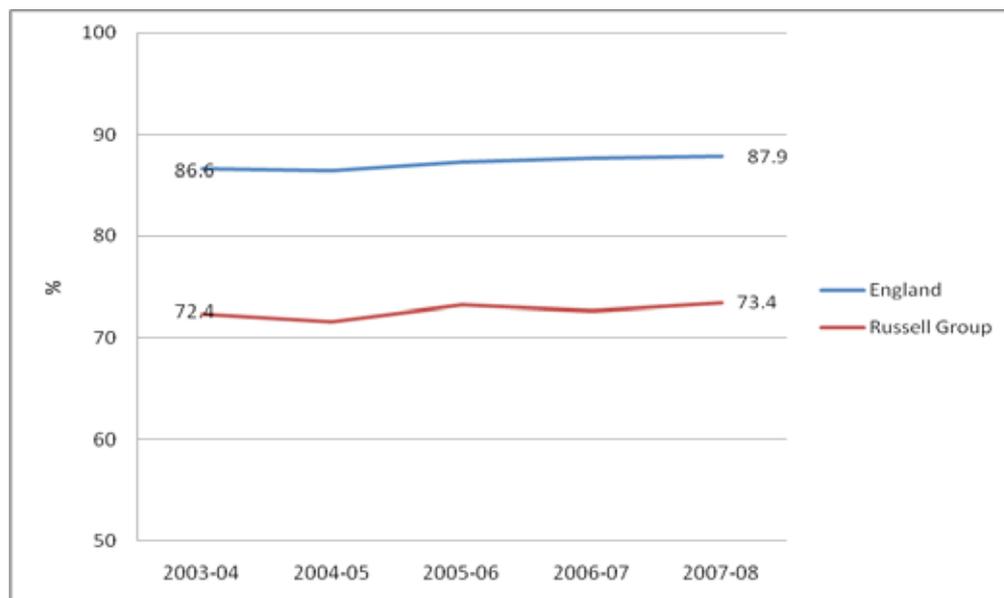
Source: HESA, annually published widening participation indicators

18. There is an additional risk that the significant increases in participation from the most disadvantaged areas might be disproportionately depressed or reversed as competition for places grows. It is important therefore, that both the widening participation and fair access agendas remain high priority for both Government and institutions over the coming years. If we are to improve social mobility to the elite professions, this issue will be particularly important for the most selective institutions.

19. It is also evident from the young participation figures that, if growth in overall student numbers is maintained, then, with a declining young population, there is a genuine opportunity to realise the Government's 50 per cent participation target in the next few years.[8]

Notes

1. Higher Education Funding Council for England (2010), Trends in young participation: core results for England. Bristol: HEFCE, p.4.

2. UCAS media release, 2 November 2009, First figures for 2010 entry http://www.ucas. ac.uk/about_us/media_enquiries/media_ releases/2009/2009-11-02 Accessed: 30 January 2010.

3. HEFCE (2010), p.2.

4. HEFCE (2010), p.2

5. For example, areas of low parental incomes are located disproportionately in London (personal communication, Dr Corver, HEFCE, January 2010).

6. "For example, entrants from the most disadvantaged areas are relatively less likely to attend HEIs that were formerly UFC funded (Table 2, page 120, HEFCE 2005/03)". Since making its first submission to the Browne Review, OFFA has published analysis showing that participation among the least advantaged 40 per cent of young people at the top third of selective universities has remained almost flat since the mid-1990s. The most advantaged 20 per cent of young people are seven times more likely than the least advantaged 40 per cent to attend a highly selective university. See OFFA (2010) *What More Can be Done to Widen Access to Highly Selective Universities?*

7. The young population is predicted to decline by 15 per cent between 2009 and 2019 – HEFCE data.

8. The 50 per cent target is defined relative to the HEIPR which has a different construction and broader age range than HEFCE's young participation measure. In recent years the HEIPR has been around 10 percentage points higher than the HEFCE measure.

Table 3. UK accepted UCAS applicants by ethnicity to UK institutions (from applicants domiciled in England), 2005 to 2008 years of entry*

Acceptances	2005		2006		2007		2008	
Asian - Bangladeshi	2794	0.9	3040	1.1	3134	1.0	3588	1.0
Asian - Chinese	2998	1.0	2935	1.0	3104	1.0	3233	0.9
Asian - Indian	14,001	4.6	13,802	4.8	13,553	4.4	13,988	4.1
Asian - other Asian background	3899	1.3	3849	1.3	4062	1.3	5065	1.5
Asian - Pakistani	8390	2.8	8463	2.9	8728	2.8	9790	2.8
Black - African	10,163	3.4	10,750	3.7	12,204	4.0	15,412	4.5
Black - Caribbean	4400	1.5	4695	1.6	4948	1.6	5951	1.7
Black - other black background	1083	0.4	1073	0.4	1121	0.4	1191	0.3
Mixed - other mixed background	2869	1.0	2813	1.0	3184	1.0	3455	1.0
Mixed - White and Asian	2865	0.9	2737	0.9	3148	1.0	3547	1.0
Mixed - White and Black African	862	0.3	982	0.3	1093	0.4	1233	0.4
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	2011	0.7	2102	0.7	2616	0.9	3165	0.9
Other ethnic background	3418	1.1	3401	1.2	3709	1.2	3727	1.1
Total minority ethnic	**59,753**	**19.8**	**60,642**	**21.0**	**64,604**	**21.0**	**73,345**	**21.3**
Unknown	15,745	5.2	16,896	5.8	16,858	5.5	19,325	5.6
White	226,300	75.0	211,691	73.2	225,497	73.5	250,938	73.0
Total	301,798	100.0	289,229	100.0	306,959	100.0	343,608	100.0

* Although data is available for 2003 and 2004 years of entry, there have been a number of changes to the ethnic origin classifications between 2001 and 2005 entry, including the division of White into British/Irish/Scottish/Other and the introduction of other groupings such as Mixed and Chinese. Direct comparisons between the years are therefore not recommended.

Source: UCAS statistics online

5. Widening Participation in HE: Early Intervention and High-aspiration Social Contexts
Rachel Carr and Hugh Rayment-Pickard

IntoUniversity

IntoUniversity works extensively with young people from Black and Minority Ethnic communities, but we do not target BME students specifically. We target young people from deprived backgrounds with no or little experience of Higher Education in their families and peer groups. And since BME students are strongly represented in our target group we are necessarily engaged with the issues that concern their access to higher education.

IntoUniversity's experience is that it is crucially the attitudes, aspirations and ambitions of young people which will determine their future success. Poorly motivated young people with low self esteem and aspiration are unlikely to succeed even when provided with good educational opportunities and special schemes to smooth their path to Higher Education or into the professions. Young people from deprived backgrounds need both to have their aspirations raised, and to have their learning supported. Without these basic principles in place, other measures stand little chance of success. **Into**University uses a 'third space' – between school and home – to raise aspirations and support learning.

Overcoming the Barriers to Higher Education, a report commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), concluded:

> *Given that it is possible to predict with alarming accuracy the qualifications of individuals at age 16 and their chances of staying on in education simply from what is known about them at birth, we need to direct our resources more towards families and wider society.* (Gorard et al., 2007: 129)

Our experience at **Into**University supports the public research showing that aspirations are generated within families, peer groups and communities. Young people from middle-class homes, where parents and other siblings have been to university, are very likely to graduate themselves. Conversely, research shows that students from families with no university experience, and where the very concept of a university education and its benefits are not well understood, are most unlikely to progress into Higher Education (Gayle et al., 2002: 5–20).

We know that such parents are less likely to play a part in developing their children's education, and a lack of a 'HE role model' in the family can prevent aspirations from forming. It is not just parents but other family members who are also important: qualitative studies have shown that siblings and cousins can play a significant part in the aspiration to university study. Since a degree is now an entry requirement across most professions, the role of parents and families is also decisive in whether young people progress into the professions. Families with no history of professional careers and with no role models will be less likely to make their children aware of the professional opportunities available.

IntoUniversity addresses this gap by providing a social space where students can study after school with other well-motivated students and with the encouragement of specialist tutors. This space, where there is a culture of high aspirations, is critical for children from families where there is no tradition of higher education or professional careers.

Research from the Institute for Employment Studies (Connor et al.,1999) showed that many students' decisions about further study had been largely formulated by Year 11. This is why it is so crucial to plant aspirations in young people's minds at an early stage – before their attitudes to their own potential become fixed. To address this **Into**University works with children to improve their futures as early as the primary years.

The authors of *Overcoming the Barriers to Higher Education* also reached this conclusion:

> *To be fully effective, interventions need to occur early in life. Interventions in post-16 participation and in the process of application to HE face a greater challenge to make headway in changing the subjective opportunity structure of the individual.* (Gorard et al., 2007: 122)

Analysis has shown that (after controlling for other key factors) young people with a majority of their friends going on to university are also more likely to go on to university themselves (DfES,

unpublished). With few friends and community members with HE experiences, and a general culture that going to university would be a rarity for people in their area, aspirations can be curtailed. This is why IntoUniversity also provides young people with an aspiring and focused peer group.

It is also the case that in many low-aspiration contexts, educational success is undervalued and not well supported. In over-crowded homes there may be no quiet space to complete homework. Where the parents have a poor education, there may be little or no home support for learning. In low income households there may be a scarcity of books, IT and other education resources in the home. In homes and communities where young people do not get good enough GCSEs, it may be counter-cultural even to go to sixth form, let alone into Higher Education or into the professions. In homes where English is not spoken, support for language-based homework may be unavailable.

Unfortunately, some schools in deprived areas are unable to overcome (or even sometimes prevent themselves from succumbing to) the prevailing local culture which is all too often one of educational underachievement. Children attending such schools therefore significantly benefit from support outside of the school day. After school study has been proven to have a significant impact on educational achievement. A 2001 longitudinal study (MacBeath et al., 2001) showed an improvement of an average of three and a half grades or one or more A-C passes at GCSE. The report also concluded that:

> *Study support appears especially effective for students from minority ethnic communities and, to a lesser extent, for students eligible for free school meals.*

The evaluation of Aimhigher by the NFER in February 2006 suggested that certain kinds of out-of-school intervention were more effective than others at encouraging young people to go to university: residential schools; campus visits/ open days; mentoring of school/college pupils and young people; subject-related taster events; information, advice and guidance. These were considered to be especially effective when they formed part of an ongoing and coherent package of support. This is why **Into**University provides an integrated and sustained out-of-school and after-school programme reaching children from aged 7 up0 to 18 and into university and beyond.

In summary, the work at **Into**University indicates that one of the barriers for BME students is the lack of high-aspiration social contexts. The provision of such contexts – through focussed learning programmes, mentoring and academic support – can be a highly effective approach to increasing participation in Higher Education.

What is not yet known, of course, is whether the proposed changes to higher education funding, including the increase in tuition fees, will raise further barriers for students from deprived backgrounds that will impact negatively on progress already made towards widening participation in higher education.

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6. Cambridge: First Class in Inclusivity
Mark Copestake
GEEMA

The Group to Encourage Ethnic Minority Applications (GEEMA) was set up by Cambridge undergraduates in 1989 to ensure that talented UK Black and minority ethnic (BME) students were actively encouraged to apply to the University of Cambridge. It was one of the first programmes of its kind to be offered in the UK higher education sector and drew together outreach initiatives such as Open Days and Summer Schools exclusively for students from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds, school visits and partnerships with external organizations into one coherent programme, which has met with significant success.

Matthew Ryder, who studied law at Cambridge from 1986 to 1989 was one of the group of students who helped to found GEEMA. He is now a barrister at Matrix chambers, specializing in crime and human rights. He explained how:

> GEEMA arose out of Cambridge Black Students' Caucus in the mid-1980s. It was a unique project because it was the first time Black British students were a visible entity at Cambridge. Our goal was to make the university more accessible and less intimidating to those coming behind us.

Many students believe that Cambridge is not a place for 'people like them', and some rule out the prospect of an academic career at Cambridge on this assumption, rather than any particular evidence. In fact students at Cambridge come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds resulting in a very diverse and multicultural community; conveying the message that the university is such a rich environment in which to live and study is one of the primary objectives of GEEMA work.

There are, however, other factors affecting participation of BME students in institutions such as Cambridge. There is, for example, a considerable body of evidence indicating that students from ethnic minority groups are attracted to particular degree courses. The progression routes of BME students to university tend to be linked socio-cultural norms which may be experienced as expectations and/or pressures, for example, parental pressure to study a particular subject that leads to a professional vocation.

UCAS data shows that between 2007and 2009 36 per cent of all applicants to study medicine at UK universities were students from BME backgrounds. Within the same years, 30 per cent of all applicants to study law at UK universities and 30 per cent of all applicants to study business and administration courses were also students from BME backgrounds. The fact that BME students tend to be attracted to the most competitive courses means that many very able students find that they are unsuccessful in securing a place; many others find that more vocational subjects are simply not offered in the first place. Data also suggest that BME students tend to gravitate to urban centres where there is already an established BME community; and so, for example, many BME students from London don't even consider higher education institutions outside of the capital (Reay, David and Ball, 2005: 86).

And so as well as working to dispel unfounded stereotypes and misconceptions which surround the University of Cambridge, GEEMA pursues a number of other aims. The GEEMA Coordinator and current undergraduates reassure students that it is only natural to feel apprehensive about going to university and that whatever their background, it is likely they'll find someone who shares the same interests as them. It encourages students not to feel pressurized into choosing particular courses as a result of social expectancies, and stresses the importance of choosing a subject the student enjoys. It advises BME students on A-level subject choices and emphasizes the impact that these choices can have on later course options at university and indeed in terms of career aspiration. And it strives to increase awareness and the confidence to consider other universities and higher education institutions beyond the students' local area.

In order to deliver these messages, GEEMA runs a series of events including day visits and residential courses for UK BME students between Years 10 and 13. GEEMA works and communicates with over 400 schools and colleges in the UK which have been identified as having a high percentage of BME students and are located in areas with a relatively high density BME population. The GEEMA Coordinator and undergraduate ambassadors from the university visit schools and

colleges around the UK to talk to students about what it is like to live and study at Cambridge. The GEEMA Coordinator also hosts visits to the university from schools groups and BME organizations including the Windsor Fellowship, African Caribbean Diversity and Black Boys Can. Furthermore, GEEMA coordinates a series of Challenge Days, Taster Days and Masterclasses and holds specific events in conjunction with Black and Minority Ethnic History Season in October. GEEMA holds two summer schools, one for Year 10 students and one for Year 11 students. These three-night residential summer schools offer a taste of the wide variety of courses available to study at Cambridge. The summer schools include lectures, seminars, discussion groups and practical work, and introduce participants to subjects they will not have encountered through the national curriculum to broaden their horizons and encourage them to consider the wide range of courses available to them in higher education. GEEMA is also proactive in initiating a support network for ethnic minority applicants at Cambridge, liaising with CUSU (Cambridge University Students' Union), societies and organizations across the university. GEEMA produces a series of undergraduate profiles and videos in which BME students at the university talk about their own experiences of studying and living in Cambridge.

The impact of GEEMA activity over the last twenty years is pronounced. In 1990, a year after GEEMA was founded, 158 (or 5.5 per cent) of the 2865 home students admitted to Cambridge whose ethnicity was known were from ethnic minorities. For 2008, the figure had increased to 448 (15.5 per cent) out of 2890. While this progress is pleasing we are not complacent and:

> … the university is determined to continue to admit the best and the brightest students, irrespective of social, financial, school, religious or ethnic background.

Jon Beard, Director of Undergraduate Recruitment for the University, said:

> The University of Cambridge remains committed to attracting the brightest and best students regardless of background. The university is rightly proud of the work GEEMA does and the progress it has made, and is committed to push even harder to ensure that all students of high academic ability know that Cambridge could be for them.

Over the coming years, GEEMA hopes to develop stronger links with a wider range of schools, increase activity and capacity on events, improve virtual engagement via the web and improve dialogue with teachers and key organizations.

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7. Widening Participation in Higher Education
Joanna Papageorgiou
UCAS

UCAS has been a key partner in the work being undertaken to widen participation and in terms of fair access to all. The former Chief Executive of UCAS, Anthony McClaran, has been a member of the Higher Education Funding Council for England's widening participation strategic committee and part of Steven Schwartz's group on admissions practice. For UCAS the Schwartz Report was a very important piece of work and we took note when they said that a 'fair and transparent admissions system is essential for all applicants'.

To make sure applicants are protected and considered fairly by each institution, with the institutions' agreement, there have been substantial structural changes to admissions in recent years.

• The order of preference in the application was abandoned because it was unfair for the applicant in cases where institutions based their response on the position they were placed within the application.

• UCAS has introduced the principle of invisibility: universities cannot see the other institutions to which a prospective student has applied.

• UCAS is helping institutions take another step towards transparency, by providing an electronic means to send feedback to unsuccessful applicants.

This work goes hand in hand with a code of practice on feedback that has been developed by Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA), as one of the outcomes of the Schwartz report into fairness in university admissions published in 2004.

In terms of admissions criteria, the growth in Entry Profiles has provided an unprecedented level of transparency in university entry requirements. Entry Profiles are statements which can provide a mechanism that allows higher education institutions (HEIs) to go well beyond the traditional A level grades to describe aspects of what they are looking for in a successful applicant.

Some HEFCE funded research found that 'the primary target groups for widening participation are over-represented in HE applicants with a vocational education and training background'. Research into vocational qualifications is one way that UCAS has helped provide transparency in admissions research.

UCAS has also contributed in the pursuit of fair admissions with the use of the UCAS Tariff. This is a points system used to report achievement for entry to higher education in a numerical format:

• The Tariff establishes agreed comparability between different types of qualifications and provides comparisons between applicants with different types and volumes of achievement.

• With the use of the data supplied by HEIs on entry requirements, UCAS conducted research to examine the comparability of vocational and academic qualifications. In general, grade and Tariff ranges were found to match between vocational and academic qualifications.

• However, inconsistencies do exist in the amount of information available for vocational applicants. Many applicants are instructed to 'contact the institution' (especially for BTEC, particularly for physics and civil engineering courses) and detailed information is not provided for vocational applicants.

For all courses and types of institutions, A level applicants had detailed entry requirements information and were not asked to combine their qualifications with a vocational one.

• Entry requirements for many subjects requested a vocational qualification to be held in combination with an A level,   particularly for entry to mathematics, physics and business studies courses.

UCAS applicant data from 2006 shows that 93 per cent of HEIs specify the entry requirements for students holding A levels. For the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education this figure dropped to 81 per cent, for BTEC National Diplomas to 55 per cent, and for some National Diplomas to just 21 per cent.

While there is no evidence at all of direct discrimination on the part of admissions offices against students progressing with vocational qualifications, there is some evidence of lack of knowledge and lack of understanding. As Anthony McClaran has said, 'In many cases the entry requirements don't exist, they are simply not listed – it is as if the qualification is invisible.'

While acknowledging the reality of the current higher education landscape, there are many positive ways in which UCAS is enabling access to an admissions system that is designed to suit all applicants.

The UCAS External Relations Team is actively working on obtaining Entry Profiles for all courses through UCAS. For 2009 entry there was 88 per cent coverage (38,876 of 50,153 courses) of undergraduate courses in the UK and the intention is for coverage to reach 100%.

- The UCAS Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme was developed in response to recommendations made by Schwartz. One of its aims is to raise awareness of the 'fair admissions agenda' amongst staff working in the HE arena.

- Modules in the programme include 'Positive and Constructive Feedback to Applicants'; 'Qualifications within the UCAS Tariff'; 'From Care to University'; 'Widening Participation and Fair Admissions'.

- 30 per cent of the qualifications that are currently included in the Tariff can be considered vocational and there has also been an approach from City & Guilds for the inclusion of their qualifications.

8. Student Experiences with Diversity

Jessica Mai Sims

Runnymede

In 2007, Runnymede Trust published the community study, *Not Enough Understanding? – Student Experiences of Diversity in UK Universities* (Sims, 2007) which focused on diversity in higher education. The report includes the experiences of undergraduate students at a London university with over 50 per cent intake of BME students – 'State University' (SU).[1] The research participants spoke of their experiences and opinions of diversity, social formations and networks and racism. From their experiences a critique of the value of diversity emerged: diversity does not necessary lead to greater commitments to racial equality or community cohesion, rather these ideals must be addressed through institutional policies and practice to promote good relations and equal opportunities.

Much like society at large, the university is a site where issues surrounding equality, difference and cohesion are becoming more pronounced with policies intending to provide greater opportunities for 'non-traditional' students. It could be argued that BME student participation is positive because they are more likely to attend university than their White counterparts, but this merits more consideration. Universities are far from experiencing equal opportunities as BME students are more likely to be concentrated at modern universities in London, are less likely to perform as well as their White peers, and are more likely to be unemployed after graduation. Indeed there are growing concerns over racial and faith-based tensions on campuses.

Increasing opportunities for BME students to participate in higher education is important; however the emphasis on race equality and student experiences cannot be forgotten. University may prepare individuals for their professional careers through their studies, but it also prepares individuals to interact in dynamic and diverse environments. Higher education institutions have potential to contribute to a more tolerant society through the social relationships developed within their campuses. However, besides improving the academic opportunity of BME students, universities must in turn place greater emphasis on social opportunity to foster university student communities as positive social environments.

Diversity as an Asset and Challenge

In focus groups with the students, it was revealed that SU's diverse student body was an asset to the university but also provided some unease. It was an asset in that students chose to go to SU because it, and the city it is located in, is cosmopolitan and highly diverse. Students felt that this characteristic would provide for opportunities to meet people like and unlike them. They would be able to benefit from a multicultural social experience, and also multidimensional learning through working in new environments. From the university's point of view, diversity is an asset because it provides a reputation to further attract students.

Diversity, then, poses a challenge to universities – how do you attract students of diverse backgrounds if your institution does not have a reputation of being diverse? This question is, however, missing an important aspect of the widening participation debate: does having a diverse environment equate to having a welcoming environment or good social relations? Some students in the study may have been attracted to SU because of the reputation of having a diverse student body, but then found that opportunities to meet people of different background were lacking. For example, one perception among the research participants was that friendship groups were made up of students along ethnic, faith and racial lines. While ready to admit this could be for reasons of choice or exclusion (and that this was perception and not necessarily reality), they felt that societies and associations had a stronger role to play in creating opportunities for people to meet.

Many felt that student clubs and societies offered an extensive range of interest and relationship building opportunities for many students, though they also felt that these associations were mainly for people that already had a previous link either through cultural affiliation or personal acquaintances. Societies were seen as not making enough effort to reach out to non-traditional potential members, which was seen as a missed opportunity. Mainstream societies and associations – which are taken for granted

as attracting all students regardless of culture or faith – were perceived to be completely comprised of White British students. One issue they raised in this context was the criticism that mainstream associations had too many alcohol-centric activities, which could contribute to excluding non-drinking students in general. This was a very important point for students at this university because of the high proportion of Muslim students. The students felt that culturally defined societies as well as mainstream clubs both needed to consider how they could promote a welcoming environment to students of all backgrounds.

Racism is another important issue that universities had a duty to address. The students in the research did not mention racism as being a particular cause of concern; however, they did state that it occured on campus. Interestingly, two of three racist incidents that were discussed by the students occurred in the halls of residence. At SU, students preferred to live in the halls of residence for a 'fuller' university experience because they felt that the more social interaction with peers in non-academic settings they had, the more they were able to identity with both their peers and the institution. It is important that the halls of residence are safe and positive spaces for students and are free of discrimination and intimidation. There is no doubt that a student's overall experience at university would be dramatically influenced by a personal space plagued by discriminatory behaviours. Students need to be made confident in reporting discriminatory and intimidating behaviour and reassured that this behaviour will be addressed.

Conclusions

Currently debates on widening participation centre on getting underrepresented groups in universities – and often in specific prestigious universities – to increase their social mobility and life chances. However this focus on academic achievement does not touch on the social aspect of attending university. The presence of diversity on campus does not necessarily mean that students will have an improved understanding of each other or diversity, but rather improved understanding is dependent on interaction. Studies have shown that interaction with close friends of a different race or ethnicity is a powerful way in which students accrue the educational benefits of enhanced self-confidence, motivation, intellectual and civic development, educational aspirations, cultural awareness and commitment to racial equity (Chang et al., 2005; Chang et al, 2006). In the

study, the students acknowledged the resource of having students of different backgrounds and experience but felt that this was a raw resource that relied on personal connections. Many felt unconfident in putting themselves in new situations – and for many this meant engaging with people from other backgrounds. Students believed that it was the administration's responsibility to promote good relations between groups at the university beyond allowing the formation of student societies. Universities have a need for the development of policy and practice that address student experiences in terms of race equality, intercultural dialogue, and social cohesion.

Note
1. The name of the university has been changed.

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9. Widening Participation: A Worthwhile Strategy?

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Over the years the widening participation agenda has focused on widening the participation of students getting into higher education from non-traditional backgrounds. Emphasis has been placed on the profile of students in terms of ethnicity, gender and class that are being attracted into studying at university level. Inevitably widening participation has led to concerns about the potential of students from non-traditional backgrounds to achieve at the same level as more traditional students. In October 2009 a report by the Equality Challenge Unit (reported upon by J. Shepherd in the Education Guardian, 27 November 2009, p. 3) saw the spotlight being placed on the achievement of Black and minority ethnic (BME) students within higher education. The report revealed that White students were almost twice as likely as Black students to obtain a first or 2:1 (66.4% White and 37.7% Black) in the academic year 2007-08. Degree classification statistics suggest that this gap in attainment is persistent rather than unique, which suggests that little has been done to ensuring that students from BME backgrounds are able to achieve equal outcomes.

 The ECU report attracted two responses from the public both of which are worth noting. One suggested that 'no amount of explaining away the figures can get away from… challenging institutional racism in academia', whilst the other, in being critical of the report for its lack of 'sophisticated solutions' to address the issues raised argued that 'sophisticated solutions are known', but 'there is not the political or institutional will, nor the courage to realise them' (Education Guardian, 3 November 2009, p. 3). The outrage at this inequality in achievement outcomes is laudable, and clearly such inequality needs to be and must be addressed. Notwithstanding, I am equally concerned that the attention given to widening BME student participation in higher education often obscures and in some ways negates the underrepresentation of academic staff from BME backgrounds in higher education, the positions they occupy and the type of experiences they have whilst there. A literature review by Leathwood, Maylor and Moreau (2009: 1) revealed that:

> … the proportion of academics of Black, Asian and mixed/'other' ethnicity in the academic population is lower than their proportion in the UK working population overall, and lower than their proportion in the UK population of working age qualified to be in academic jobs (i.e. those with NVQ Level 5 qualifications).

They also found that the number of BME staff employed also varies according to institution and the subject area taught (see also HEFCE, 2008); leading some institutions (predominantly post-1992 universities) to have a higher concentration of BME staff.

Whilst accepting that academics (like other staff) will seek employment in particular institutions (and locations) for a variety of reasons, where BME academics are not employed across the higher education sector as a whole, this can create a false impression amongst the student population – that BME staff are not lecturers and/or are only capable of teaching in certain institutions. Unfortunately, such misconceptions will not be challenged while BME academics continue to be underrepresented in higher education.

BME lecturers are also required if the whole student population (i.e. majority and minority ethnic) is to be provided with a more balanced representation of society and experience of lecturers from ethnically diverse communities. Wider representation of BME lecturers would go some way towards encouraging prospective BME students that not only is their entry into higher education achievable, but it is possible for BME students to succeed and become lecturers in higher education if that is a goal that they have. Reassurance about the possibilities of higher education is essential because at a Black widening participation conference[1] that I attended in October 2009 (and reported upon) for some of the children present the concept of 'university' was meaningless. Added to this, some children lacked self belief that it was possible for Black children to achieve academically. This is hardly surprising when there are teachers in school who believe that 'failure' is 'cultural' and specific to Black children. This was a comment made by one of the teachers who attended the conference. The fact that this was not an isolated comment is evidenced by a pupil at the conference who said: 'lots of people (teachers) say we can't do it, people in our area don't do well, and people like me are a failure'.

It might seem odd that I am advocating the increased recruitment of BME academics when the employment experiences of existing BME academics in higher education suggest they are treated differently to White staff. Leathwood, Maylor and Moreau's (2009) review indicates that when compared with White staff BME staff are less likely to be on permanent contracts or to receive equivalent pay (AUT, 2005) or attain professorial posts. They also highlighted BME academic staff experiences of isolation and marginalization in particular departments (owing to their low numbers) and more worryingly racism (Carter et al., 1999; Deem et al., 2005; Jones, 2006; Maylor, 2009; Mirza, 2006, 2009; Wright et al., 2007). A recent newsletter (November 2009) by the Universities College Union (UCU) suggests that Black UCU members 'suffer disproportionately from racial discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping' (Thakoordin, 2009: 2). Indeed such experiences are largely responsible for the Vice Chair of the Black members Standing Committee of the UCU calling for the setting up of a Black members' network to address negative Black staff employment experiences.

To conclude, raising the aspirations of BME students and enhancing their self belief that academic attainment is realisable must be a key priority for any widening participation policy agenda. The increased recruitment of BME lecturers within Russell Group, 1994 and post-1992 universities is another key priority. Widening participation will also need to consider why BME students would want to study in a university environment where BME staff are known to experience racism and/or have other negative experiences, and where the academic attainment for BME students is not equivalent to White students. If these concerns are not addressed a widening participation policy agenda will be futile.

Note

1. The conference was entitled 'Black to the Future': A Black Achievement Conference for Black Teenagers. The conference was organized by the widening participation team at the London School for Economics, 10 October 2009.

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SECTION III: DOES THE INSTITUTION MATTER?

10. Whither Widening Participation and Race Equality in Higher Education after 2012?

Pam Tatlow

million+

In November 2009, Peter Mandelson and David Willetts – then respectively Labour's Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Conservative's Shadow Universities and Science Minister – agreed the terms of reference for the review of university fees in England which had been promised during the debate about the 2004 HE Bill. The latter – agreed in the House of Commons by only five votes – allowed universities to vary fees from 2006. However, Labour's backbencher MPs put paid to a full market by insisting on a fee cap of £3000 per annum. Over time this has risen by inflation (as allowed for in the Act) with fees standing at £3290 in the 2009/10 academic year.

The fee cap was a wily move on the part of Labour's then MPs and one that helped participation. The overall package of a £3000 fee cap, a means-tested maintenance grant and maintenance loan plus a loan system where no interest rate was charged and where repayments were linked with earnings after graduation for a maximum period of 25 years, confounded the sceptics. After an initial significant downturn in 2006 (the year of implementation), full-time applications quickly returned to and then greatly exceeded their previous levels. Improving levels of attainment, the impact of the Educational Maintenance Allowance which encouraged post-16 staying on rates, the downturn in the economy and industrial restructuring, all combined to deliver record numbers of applications in 2009 and 2010 and increasing numbers of older students including from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds.

Overall, widening participation was not as deeply damaged by the introduction of variable fees for universities in England as some had predicted and other initiatives such as Aim Higher were funded to encourage interest and aspiration. The story was, however, different for part-time students. They were excluded from the 2004 HE Act and still have

to pay fees upfront. Little wonder then that part-time enrolments are only just returning to pre-2006 levels.

As a result of this rising demand, both the Labour and the Coalition Governments imposed number caps on universities although Labour proposed 20,000 additional numbers in the April 2010 budget – a number reduced to 10,000 by the Coalition. Overall a record number of students were funded to commence their studies in 2010. However, the extent to which there was a mismatch between supply and demand was revealed by UCAS statistics. These confirmed that 60,000 students who had been unable to get into university in 2009, reapplied in 2010.

During the last decade, the number of students from the lowest socio-economic groups increased by 4% – not marvellous but not a disaster either. Universities committed to widening participation continued to lobby the Government for additional funded numbers pointing out that the students most at risk of missing out on a university place were widening participation students, including those from BAME backgrounds who sometimes present with lower pre-entry qualifications or are older and apply later. These students are most likely to have their life chances changed by studying for a graduate qualification but they are also most at risk of not getting places when demand outstrips funded places.

One might think that investment in higher education was a long-term Treasury gain rather than a drain on the nation's finances. On the contrary, the Review of fees and funding agreed by Mandelson and Willetts in 2009 and chaired by the former Chief Executive of BP, Lord Browne, took an entirely different view of the role of public investment in higher education when it reported in October 2010. The Browne Review entered new territory by describing the public funding of higher education as a 'subsidy'. Under Browne, £3.5bn

of teaching funding for almost two million students is reduced to just £700m per annum. The fee cap is lifted altogether with potentially unlimited fees although universities would be required to pay a percentage levy on fees above £6000 – a device clearly designed to limit fee levels. Part-time students were partially brought into the fold with the offer of fee but not maintenance loans and all students would repay fee and maintenance loans as graduates (as at present) but on an extended repayment period of 30 years and with the addition of a 2.2% interest rate.

As a result, those who had hoped that Browne might be the answer to the future funding of universities in England were taken aback by the unprecedented cut in teaching funding. Not so Coalition Ministers or the Treasury which clearly saw Browne as the pre-emptor of a wholesale transfer of responsibility for the future funding of higher education from the taxpayer to students and graduates.

Coalition Minsters are backing a slightly amended version of Browne and have proposed a fee range of £6000 to £9000 per year with higher fees being subject to access agreements. However, the big picture remains the same. The Coalition Government appears to be intent on promoting a fundamental reform of higher education funding which was never the subject of discussion prior to the May 2010 general election. The Browne Review is largely predicated on a 'standard' 18 year-old student progressing to university and entering the workforce at 21/22 years of age. Surprisingly, given statutory duties, no Equality Impact Assessment including in relation to race equality has been published for either the Browne or the Spending Review or indeed for the Government's plans to implement Browne on which MPs will be required to vote by the end of December.

Whatever the pros and cons of the current system, the Coalition's reforms end the partnership approach by which undergraduate teaching has been funded for the last 12 years and which relied on major investment by the state through an annual teaching grant and much smaller contributions linked to earnings from graduates, i.e. those who had benefited from higher education. Instead, by withdrawing virtually all teaching funding starting in 2012, the Government assumes that only the individual gains from higher education and that neither society nor the economy benefit. Such an individualistic approach has rarely served the cause of equality well.

Ministers describe this as 'funding following the student'. In reality, unless they are wealthy enough to pay upfront, students will have no option but to take out much higher loans if they want to go to university from 2012. It is true that they will have 30 years to repay (after which the loan will be written off) and that they will not have to commence repayments until their earnings reach £21000 (although after this threshold a tapered interest rate of up to 3% will be added to loans).

For their part, universities have made clear that there can be no race to the bottom in terms of fees. Under the Government's Spending Review, many universities are likely to lose from 95–100% of their annual undergraduate teaching funding. They have also been told that their budgets will be cut in the current academic year, again in 2011/12 and that by 2012 they will be expected to offset even greater cuts in teaching funding with much higher fee levels. A survey undertaken by million+ confirmed that universities will have to charge average fees of £7400 but many are likely to have to set fees at higher levels. London institutions where many Black, Asian and minority ethnic students study, have no guarantee that they will be funded for the additional staff costs which they incur – additional costs that are currently recognized in the annual teaching funding allocation to institutions in the capital. Unless this problem is resolved, students in London face even higher fees. If nothing else this is surely a straightforward question of fairness and race equality

The Coalition Government is seeking to get the fee cap lifted by tabling statutory instruments to amend the 2004 HE Act before Christmas. It then proposes to table other legislation to amend the graduate contribution system and separately a Higher Education White Paper in 2011. The latter is likely to encourage the entry of private providers into the higher education market but also to reform the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Modelling of the Coalition's proposals undertaken by million+, in our role as a university think-tank, suggests that many graduates will pay much more for much longer and many more will get to the end of the 30 year period never having repaid their loans in full. Because of the gender pay gap, women inevitably fare worse than men as do lower earning graduates more generally. It is already well-known that BAME graduates face more difficulty in genial terms entering the labour market than their white counterparts. However, without

producing any modelling of graduate profiles other than by earnings, the Government says that this will be progressive because outstanding loans will be written-off. It remains to be seen how many people will view the new system in the same light. Inevitably, the wealthiest will be least disadvantaged if only because they will either pay upfront or pay off early. This leaves many other questions including those related to race unanswered.

Much of the Government's modelling is based on the assumption that people will start repaying in their late twenties. This takes little account of the much older profiles of many students from widening participation backgrounds who enter university and graduate much later. Even the extension of fee loans to part-time students provided they study for 33% of the course each year, may not provide the boost to part-time and flexible study which many would hope – principally because pro-rata fees are also likely to be higher. Similar questions arise in respect of work-based students and any employers involved in co-funding programmes will be faced with higher bills. The fear is that employer funding remains the same but fewer people are supported.

There are also huge risks to participation more generally and widening participation and race equality in particular as a result of the very rapid timescale for transition. This is much shorter than in 2004 when universities, applicants and their advisers had more than two academic years to prepare for a system which had some positive benefits, e.g. the reintroduction of maintenance grants and the ending of the requirement for full-time students to pay fees upfront. Students, who have already started studying at school and college for Level 3 or other qualifications in the hope of going to university in 2012, are likely to be faced with taking out fee loans at least double those that they were expecting.

The pages of Facebook and twitter reveal a great deal of anger at the prospect. Those advising students and especially students from families with no previous experience of studying at university or whose peer groups do not value higher education will face major challenges. The greatest risk is that students make the wrong choices not based on ability or aptitude but because they are averse to such high fee loans. For its part, the Government has been slow to consider the implications for older students and for others for whom usury and the payment of interest are unattractive forms of

funding. It is only to be hoped that Equality Impact Assessment from the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills is published before and not after MPs have voted.

If as the Coalition hopes, MPs vote for higher fee caps in December 2010, universities will have little more than two months to consider the implications for fee levels before they start preparing their prospectuses for 2012. Even then not all aspects of the graduate repayment system may be known until the New Year. Universities which are leaders in widening participation are deeply concerned by Ministerial statements which suggest that fee levels over £6000 will be subject to access agreements. The scale of the cut in teaching funding is such that even with efficiency savings, universities that already meet much more rigorous benchmarks in terms of widening participation and BAME participation will have no option but to levy higher fees. As a result, they are rightly concerned that they will be unfairly penalized by measures that appear to be targeted at a small number of universities which consistently fail to meet much less rigorous benchmarks.

There is also the problem that universities with much more socially exclusive student profiles and fewer BAME students will find it easier to levy fees of £9000 if only because they have many more students who can afford to pay upfront and much larger endowment funds to provide scholarships. This will lead to inequity in institutional resources. There is the obvious additional concern that high fee levels in some institutions will reinforce old-fashioned, hierarchical employer views about the quality of graduates, thereby undermining the employability prospects of students (including those from BAME backgrounds) who study in much greater numbers at more socially inclusive institutions.

Universities are very concerned that the widening participation premium which supports the costs of teaching students from non-participation backgrounds will no longer be funded. Separately, the future funding of Aim Higher which has done much to promote aspiration and partnership working has also been thrown into doubt.

For its part, Labour has opposed the Government's proposals and is exploring the possibility of a graduate tax. Interestingly, a million+ study (million+ / London Economics, 2010) of a graduate tax published in September 2010, suggests that a tax could be levied on earnings over a particular

threshold and for a specified period of time (rather than for a lifetime). For example, a 2% graduate tax on earnings over £21,000 for 20 years would replace all of the funding that the Government is currently proposing to remove from universities. A graduate tax has the added advantage of removing the need for all fees and fee loans, is certainly fairer and is likely to boost participation. It may also compare favourably to the system being backed by the Government. This will require students to take out fee loans of up to £27,000. With maintenance, total loans may reach £40,000 which graduates will have to repay at 9% of earnings over £21,000 (plus interest of up to 3%), for up to 30 years.

For the Treasury, the ending of public investment for the funding of undergraduate teaching has the bonus of reducing the deficit since teaching funding is counted against the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement. However, the student loan book will balloon and the Government will have to borrow to fund the loan book and to make sure that universities get the higher fees that they will be forced to levy. Under arcane Treasury accounting rules, only the write-off costs of these loans will appear on the Treasury books. The end result is that MPs will be defending much higher fees on the doorstep which could be avoided if teaching funding was restored. Moreover, the 'transfer of funding to students' may not be a good deal in the long-term for the taxpayer since there are likely to be much higher write-off costs than under the present system.

Conservative Ministers support the new system primarily because it reduces the deficit but also because it promotes a market and because they believe that quality will be promoted by competition. For their part, Liberal-Democrats claim that the new system is also necessary to reduce the deficit. Assuming that the deficit is reduced by 2015 (the Coalition's goal), the jury has to be out as to whether the students of tomorrow can expect a change of mind after 2015 in respect of the future public funding of teaching.

There is a chance that participation and demand are maintained in 2012 and beyond if unemployment levels remain high. However, universities will have to consider the potential for a downturn in participation, not because attainment levels are falling, but because the transition period is very short and applicants may take a different view of the fee and repayment package on offer compared to the present system. The graduate

repayment scheme is also highly complex and will certainly cause difficulties for student advisers, the Student Loan Company, HMRC and in the long run for graduates trying to verify how much they owe.

As a result, there have to be real doubts as to whether the Coalition's plans provide a long-term and sustainable funding framework for higher education in England and whether this framework will enhance the greater social cohesion that is integral to the participation agenda. The big risk of this experiment is that participation declines and, in particular, that widening participation and the goals of improved social mobility and race equality are damaged. Many of those committed to both widening participation and race equality will have to redouble their efforts with fewer resources to try and ensure that this does not happen. In the meantime, MPs and Minsters still have questions to answer as to whether and to what extent their reform of higher education funding in England will support or undermine race equality in the future.

Reference

million+ / London Economics (2010) *A Graduate Tax: Would it Work?*

11. Self-respect and Respecting Others: The Consequences of Affirmative Action in Selective Universities

Omar Khan
Runnymede

Despite higher Black and minority ethnic participation in higher education, Black and minority ethnic students remain under-represented at the more selective or 'prestigious' universities in the UK. One way of responding to this under-representation is to adopt positive or affirmative action for Black and minority ethnic (BME) students. Although there are a variety of justifications for and objections to this sort of measure, in this article I explain why we might apply affirmative action and principally address the objection that affirmative action leads to reduced self-respect for its beneficiaries: that those who get into university because of affirmative action will feel less capable, less confident and ultimately less self-esteem because they know they don't deserve to be there.

Increasing BME Participation in 'Prestigious Universities'

Before addressing this objection, it is worth explaining why BME students are under-represented at top universities, and why it's a problem. As other contributors to this report highlight, some BME students have lower levels of attainment in UK secondary schools, in part because they are more likely to attend lower performing schools. Another factor that was prominent in the past but that may be lessening now is that Black and minority ethnic students are somewhat less likely to apply to more prestigious universities, perhaps because they may think that such universities are 'not for people like me'. (How the Browne reforms will affect this notion is an unknown question, though affirmative action might send a signal to low-income students that universities are for people like them, regardless of fees.) A related explanation is that BME students are more likely to attend university near their homes, which in the case of BME people is more likely to be (parts of) London and other urban areas.

Why should we care that BME students attend prestigious universities, rather than universities generally? It is of course true that students benefit generally from attending university, and different courses and experiences are more relevant and inspirational for different students. We shouldn't start with the view that everyone should aim to study Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) at Oxford. Nonetheless, three significant reasons explain why we should seek to increase the number of BME students at higher ranking universities.

First is that more 'prestigious' universities have higher employment rates. According to the Guardian University Guide (Guardian, 2010), the proportion of graduates with a job six months after graduation ranges from only 40 per cent to over 80 per cent. Many of the universities with the highest BME populations have the lowest employment rates, and given the currently poor prospects for graduates generally, this is likely to have an adverse affect on ethnic employment, which in 2010 stands at 12 per cent less than White British employment. Especially because graduates have suffered more in the economic downturn, and because initial employment experiences are so important for people's long-term engagement in the labour market, we need to ensure that BME students get the best possible employment opportunities from their education.

A second reason why policy should aim to increase the number of BME students at more selective universities is because this will increase the likelihood that graduates will have better social networks. Given that fewer BME students have parents in the salariat or managerial professions, creating networks among their peers and previous graduates is particularly important for them to get good jobs. So whereas the first point is how attending prestigious universities increases the likelihood of graduates getting any job (their employment rate), a second point focuses on the quality (or pay) of the kinds of jobs they actually get. This is of course important for the graduates themselves, but also for creating a BME middle class. In turn, this may help future BME graduates tap into a social network in which professional ethnic minorities are better able to explain 'what works' in getting these jobs.

However, education is not only about preparing people for the job market. That university can allow people to fulfil their aspirations, pursue knowledge and self-awareness is not simply an ideal, and should be better realized for students of all socio-economic backgrounds. More generally, one of the important characteristics of university is that it allows people to engage critically with ideas – and of course with people who think differently from them. With decreasing social mobility, and given their parents' residential, occupational and social network choices, children are less and less likely to meet people from different backgrounds during their childhood education. University therefore becomes a crucial arena for people to learn the value of public debate and to appreciate that those that are different have reasonable and thoughtful perspectives. To put it in another, cruder way, university facilitates 'social mixing'.

This leads to the third reason why we should focus on increasing the proportion of BME people at more selective universities: such universities tend to produce graduates who are more likely to be in positions of power. Consequently, social mixing in these universities is vital for those in power to appreciate the perspectives and needs of others. Currently, however, these universities are among those least likely to have a representative sample of the UK population, including in terms of ethnicity. For example, in 2009 only one Black Caribbean student was accepted at Oxford University (University of Oxford, 2010), meaning that Oxford graduates are significantly less likely to meet Black Caribbean people during their educational and social experiences at university. Those in power in the future appear no more likely to know Black people than those who are in power now – unless we take measures to increase BME numbers at 'prestigious' universities.

Affirmative Action as a Response

An obvious way of increasing the numbers of BME students who attend high-performing universities is through positive or affirmative action. However this policy is adopted, it would involve measures to increase the number of BME students, and in particular Black students, at Oxbridge and other Russell Group universities. Such a policy has been adopted in the United States, and has had a number of beneficial effects, some of which have been outlined above.

One of the main benefits of increased diversity on US campuses has been greater appreciation of other experiences and viewpoints. One likely reason why younger well-off White people were more likely to vote for Barack Obama than their parents is because they actually met African American students during their university education, in large part because of the application of affirmative action in higher education from the 1970s. Generally speaking, affirmative action gives African American applicants a greater chance of being accepted to university, but it is not (usually) equivalent to quotas or even targets.

In the US, those from various regions, children of war veterans, athletes, and even males are sometimes given better chances of getting into university. In every case, the various characteristics only contribute partly to gaining acceptance (say 20 points out of 100 necessary for entry), but in all cases the aim is to ensure under-represented or disadvantaged groups attend university. So-called 'Ivy League' schools have been prominent advocates of this policy, such that at Barack Obama's Alma Mater, Harvard Law School, around 180 out of 1600 students (or 11%) are now African American, roughly their proportion in the US population.

Affirmative action obviously benefits those students who wouldn't have otherwise got in to top universities without these measures. It also benefits the wider BME group, in so far as it indicates that universities are willing to accept such students (a consideration that may be more relevant in light of Lord Browne's proposals), and increases the likelihood that BME people have wider and deeper social networks. Finally, it benefits everyone in society as it improves the representative quality of our institutions, particularly our democratic institutions and those in which people exercise real power.

Does Affirmative Action Result in Reduced Self-esteem?

There are of course a number of additional justifications for and objections to affirmative action, as well as questions about how best to implement it practically. Partly for reasons of space, but partly because it is a recurring theme in the UK, I only address a particular objection, namely that affirmative action creates feelings of inadequacy in its beneficiaries.

While the objection may seem obvious enough, there are two separate arguments as to why affirmative action might result in lowered respect for its beneficiaries. First is that the direct beneficiaries of affirmative action – say, those Bangladeshi students who would then be admitted to Oxford with 1 A and 2 Bs – will realize that their scores are lower than White students (say those with 3 As), and so feel anxious or even inadequate.

Two pieces of empirical evidence cast doubt on this claim. First is significant evidence from the US that far from thinking that they don't deserve their qualifications or success, African Americans explicitly think that they belong at élite US universities. Based on a study of over 45,000 students who attended these universities between the 1970s and 1990s, Bowen and Bok (1998) did not find high levels of anxiety or self-doubt. They further found that African American beneficiaries of affirmative action ended up getting as good qualifications, while being more likely to engage in civic activities and serve the needs of the worse-off, a finding that has recurred in such diverse areas as medical schools in the US and engineering schools in India (where quotas operate).[1]

A second piece of evidence regards the link between standards of admission to university and university degree qualification. A number of studies have shown that in the UK students from the independent sector are less likely to get a good degree. As one study put it:

> In order to have equal predicted probability of obtaining a good degree, the average independent school educated student would need about one grade higher at A level than the LEA-education student for each of their three A-level subjects (e.g. an A level portfolio of BBB compared to CCC). (Smith and Naylor, 2001: 42)

What does this mean? In essence, it means that when we compare two pupils with the same A level results, one of whom is from the state sector and one from the independent sector, the pupil from the state sector appears to have greater ability. It is perhaps then unsurprising that universities might consider positive action to accept more pupils from state sector school who have slightly lower A level results when they know that these students are more likely to get a good degree result.

These findings explains why many beneficiaries or potential beneficiaries of positive or affirmative action understand that their lower A level or other

pre-university qualifications are a poor indicator either of their ability or of their likelihood of gaining a good degree. Evidence on prior attainment and degree qualification suggest a weak correlation between prior attainment and degree qualification, though the data is somewhat mixed and a recent study of University of Glamorgan students found that 'the average UCAS points for those receiving First Class marks was rather low, at 154.' (Newman-Ford et al., 2009).[2] In any case, we know that many independent school-educated pupils have A level results that do not accurately predict their ability or degree results. In The Shape of the River (Bowen and Bok, 1998), many respondents observed that more privileged students in universities such as Harvard may have had higher test scores (and so were presumably accepted on merit), but that didn't mean they were more able or harder working than African American with supposedly worse qualifications (and so presumably accepted via affirmative action).

The Social Bases of Self-respect

The second, alternative interpretation of the importance of self-respect or esteem generally is that others have a lowered opinion of those who benefit from affirmative or positive action. There is certainly evidence that many White people in the US believe that beneficiaries of affirmative action are somehow less talented or deserving of their position. A less appealing version of this objection is where White people object to affirmative action on behalf of those who would benefit. That is, White people already in a particularly well-positioned job (or at Oxford) might say, 'I would feel inadequate if I thought I didn't get into Oxford based on merit'. However touching this concern is for the self-esteem of Black people, there is something more serious about the potential consequences of White people thinking BME people's achievements are unworthy. A person's esteem or respect is affected by the views of other people in society. No matter how confident I am in my own self-regard, if everyone else thinks I'm undeserving of their respect, my self-confidence will have little real effect on my experiences in wider society.

It is important to concede this point, or what the philosopher John Rawls has called the 'social bases of self-respect' (Rawls, 1971/2005; see also Moody-Adams, 1992/3). Whatever it is that we deem valuable, or however we estimate our own worth and the projects we pursue in life, it is difficult for us to feel affirmed in those values

and pursuits if no one else agrees with us. Yet in the case of affirmative action in universities, it hardly seems likely that no one would think that beneficiaries of the policy were equally deserving of attending university (this author at least doesn't share that perspective).

More likely is that a majority or even the vast majority of people would think that beneficiaries were undeserving of their position; if true, this would suggest caution in applying affirmative action. However, as we have outlined above, empirically speaking this is a fairly untenable position. If current A level results are the standard, then it's obvious enough that such undeserved characteristics as location and kind of school, and parental education and social class explain much of the differential results achieved in Britain. And when we examine how poorly independent-schooled children translate their A levels into good university degrees, it becomes even less credible that all students in the UK today unequivocally deserve their results.

Conclusion

Everyone would prefer to believe that they achieved their results on the basis of hard work and merit. Undoubtedly many do, and in any case we should not fault those who currently benefit from their parents' decisions, for which they are not responsible. Yet neither can we believe that BME students are so undeserving of places in more prestigious universities. If affirmative action is applied in Britain, and those who currently get three Bs are newly admitted to Oxford, I suspect they will be more likely to think that many of their independent-educated or wealthy colleagues are undeserving peers than to wallow in self-pity and feel lowered self-esteem.

Recall that only one Black Caribbean student was accepted to Oxford in 2009, which is hardly a recipe for increased self-respect for those few Black students at Oxford, and still less for those White students who believe that Black students are undeserving of any more places there. Affirmative action may or may not work in Britain, but better representation in more selective universities would benefit the students who get a place, increase respect among the wider BME community, improve the quality of our social interactions, and ultimately enhance our economy and democracy by providing equal access to jobs and power. In other words, affirmative action would not only help its direct beneficiaries; it would benefit all of us.

Notes

1. For evidence that Black and Hispanic doctors are indeed more likely to practise in areas with large Black and Hispanic populations, thus suggesting that affirmative action directly improves the health of Black and Hispanic Americans, see: Cantor et al. (1996) and Komaromy et al. (1996). Studies of Dalit and Adivasi medical students in India have similarly found that such students are far more likely to join less lucrative public practices that provide necessary medical attention to those least able to afford it – see Patwardhan and Palshikar (1992) and Velaskar (1986). More recent evidence on engineering colleges again confirms these findings – see Bertrand, Hanna and Mullainathan (2008).

2. For evidence that prior attainment correlates with degree qualification, see Jansen (2004). Chapman (1996) has found some counterintuitive results for some degrees at some universities, where prior attainment was negatively correlated with degree results. However, his findings generally suggest a positive correlation, though a weak one, especially for Humanities and Social Sciences (the strongest correlation appears to be for Mathematics).

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SECTION IV: APPENDIX
Appendix 1 Roundtable Participants

Jane Berry is responsible for delivering activity undertaken by the Inclusion team at the Higher Education Academy. This includes programmes of work to promote cultural change and evidence-informed practice that will support the enhancement of the learning experience of an increasingly diverse student body. This work is set in the context of the Widening Participation and equality agendas and the commitment in the higher education sector to improving student retention and success. Prior to joining the HEA Jane was an independent qualitative researcher with a particular interest in post-16 education and training and employer engagement.

Dr Rachel Carr is the Chief Executive and co-founder of IntoUniversity. Rachel created, delivered and managed the IntoUniversity Education Programme at its first centre in North Kensington before becoming CEO and implementing the charity's first business plan to grow from one to six centres. Previously, she was a university lecturer and Head of an English Department. She has over 20 years' experience working with children and young people.

Mark Copestake, at the time of writing, worked as a Schools and Colleges Liaison Officer in the Widening Participation team at the University of Cambridge Admissions Office. Mark was responsible for GEEMA (Group to Encourage Ethnic Minority Applications) which aimed to raise the aspirations of academically able black and minority ethnic students in the UK and encourage them to consider higher education and the University of Cambridge. Mark now works as the School and College Relations Manager at the Social Mobility Foundation. Mark has a BA in History of Art from the University of Cambridge.

Miriam E. David, PhD., AcSS, FRSA is Professor Emerita of Sociology of Education and was previously Professor of Education (2005-2010) and Associate Director (Higher Education) of the ESRC's Teaching & Learning Research Programme (2004-2009) at the Institute of Education University of London. She is also a visiting professor in CHEER, University of Sussex. She has a world class reputation for her research on gender, social diversity and inequalities in education. Her most recent book publication is as editor) of *Improving Learning by Widening Participation in Higher Education* (London: Routledge Education, 2009).

Omar Khan is the senior research and policy analyst who leads Runnymede's programme on financial inclusion. He is the author of *Financial Inclusion and Ethnicity* (2008), *Who Pays to Access Cash?* (2009), *Why Do Assets Matter?* (2010), and *The Costs of 'Returning Home'* (2010). Over the past eight years Omar has also published many articles and reports on political theory and British political history for Runnymede and has spoken on topics including multiculturalism, integration, socio-economic disadvantage, and positive action in the UK and Europe. Omar completed his DPhil in Political Theory from the University of Oxford. In addition to sitting on the Department of Work and Pensions' Ethnic Minority Advisory Group (EMAG), Omar is a trustee at Olmec (a social enterprise), and sits on advisory boards for the 2011 Census, the Household Longitudinal Survey, the Electoral Reform Society, and is the UK representative on the European Commission's ocio-economic network of experts.

Dr Uvanney Maylor is a Reader in Education and Deputy Director of the Institute for Research in Education at the University of Bedfordshire. She is an elected member of the British Educational Research Association Executive Council. Dr. Maylor is committed to educational social justice, inclusion and equity. Her research focuses on issues of 'race', ethnicity, racism and culture as they impact on educational practice and Black and minority ethnic student and staff experience.

Joanna Papageorgiou is an Applied Statistics Analyst at UCAS in the Policy and Public Affairs Department. Joanna has completed undergraduate studies in Law at the University of Kent and Politics at the University of Essex. She studied quantitative and qualitative research methods during her BA and her MA in Politics at Essex where she applied the methods in her dissertation on social capital and social exclusion. Joanna worked at the statistical software company NESSTAR where she gained experience in testing and documentation.

Dr Hugh Rayment-Pickard, Director of Communications, Training and Planning, at IntoUniversity. Hugh has over 20 years' experience in the not-for-profit sector and is a co-founder of IntoUniversity. He manages the external and internal communications strategy, the management and leadership training programme and is working with the Chief Executive on the long-term strategic vision for the charity as it moves into its second and third phases of expansion.

Jessica Mai Sims has been working as a research and policy analyst on Runnymede 360 and as the UK coordinator for Cities of Migration – an international project led by the Maytree Foundation, Canada. Previously, she was working on Runnymede's Community Studies series, which highlighted smaller ethnic minority groups in the UK. Jessica is currently a standing committee member of the UK Vietnamese Network and acts as advisor to the Thai Language and Culture School, Bournemouth. Aside from race equality and qualitative research methods, her areas of expertise are integration policy and practice of new migrants, Vietnamese and Thai ethnic minorities in the UK and mixed race studies. Jessica holds a BA in International Relations from San Francisco State University and an MSc in Nationalism and Ethnicity from the London School of Economics.

Pam Tatlow has been Chief Executive of the university think-tank, million+ (www.millionplus. ac.uk) since 2007. Under her leadership, million+ has published a series of influential reports analysing the contribution of universities to the economy and society. The most recent million+ report, *A Graduate Tax: Would it Work?* concluded that a graduate tax was a feasible and fairer option. Prior to taking up her current role, Pam worked as a teacher, lecturer and as a senior trade union officer and has served as a lay judge on the Employment Appeal Tribunal since 2002.

Professor Liz Thomas is Senior Adviser for Widening Participation at the Higher Education Academy. She is also Director of the Widening Participation Research Centre at Edge Hill University and Lead Adviser Working with Institutions for Action on Access, the national widening participation co-ordination team for England, funded by HEFCE. Liz has over twelve years experience of undertaking research about widening participation and student experience, and using research to inform policy and practice at all levels. She is currently focusing on institutional transformation to engage diverse students in accessing and succeeding in higher education, and is Director of the What works? Student retention and success programme support and co-ordination team. Liz is renowned internationally for her work on widening participation and the student experience and she is author and editor of nine book and co-editor of the journal *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*.

Debbie Weekes-Bernard works as the Senior Research and Policy Analyst for Education at the Runnymede Trust. Her work has included research on the impact of educational 'choice' agendas on BME parents and children., organizing large conferences on education and community cohesion and speaking and writing about issues to do with choice, chesion, achievement and educational inequality.

Selected Runnymede Publications

Achieving Race Equality in Scotland
A Runnymede Platform by Sir Jamie McGrigor, Robert Brown, Humza Yousaf and Johann Lamont with responses from Professor Kay Hampton and Ephraim Borowski (2010)

Financial Inclusion amongst New Migrants in Northern Ireland
Report by ICAR in collaboration with Citizens Advice Belfast by Julie Gibbs (2010)

'Snowy Peaks': Ethnic Diversity at the Top
A Runnymede Report by Veena Vasista (2010)

Did They Get It Right? A Re-examination of School Exclusions and Race Equality
A Runnymede Perspective edited by Debbie Weekes-Bernard (2010)

Ready for Retirement? Pensions and Bangladeshi Self-employment
A Runnymede Financial Inclusion Report by Phil Mawhinney (2010)

Saving Beyond the High Street: A Profile of Savings Patterns among Black and Minority Ethnic People
A Runnymede Financial Inclusion Report by Omar Khan (2010)

Preventing Racist Violence in Europe: Seminar Report and Compendium of Good Practice
A Runnymede Roundtable Report by Kjartan Páll Sveinsson, Sarah Isal, Robin Oakley and Aine Woods (2010)

The Future of the Ethnic Minority Population of England and Wales
A Runnymede/Centre for Policy on Ageing Report by Nat Lievesley (2010)

The Costs of 'Returning Home': Retirement Migration and Financial Inclusion
A Runnymede Report by Omar Khan and Phil Mawhinney with research assistance from Camille Aznar (2010)

Ethnic Profiling: The Use of 'Race' in UK Law Enforcement
A Runnymede Perspective edited by Kjartan Páll Sveinsson(2010)

Lone Mothers of Mixed Racial and Ethnic Children: Then and Now
A Runnymede Perspective by Chamion Caballero and Professor Rosalind Edwards (2010)

Seeking Sound Advice: Financial Inclusion and Ethnicity
A Runnymede Report by Phil Mawhinney (2010)

Mixedness and the Arts
A Runnymede Thinkpiece by Chamion Caballero (2010)

Labour and Cohesive Communities
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About the Editor

Debbie Weekes-Bernard works as the Senior Research and Policy Analyst for Education at the Runnymede Trust. Her work has included research on the impact of educational 'choice' agendas on BME parents and children, organizing large conferences on education and community cohesion and speaking and writing about issues to do with choice, cohesion, achievement and educational inequality.

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