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Understanding a whole institution approach to widening participation: Final report

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1. Context

Widening participation (WP) in higher education (HE) is an international, UK-wide and English policy objective[1], which in the latter context was set out in the National Strategy for Access and Student Success[2] and reconfirmed in last year's White Paper[3] and the subsequent

[1] See for example Bowes, L., Thomas, L., Peck, L., Nathwani, T., 2013. International Research on the Effectiveness of Widening Participation Report to HEFCE and OFFA. Bristol: HEFCE. Shah, M., Bennett, A. and Southgate, E. (eds) (2016) *Widening Higher Education Participation. A Global Perspective*. Elsevier: Waltham, MA, US & Kidlington, UK

[2] HEFCE and OFFA (2015) National Strategy for Access and Student Success. London: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills http://www.hefce.ac.uk/sas/nsass/

[3] BIS (2016) *Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and student choice*. Cm 9258. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-success-as-a-knowledge-economy-white-paper, accessed 3rd June 2016.

Higher Education and Research Act 2017[4]. The National Strategy and the sector-wide Social Mobility Advisory Group, which made recommendations to the Minister for Education[5] on how England could achieve greater social mobility through HE, both conclude that a whole institution approach is required to achieve WP outcomes. Similar recommendations are made in other research about WP[6], student retention[7] and student attainment[8] in the UK, and comparable research abroad[9]. Indeed, in the English context a whole institution approach underpins the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) request for Initial Widening Participation Statements from HE institutions in 2001. Analysis of these institutional statements however found that there was 'little cross-reference and linkage made between the teaching and learning strategies and the disability statement' (paragraph 14) and 'retention receives surprisingly little attention as an issue, with employability considerably less' (paragraph 15)[10]. Case study research in 2005 indicated how in some universities WP was starting to move 'from the margins to the mainstream'[11], and the expectation of a whole institution approach was made more explicit in the 2009 request from HEFCE for a Widening Participation Strategic Assessment (WPSA) from each institution[12], (although that particular phrase was not used). Analysis of the WPSAs found differential progress in developing a strategic, or whole institution approach; for example, while 91% of institutions discussed retention issues, only 53% of institutions referred explicitly to their learning and teaching strategy (despite being encouraged to make links to all relevant strategies and policies), and 42% of institutions identified staff training activities to support wider staff engagement in WP as part of their institutional approach[13].

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[4] http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/29/contents/enacted/data.htm

[5] Social Mobility Advisory Group (2016) Working in Partnership: Enabling social mobility in higher education. The final report of the Social Mobility Advisory Group. London: Universities UK

[6] Moore, J., John Sanders and Louise Higham (2013) Literature review of research into widening participation to higher education. Bristol: HEFCE

[7] Thomas, L., Hill, M., O' Mahony, J. and Yorke, M. (2017) Supporting student success: Strategies for institutional change. Findings and recommendations from the What works? Student retention and success programme. London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation

[8] Mountford-Zimdars, A., Sabri, D., Moore, J., Sanders, J., Jones, S. and Higham, L. (2015) Causes of differences in student outcomes. Bristol: HEFCE

[9] Kift, S. M. (2009). *Articulating a transition pedagogy to scaffold and to enhance the first year student learning experience in Australian higher education. Final Report for ALTC Senior Fellowship Program*. ALTC Resources. Retrieved February 7, 2010, from http://www.altc.edu.au/resource-first-year-learning-experience-kift-2009

[10] HEFCE 01/36a (2001) *Analysis of initial strategic statements for widening participation*. Report by Action on Access. Bristol: HEFCE http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100303164858/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2001/01_36a.htm

[11] Thomas, L. et al (2005) *From the margins to the mainstream: embedding widening participation in higher education*. London: Universities UK

[12] HEFCE 09/01 (2009) *Request for widening participation strategic assessments*. Bristol: HEFCE

[13] Thomas, L. et al (2010) Review of Widening Participation Strategic Assessments. Ormskirk: Action on Access https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/review_of_wp_assessments-2009.pdf

Thus, while there is a longstanding belief in the value of a whole institution approach to WP, there is a lack of understanding about how to implement this in practice, and little or no evaluation of the impact this has on WP outcomes. This research, which has been commissioned by the Office for Fair Access (OFFA), is therefore timely to further develop understanding about a whole institution approach to WP, ways in which it is being implemented by institutions and to consider how it could be evaluated. The study provides the opportunity to take stock of progress in a selection of higher education providers (HEPs) that feel they have embraced this agenda, and to look at how they have enacted a whole institution approach, with a view to drawing out lessons for the participating institutions and for others in the HE sector, and to consider how this work can be evaluated. It aims to provide insight and guidance for HEPs to assist them to move further towards a whole institution approach. More specifically, the research addresses the following research questions:

i. What is involved in a 'whole institution' approach to WP?
ii. How can a whole institution approach be implemented and managed?
iii. What strategies and tools can be used to evaluate a whole institution approach to WP?

This is small scale, exploratory research, rather than the final word on a whole institution approach to WP; in particular further work is required to evaluate the process and impact of implementing a whole institutional approach to WP (see section 7).

2. Research design and methods

A mixed methods research design was developed to address the research questions, combining a literature review, five institutional case studies and a participatory workshop. It should be noted that the timescale to undertake the study was very short (due to the conditions of the contract), and this has inhibited the field work phase to some extent, as not all institutions were able to accommodate visits at short notice and whilst preparing their Access Agreements. The study has been informed by Appreciative Inquiry (AI), Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) and complexity theory.

2.1 Literature review

The literature review addressed the three research questions listed above. A number of search terms were developed in relation to each question (see appendix 1), and searched using Academic Search Complete, which includes academic and peer-reviewed material and much more, including conference papers and reports, newspapers and professional journals. The searches were supplemented by additional references drawn from the materials identified. Material was selected if it contributed understanding to the research questions, and was considered to be of sufficient quality (e.g. peer reviewed or undertaken or funded by a reputable organisation). A broadly 'realist' approach has been taken – which takes account of complexity, and is concerned with making sense of context, mechanisms and outcomes – and is thus more appropriate for this issue where the topic (WP and fair access)

and the context (higher education institutions) are both complex issues with multiple understandings, levels and functions.

2.2 Case studies

Five institutional case studies in diverse types of institution were undertaken, to explore whole institution approaches to WP. Suitable case studies were identified by inviting institutions to volunteer to participate and by direct approaches to institutions. Details of the study and the request for case studies were distributed across the sector through social media and JISCmail lists. More than 20 HEPs expressed a willingness to participate, even in the tight timescale for the study. At this stage HEPs were asked to provide information about their 'whole institution approach' to WP.

Selection aimed to achieve relevant examples of institutions that had made progress implementing a whole institution approach, but which might be viewed as different types of institution, especially with respect to size and selectivity in recruitment, informed by the typology developed by Bowes et al. (2012)[14]. The participating institutions were: Aston University, Kingston University London, Solihull College University Centre, the University of Sheffield and University of Worcester. It was not possible to secure the participation of a small specialist institution in the time available for the field work. Thus all of the institutions were effectively self-nominated, based on a view that they had engaged with and made progress towards a whole institutional approach to WP. Selection however does not in and of itself indicate that a whole institutional approach has been achieved, but rather the case studies felt they had engaged with this agenda, and offered a valuable insight into and reflection on what is happening – and what still needs to be done. However, as the case study descriptions in section 3 demonstrate, they are all achieving well against both widening access and non-continuation indicators, suggesting a positive link between efforts to take a whole institutional approach to WP and outcomes.

Case study visits were based on a three-hour participatory workshop, designed to engage different groups within the institution who contribute to WP, to explore the three research questions. The workshop agenda and workbook is in appendix 2. Information was collected during the workshops in two key ways: via flip charts recording information, views and ideas in a transparent way, and through individual or collaborative completion of workbooks designed to address the research questions. In the workbook participants were given ethical information about the study, including anonymity, their right to withdraw and how the information would be used, and each participant signed the consent form.

An Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach was used to positively explore the research questions, and think beyond current experiences, to be aspirational about how practice could be

[14] Bowes, L., Jones, S., Thomas, L., Moreton, R., Birkin, G. and Nathwani, T. (2012) *The Uses and Impact of HEFCE Funding for Widening Participation*. Bristol: HEFCE

developed further (Fitzgerald et al., 2002)[15], which was significantly enhanced by the dialogical approach used (see Ludema et al., 2001, p189[16]). Indeed, informal feedback from the workshops has been that they have been useful to institutions and participants, stimulating further thinking about working together as a whole institution to widen participation. At a personal level the workshops helped people to develop understanding of their contribution to WP within the institutional context, as one person emailed: 'Everyone enjoyed the workshop and seeing how everything fitted together. Seeing the bigger picture has actually enthused people (yes – even more!)'. While for those who were grappling with how to further develop their institutional approach it was useful to see the experience through the eyes of different groups and to hear their views on how things could be improved. The combination of discussion and reflection provided description, new insights and opportunities for issues to be surfaced, shared and recorded.

2.3 Analysis

The materials from the case studies were reviewed, and used in two distinct ways. First an institutional report was drafted which provides a summary of:

- Institutional context
- Institutional approach to WP, including 'stakeholder groups' involved and activities undertaken
- An overview of how a whole institutional approach is understood and managed within the institution
- Institutional strengths to be drawn upon in the analysis and subsequent and guidance for institutions,
- Areas for development identified in contrast to the other case study institutions. This was intended to provide some comparative feedback to the participating institutions.

Full case study reports are provided in appendix 3, and should be read to appreciate the depth, breadth and complexity of what is being undertaken in each institution.

Secondly, the materials were reviewed, recorded and thematically categorised in relation to each of the research questions. This provided understanding of common issues and approaches, and alternatives, across the case studies. It also helped to highlight strengths or innovative approaches which inform this report and guidance for institutions.

The literature was used to develop and enhance understanding of the learning from the empirical research, and to identify additional ways in which a whole institution approach can be developed, managed and evaluated.

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[15] Fitzgerald, S.P., Murrell, K.L. and H.L. Newman (2001). Appreciative inquiry – the new frontier, in J. Waclawski and A.H. Church (Eds.) *Organization development: Data driven methods for change.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, pp203-221

[16] Ludema, J.D, Cooperrider, D. L. and Barrett, F. J. (2006) AI: the Power of the Unconditional Positive Question, in Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury Eds., *The Handbook of Action Research,* Sage, p189-192

2.4 Participatory workshop

A participatory workshop was organised for staff from HEPs and students' unions (SUs) to discuss and review the emerging findings. The aim of the workshop was to check wider applicability of the findings across a larger number of HEPs, and primarily to consider how the findings could most effectively be used to support institutions to develop their 'whole institution approach to WP' and evaluate its effectiveness. The learning from the workshop has been used to revise the report and inform the guidance and tools developed.

3. Case studies

In this section a summary of each institution is provided, including: contextual data about the undergraduate HE population[17]; an overview of the WP work undertaken; key features about how WP operates and is managed across the institution; strengths and lessons from each institution for this research; and potential areas for future development for each institution. Full case studies are available in appendix 3, and should be read for a fuller narrative.

3.1 Aston University

Aston University has 7,575 full-time and 580 part-time undergraduate students, 86% of whom were under the age of 21 on entry to HE, they are evenly split male (52%) and female (48%). 30% of students study business and administrative studies, 16% engineering and technology, 14% subjects allied to medicine, and 12% biological sciences. 35% of students are White; 6% have a disability; 30% have high tariff entry qualifications; 30% are from POLAR groups 1 and 2. Aston exceeds all of its WP benchmarks. The non-continuation rate for UK domiciled full-time first degree entrants in 2014/15 was 4.3% compared to a benchmark of 6.2%; 4.8% for young entrants from low participation neighbourhoods compared to a benchmark of 6.8%; and 12.2% for mature students with no previous HE qualification compared to a benchmark of 13.4%.

Aston is explicitly committed to WP in the University's 2020 strategy. WP is delivered across the student journey, starting with work in primary schools, and extending to employment and postgraduate study; a large number of staff from across the university are involved, and extensive use is made of student ambassadors. Aston offers alternative Year Zero entry routes into each school. A particularly distinctive feature of Aston's approach to WP is that it promotes and supports all students to have a one-year work placement, either in the UK or abroad, irrespective of subject studied or student background. Features that contribute to whole institution approach include:

[17] Data is drawn from the Teaching Excellence Framework data prepared by HEFCE, available from http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/tef/data/tefworkbooks/; widening participation performance indicators prepared by HESA, available from https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/performance-indicators/widening-participation-summary; and non-continuation data prepared by HESA, available from https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/performance-indicators/non-continuation.

- Strong institutional commitment and focus on WP, and not over committing to other agendas.
- A clear institutional structure, with clearly defined teams with responsibility for WP, and who engage and co-ordinate wider staff engagement, and provide support across the student journey.
- Value-based institution, and some processes to recruit, develop and promote staff who share these values, and have the skills and commitment to contribute to WP.
- Some alignment of institutional policies and processes with WP and student success.
- Relatively small size and single campus facilitates networking and collaboration, resulting in 'bottom-up' initiatives.
- Extensive use of student ambassadors thus involving the student population and alumni in WP throughout the student lifecycle.
- Better use of institutional data, undertaking evaluation and WP research are underway.

Future challenges include improving the use of data, developing institutional alignment, and further embedding the engagement of all staff.

3.2 Kingston University London

Kingston University has 14,500 full-time and 1,475 part-time undergraduate students, 70% of whom were under the age of 21 on entry to HE; they are fairly evenly split male (46%) and female (53%). 15% of students study creative arts and design, 14% business and administrative studies, 13% subjects allied to medicine, 11% engineering and technology and 10% social studies. 47% of students are White; 10% have a disability; 9% have high tariff entry qualifications; 19% are from POLAR groups 1 and 2. Kingston exceeds most of its WP benchmarks. The non-continuation rate for UK domiciled full-time first degree entrants in 2014/15 was 9.0% compared to a benchmark of 9.7%; 6.0% for young entrants from low participation neighbourhoods compared to a benchmark of 9.8%; and 15.0% for mature students with no previous HE qualification compared to a benchmark of 13.7%.

WP at Kingston is organised around the student lifecycle, with the aim of providing a seamless experience for students. The Widening Participation team focuses mostly on widening access, and works closely with academic staff and other directorates across the institution. Of particular note is Kingston's focus on the inclusive curriculum to deliver academic success for all students; also the provision of opportunities and financial support for the enrichment of students beyond the academic sphere. WP work is strongly informed by data, monitoring, evaluation and research, much of which is undertaken by the Planning Office. Colleagues from across the institution meet together as members of the Access Working Group, which develops the strategy and allocates funding. This group reports into the Education Committee and its decisions are informed by the University's Strategic Plan.

Features that contribute to whole institution approach include:

- WP is championed at senior management level, and is embedded into the institutional mission, and strategic plan, policies and operations across the institution.
- A strong focus on both the academic and non-academic experience of students in HE.
- Valuing and supporting teaching as a crucial element of WP, including staff development, recognition and reward.
- The combination of an inclusive culture with an institutional structure and processes that reinforce the values of the institution.
- Use of data to inform the process at all stages and levels, including staff accountability.
- All staff are invited to contribute to and share in decisions about WP through forums such as the Access Working Group and the Network of Equality Champions.

An area for potential future development is further opportunities for sharing expertise with other teams (e.g. between outreach, engagement and enhancement teams and with academic staff).

3.3 Solihull College University Centre (SCUC)

Solihull College University Centre currently has around 900 HE students across all their provision[18]. 47% of the students were under the age of 21 on entry to HE, evenly split between male and female students. 14% are studying first degrees and 86% other undergraduate provision; 22% are studying business and administrative studies, 16% education, 14% engineering and technology and 12% creative arts and design. 68% of students are White; 10% have a disability; only 6% have high tariff entry qualifications; 39% are from POLAR groups 1 and 2. The average non-continuation rate for the last three years was 10.6% compared to a benchmark of 12.7%. (HESA data on WP and non-continuation is not available).

WP work takes place at each phase of the student journey, but as a small institution WP is genuinely undertaken by 'everyone' with no dedicated WP roles. Academic staff are particularly actively involved across the student lifecycle, and the Careers Advisers also work across the student lifecycle, providing impartial information, advice and guidance pre and post entry. All applicants are interviewed, and the emphasis is on recognising potential, matching students with appropriate courses and establishing a personal relationship between the student and the course leader.

Features that contribute to whole institution approach include:

- Shared institutional vision, commitment and values associated with WP.
- Wholly positive discourse about WP and diversity – valuing diversity and believing in students.

[18] TEF data is based on 615 full-time and 160 part-time HE students however.

- Student-focused, genuinely caring and personalised approach at all stages of the student lifecycle; staff know all the students.
- Teaching is highly valued across the institution.
- Easy communication between staff and collaboration between functions: staff always know who to ask, and there are frequent feedback loops, facilitated by the small size of the institution.
- Employ staff who understand WP and are often from WP backgrounds, including staff who have studied at the college and now are employed there.

SCUC's approach is facilitated by its small size, enabling staff to know students and to communicate easily with each other. If the HE provision was to increase significantly some aspects of this approach would need re-visiting to ensure they were maintained.

3.4 University of Sheffield

The University of Sheffield has 17,420 full-time and 1,085 part-time undergraduate students, 88% of whom were under the age of 21 on entry to HE, evenly split between males and females. 16% of students study engineering and technology, 10% social studies and 10% languages. 70% of students are White; 10% have a disability; 51% have high tariff entry qualifications; 19% are from POLAR groups 1 and 2. The University of Sheffield exceeds the majority of its benchmarks for widening participation. The non-continuation rate for UK domiciled full-time first degree entrants in 2014/15 was 2.6% compared to a benchmark of 3.8%; 2.5% for young entrants from low participation neighbourhoods compared to a benchmark of 4.3%; and 11.6% for mature students with no previous HE qualification compared to a benchmark of 12.4 %.

Sheffield works to widen participation across the student lifecycle, but particular emphasis is placed on outreach and transition, and some targeted employability initiatives. Much of the WP work is undertaken or co-ordinated by staff with specific WP remits, some of whom are based in academic departments. Alumni Development engage graduates in volunteering and financial support to contribute to WP. The students' union is active in student-led WP work including academic societies that engage with schools, and data sharing allows them to track the participation of WP students in union activities and services.

Features that contribute to a whole institution approach:

- Institutional values based on a historic notion of civic responsibility that contemporarily promotes WP through the Learning and Teaching Strategy.
- WP-specific roles located in academic departments, and active roles played by the Students' Union and the engagement of Alumni.
- Widening Participation and Research and Evaluation Unit that draws together data from across the institution to inform WP priorities and interventions.
- Range of fora that bring some stakeholders together, and annual reports that summarise aspects of WP work offering some co-ordination.

- Some institutional processes help to manage WP, including annual reporting against additional fee income and Annual Reflections which require academic departments to reflect on their progress against university priorities, including WP and student support.
- Plans to develop whole institution approach further.

A key potential area for development is to place greater emphasis on the experience of WP students in HE, which might include the sharing of student level data with academic departments, and developing curriculum and pedagogy for a diverse student population.

3.5 University of Worcester

University of Worcester has 6,290 full-time and 1,065 part-time undergraduate students, 65% of whom were under the age of 21 on entry to HE; 63% are female and 37% are male. 24% of students study biological sciences, 22% subjects allied to medicine, 13% business and administrative studies and 12% education. 87% of students are White; 11% have a disability; only 7% have high tariff entry qualifications; 33% are from POLAR groups 1 and 2. University of Worcester exceeds all of its benchmarks for widening participation. The non-continuation rate for UK domiciled full-time first degree entrants in 2014/15 was 8.1% compared to a benchmark of 9.0%; 7.3% for young entrants from low participation neighbourhoods compared to a benchmark of 10.3%; and 9.1% for mature students with no previous HE qualification compared to a benchmark of 11.0%.

WP is embedded within the ethos and culture of Worcester, and all departments and individuals are involved. While WP is conceptualised across the student lifecycle it is not organised along these lines, rather the objectives cut across all departments, implying everyone has a contribution to make to WP across the student lifecycle. Staff own the concept and practice of widening participation, and work together collaboratively to implement initiatives that they believe to be valuable. The concept of a whole institution approach extends beyond the boundaries of the institution to encompass the city of Worcester. The WP work of the institution is overseen by a senior manager, but this role does not directly implement WP.

Features that contribute to a whole institution approach:

- Explicit institutional commitment, values and culture endorsing diversity and the student experience permeates all parts of the university.
- A strategic rather than operational role for the Director of Inclusion and other services such as disability service.
- Academic departments, professional service teams and the Students' Union contribute to WP across the student lifecycle.
- Students and recent graduates are employed in a range of roles to widen participation.
- The development of the University's estate is explicitly informed by diversity and inclusion and student involvement.

- Arguably, passionate staff are attracted to the institution and empowered to drive forward the WP agenda; organic, collaborative, 'bottom-up' projects operate between teams and individuals across the institution.
- The comparatively small size facilitates communication, and there are formal opportunities for sharing.
- The concept of inclusivity permeates the city as well as the institution.

An area for potential development is to consider how institutional structures and processes support and reinforce the strong institutional commitment and staff-initiated projects to help improve communication and co-ordination and reduce fragmentation, duplication and frustration.

4. Findings and discussion

The findings are drawn from analysis of the case study visits, informed by the literature, and related to the three overarching research questions. The emerging findings have been explored and refined through the participatory workshop, during which participants shared their views and experiences.

4.1 What is involved in a 'whole institution' approach to widening participation?

This question sought to address the issue of 'what does a whole institution approach look like? OFFA define a whole institution approach as:

> *"An approach to widening participation and fair access that is embedded at all levels of an institution, not limited to a particular unit or department, engaging across all areas of its institutions' work and inclusive of senior management."*[19]

At the institutional workshops participants were asked to provide descriptive information about the WP work that take place across their institutions and contributes to WP (interventions, services and other activities, both provided by people in the room and involving people not at the workshop). Each institution generated a very long list of activities and services, some of which were common across the case studies, and others which were unusual or institution specific. But the question remained: 'what makes this a whole institution approach?' to which the unanimous answer was: 'it's what we do; it's who does it; and it's our collective commitment to doing it'. Looking across the piece, and reviewing the literature more broadly, a number of core features of a whole institution approach were identified:

4.1.1 Core features of a whole institution approach

(a) A whole lifecycle approach to WP is adopted.

[19] OFFA glossary, whole-institution approach. https://www.offa.org.uk/glossary/, accessed 21/2/17

(b) Staff from departments, services and units from across the institution are involved in WP (i.e. not just 'professional WP' staff).
(c) There is a clear and explicit institutional commitment to WP, defining target groups and expected outcomes as appropriate.

(a) **A whole lifecycle approach** embraces a temporal understanding of WP, extending from pre-entry support, to on-course success, to post-graduation progression. Within the OFFA framework this is conceptualised as three discrete but inter-connecting phases: access, student success and progression. A lifecycle approach is common place across English HEPs, and certainly all the case study institutions viewed WP as a process that occurs across the student lifecycle, some starting with primary school pupils, and including pre-entry outreach, admissions, transition, learning and teaching, student engagement and support, progression into employment and study, and in some cases access to postgraduate study and entry into the professions. Institutions do have different areas that they prioritise (largely reflecting different institutional profiles and contexts) and different ways of addressing them.

(b) **Staff from across the institution** were gathered together by each of the case study institutions, representing a wide range of roles, teams and units (e.g. marketing, recruitment, academic - including personal tutors, programme leaders and lecturers, learning support, disability services, careers advice, planning, financial services, research and evaluation, senior managers etc). This frequently involved staff who had a role and remit other than WP in the delivery of these activities and interventions; these can be contrasted with professional WP staff who can be understood to be employed primarily to deliver WP activities or outcomes, often having WP (or a specific stage of the student lifecycle) in their job title, and/or being paid for from WP resources. See for example Solihull College University Centre, where all staff are involved in WP. Kingston University has rolled out a programme to engage all academic staff in the delivery of an inclusive curriculum. At several institutions careers staff played a role in pre-entry advice and guidance and academic staff contributed to widening access activities. The University of Sheffield has developed a hybrid model, which involves locating WP staff within academic departments, to work collaboratively with local academics and the central WP team. This approach is perhaps best viewed as a stepping stone to wider academic staff engagement.

In addition, most of the case study institutions involved their current students and graduates in WP in various ways across the student lifecycle. For example, at the University of Worcester student ambassadors are trained to provide impartial IAG to school students; and the students' union at the University of Sheffield facilitates student-led WP work, including academic societies that engage with schools, and data sharing allows them to track the participation of WP students in union activities and use of the advice services. At other institutions the unions facilitate representation of WP students and their interest, and run societies and services that engage and support WP students. Engaging colleagues from across the institution, including those who are not WP professionals, and students, is integral to a whole institution approach. The more integrated WP is into 'everyone's job' the fewer professional WP-specific roles there seem to be.

(c) **Institutional commitment** emerged in addition to what is done (working across the lifecycle) and by whom (staff from across the institution). Commitment to WP might be demonstrated in the institutional mission, referred to in institutional policies and reinforced by institutional leaders, demonstrating that WP is both a commitment and a priority – and what this means in practice. Furthermore, this needs to be sufficiently detailed to enable staff and students to act upon it, including defining target groups and expected outcomes for example. All of the case studies were emphatic that WP is, and should be, an explicit and widely shared institutional priority. While this may be understood simply as stating a commitment to WP, the case studies suggested it was more sophisticated, moving beyond identifying target groups and pledging to widen access and success for them. There was discussion of values, such as being student-centred, valuing diversity, and working in partnership with the local community, which underpinned the work of the institution. There was commitment to the nature of the student experience, for example ensuring students experience a coherent and seamless journey, and joining up services provided by different parts of the institution, enabling every student to maximise their success at each stage of the journey, and treating students as individuals and personalising their experience. Once it is clear what the institution is committing to and what its values are this can be demonstrated through:

- A shared vision for and narrative about WP, which is often connected to institutional location and history, and is evident in the institutional mission and the way the institution talks about itself.
- Explicit and shared institutional values, (e.g. valuing diversity, being student centred, committed to equality of outcomes) which often resonate with the passion and commitment of individuals within the institution.
- Clearly defined and understood WP target groups, which are informed by the institutional history and contemporary context.
- WP is linked to other institutional priorities and embedded into institutional polices and strategies.
- Teaching, learning and the student experience are valued, prioritised and recognised across the institution.
- Everyone is aware of how their work contributes to WP, and staff have agency to develop their contribution and take forward work in this area.

4.1.2 Additional characteristics beyond the minimum

In addition to these minimum features which have been identified as core elements of a whole institution approach, a set additional characteristics were identified from the case studies. These may be useful for institutions wishing to extend themselves beyond the minimum requirements.

(d) **Working with a wide range of WP target groups**: extending the focus of WP work beyond POLAR 3 groups and disabled students, including groups such as care leavers and care givers, students with non-traditional entry qualifications and Black and Minority Ethnic

groups, particularly in relation to institutional or local contexts[20]. This includes being aware of the different dimensions and complexities of WP, for example the differences within the Black and Minority Ethnic category, or the inter-sectionality between WP characteristics such socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender, first in family, commuting, etc. This requires analysis of institutional data to understand participation and success of these differentiated groups and ensuring that WP efforts are not exclusionary or ineffective.

(e) **Expanding the student lifecycle**: incorporating admissions into the lifecycle, including alternative entry pathways, reduced offers, and matching students with courses; ensuring marketing is both inclusive and informed by the perspectives of WP students; identifying and addressing differential attainment of WP target groups; and addressing access to postgraduate study[21]. See for example Aston University and Solihull College University Centre.

(f) **Embedding WP into all roles and considerations across the institution**: extending awareness and action to roles beyond those having direct contact with students, and building consideration for WP and diversity into all areas of the institution and all decision making. For example, the estates department considers diversity in planning teaching rooms, new accommodation and other developments. See for example University of Worcester.

(g) **Students, alumni and the students' union contribute to WP**: students can be directly involved in the delivery of WP activities (e.g. outreach, peer support etc). In addition the Students' Union can co-ordinate and deliver WP activities, provide support for WP groups through services and events and through elected officers; and they can share data with the institution, helping to build up a more complete picture of engagement. In a number of institutions alumni are involved in both widening access and mentoring students to support progression, as well in fundraising etc. See for example University of Sheffield.

(h) **Data, evidence and research inform all stages**: including understanding the issues, staff accountability, monitoring student participation, to inform decision-making, to plan interventions, and impact. See for example Kingston University. This can include:

- Financial monitoring has become more common place as institutions have become more efficient at providing their returns to the Office for Fair Access. This has the advantage of helping to identify where activities are happening across the institution, and promoting collaboration or co-ordination.
- Collecting and using information about students is growing in importance, although in some institutions it was still felt that this information could be shared and used more effectively with academic staff.

[20] There is less focus on mature students in discussions about a whole institutional approach to WP, and this is a gap that HEPs may wish to address.

[21] Access to PG study was not drawn attention to during the case study visits, but was identified by another contributor to this study.

- Institutions showed evidence of developing capacity and expertise to undertake evaluation to improve the effectiveness of WP interventions.
- A number of institutions had also developed WP research capacity, e.g. to gain understanding about the characteristics and experiences of WP groups.
- Data sharing between the HEP and the students' union allows a deeper and wider understanding of WP engagement across the student experience and the institution.
- Increasingly institutions are developing effective approaches to engage with student views and voices, or to work in partnership with students to ensure their perspectives are built into institutional and curriculum developments.
- Using metrics to promote engagement, accountability, change and impact, both in relation to staff and students.

(i) **WP Resources are allocated across the institution**: encouraging and facilitating everyone to contribute to WP, rather than being held centrally which reinforces the idea that it is not everyone's job. Access to financial resources is often key to enabling WP work to be initiated, implemented and evaluated – and rolled out – by non-WP staff. This requires that:

- Financial resources are devolved or distributed across the institution, and not just used centrally by a WP team.
- People know how to access resources to pilot and implement WP work.
- Resourcing is available to roll out interventions and approaches that have been demonstrated to be effective.

(j) **An integrated rather than fragmented approach:** activities and services are co-ordinated, and not ad hoc or fragmented, offering a coherent approach, avoiding duplication and gaps, and contributing to strategic WP objectives. In the case studies there are examples of co-ordination through a central unit (e.g. University of Sheffield), while others are more organic and collaboratively organised across the institution (e.g. University of Worcester). Integration is promoted by for example:

- Co-ordinated outreach to avoid different parts of the institution contacting schools etc.
- Collaboration between services to develop new interventions and approaches to support WP goals. This approach can be more organic and bottom up than co-ordination which relies on more formality.
- Informal communication between different parts of the institution through networks and sharing practice.
- Formal opportunities to contribute to the WP agenda.
- Effective communication mechanisms to collate and share information across the institution.
- Shared spaces to facilitate sharing between teams and individuals.

The case studies exhibit different approaches to integration and fragmentation, and some contrasting examples are summarised here. At the University of Worcester people take the initiative to develop collaborative, bottom-up initiatives. While at Solihull College University Centre everyone is involved, and informal communication is the norm, facilitated by the size

of the institution. More specifically, the University of Sheffield has undertaken fragmented work to improve the outcomes of ethnic minority students, but this is now owned by the Learning and Teaching Committee and will be taken forward by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Board. This can be contrasted with Kingston University that has adopted a more top-down model, based on staff development and a key performance indicator which applies across the institution to develop an inclusive curriculum to reduce the attainment differential. Aston University has appointed staff to undertake data analysis and research about retention and attainment, and uses this information to identify hot spots, and to work with schools and services to implement solutions.

4.1.3 A mature institution: From individual champions, to pockets of excellence, to a whole institution approach

In making sense of what a whole institution looks like it has been useful to conceptualise it as a process, or journey towards a more inclusive institution. This is represented here as a simple maturity model[22], which offers a way of conceptualising the process of change and provides opportunities for benchmarking, comparison and development by individual and groups of HEPs. This is shown in figure 1.

Figure 1: Institutional approaches to widening participation maturity model

Within the institutional context, national policy has evolved over the last twenty years from widening access projects in the mid-late 1990s, to requiring institutions to widen access through Access Agreements, and subsequently a focus on the different lifecycle phases. Now the policy context is promoting a whole institution approach.

For example, widening access projects encouraged the recruitment of staff specifically to undertake this role (often on short-term contracts). Since then there has been a growth in

[22] The idea of a maturity model is being used here in a generic way, rather than referring to a specific model such as the capability maturity model.

other personnel, including academics, professional services and students collaborating in outreach and other widening access interventions. The increased priority accorded to student success, and the research about how to improve retention and success, has resulted in pockets of excellence led by different colleagues across the institution, but as the focus extends to whole student experience and a whole institution approach this requires everyone to play their part.

The arguments for a whole institution approach have been made, and policy instruments, such as Widening Participation Initial Statements, Widening Participation Strategies and Widening Participation Strategic Assessments have been used to promote such an approach by institutions, to help move WP from a marginal to a mainstream activity. For example;

> *"There is always a risk that single item approaches become marginalised within a university as being the responsibility of a particular interest group. This development [widening participation strategies] has been in response to government direction, [and] has the potential to shape and change institutions so that they become more inclusive." (Layer, 2002)*

To date this work has largely focused on working across the student lifecycle, engaging individual champions from across the institution, and resulting in pockets of excellence in specific parts of most institutions. Now the challenge is for alignment and consistency across the institution to create an inclusive approach which all students benefit from irrespective of where they are located within the institution, and arguably which extends not just across their lifecycle, but throughout their daily lived experience, incorporating their academic experience, but also their personal and social well-being and their professional development.

Alignment involves:

> *… matching resources, policies, and practices with the institution's educational purposes and student characteristics through forging educational partnerships within and among traditional organisational boundaries, especially faculty, academic affairs, and student affairs units.* (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 2010, cited in Felten et al 2016, p92)

An inclusive approach:

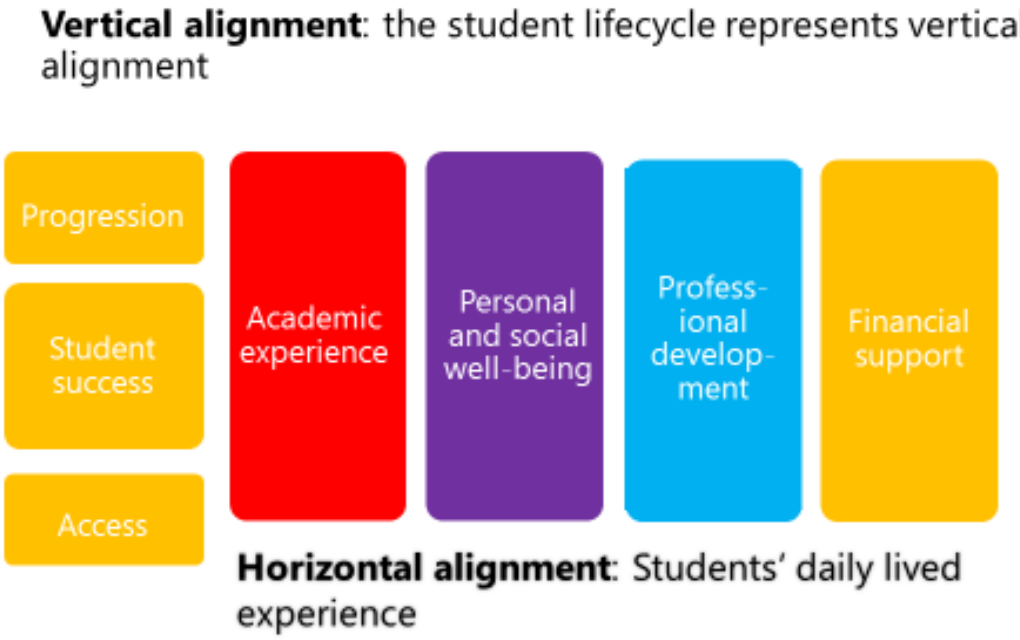
> *… necessitates a shift away from supporting specific student groups through a discrete set of policies or time-bound interventions, towards equity considerations being embedded within all functions of the institution and treated as an ongoing process of quality enhancement. Making a shift of such magnitude requires cultural and systemic change at both the policy and practice levels. (May and Bridger, 2010, p.6)*

An inclusive academic experience becomes particularly pertinent in the English context where changes to the Disabled Students' Allowance require HEPs to provide more generic

educational support (or non-medical help) through the curriculum[23], which will be of benefit to many other students too. The challenge is to become inclusive across the whole student experience, recognising for example the benefits students gain from participating in enrichment activities, which many 'non-traditional' students under-participate in[24].

Felten et al argue that HE staff tend to prioritised vertical alignment across time, whereas students (also) value and benefit from horizonal alignment, which reflects their daily lived experiences. This is represented in figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Vertical and horizontal alignment



This diagram reflects the way that WP has developed in national policy and individual institutions in England. The early focus was on access (throughout outreach) and the provision of limited financial support to off-set the introduction of tuition fees. The WP discourse extended to the student lifecycle, still with financial support (usually) operating in parallel to this, rather than being integrated. Individuals and teams in many institutions have developed excellent practice to widen access, improve student success and enhance progression beyond HE. But how can we connect this across the student experience, and ensure that all students benefit? This ideal is presented in figure 3, and theme of how to implement this is discussed in section 4.2.

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[23] Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2014) *Higher education: student support: changes to Disabled Students' Allowances (DSA)*. London: DBIS https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/higher-education-student-support-changes-to-disabled-students-allowances-dsa

[24]See for example Thomas, L. and Jones, R. (2017) *Student engagement in the context of commuter students*. London: The Student Engagement Partnership

Figure 3: Alignment within a whole institutional approach to WP

The issue of 'maturity' can be achieved is discussed in section 4.2

4.2 How can a whole institution approach be implemented and managed?

The case study institutions discussed a number of things that contribute to managing a whole institution approach to WP, for example:

- Explicit institutional and individual commitment, including senior management, to WP and being student-centred.
- Shared values, including viewing diversity positively, being widely endorsed and permeating the institution.
- Strategic lead (team or individual) focusing on WP across the student lifecycle.
- Valuing teaching and focusing on the whole student experience.
- Involvement of students, Students' Unions and alumni.
- Everyone recognising their role and contribution to WP.
- Alignment of institutional policies and processes with WP and student success.
- Size and structures that facilitate cross-institutional communication, including opportunities for involvement, sharing and learning.
- The institutional estate is proactively informed by WP and student diversity.
- Staff are empowered to collaborate and lead bottom-up WP initiatives.
- WP is underpinned by data and research and staff accountability.

The challenge however was to consider how these factors, which overlap with some of the characteristics of a whole institution approach described in the previous section, can be

understood and utilised within an HEP to implement and manage a mature, whole institution approach. This is the focus of the remainder of section 4.2.

4.2.1 Understanding higher education institutions as a system

In order to implement a whole institution approach systems thinking has been used as a tool to understand managing change. Initially the intention was to use Soft Systems Methodology (SSM)[25] to model the contrasting 'world views' of the different groups or stakeholders contributing to WP in the case study organisations, and to use this to understand how these different views within the same institution resulted in flaws in the system, and how they could be united to work together. The workshops however demonstrated that in the case study institutions there were widely shared views and values with regards to WP (i.e. shared views within a single institution, rather than between institutions). Thus, the understanding of WP appeared to be fairly 'tight' and those individuals and teams contributing to WP in the case study institutions seemed to be broadly in agreement about many of the underlying values, definitions and approaches. What emerged instead was a *complex* system, in which there were multiple groups contributing in a variety of ways to the institutional vision of WP. This can be contrasted with a *complicated* system, where there is a fixed pattern– albeit complicated – to the way in which WP operates. A complex system appears to be more collaborative, with different groups working together making multiple – and variable - contributions. This is more difficult to describe, manage and evaluate, which are the three aims of this project.

Indeed, in a HEP where there are genuinely highly levels of individual passion and commitment to WP action there appears to be what could be viewed as 'too much complexity'. The multiple and variable contributions to the institutional WP goals and objectives can result in fragmentation and incoherency, risking duplication and gaps in provision, and even 'competition' between comparable interventions, resulting in staff frustration and student confusion. (Duplication and gaps were identified in several of the case study workshops and staff frustration was raised in one of the workshops in particular). Overall a complex system seems likely to result in an inconsistent student experience and outcomes, depending in part on which subject a student studies and their particular combination of WP characteristics.

This indicates the potential value of seeking to emulate – at least to some extent – a complicated system, to seek to achieve more certainty in the processes, and the experiences and outcomes for students through a more co-ordinated approach. This however has to be balanced against the value of bottom up initiatives which show understanding of the localised context. Thus the aim is never to eradicate collaboration and localised solutions, but to find ways to promote and implement them across the whole institution as appropriate, and find ways to have confidence that students are not disadvantaged because

[25] Checkland, P. B. and Poulter, J. (2006) Learning for Action: A Short Definitive Account of Soft Systems Methodology and its Use, for Practitioners, Teachers and Students, John Wiley and Sons Ltd, Chichester

of, for example, their subject choice. This requires both bottom-up and top-down approaches to flourish, and reinforce and support each other.

4.2.2 Top-down, bottom-up approach to change

In the context of gender mainstreaming two broad approaches to managing change have emerged: enforcement, and sensitising and equipping (i.e. involuntary and voluntary). The broadly shared views identified in the case study workshops placed greater emphasis on sensitising and equipping staff to be effective with regards to WP, rather than on enforcement. This may however reflect the institutions that regard themselves as having a whole institution approach to WP and volunteered as case studies, and the staff who attended the workshops. It should be acknowledged that all HE staff will not be equally committed to and passionate about WP – either in the case study institutions or across the sector more widely. In the HE context May and Bridger (2010)[26] found that it was necessary to undertake changes at both the institutional and the individual levels to engage staff and bring about change:

> *… organisational change required to bring about inclusive policy and practice fell into two broad categories: institutional-level change: targeting institutional policy, strategy, structures, systems, processes and/or environmental factors, whether centrally or within departments/faculties; individual-level change: targeting individuals' attitudes, awareness, knowledge, understanding, perceptions and assumptions, as well as practice. (May and Bridger, 2010 p36).*

Similarly, in her work on developing the first year experience in Australia in general and Queensland University of Technology in particular Kift (2009) advocates the 'top-down, bottom-up' approach. With the work on the ground focusing on individual practice, and the top-down approach recognising the 'transition pedagogy' as a priority, developing a model of institutional action and promoting an appropriate institutional culture. A top-down, bottom-up approach is interpreted in the following discussion as addressing both the structure and culture of the institution.

4.2.3 Changing the culture and structure of the institution

Culture refers to the values, attitudes and practices of the staff (and students) within the HEP. WP needs to be 'tightly' defined, understood and implemented to facilitate compatible understanding and action – and student experiences and outcomes – across the institution. Structure refers to the institutional policies, processes and organisation (e.g. of financial and human resources) of the HEP and its sub-units. The structure can facilitate the institutional culture (and bottom-up work of staff and students) or frustrate it; structure contributes to the consistency of outcomes across the HEP, by for example co-ordinating outreach activities and ensuring an inclusive curriculum across the board. The interplay of culture and structure – the top-down, bottom-up approach – should enable people to be sufficiently well

[26] May, H. and Bridger, K. (2010) Developing and embedding inclusive policy and practice in higher education, York: Higher Education Academy

informed and have the capacity and commitment to implement inclusive practices, while the structure both helps to ensure this and provides co-ordination across the institution, promoting integration and consistency – and avoiding duplication, fragmentation and gaps in provision. It is worth noting that the goal is primarily consistency of outcomes (rather than an identical experience) – in other words particular groups of students should not be disadvantaged because of their characteristics or because of their subject of study (or the intersection of any of these variables). Localised solutions within an institutional structural framework, and co-ordinated across the student experience are vital.

As can be seen from the list of at the beginning of section 4.2 institutions identified a range of ways of managing a whole institution approach, which broadly divide into cultural and structural factors. This is exemplified through the issue of staff engagement with WP, which is at the heart of developing an inclusive institution, or a whole institution approach to WP. Having staff engaged in WP can be understood to have a range of characteristics generated from the intersection of culture and structure.

- WP and teaching are valued and rewarded by the institution.
- Everyone is clear about their contribution to WP and understands their responsibilities for WP.
- Academic staff and professional service staff contribute pre-entry as well as post-entry.
- Staff across the institution are aware of who students are and where they come from – and all decisions – and practice – are informed by this.
- Work to widening participation is undertaken in partnership with students, and students are facilitated to have a voice with respect to WP.
- Students unions contribute to WP through elected officers and staff, including contributing to the development of the Access Agreement, campaigns, provision of services, academic societies, monitoring the engagement of students from different backgrounds, named WP roles, and contributing to discussion and development of WP across the institution.
- Staff are empowered and feel that they have agency to initiate WP work, and have access to resources to do so.

Drawing on the evidence from the case studies, the participatory workshop and the literature, key elements of culture and structure that contribute to a whole institution approach are outlined below.

Culture (values, attitudes and practice of the people within the HEP, contributing to bottom-up approaches) includes:

- **Leadership**: Managers at all levels understand, promote and are informed by WP principles.
- **Values, attitudes and practices** of academic, professional and support staff reflect the institutional commitment to WP.

- **Students and alumni** understand, value and contribute to the institutional commitment to WP.
- **People meet together** to discuss WP and diversity and develop their practice.
- Staff from across the institution feel confident to **initiate and implement WP** interventions and practices.
- **Staff use the available data and evidence** to inform their decision-making and practices.

Structure (policies, process and organisation within the HEP, which can be understood as top-down approached) includes:

- **Staff policies and processes** - recruitment, induction, annual review, professional development and promotion reflect WP - including for senior managers.
- **Staff development and training** is provided to all staff to support WP.
- **Academic experience policies and processes** (e.g. learning, teaching and assessment[27], quality assurance and validation processes, annual monitoring) embrace WP.
- **Student support policies and processes** relating to academic, personal, financial and professional development meet the needs of WP groups.
- **Student recruitment and admissions policies and processes** reflect WP.
- Policies and processes to enhance **employability and access to postgraduate** study meet the needs of WP target groups.
- **Structures facilitate dissemination** – sharing information and practices and enabling people to contribute.
- **Strategic** (not just operational) **leadership for WP** provides guidance and co-ordination, rather than direct implementation.
- **WP resources are allocated across the institution**, or are available to all staff, not retained centrally.
- Institutional processes make **data and evidence** accessible so that it can be used to inform strategic and operational decision-making and practice.
- **Staff use the available data and evidence** to inform their decision-making and practices.
- Institutional **accountability** procedures, including key performance indicators, incorporate WP.

Structure refers to the institutional policies, processes and organisation (of resources, staff etc). Developing an institutional structure that promotes WP can be understood to involve[28]:

- Ensuring policies, processes and organisation take account of WP and diversity (structure as **espoused**);

[27] Or equivalent policy and associated processes.

[28] Evans, K. Behrens, M., Hoffmannn, B., Saxby-Smith, S. and Rudd, P. (1999) Comparative successes or failures? Some methodological issues in conducting international comparative research in post-secondary education. Paper presented at the *British Educational Research Association Annual Conference*, University of Sussex

- Considering the extent to which structure are **enacted** (i.e. they are implemented and move beyond paper-based aspirations or statements); and
- Assessing the impact or **effect** of the structure on WP/diverse students.

Culture refers to the values, attitudes and practices of the staff (and students). Developing a 'WP friendly' or inclusive culture can be understood to involve:

- Raising people's **awareness and understanding** of the issues;
- Developing people's **skills and capacity** to deliver inclusive practice;
- People behave inclusively and deliver inclusive **practice**; and
- Demonstrating the **impact** of people's practice on the experiences or outcomes of students from target groups.

As implied in the work of Kift (discussed above), there is a relationship between the cultural characteristics of a whole-institution approach – the values, attitudes and practices of the 'people' (staff and students) – and the structural features – the policies, processes and organisation (of financial and human resources). The structure may be seen to promote, 'nudge' or 'push' people towards the desired culture. Structure also plays a key role in avoiding fragmentation – characterised by duplication, gaps, competition and inconsistency – and promote integration. This can be seen through numerous examples, such as:

- Co-ordinated outreach to avoid different parts of the institution contacting schools etc.
- Collaboration between services to develop new interventions and approaches to support WP goals.
- Informal communication between different parts of the institution through networks and sharing practice.
- Formal opportunities to contribute to the WP agenda.
- Effective communication mechanisms to collate and share information across the institution.
- Shared spaces to facilitate sharing between teams and individuals.

In table 1 below, some of the relationships between cultural and structural changes are illustrated.

Table 1: Examples of how the culture and structure intersect to promote and facilitate WP across the whole institution

Culture	**Structure**
Leadership: Managers at all levels understand, promote and are informed by WP principles.	Staff policies and processes. Staff development and training. Academic experience policies and processes. Student support policies and processes. Progression policies and processes. Institutional accountability. Structures facilitate dissemination.

	WP resources are allocated across the institution. Data and evidence is available.
Values, attitudes and practices of academic, professional and support staff reflect the institutional commitment to WP.	Staff polices and processes. Academic experience policies and processes. Staff development and training. Student support policies and processes. Progression policies and processes. Institutional accountability. Student recruitment and admissions. Strategic leadership for WP. WP resources are allocated across the institution. Data and evidence is available.
Students and alumni understand, share and contribute to WP.	Student recruitment and admissions. Academic experience policies and processes. Student support policies and processes. Progression policies and processes.
People meet together to discuss WP and diversity.	Structures facilitate dissemination. Staff development and training. Strategic leadership for WP. Data and evidence is available.
Staff from across the institution feel confident to **initiate and implement WP** interventions and practices.	Staff policies and processes. Staff development and training. Academic experience policies and processes. Student support policies and processes. Progression policies and processes. Institutional accountability. Strategic leadership for WP. Structures facilitate dissemination. WP resources are allocated across the institution. Data and evidence is available. Institutional accountability.
Staff use the available data and evidence to inform their decision-making and practices.	Data and evidence is available. Staff development and training. WP resources are allocated across the institution. Institutional accountability.

4.2.4 Essential strategies for implementing and managing a whole institution approach

Substantial consensus has emerged in the literature with regard to some of the 'minimum requirements' for gender mainstreaming within organisations (e.g. Kardam 1991; Hannan-Anderson 1992; Jahan 1995; Macdonald 1994; and Roothaert et al. (2006):

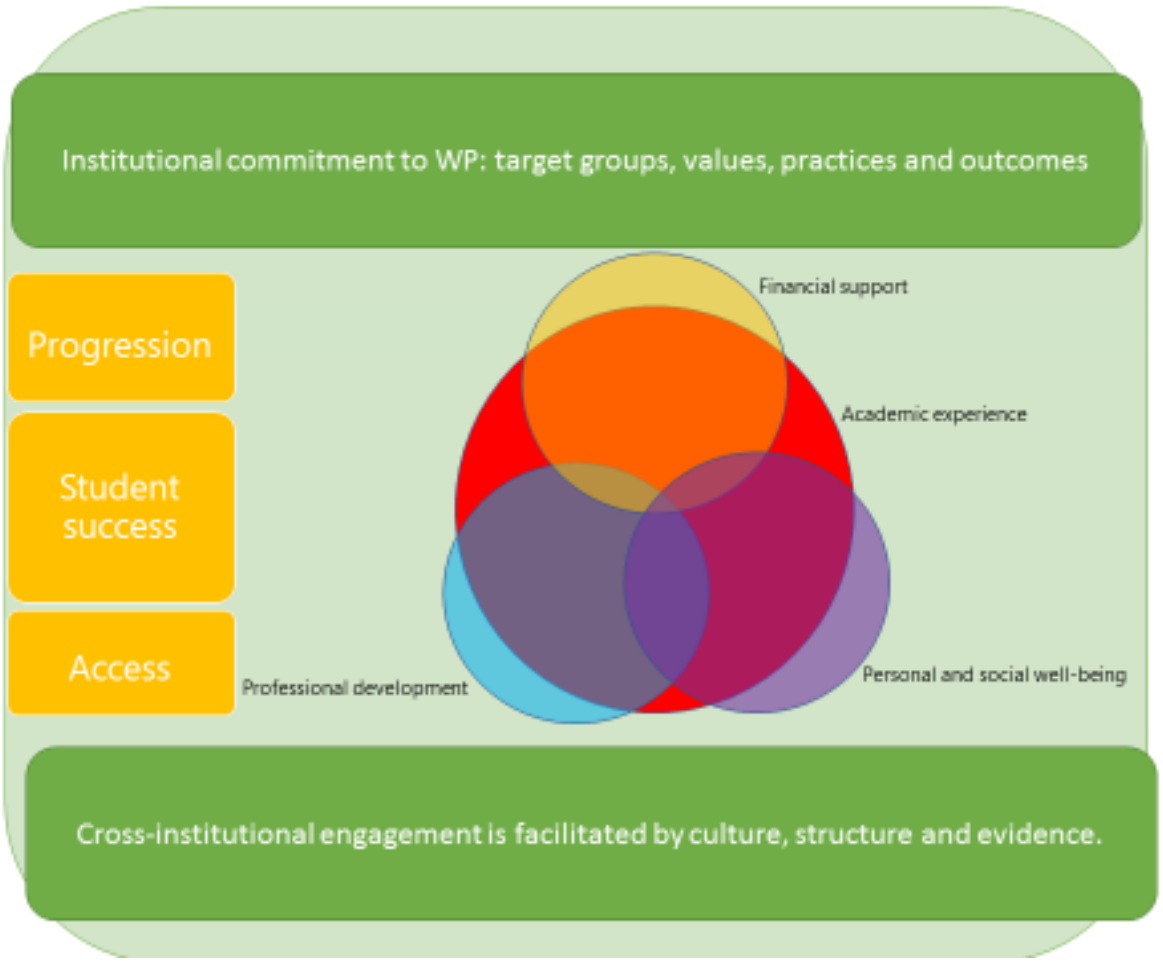
- A positive policy commitment to gender and development, with management support;
- Gender experts acting as focal points with a catalytic role;
- Awareness- and skills-raising for all relevant personnel through gender training;
- Incorporation of gender objectives into planning and implementation procedures;
- Supportive organisational culture; and
- A clear identification of who has responsibility for implementation and a system of accountability.

Therefore, building on this approach from the field of gender mainstreaming, and the findings from this study reported in sections 4.1 and 4.2, the next step is to identify the essential strategies for implementing a whole institution approach, which ensures both the structural and the cultural context is facilitative of WP.

(a) Vertical alignment: A whole lifecycle approach to WP is adopted.
(b) Horizontal alignment: Staff from departments, services and units from across the institution are involved in WP (i.e. not just 'professional WP' staff).
(c) Institutional commitment and leadership: There is a clear and explicit institutional commitment to WP, defining target groups and expected outcomes as appropriate.
(d) Pragmatic approach to change: A top-down, bottom-up approach is adopted, developing a culture and structure that promote and supports inclusivity and consistency. This incorporates:
    a. Staff capacity and engagement: The values, attitudes and practices of the staff and students within the HEP promote and support WP.
    b. Institutional structures facilitate ownership and communication: The institutional policies, processes and organisation (e.g. of financial and human resources) of the HEP and its sub-units promote and support WP across the institution.
    c. Evidence informed and accountability: Data and evidence is used to understand the issues, ensure staff accountability, monitor student experience and outcomes, inform strategic and operational decision-making, and evaluate the process and impact.

This whole institution approach is summarised in the diagram below:

Figure 4:



4.3 What strategies and tools can be used to evaluate a whole institution approach to WP?

4.3.1 Clarifying the purpose of the evaluation

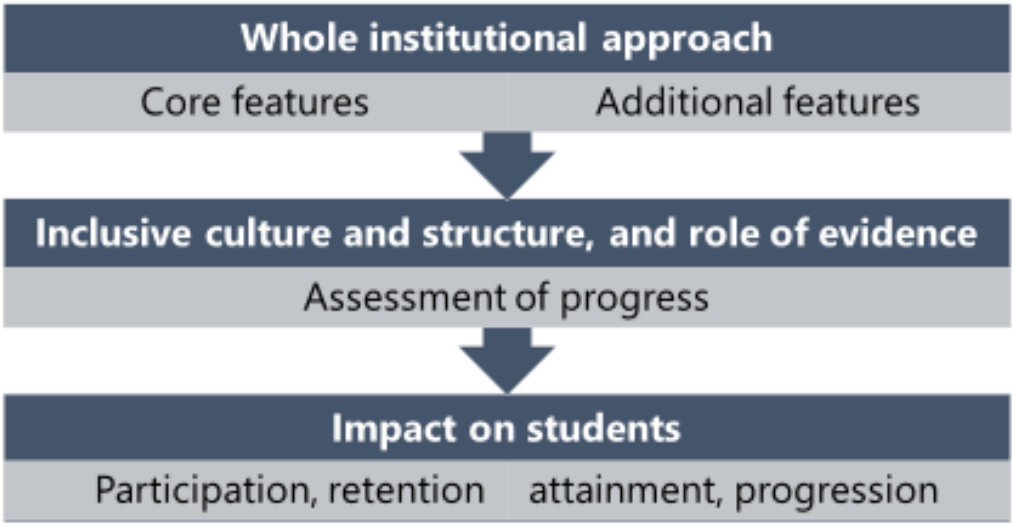
Before developing an appropriate evaluation strategy, it is necessary to be explicit about the purpose of the evaluation. There are three primary reasons for undertaking an evaluation[29]. (In the following 'it' refers to the intervention, feature, process, strategy or change that is being evaluated):

i. **Accountability**: Has it been implemented as planned?
ii. **Improvement**: What has worked well? What has worked less well? Can it be improved?
iii. **Impact**: What have been the short-term benefits, medium-term outcomes, and longer-term impact of it (on students, staff, the institution)?

[29] http://tsep.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Student-Engagement-Evaluation-Framework-and-Report.pdf

The case studies indicated that overall rates of participation, retention, attainment and progression are indicators of an effective whole institution approach to WP – and indeed this is broadly borne out in their data. In the context of gender mainstreaming Rao and Stuart (1997)[30] expressed concern that gender planners tend to focus on outcomes, 'not recognising that process itself may be an outcome' (1997:16). Elsewhere it is argued that it is necessary to: … establish appropriate monitoring and evaluation or other progress-reporting mechanisms to assess the impact of gender-equality policies and strategies (ECOSOC 2003). In other words, the aim should be to evaluate progress with respect to the process of establishing a whole institution approach (or an inclusive institution), rather than the outcome *per se*. Thus this section will focus on developing an approach to assess progress towards developing a whole institution approach, based on the conclusions to the previous sections. The findings and conclusions are combined to develop the evaluation model, illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Evaluation model



This evaluation model is informed by a broad theory of change:

> *"If all parts of the institution are engaged in WP then diversity will be reflected in and inform the culture and structure of the organisation. If diversity informs the culture and structure of the organisation, then policies, processes, values, attitudes and practices will enable the successful participation of all students regardless of personal characteristics or disposition, educational background, current circumstances or cultural issues."*

In this first stage of the evaluation model (evaluating the core and additional features of a whole institution approach) the focus is on accountability and improvement. In the second stage (evaluating the implementation and management of a top-down, bottom-up

[30] Rao, A. and Stuart, R. (1997) Rethinking Organizations: A Feminist Perspective, *Gender and Development*, Vol. 5, No. 1, February 1997.

approach, underpinned by evidence and accountability) the focus is on accountability, improvement and impact (on staff, students and HEPs). In the third stage the focus in on the impact on WP students and graduates.

4.3.2 Evaluating the core and additional features of a whole institution approach

Here the purpose is to check which features of a whole institution approach exist, and to assess whether there is any scope for improvement. The existence of the features become the indicators. Section 4.1.1 identified core features of a whole institution approach and section 4.1.2 identified additional characteristics of a whole institution approach. Providing evidence may be seen as the dominant challenge here, and might be achieved by providing examples. (See table 2 below).

The second part of the evaluation task is to consider if there is room for improvement. This can be done in two ways, first by reviewing the list of additional characteristics beyond the minimum (in section 4.1.2 and the case studies in appendix 3) and reflecting on how these could be incorporated into the current institutional approach. The second approach is to look for evidence to address questions such as:

- How have staff and teams engaged with and experienced this feature?
- How have students engaged with and experienced this feature?
- What has worked well and why?
- What has not been successful and why?
- What are other HEPs doing?
- What could be done differently in the future?

Evidence might be collected through:

- Self-evaluation workshop, inviting staff and students from across the institution to provide examples and reflection on improvement.
- Survey of staff and/or students' views and experiences.
- Focus groups with staff and students.
- A 'citizens' jury' inviting colleagues to share their views and experiences and allowing students to 'pass judgement' on the HEP's progress towards a whole institution approach.

Table 2 can be used to facilitate the collection of evidence, or it can be completed afterwards as a way of synthesising the evidence.

Table 2: Evaluating the core and additional features

Feature/indicator	**In existence (yes/no/in progress)?**	**Evidence (examples)**	**How can it be improved? Ideas and next steps**
Whole lifecycle approach*			

Staff from across the institution (not just WP professionals) are involved*			
Explicit institutional commitment*			
Extended range of WP target groups			
Expanded student lifecycle			
WP embedded into *all* roles and processes			
Student, alumni and union are involved			
Data, evidence and research inform all stages: • Understanding the issues • Staff accountability • Monitoring student participation • Inform decision-making • Evaluating impact			
WP resources are allocated across the institution.			
Co-ordinated approach to WP			

* Essential features.

4.3.3 Evaluating the essential strategies for implementing and managing a whole institution approach

The purpose of this stage of the evaluation model is three-fold: accountability, improvement and impact (of the essential strategies that are contributing to a whole institution approach or an inclusive institution, rather than on WP students, which is the focus of the third evaluation stage). Section 4.2.4 identified the essential strategies for implementing and managing a whole institution approach. This is based on a top-down, bottom-up approach, which develops a culture and structure to promote and support inclusivity and consistency, and is underpinned by evidence. Thus the three essential elements are:

(a) Staff capacity and engagement: The values, attitudes and practices of the staff and students within the HEP promote and support WP.

(b) Institutional structures facilitate ownership and communication: The institutional policies, processes and organisation (e.g. of financial and human resources) of the HEP and its sub-units promote and support WP across the institution.
(c) Evidence informed and accountability: Data and evidence is used to understand the issues, ensure staff accountability, monitor student experience and outcomes, inform strategic and operational decision-making, and evaluate the process and impact.

Indicators are needed in relation to each of these strategies, to assist institutions to gauge progress towards implementation. These can be drawn from section 4.2.3. Culture refers to the values, attitudes and practices of the staff - and students - which promote and support engagement and capacity to be inclusive and deliver a whole institution approach. Structure refers to the institutional policies, processes and organisation (e.g. of financial and human resources) of the HEP and its sub-units, which facilitate ownership and communication and promote bottom-up change, and also contribute to consistency of outcomes. Data and evidence is used to understand the issues, ensure staff accountability, monitor student experience and outcomes, inform strategic and operational decision-making, and evaluate the process and impact of change and make improvements.

The following cultural and structural issues – and indicators – were identified in section 4.2.3, and indicators relating to using data and evidence are incorporated (vi, xvii, xviii, & xviii in particular).

i. **Leadership**: Managers at all levels understand, promote and are informed by WP principles.
ii. **Values, attitudes and practices** of academic, professional and support staff reflect the institutional commitment to WP.
iii. **Students and alumni** understand, value and contribute to the institutional commitment to WP.
iv. **People meet together** to discuss WP and diversity and develop their practice.
v. Staff from across the institution feel confident to **initiate and implement WP** interventions and practices.
vi. **Staff use the available data and evidence** to inform their decision-making and practices.
vii. **Staff policies and processes** - recruitment, induction, annual review, professional development and promotion reflect WP commitment and priorities - including for senior managers.
viii. **Staff development and training** is provided to all staff to support the development of awareness WP and capacity to contribute effectively.
ix. **Student recruitment and admissions policies and processes** reflect WP.
x. **Academic experience policies and processes** (e.g. learning, teaching and assessment, quality assurance and validation processes, annual monitoring) embrace WP.
xi. **Student support policies and processes** relating to academic, personal, financial and professional development meet the needs of WP groups.

xii. Policies and processes to enhance **employability and access to postgraduate** study meet the needs of WP target groups.
xiii. **Structures facilitate dissemination** – sharing information and practices - and enable people to contribute.
xiv. **Strategic** (not just operational) **leadership for WP** provides guidance and co-ordination.
xv. **WP resources are allocated across the institution**, or are available to all staff, not retained centrally.
xvi. Institutional processes make **data and evidence** accessible so that it can be used to inform strategic and operational decision-making and practice.
xvii. Institutional **accountability** procedures, including key performance indicators, incorporate WP.
xviii. Data, evidence and research inform all stages:
- Understanding the issues
- Staff accountability
- Monitoring student participation
- Inform strategic decision-making
- Inform operational decision-making
- Evaluating the impact of interventions and change

xix. There is a top-down, bottom-up approach, combining culture and structure to promote and support inclusivity and consistency, which is underpinned by evidence.

The aim is to evaluate for three inter-related purposes:

- **Accountability**: to what extent each strategy has been implemented?
- **Improvement**: how can each strategy be improved?
- **Impact:** what has happened as a result of each strategy being implemented?

Progress towards implementation (accountability) could be assessed using a simple scale, coupled with the presentation of evidence and examples. A simple scale might be:

- Not started/no evidence available
- In progress (early stages)
- In progress (advanced)
- Completed/exemplary

Considering improvement could be done by working with those roles or teams involved in or affected by particular strategies to collect evidence that addresses questions such as:

- How have people experienced the strategy?
- What has worked well and why?
- What has not been successful and why?
- What could be done differently in the future?
- What else could we do?

Examining the impact of a strategy could be combined with collecting evidence about improvement, and indeed, looking at impact may contribute insights about how the

implementation of the strategy could be improved. It could involve collecting evidence in relation to the following types of question:

- What have people learnt?
- How have people changed their practice, what do they do differently now?
- How has this affected staff and students?
- Are there any unintended consequences?

Evidence could be collected from staff teams and students through a wide range of methods which aim to uncover practice and develop understanding about experiences and issues at a local level:

- Self-evaluation process completed by different teams/units within the HEP, perhaps including reflection on priorities for improvement.
- Self-evaluation workshop, inviting staff and students from across the institution to provide examples and reflection on improvement.
- Survey of staff and/or students' views and experiences.
- Interviews or focus groups with staff and students or attending a team meeting.
- A 'citizens' jury' inviting colleagues to share their views and experiences and allowing students to 'pass judgement' on the HEP's progress towards a whole institution approach.

Table 3 (below) could be used to help collect evidence and make assessments, or could be completed once the evidence has been collected, analysed and synthesised. It may also be useful to assess the extent to which different roles and teams across the HEP have developed capacity and engaged with the WP agenda. This can be conceptualised as a staged process, that individuals and staff groups progress through, which involves:

- Raising people's **awareness and understanding** of the issues;
- Developing people's **skills and capacity** to deliver inclusive practice;
- People behave inclusively and deliver inclusive **practice**; and
- Demonstrating the **impact** of people's practice on the experiences or outcomes of students from target groups.

This could be applied to different groups across the institution, such as leaders and managers at all levels across the institution, staff in different roles contributing to students' experiences, staff without direct contact with students, students' union staff, officers, clubs and societies and so on to address cultural elements i, ii and iii listed above.

With regards to structure it could be useful to review which policies and process take account of the HEP's WP commitment and priorities. This can be conceptualised as a three-stage process:

- Ensuring policies and processes take account of WP and diversity (policy/process as **espoused**);
- Considering the extent to which policies and processes are **enacted** (i.e. they are implemented and move beyond paper-based aspirations or statements); and
- The impact or **effect** of the policy/process on WP/diverse students.

Table 3: Evaluating the essential strategies: Culture, structure and evidence

Strategy / Indicator	**Accountability:** To what extent has this been implemented?[31]	**Improvement:** How can it be improved? Ideas and next steps	**Impact:** What has happened as a result of this being implemented?
Leadership: Managers at all levels understand, promote and are informed by WP principles.			
Values, attitudes and practices of academic, professional and support staff reflect the institutional commitment to WP.			
Students and alumni understand, value and contribute to the institutional commitment to WP.			
People meet together to discuss WP and diversity and develop their practice.			
Staff from across the institution feel confident to **initiate and implement WP** interventions and practices.			
Staff use the available data and evidence to inform their decision-making and practices. **Staff policies and processes** - recruitment, induction, annual			

[31] This way in which is progress is described may vary, but could include: not started/no evidence available; in progress (early stages); in progress (advanced); completed/exemplary.

review, professional development and promotion reflect WP commitment and priorities - including for senior managers.			
Staff development and training is provided to all staff to support the development of awareness WP and capacity to contribute effectively.			
Student recruitment and admissions policies and processes reflect WP priorities.			
Academic experience policies and processes (e.g. learning, teaching and assessment, quality assurance and validation processes, annual monitoring) embrace WP.			
Student support policies and processes relating to academic, personal, financial and professional development meet the needs of WP groups.			
Policies and processes to enhance **employability and access to postgraduate** study meet the needs of WP target groups.			
Structures facilitate dissemination – sharing			

information and practices - and enable people to contribute.			
Strategic (not just operational) **leadership for WP** provides guidance and co-ordination.			
WP resources are allocated across the institution, or are available to all staff, not retained centrally.			
Institutional processes make **data and evidence** accessible so that it can be used to inform strategic and operational decision-making and practice.			
Institutional **accountability** procedures, including key performance indicators, incorporate WP.			
Data, evidence and research inform all stages: • Understanding the issues • Staff accountability • Monitoring student participation • Inform strategic decision-making • Inform operational decision-making • Evaluating the impact of interventions and change			

There is a **top-down, bottom-up approach**, combining culture and structure to promote and support inclusivity and consistency, which is underpinned by evidence.			

4.3.4 Evaluating the impact on students

The final stage of the evaluation model is to evaluate the impact of a whole institution approach on WP student outcomes, such as:

- Application
- Admission
- Continuation
- Completion
- Attainment
- Employment
- Progression to further study

There have been quite a few studies recently designed to consider how to evaluate the impact of WP on student outcomes, for example research commissioned by HEFCE to develop an evaluation framework for evaluating the impact of activities and to better demonstrate the impact of funding to widen participation in HE[32]. This study includes an evaluation framework for WP, and considers what can be done, now and in the future, to produce stronger evidence. More recently OFFA commissioned worked designed to improve the quality of evidence about the impact of outreach initiatives[33], which, as it says, could be applied to other phases of the student lifecycle and associated student outcomes. This is based on three levels of evaluation, culminating in approaches that seek not just to measure change, but to attribute this to the associated intervention (e.g. through comparison with similar students who have not experienced the intervention):

- Level 1: Narrative of change
- Level 2: Impact (not causal)
- Level 3: Impact (causal)

It is beyond the scope of this report to critique these approaches or to develop an alternative model. However, in designing an approach to evaluate the impact of a whole institution approach on student outcomes it would be prudent to draw on existing work within the institution, and this growing body of applied research and guidance to support institutions in achieving this goal.

5. Conclusions and implications

There is not a single model for a whole institution approach to WP, but very valuable learning has emerged from the research undertaken for this study. None of the case study

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[32] CFE Research (2015) *Student Opportunity outcomes framework research: in-depth study*. Bristol: HEFCE http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2015/sodepth/, accessed 26/6/17

[33] Crawford, C., Dytham, S. and Naylor, R. (2017) *The Evaluation of the Impact of Outreach. Proposed Standards of Evaluation Practice and Associated Guidance*. Bristol: OFFA, https://www.offa.org.uk/egp/improving-evaluation-outreach/, accessed 26/6/17

institutions have fully achieved a whole institution approach, and participants spontaneously identified either shortcomings or ways in which their institutional approach could be improved. Similarly, at the participatory workshop, there was interest in how the learning could be applied to participants' own contexts. The report suggests some core features of a whole institution approach that should be viewed as minimum requirements, and which largely mirror the simple definition of a whole institution approach provided by OFFA. However, the additional characteristics extracted from the case studies provide very useful insights into a more sophisticated understanding of what a whole institution approach looks like. This understanding is enhanced by consideration of the maturity model, drawing on the ideas of not just vertical, but also horizontal alignment to ensure that students' daily lived experience is inclusive and enabling – and promotes success.

The case studies tended to prioritise institutional culture, particularly values that inform personal practices, as central to implementing a whole institutional approach. But this begs the question as to how one can ensure that staff – including senior managers – and students - ascribe to these values. Here the importance of structure emerges – the policies, processes and organisation of human and financial resources that help to ensure the culture of the institution is indeed inclusive and operates to widen participation and promote the success of these students. Structure also has an important role to play in relation to co-ordination and integration, to avoid duplication, gaps and competition between WP interventions, and to promote consistent student outcomes. This need for consistency of outcomes points to the value of a complicated system which works in a predicable way, but this may be complemented by a complex system, where multiple actors contribute in multiple ways and create local solutions. This indicates the value of a top-down, bottom-up approach, addressing both structural and cultural issues, and this is most effective when it informed by evidence throughout the process. A set of essential strategies from implementing and managing a whole institution approach have emerged, which may prove to be a useful starting point for reviewing the current situation, further developing a whole institutional approach – and evaluating progress.

The case study participants were clear that the key indicator of an effective whole institution approach is positive student outcomes – i.e. the outcome indicators that all WP work is aiming to achieve. And indeed, the success of the case study institutions in widening access and ensuring student success could be taken as indicative. Progress towards a whole institution approach is however seen to be a separate issue, and the focus in section 4.3 is on evaluating the core and additional features and the strategies for implementation and management. The emphasis here is primarily on formative evaluation, so using the evidence to improve the effectiveness of the approach, rather than on evaluating the impact of particular aspects of a whole institution approach.

It is not assumed that this report has exhausted the topic of a whole institution approach, but it does illuminate a widely promoted but under-researched topic. There is clearly much more to be done, including establishing whether there is a causal relationship between a whole institution approach and better WP outcomes.

6. Guidance and toolkit

The guidance and tools have been developed from the research in response to the key research questions, and so are largely embedded into the preceding sections of the report. Here two approaches, one quick and the other more time intensive have been suggested to help HEPs assess where they are and agree future priorities.

6.1 An initial activity: Reflective questions

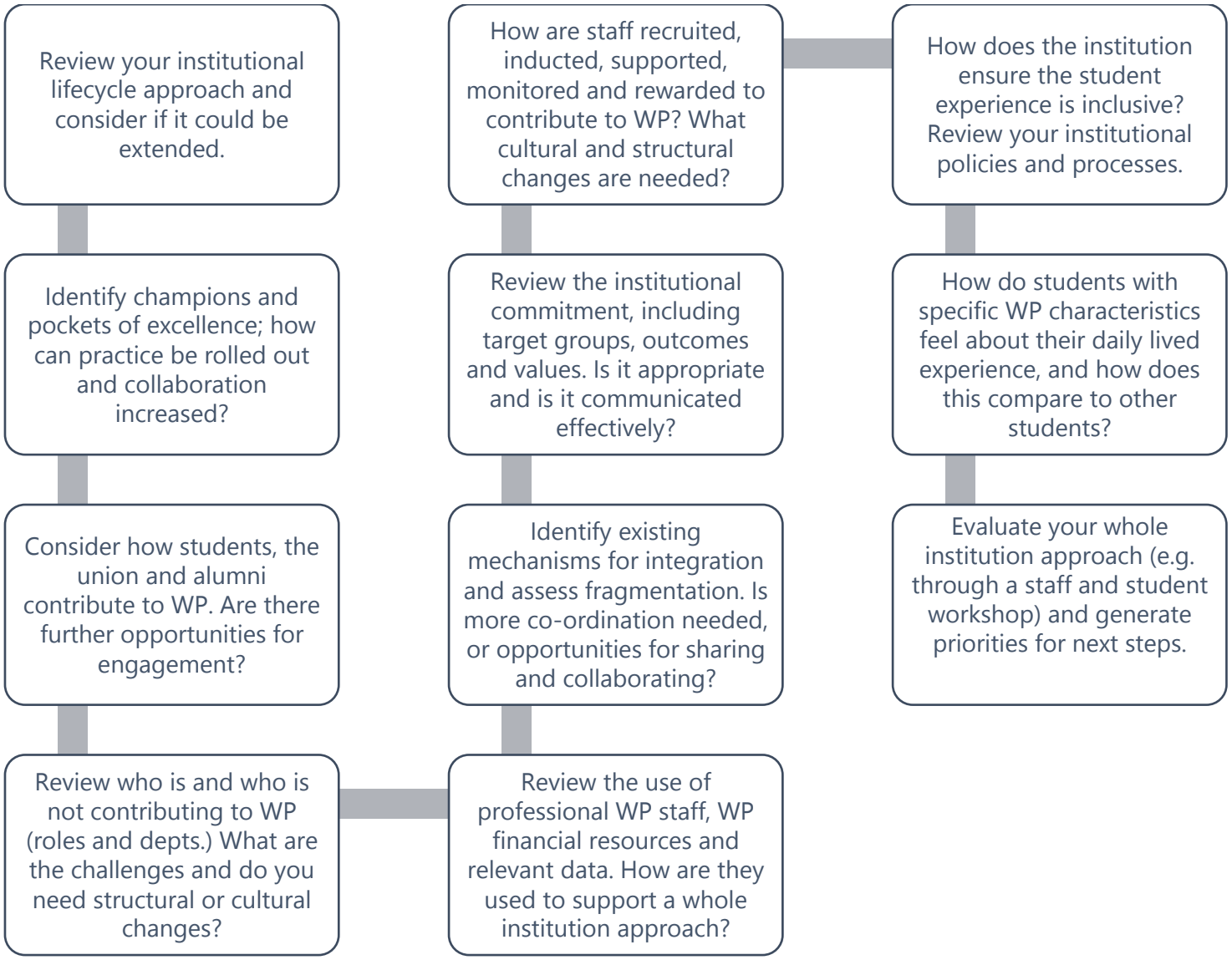
For those short of a time, a useful starting point may be to consider the following reflective questions. These can be used to generate debate about an HEPs approach to WP, and to identify areas for further focus.

i. Does widening participation take place across the student lifecycle: recruitment, admissions, teaching and learning, employability and progression?
ii. Is WP an institutional priority, with clear target groups identified, and reflected in all policies, processes and leadership at all levels?
iii. Is everyone involved in widening participation, sharing ownership of the agenda and being allocated resources?
iv. Are there opportunities for staff and students to learn from each other and experts, and to have their contribution to widening participation recognised?
v. Are data and evidence used to inform strategic planning, everyday practices and monitoring of students engagement and outcomes?

6.2 A more in-depth approach

Those wishing to engage in a more in-depth approach might find the questions and tasks presented in Figure 6 below useful, which build on the findings from this report.

Figure 6: Step-by-step guide to implementing a whole institution approach


Review your institutional lifecycle approach and consider if it could be extended.
Identify champions and pockets of excellence; how can practice be rolled out and collaboration increased?
Consider how students, the union and alumni contribute to WP. Are there further opportunities for engagement?
Review who is and who is not contributing to WP (roles and depts.) What are the challenges and do you need structural or cultural changes?
Review the use of professional WP staff, WP financial resources and relevant data. How are they used to support a whole institution approach?
Identify existing mechanisms for integration and assess fragmentation. Is more co-ordination needed, or opportunities for sharing and collaborating?
Review the institutional commitment, including target groups, outcomes and values. Is it appropriate and is it communicated effectively?
How are staff recruited, inducted, supported, monitored and rewarded to contribute to WP? What cultural and structural changes are needed?
How do students with specific WP characteristics feel about their daily lived experience, and how does this compare to other students?
How does the institution ensure the student experience is inclusive? Review your institutional policies and processes.
Evaluate your whole institution approach (e.g. through a staff and student workshop) and generate priorities for next steps.

7. Recommendations

7.1 Institutions

7.1.1 Meet minimum standards

All institutions should ensure they meet the core features of a whole institutional approach (section 4.1.1). This should draw on section 4.3.2 to evaluate the core features.

7.1.2 Opportunities for improvement

Institutions wishing to extend themselves beyond the minimum should look at the additional characteristics identified across the case study institutions (section 4.1.1) and consider which of these would have relevance and value in their own institutional context. This could draw on section 4.3.2.

7.1.3 Towards maturity

Institutions that have moved beyond the minimum standards and include many or all of the additional characteristics may wish to move towards greater 'maturity', moving from pockets of excellence towards a whole institutional approach. The initial activity (6.1) can be used to consider progress towards maturity, and 6.2 could be utilised a step-by-step process towards a whole institutional approach.

7.1.4 Evaluate progress towards a whole institutional approach

Once the institution has reviewed its current position and embarked on the implementation of changes towards a more mature whole institution approach evaluation of the process and the progress made needs to be embedded and undertaken, drawing on section 4.3.3. This needs to move beyond evaluating the core and additional features of a whole institutional approach to evaluate the essential strategies for implementing and managing a whole institution approach.

7.2 Students' Unions and Associations

7.2.1 Adopt and promote a whole institution approach

Students' unions and associations should be aware of and promote the benefits of a whole institution approach to WP, which is highly student-centred, and adopt it as a priority. This should draw on the research reports advocating a whole institution approach (see section 1) and institutional evidence.

7.2.2 Review structure and culture of the union

Draw on section 4.2, and in particular section 4.2.4, to consider the extent to which the union exhibits the essential strategies that contribute to an inclusive culture and structure, including an explicit commitment to WP, student and union staff engagement in WP, guidance for union activities, training on WP and inclusivity, opportunities and barriers to engagement by all students and the way data is recorded and used.

7.2.3 Review inclusivity of activities

The union's representation, services, events, societies should be reviewed to consider who participates and leads these activities, and the extent to which they are inclusive of students from WP target groups.

7.2.4 Look for opportunities for collaboration with the institution

Opportunities may include:

- Student involvement in or student-led activities at all stages of the student lifecycle.
- Collaboration across the student experience to deliver co-curricular and extra-curricular activities that *all* students can engage in.
- Engagement of students and alumni as mentors and ambassadors to current and potential students.
- Tracking the engagement of WP students in union activities and sharing of data with the institution.
- Using student representation and voice activities to contribute to the evaluation of progress towards a whole institution approach.

7.3 Office for Fair Access, HEFCE and the Office for Students

7.3.1 Clarify expectations regarding a whole institution approach

It is not feasible that all institutions can, at this point, achieve a whole institution approach, but all HEPs should demonstrate the core features of a whole institution approach to WP, and others may wish to aspire further – and be encouraged and supported to do so. It is therefore necessary to clarify expectations and/or timescales.

7.3.2 Provide support to institutions to move beyond the minimum standards

Institutions should be encouraged and supported to move beyond the minimum standards of a whole institution approach, looking at additional characteristics, and moving towards maturity. Support could include a facilitated programme to assist institutions to review their current situation, identify priorities, implement changes based on the essential strategies for implementing and managing a whole institution approach (section 4.2.4), and embed evaluation of the process (section 4.3.3). This process can be guided by the steps presented in section 6.2.

7.3.3 Action research to test out and refine the tools

This study has developed a more in-depth understanding of a whole institution approach, but it has only taken place in a small number of institutions. It would be useful to take the learning from this study and test out the findings and the tools to further develop knowledge of the issues and implementation in different institutional contexts, including those at alternative ends of the whole institution approach spectrum.

7.3.4 Evaluation of the impact of a whole institution approach

This study was not designed to evaluate the impact of a whole institution approach, and although there is research evidence indicating the value of a whole institution approach (discussed in section 1) a causal relationship has not been proven. It is therefore important to

undertake further research to establish a link between a whole institution approach and 'better than benchmark' performance against a range of WP indicators across the student lifecycle. This could be followed up to consider whether the link is causal, and which features, if any, appear to be more important than others.

Appendix 1: Literature search terms

i. What is involved in a 'whole institution' approach to WP and fair access?

   Search terms: widening participation / fair access / social inclusion / equality and diversity + mainstreaming / embedding / inclusive / whole institution / cross-cutting / thematic approach

ii. How is thematic work (such as WP) managed across a whole institution?

   Search terms: organisational change / management / co-ordination / collaboration + mainstreaming / embedding / inclusive / whole institution / cross-cutting / thematic approach

iii. What strategies and tools can be used to evidence impact when thematic work (such as WP) is implemented across an institution or organisation?
   Search terms: evaluation / evidence / impact / effectiveness / outcomes + mainstreaming / embedding / inclusive / whole institution / cross-cutting / thematic approach

Appendix 2: Case study visit workshop materials

Understanding a whole institution approach to widening participation

Research overview

Liz Thomas Associates Ltd (LTA) is very pleased to have been commissioned by OFFA to undertake research to develop better understanding of a whole institution approach to widening participation, which will address the following research questions:

1. What is involved in a 'whole institution' approach to widening participation and fair access?
2. How is thematic work, such as widening participation, managed across a whole institution?
3. What strategies and tools are or can be used to evidence impact when thematic work such as widening participation is implemented across an institution or organisation?

In recent guidance to institutions OFFA defined a whole institution approach as:

> *"An approach to widening participation and fair access that is embedded at all levels of an institution, not limited to a particular unit or department, engaging across all areas of its institutions' work and inclusive of senior management."*

As part of this study we are conducting six institutional case studies, which involve speaking to different stakeholders that contribute to widening participation, and reviewing institutional documentation.

The outputs from this study include a research report and guidance or toolkit for institutions to help them develop their whole institution approach to widening participation, and evaluate its effectiveness and impact.

Contact details

Professor Liz Thomas, Liz Thomas Associates Ltd (LTA), liz@lizthomasassociates.co.uk; 07761560382

Indicative agenda (with approximate timings)

1. Introductions and overview of the study; information and consent. (10 mins)

2. Who is involved in widening participation at this institution? (20 mins)

3. Stakeholder groups address the following questions and design a 'poster' template provided on page 4), and whole group discussion (50 mins):
    a. What is widening participation?
    b. How do you contribute to widening participation?
    c. What is working well?
    d. What are the challenges?
    e. Is there more that your group could contribute to widening participation?

4. Whole institution approach to widening participation (65 mins)
    a. Three reasons why you think you have a whole institution approach to WP
    b. How do you work together?
    c. What are the strengths of your approach?
    d. What future improvements could be made?
    e. Visual mapping if time allows

5. Evidencing impact of a whole institution approach to widening participation
    a. Agree strengths and features of a whole institution approach
    b. Discuss how these could be evidenced, including both the process and the outcomes, and indicators and methods.

6. Thanks and close

Information sheet and consent form for research participants

If you agree to participate in the study, please sign the consent form, and return it to the person who gave it to you. You should keep the overview and ethical guidelines.

If you participate in the study it will be through a participatory workshop or a semi-structured interview. You must be 18 years or older to participate. This information will be used to inform the research outputs listed above, but you will not be named. If you participate in this study we commit to the following:

1. Your participation in the project is entirely voluntary.
2. You can withdraw at any time until 7 days after you participate without giving reasons, and you will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will you be questioned on why you have withdrawn. Your withdrawal will not be reported to any member of staff within your academic faculty/institution or place of employment.
3. Interviews, discussions and workshops may be digitally recorded and transcribed to inform the research analysis.
4. You will not be named in any publications or dissemination associated with this study, or in any informal feedback to your higher education provider.
5. If you have any preliminary questions or need further clarification please contact liz@lizthomasassociates.co.uk.
6. If you would like to make a complaint about the research please contact Dr Alex Wardrop, Evidence and Effective Practice Manager, Office for Fair Access, Nicholson House, Lime Kiln Close, Stoke Gifford, Bristol BS34 8SR. alex.wardrop@offa.org.uk.

Name: Signature:

Date:

Who is involved in widening participation?

S T A K E H O L D E R G R O U P N A M E	
What we contribute	Additional ways we could contribute
Widening participation is…	
Things that are working well	Challenges or areas for improvement

A whole institution approach to widening participation

a. Three reasons why you think you have a whole institution approach to WP

i).

ii).

iii).

b. How do you work together?

c. What are the strengths of your approach?

d. What future improvements could be made?

Evidencing impact of a whole institution approach to widening participation

Features of a whole institution approach	Short-term changes/benefits	Longer term changes/outcomes/impact	Methods of data collection

Any other thoughts or comments?

Appendix 3

A 3.1 Aston University

Aston is a medium sized university with a socially and ethnically diverse student population. It was founded to support the economy and communities of Birmingham and has maintained this commitment to WP, which is prominent in the University's 2020 strategy, and is embedded into the new medical school for international and WP students.

Aston delivers WP across the student journey, starting with work in primary schools, and extending to employment and postgraduate study, and a large number of staff from across the university are involved. Outreach work is undertaken and co-ordinated by the central outreach team, involving student ambassadors, academic staff and departments and student services (e.g. careers advisers are involved to provide pre-entry employability advice, academics offer master classes). Student ambassadors deliver a range of services, and student mentors and tutors work more intensively to raise aspiration, awareness and attainment. Work with year 12 and 13 pupils focuses on employability skills and showcases the university's placement year, and pre-entry work develops academic and mathematical skills and confidence. The new medical school has developed an extensive 18 month programme for Year 12 students in the region, which includes mentoring, work experience, an A level boot camp and a summer school. Year Zero programmes are available in each school, which provide alternative entry pathways for students with lower entry qualifications or lacking confidence to progress directly to HE study; in engineering the programme provides engineering discipline 'tasters' to help students make more informed choices about engineering degrees. They also allow the University to make an offer to all applicants. In addition the limitations of predicted grades are recognised and standard offers are made to all students with predicted grades of CCC or above.

Student transition and engagement is supported throughout the student lifecycle by mentors, including peers and alumni. Academic transition is supported through a range of interventions including on-line Get Ahead materials designed to overcome 'transition anxiety' and targeted induction programmes are offered, e.g. for mature students to meet each other and prepare for learning in HE. Other groups such as care leavers are also provided with bespoke activities, support and bursaries. Once in HE students are supported in their studies by personal tutors, and learning development, including academic writing and maths support is integrated. The Centre for Learning and Professional Practice (CLIPP) provides development for academic staff, including postgraduate certificates and continuing professional development. Efforts are in place to improve the consistency of personal tutoring and attendance monitoring will be introduced by September 2017. The students' union supports WP, including a WP officer and mature students' society. The particularly distinctive feature of Aston's approach to WP is that it promotes and supports all students to have a one-year work placement, either in the UK or abroad, irrespective of subject studied or student background. This is compulsory in 50% of programmes, and the target is for 100% of students to have work placements by 2020. Placements increase the employability of all

students especially those from WP target groups. Students are supported from the first year onwards to plan ahead and prepare for a placement; this includes proactive follow up in year two and access to a placement mentor; and placement scholarships are available.

At Aston there is strong institutional commitment to widening access and positive outcomes, which is shared by students, staff and senior managers, who are passionate about the issues. This institution is highly student-centred and is committed to being successful in this area, by not overcommitting itself to many other agendas. It is argued that the university recruits people 'like ourselves', by which they mean those who are interested in WP and share the vision discussed at the workshop. This is reinforced through the recruitment process which asks 'why Aston', and as part of the process of recruiting a new VC the staff consultation drew attention to the need to recruit someone who shared the institutional value. In terms of academic staff WP is included in the job description, the postgraduate certificate for new staff addresses WP in learning, teaching and assessment, and academic promotion is on the basis of citizenship, teaching, external engagement and research. Institutional regulations are seen to be 'light touch' and are used to facilitate WP and student success, for example through the use of mitigating circumstances, and enabling students to achieve ordinary degrees. Staff enthusiasm is supported by an institutional structure which has clearly delineated teams with responsibility for WP, and wider institutional engagement (e.g. by academic departments and student services) is co-ordinated through these teams (recruitment and outreach, the HUB which provides student services and the Careers+Placement team).

The comparatively small size if the institution, which is located on a single campus, means that people know each other and are able to collaborate to develop 'bottom up' projects and initiatives to support and enhance WP. There is a culture in which people feel empowered to develop initiatives and to take risks without being penalised, indeed there is a perception of being encouraged to keep experimenting, developing and moving forward. There are a number of committees and groups that bring people together informally to discuss and contribute to WP, in particular in relation to the Access Agreement and the evaluation of interventions, although there may be a need for networks to develop a community of practice. Within the institution co-exist a co-ordinated strategic approach and smaller, collaborative innovative projects culture. Aston has started to make better use of data through the appointment of an 'Achievement Enhancement Adviser' who takes an evidence informed approach to identifying 'retention hotspots' across schools and services and implementing solutions. Aston is also developing its evaluation strategy to better understand the impact of its interventions. It is however recognised that the use of data and evidence could be enhanced. Its research capacity is being developed through the Higher Education Learning and Management Centre, who are currently researching a number of issues directly related to WP.

Distinctive features and learning from Aston

- Strong institutional commitment and focus on WP, and not over committing on other agendas.
- A clear institutional structure, with clearly defined teams with responsibility for WP, and who engage and co-ordinate wider staff engagement, and provide support across the student journey
- Value-based institution, and some processes to recruit, develop and promote staff who share these values, and have the skills and commitment to contribute to WP.
- Extensive use of student ambassadors thus involving the student population and alumni in WP
- Providing alternative entry routes into all schools
- Emphasis throughout the student journey, and ongoing support and preparation for accredited, year-long work placements.
- Some alignment of institutional policies and processes with WP and student success.
- Small size and single campus facilitates networking and collaboration, resulting in 'bottom-up' initiatives.
- Extensive use of student ambassadors thus involving the student population and alumni in WP
- Developing its use of data, evaluation and research to improve its knowledge and effectiveness.

Areas for future development could include a more explicit focus on curriculum and pedagogy and the engagement of academic staff, the use of institutional processes and procedures to embed WP, and greater use of real-time data and evidence to know WP students and to support the student experience.

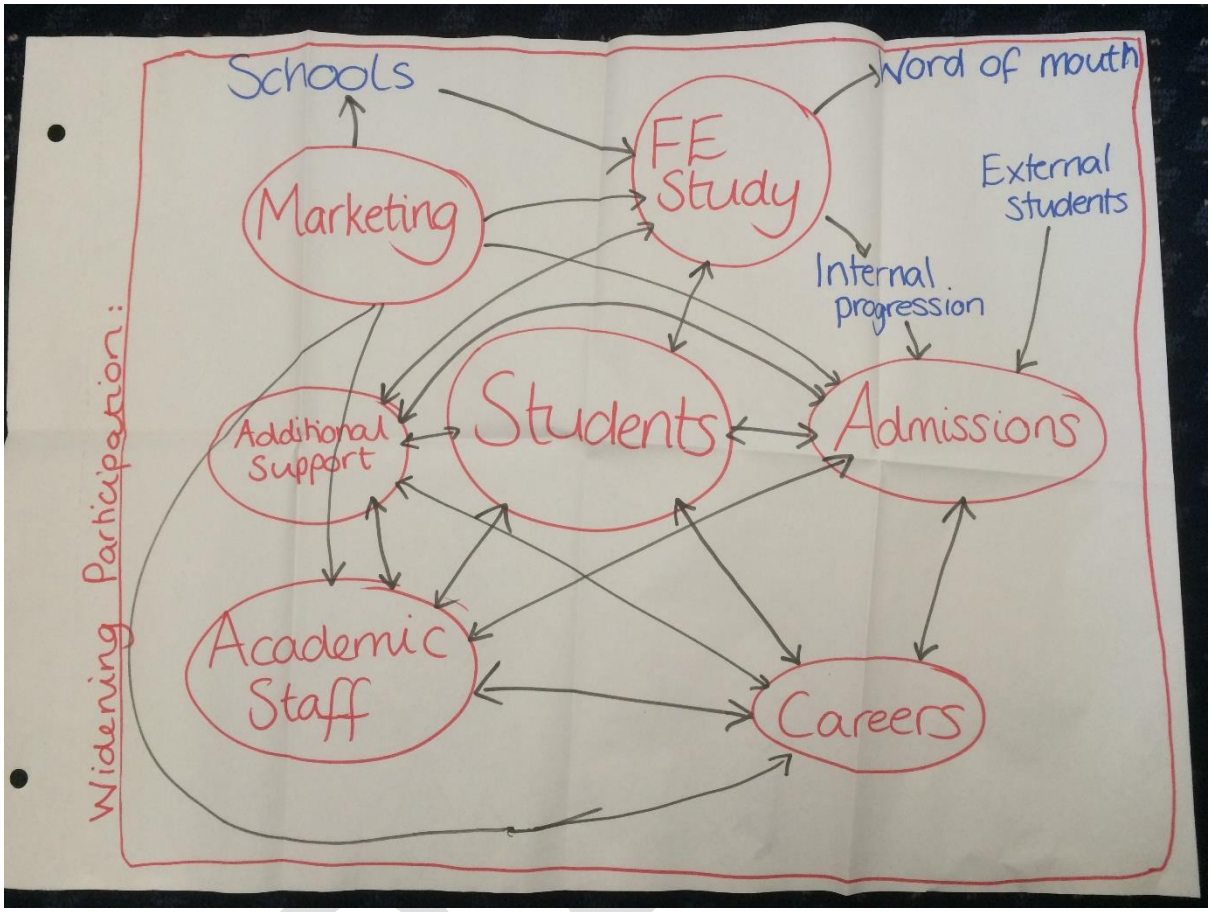
A3.3 Solihull College University Centre (SCUC)

SCUC has grown its HE student numbers significantly from around 400 in 2011 to 900 in 2016/17. Provision is located in two sites in Solihull and attracts a diverse student population[34]: 39% are from POLAR 1 and 2; 74% of students are non-tariff; 85% are local students; 53% are mature students; 29% are BME; 50% male and 10% have a disability. The majority of their students are classed as full-time, but the majority combine studying with employment and/or family responsibilities. This diversity of the student population is accompanied by positive outcomes for all students, and high levels of student satisfaction.

WP work takes place at each phase of the student journey, but as a small institution WP is genuinely undertaken by 'everyone' with no dedicated WP roles. Academic staff are particularly actively involved across the student lifecycle, and the Careers Advisers work across the student lifecycle, providing impartial information, advice and guidance. For example, one course leader wrote: 'We provide personalised support from interview to post graduation; signposting to relevant support and guidance and academic support'. Recruitment is predominantly local, and marketing ensure promotional materials provide details about flexibility and opportunities to combine studying with working, family life and other commitments, however most students have had some form of personal contact with the college or university centre. The admissions office oversee the admissions process, but all applicants are interviewed by course leaders, irrespective of whether or not they have the entry tariff required, and the emphasis is on matching students with appropriate courses and establishing a personal relationship between the student and the course leader – which often endures throughout their study experience. There is a great deal of flexibility and recognition of potential; for example accepting students with overseas qualifications and those without qualifications and other additional needs including disabilities and English as a second language. There are a range of courses to meet the needs of a diverse student population. Once on course students are inducted into each level of study, and there is significant awareness of the diversity of educational backgrounds that students come from. Course leaders play a crucial role, seeing each student every week, both in taught sessions and through one-to-one personal tutoring slots, and following-up non-attendance. Academic development and support is embedded into the curriculum; provided by student services and sessions are available in the library, and there are a range of other support services, which tailor support to the needs of students. Social and extra-curricular enriching experiences are provided by the student union. Careers Advisers work with students throughout their time at college, and additional targeted and tailored support is provided as required.

[34] Data supplied by SCUC from TEF metrics.

Figure 3: Collaboration at Solihull College University Centre



The college is relatively small and everyone knows each other, and what they do, and they all know their students. This enables staff to work effectively together, and WP is characterised by multi-directional interactions and collaboration to provide the best opportunities and outcomes for each applicant and students. Many staff described this a 'personal touch'. Working together allows staff to 'develop skills together' and provides 'reassurance that we believe in the same approach'. The small size means that there are not lots of formal structures and processes to facilitate communication and collaboration, but these are the hallmarks of the way the college works to widen participation and maximise student success. If the college grows further in size, or to if learning is to be extrapolated to other HE providers the challenge will be to recreate effective mechanisms to generate a shared, positive commitment amongst all staff to applicants and students, and to facilitate communication and collaboration. A couple of participants have noted that more formal meetings to aid communication would be useful.

Distinctive features and learning from SCUC are:

- Shared institutional vision, commitment and values associated with WP.
- Everyone is genuinely involved in WP across the student lifecycle; the emphasis is on recognising potential, matching students with appropriate courses and establishing a personal relationships across the institution and student experience.

- Wholly positive discourse about WP and diversity – valuing diversity and believing in students.
- Student-focused, genuinely caring and personalised approach at all stages of the student lifecycle; staff know all the students.
- Teaching is highly valued across the institution.
- Easy communication between staff and collaboration between functions: staff always know who to ask, and there are frequent feedback loops, facilitated by the small size of the institution.
- Employ staff who understand WP and are often from WP backgrounds, including staff who have studied at the college and now are employed there.

If the university centre expands further, or to if learning is to be extrapolated to other HE providers the challenge will be to recreate effective mechanisms to generate a shared, positive commitment amongst all staff to applicants and students, and to facilitate communication and collaboration. A couple of participants have noted that more formal meetings to aid communication about WP would be useful.

A3.2 Kingston University London

Kingston is a large, multi-site university, located in south west London. It has a diverse student population, including students from lower socio-economic groups and black and minority ethnic groups, and a large commuter student population.

WP at Kingston is organised around the student lifecycle, with the aim of providing a seamless experience for students. WP is championed at senior management level, and is embedded into the institutional mission, and strategic plans, policies and operations across the institution. There is a widening participation team which is part of the marketing and communications directorate, which focuses mostly on widening access, but they work closely with many other teams and directorates across the institution, including equality, diversity and inclusion and student services, which are more inward facing, and the academic faculties are actively engaged, which together contribute to the work to improve retention, attainment and progression. The work is strongly informed by data, monitoring, evaluation and research, much of which is undertaken by the Planning Office. The most overt formal mechanism for bringing people together is the Access Working Group, which formally engages colleagues from across the institution.

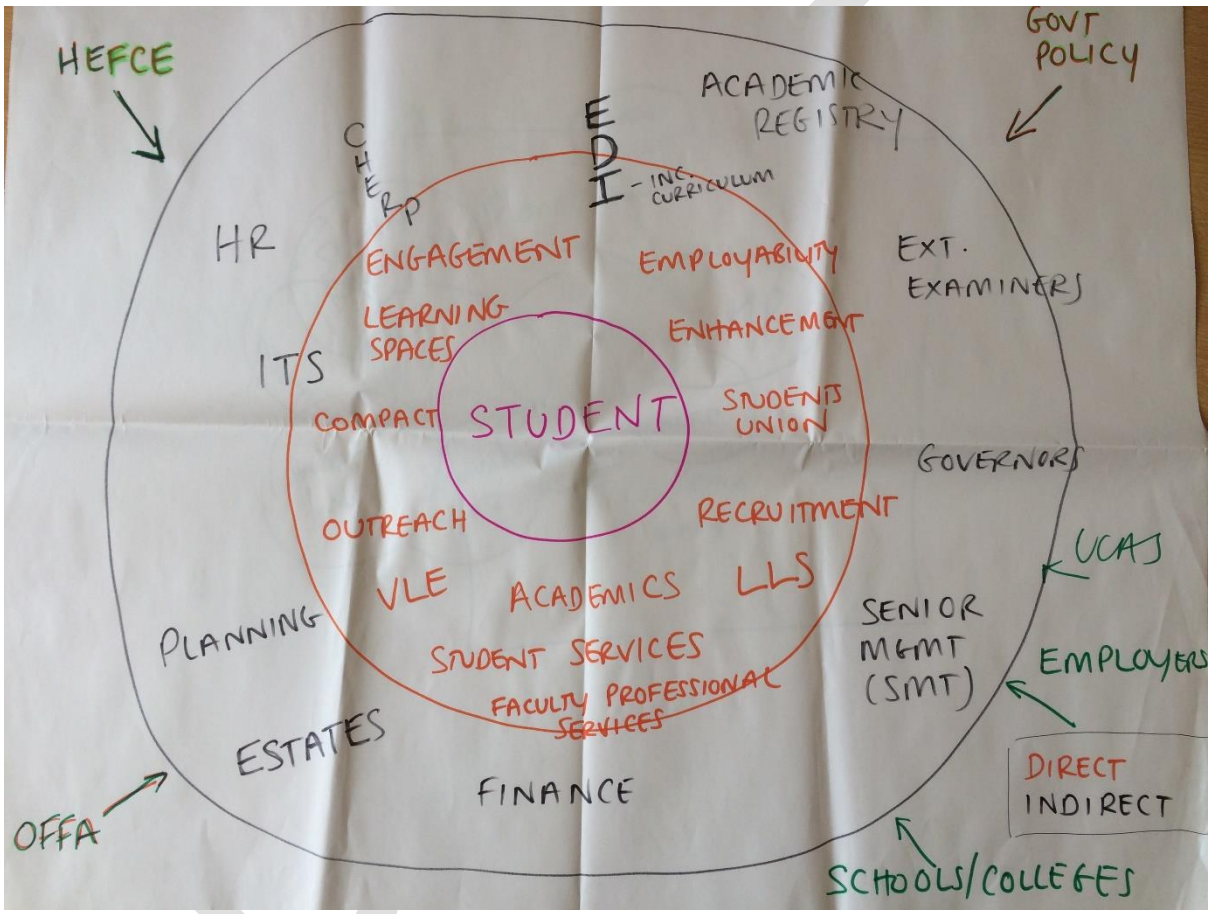
Kingston looks to widen access locally, across London and nationally. The work is sub-divided into a range of teams and functions. Outreach work aims to raise awareness about HE opportunities amongst young people and communities who would not necessarily consider HE, and this work begins in primary schools. Additional outreach activities focus on attainment raising to facilitate entry to HE. Much of the outreach work is undertaken in partnership with the faculties within the University. Once students have applied to Kingston they are engaged and supported through the Compact and Fast Track teams, with the former working nationally, while the latter provides engagement opportunities locally and across London to students from low participation schools. The support from Compact

continues once students are in HE, signposting them to additional support and activities throughout the lifecycle. Paid student ambassadors are involved in the process, which provides WP students with opportunities to earn and develop work experience which contributes to decision making and skills for future employment options.

Teaching is seen as crucial to WP, in terms of experience, retention, completion, attainment and progression. An inclusive curriculum is a key priority for the institution at the moment, driven by the institutional objective to reduce the BME attainment gap and the external driver changing entitlement to Disabled Students Allowance and requiring HE institutions to take responsibility for aspects of support through a more proactive and inclusive approach. Staff discussed how the priority accorded to teaching is promoted, supported, recognised and rewarded within the institution. Kingston has developed a range of work to promote student engagement beyond the class room, including paid roles (e.g. as ambassadors and connectors) and the promotion of volunteering and other opportunities contributing to the Kingston Award. They are keen to ensure that enrichment opportunities are available to all students, so for example financial support has been made available for international travel for eligible students. The Students Union plays a role in both providing opportunities for social engagement and enhancement activities, and facilitates student representation and voice. Services for Students provide a range of services and projects to engage and support students, particularly from target groups, including the student Connectors who work in the community with residential and commuter students; employability initiatives and financial support to enable students to engage.

WP at Kingston has a clear vision, strong leadership, explicit institutional commitment, facilitative structures and processes, opportunities and incentives for sharing and developing practice, accountability at different levels and strong 'bottom up' engagement and support. It therefore seems to combine elements of structure, process and culture (or hearts and minds). WP is characterised by collaboration through formal channels and informally (e.g. within and across teams and directorates). WP is explicit in the university's vision and strategy 'Led by learning', and this commitment is explicit in the senior management team. The Access Working Group was formed a couple of years ago as a vehicle for uncovering and reviewing WP work across the institution and developing a more strategic approach. There is now a sense that there are units that have specific functions to support widening access, retention and progression, but which work together to create a coherent student experience. The Access Working Group provides a forum for staff from different academic areas and directorates to come together to make decisions about widening access, including the allocation of funding across the institution. There are some cross-cutting initiatives such as the inclusive curriculum and BME attainment projects which reinforce aspects of WP. The inclusive curriculum work involves developing staff understanding and capacity in relation to inclusive learning and teaching through mandatory training, and building the requirements into institutional process such as validation and annual review. The BME attainment work uses data, staff development, accountability mechanisms and institutional data to contribute to a marked reduction in the BME attainment differential.

The planning office play a key role in relation to the data and evidence that informs WP at Kingston University, with a focus on managing funding, researching student behaviour and measuring impact qualitatively and quantitatively. This information is fed into strategic planning. Evidence is used to inform decision making, this includes strong financial accountability about how access funding is spent, institutional data about impact and evaluation of particular interventions and initiatives. This focus on evidence means that the planning department is a key player in WP, and indeed the Access Working Group is co-chaired by the head of planning and the associate director for widening participation. Additional research is undertaken by the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Centre (formally the Centre for Higher Education Research and Practice, CHERP).



Distinctive features and learning from Kingston

- WP is championed at senior management level, and is embedded into the institutional mission, and strategic plan, policies and operations across the institution.
- Combination of an inclusive culture with institutional structures and processes that reinforce the values of the institution.
- Valuing and supporting teaching as a crucial element of WP, including development, recognition and reward.
- A strong focus on the academic and non-academic experience of students in HE, including opportunities and financial support for enrichment.
- All staff are invited to contribute to and share in decisions about WP through forums such as the Access Working Group and the Network of Equality Champions.

- Use of data to inform the process at all stages and levels, including staff accountability.

An area for potential future development is further opportunities for sharing expertise with other teams (e.g. between outreach, engagement and enhancement teams and with academic staff).

A3.4 University of Sheffield

The University of Sheffield is a large, selective university with a founding commitment to serve the needs of the children of poor working families in the city which colours its contemporary commitment to WP. Although its student population is more traditional (i.e. full-time students, with higher entry qualifications, studying academic subjects, and predominantly under 21 when they commence studying), the university performs well in comparison to its WP benchmarks.

Sheffield works across the student lifecycle, but particular emphasis is placed on outreach and transition, with much of this work taking place or being co-ordinated by staff with specific WP remits. For example outreach staff are located within academic departments, and work collaboratively with the central team and local academics. Contextual data is used to assist the admission of students who have participated in particular WP schemes, and a centrally-located WP officer leads this process. Retention and success is supported by personal tutoring delivered by academic staff, and a range of student services – operating pre- and post-entry – including academic development, disability support and careers services. There are some additional targeted interventions in relation to employment and progression. Alumni development engage graduates in volunteering and financial support to contribute to WP. The students union is active in student-led WP work including academic societies that engage with schools, and data sharing allows them to track the participation of WP students in union activities and use of the advice services.

Sheffield is proud of its values - based around notions of civic responsibility – that promote WP. 'Student diversity', 'new routes to higher education' and 'communities of learning within an inclusive environment' are some of the 'major themes' in the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2016-2021. Institutional values and commitment are underpinned by evidence which informs WP work within the institution; while different data is dispersed throughout the institution this is drawn together by the Widening Participation Research and Evaluation Unit. Despite this, much of the WP work is currently led by enthusiasts, who spot opportunities and take the work forward, which results in project working and informal collaboration. (After the case study visit a WP special interest group – SIG - was launched, that brings together on a monthly basis through working lunches staff from across the institution who are interested in WP students' success and progression. This group reports to the learning and teaching committee. This appears to be an effective way of bringing together staff for cross-team collaboration). The senior management team are characterised as being supportive, and generally delegate responsibility for WP to appropriate staff and work units. Much of the cross-institutional communication is ad hoc: there is a range of fora

that bring some stakeholders together, and other some publications (e.g. a report which draws together information about outreach activities across the institution), but nothing for all staff with an interest in WP. There are however some institutional processes that help to manage WP, including annual reporting against additional fee income and Annual Reflections which require academic departments to reflect on their progress against university priorities, which can include WP and student support. The new WP SIG also contributes to better cross-institutional communication.

In summary, the distinctive features identified from the Sheffield case study are:

- Institutional values based on a historic notion of civic responsibility that contemporarily promotes WP through the current Learning and Teaching Strategy.
- WP-specific roles located in academic departments, active role for the Students' Union and engagement of Alumni.
- Widening Participation and Research and Evaluation Unit that draws together data from across the institution to inform WP priorities and interventions.
- There is a range of fora that bring some stakeholders together, and annual reports that summarise aspects of WP work
- Some institutional processes help to manage WP, including annual reporting against additional fee income and Annual Reflections which require academic departments to reflect on their progress against university priorities, including WP and student support.
- Plans to develop whole institution approach further, including a new WP special interest group.

A key potential area for development is to place greater emphasis on the experience of WP students in HE, which might include the sharing of student level data with academic departments, and developing curriculum and pedagogy for a diverse student population.

A3.5 University of Worcester

Worcester is a medium sized university with a diverse student population; with approximately 70% first generation entrants and a significant number of physically disabled students, and only 7% of students have a high entry tariff.

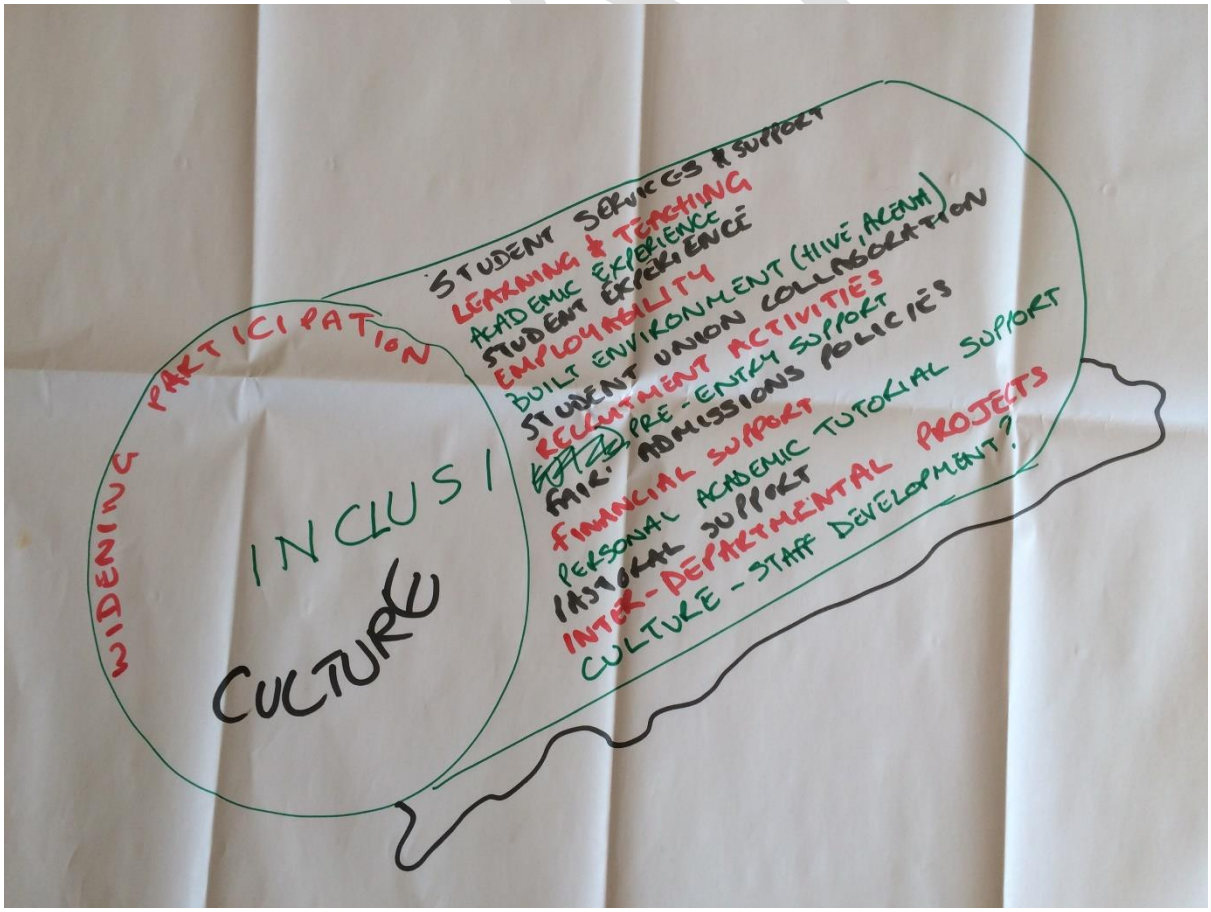
WP is embedded within the ethos and culture of Worcester, and all departments and individuals are involved. While WP is conceptualised across the student lifecycle (with work to raise aspirations, attainment and applications; improve student retention and attainment; and improve progression beyond undergraduate study) it is not organised along these lines. Rather these objectives cut across all the departments: WP throughout the student lifecycle is everyone's business, meaning everybody does something. The concept of a whole institution approach extends beyond the boundaries of the institution, and there are explicit ways in which the university is engaging with and is inclusive of the city, from shared buildings to consultation on the institution's strategic plan.

The Director of Inclusion is a member of the senior management team located within the VCs office; she takes a strategic rather than an operational role. The academic institutes (or departments) and their staff are involved in WP across the student lifecycle, including undertaking outreach work with schools and communities, contributing to open days and applicant days, establishing contact with students prior to entry and establishing a relationship with them, through inclusive learning, teaching and assessment, and personal tutoring. They also work closely with students to support progression into employment, with each institute having an employer forum, and events and development opportunities. In addition to institute-led outreach work, there is a central outreach team, who work with schools, colleges and communities. There is no clear division between the work of this team and that of the institutes. Students and recent graduates are employed in a range of roles to work with potential students and existing students to support access and success, and provide an authentic experience. For example, student ambassadors are trained to provide impartial IAG to school students.

The university has a range of academic and welfare services; some elements are integrated into pre-entry activities and the HE curriculum, including academic development and careers advice. Library staff are linked to specific institutes and focus 'less on collections and more on students', including developing students' information literacy; in additional library staff have mental health training. The disability service provides operational support for disabled students, but also plays a more strategic role, contributing to work around universal design and inclusive learning. The students' union is fully committed to the inclusion agenda, and attends open days and applicant days, and takes steps to engage a diverse student body, for example through education societies. The Students' Union officers reflect the diversity of the institution. Estates contribute to WP through the development of learning spaces, student accommodation and other developments taking into account student diversity as a matter of course, and campus safety. Learning spaces have been developed to facilitate inclusive learning. All new student accommodation has turning space for wheel chairs on all floors to allow students not just to live in the accommodation but visit friends etc. Students have been actively involved in the development of buildings, including the new student accommodation, which has been deigned to avoid windows being overlooked and to facilitate the delivery of shopping, take away etc. The Hive is the library based in the city which has been developed to meet the needs of the university and the community, and includes the council offices.

At Worcester there is a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion, underpinned by widely and strongly held values by staff and a culture which puts diversity and the student experience at the centre of things – and gives permission to staff to work collaboratively. This results in an organic approach to managing and delivering WP. Much of the work to widen participation and support student success is 'bottom up', initiated and led by staff who identify an issue, seek out support and implement change; there are few example of top-down initiatives. Project working is encouraged, and people look for allies to collaborate with and take the work forward. Given the size of the institution people know who to engage with. Once things have been proven they influence upwards. Effective practice is shared, for example through share and inspire seminars, and successful work is then more widely

endorsed and emulated. This results in a culture of creativity, innovation and empowerment, which allows for fleet and flexible responses. However this approach is fragmented rather than integrated, and this can be frustrating, sometimes taking longer to achieve results or resulting in duplication or even conflicting interventions. On the positive side there are numerous examples of staff initiatives that have had a positive impact on students, for example a scheme connecting students in need of cost-effective accommodation with local people looking for company, a contribution to household bills, and even help with technology etc. Or when the personalised timetable was introduced issues arose which were dealt with quickly through discussion between the students' union and registry. More negatively there have been initiatives to improve retention led by the institution and one institute that were in conflict. The whole institution approach involves passionate individuals driving forward the agenda. It is argued that these staff are attracted to the institution by its ethos and values, and find satisfaction from the opportunities for creativity and ownership. It is not driven by structures, process or senior dictats, but by passion and projects, which are supported by underlying institutional processes which are not explicitly about WP (as this is embedded into the institution). There are informal networks or a 'community of practice around inclusive learning' which enable people to be 'recruited to ideas' which is a creative and empowering process. It is less clear however how these values are communicated and checked, as there appears to be relatively little formal accountability. It is acknowledged that the institution makes less use of institutional data than other comparable institutions.



Institutional commitment to WP and inclusion is explicit in the views and actions of the senior managers, including the vice chancellor. This includes ensuring all buildings are accessible to the people of the city, and involving them in the process of institutional planning. There is no doubt in the minds of staff that diversity is an institutional commitment and priority. The strategic plan focuses on inclusivity and identifies core activities, which is supported and driven by collaboration between groups, and feeds back to L&T committee. Institutional strategy and process is in the background, informal collaboration and project working are in the foreground. For example, the institute of science developed a successful Foundation Year, and subsequently they arranged a cross-institutional meeting about Foundation Years for those interested, which resulted in sharing across other academic institutes.

Distinctive features and learning from Worcester

- Explicit institutional commitment, values and culture endorsing diversity and the student experience permeates all parts of the university.
- A strategic rather than operational role for the Director of Inclusion and other services such as disability service.
- Academic departments, professional service teams and the Students' Union contribute to WP across the student lifecycle.
- Students and recent graduates are employed in a range of roles to widen participation.
- The development of the University's estate is explicitly informed by diversity and inclusion and student involvement.
- Arguably, passionate staff are attracted to the institution and empowered to drive forward the WP agenda; organic, collaborative, 'bottom-up' projects operate between teams and individuals across the institution.
- The comparatively small size facilitates communication, and there are formal opportunities for sharing.
- The concept of inclusivity permeates the city as well as the institution.

An area for potential development is to consider how institutional structures and processes support and reinforce the strong institutional commitment and staff-initiated projects to help improve communication and reduce overlap, duplication and frustration.