Ethnicity, Education and Employment

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Foreword

This report is based on and informed by in-depth case studies from five different universities. It is about student experiences of the HE sector and particularly about non-traditional students, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds. It identifies a range of central issues and challenges that confront HE as a sector in transforming to accommodate students from many different backgrounds.

In a shifting policy context in which widening participation to and in HE is a government priority this report examines, explores and focuses on a number of key research questions. These questions address HE as a site for both the transformation and reproduction of socio-economic inequalities. Through an examination of the policy and practices of the five case study institutions this report reveals important insights into the impact that the different approaches adopted by HEIs are having on the character and quality of the student experience.

At a time when HE is in transformation from its elite past to a high participation and inclusive future the report highlights the centrality of improving our understanding of the interconnections between ethnicity, education and employment. The report has important messages not only for policy makers and institutional managers but critically for academics and support staff in universities who can contribute the most value to student success.

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## Glossary

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<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APEL</td>
<td>Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning</td>
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<td>CRE</td>
<td>Commission for Racial Equality</td>
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<td>DFES</td>
<td>Department for Education and Skills</td>
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<td>DipHE</td>
<td>Diploma in Higher Education</td>
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<td>ESECT</td>
<td>Enhancing Student Employability Coordination Team</td>
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<td>HE</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
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<td>HEA</td>
<td>Higher Education Academy</td>
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<td>HEFCE</td>
<td>Higher Education Funding Council, England</td>
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<td>HEI</td>
<td>Higher Education Institution (a University or HE college)</td>
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<td>HESA</td>
<td>Higher Education Statistics Agency</td>
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<td>HNC</td>
<td>Higher National Certificate</td>
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<td>HND</td>
<td>Higher National Diploma</td>
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<td>ITT</td>
<td>Initial Teacher Training</td>
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<td>ME</td>
<td>Minority Ethnic</td>
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<td>OFFA</td>
<td>Office for Fair Access</td>
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<td>PDP</td>
<td>Personal Development Planning</td>
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<td>RRAA</td>
<td>Race Relations Amendment Act (2000)</td>
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<td>TTA</td>
<td>Teacher Training Agency (now TDA – Training and Development Agency for schools)</td>
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<tr>
<td>UEL</td>
<td>University of East London (lead institution in this study)</td>
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<tr>
<td>VLE</td>
<td>Virtual Learning Environment, a computer programme for distance learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>WebCT</td>
<td>a virtual learning environment programme for computerised and distance learning</td>
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<td>WP</td>
<td>Widening Participation</td>
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Executive Summary

Aims and Objectives

This report is about student experiences of higher education (HE) within the context of the widening participation agenda and the changing expectations of the role of HE in society. The increasing representation of non-traditional students in HE, and particularly Minority Ethnic (ME) students, creates new contexts for higher education institutions (HEIs) to work in and means that English HEIs are facing a moment of critical transformation. Within the context of social and economic changes in our society and challenges to the discourse of multiculturalism, this research project has explored students’ experiences of Higher Education from their point of entry, through their time on a course and to their search for employment following graduation.

Based on the latest research findings that emphasise the different HE participation rates, patterns and outcomes between different ME student groups, the project has attempted to assess the stakeholders’ perceptions of the effectiveness of HEI strategies and policies designed to support ME students’ participation in HE during all phases of their educational careers.

The four main project objectives were:

- to obtain a better understanding of the ways in which minority ethnic students and other stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of institutional strategies and initiatives designed to promote student success;
- to comment on the relationship between perceived learner needs and institutional provision for minority ethnic students in HE;
- to develop a clearer appreciation of the relationship between widening participation initiatives, strategies and measures designed to support minority ethnic student groups;
- to develop recommendations for building on existing work and developing new approaches to minority ethnic student support.

Project Background

The project was conducted between January 2004 and August 2006, funded by the European Social Fund. It has been undertaken by the University of East London as the lead agency, in partnership with the University of Bradford, Brunel University, Edge Hill University, and Leeds Metropolitan University. A case study approach was adopted due to the differences between partner universities in the profiles of student bodies and courses offered.

Each case study took a different methodological approach, but all the following research tools were used at some point in the project: a literature review; an analysis of national statistics; institutional data analysis; policy and strategy evaluation; questionnaires with students; interviews with students, graduates, university staff and employers; student focus groups; and participant observation. The principal methods used were qualitative research
methods, mainly semi-structured interviews, in order to allow the voices of the students to be heard.

Over the project lifetime, most institutions involved in the project saw some form of institutional restructuring and/or the development of new institutional strategies. It is therefore important to remember the transitional nature of institutional contexts.

**Key Messages**

Ethnicity is not a category that refers only to minority ethnic groups; White groups also have an ethnicity: each group has individual social and cultural characteristics but they can share a history and a present with other groups. Therefore, in exploring the needs of ME students it is vital to consider how the categories of ethnicity and difference are constructed and influence students’ experiences of HE. No convincing argument has been made about how and in what ways ethnicity impacts on students’ experiences; therefore, this research disaggregates the analysis to identify how other axes of difference such as educational and social backgrounds, gender, age, degree choices, career aspirations, and job seeking behaviour interact with ethnicity to influence student experiences.

In order to understand the complexities of student experiences, it is important to focus on students and hear their own perceptions of, and experiences in HE; this has been the focus of this project.

Interrogating institutional policies and practices on WP, Graduate Employability and Equality & Diversity through policy analysis and interviews with both Senior Managers and non-Senior Managers highlighted the necessity of good institutional communication and the need for clear, integrated strategies. The importance of rigorous monitoring and assessment of the effectiveness of these initiatives has been illuminated. This was often found to be insufficient. The current methods used by funding bodies for measuring student success are inflexible and can devalue the diversity of student outcomes today.

Many non-traditional students have multiple responsibilities including work and family commitments in addition to their studies, therefore HEIs are facing new challenges to meet these students’ needs. Most students now enter HE with the aim of improving their career opportunities and the employability agenda in universities is a reflection of this increasing vocational ambition. However, students’ voices also showed that HE can give them broader horizons and wider experiences, and some students stress that this should not be forgotten in the search for employability. Many non-traditional students have different learning support needs; these students’ accounts of their experiences illuminate the need for HEIs to develop strategies to support students on a more individual basis according to their specific learning needs.

Many students do not see their ethnicity as a central factor in their experience of HE, or they see it as one of many interacting social and economic factors shaping their experiences. However ethnic differences cannot be ignored,
interaction between different ethnic groups has been observed to be limited on campus, with some level of segregation occurring. This is something that universities should be aware of, and actively encourage their whole community of staff and students to address given the current debates in our society that challenge the discourse of multiculturalism.

**Key findings**

- Career development is the most common reason for students coming to HE, but a significant number of students also see HE as an opportunity for broader personal development.

- The diversity of the culture of HEIs is seen as a positive characteristic, but the extent to which students from different backgrounds mix with each other varies.

- Providing positive role models can encourage ME students to be more successful in HE.

- At an institutional level the awareness of WP is considered high, but measuring the success of WP initiatives is difficult, and has brought new challenges for HEIs.

- Consistency in widening participation and graduate employability services, including better communication between services, academic schools and departments helps to embed policy initiatives across institutions and into each academic programme.

- The provision of more individualised and flexible academic support, as well as pastoral support, in order to meet diverse student learning needs is necessary for students to achieve their full potential.

- Employability has become a contested issue between managers and teaching staff, partly due to the ambiguity of the term. Students also have different understandings of their own employability and of the HEIs’ role in enhancing their employability.

- Increasing opportunities for work placements and removing the barriers that certain groups face in accessing placements can enhance graduate employability.

**Conclusions**

This research shows that all ME groups are actively participating in HE, not just those who traditionally have had higher participation rates. It is clear that there are different educational outcomes for different ethnic groups, both White and Minority Ethnic. These findings are supported by previous research. However, the project also observed varied outcomes for the same ME group in different institutions. This reinforces the claim that ethnicity is not a central factor in educational achievement. Indeed, many ME students expressed the opinion that ethnicity is not a fundamental factor in their HE
experience at all, but that other factors such as gender, age, religion, and family circumstances interact with their ethnicity. Nevertheless, this research has shown that ethnicity does impact on a student’s life in HE in various ways, such as in their access to a work placement or in everyday interactions at university, where they are still considered by some to be ‘different’.

New WP policies and strategies have been offering non-traditional students a valuable opportunity to access HE, which could be a turning point in their lives. Through their experiences of HE, many students improve their career prospects, as well as gaining greater self-confidence and broadening their horizons. In this way HE offers a transformative opportunity to students that can challenge socio-economic hierarchies in society. However, these students are more likely to attend a local university, often with a large population of non-traditional ME students; and they are less likely to attend distant and more traditional or prestigious universities. Unless this trend is reversed, participation in HE by non-traditional or ME students will simply result in the reproduction of existing social, economic, and spatial divides.

Many students, who are the first member of their family to attend HE, feel that the experience has empowered them. However, some of these students feel that they do not fit into HE culture and thus feel isolated during their course. HEIs need to consider new ways to accommodate these students’ needs and to welcome them into a diversifying HE culture. Otherwise, the experience of HE will only lead to these students internalising their self-perceived social inferiorities and accepting social inequalities, thus structurally reproducing societal differences. With the drive to meet government employability targets many universities are creating more vocationally orientated programmes; however, if HEIs have a specific educational role which is different from other learning providers, it is providing a space for wider social interactions and an opportunity to learn about and challenge existing social structures and inequalities. Within the context of the current challenges to the discourse of multiculturalism, providing a space for learning about and challenging societal and cultural norms is an important role for universities to take on to contribute to changing our wider society.
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aims and Objectives of the Project

The Ethnicity, Education and Employment project has been developed in response to recent changes in English Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) related to Widening Participation initiatives. It is also built on the latest research findings, which highlight the differences in HE success and employment outcomes between different Minority Ethnic (ME) groups. The project assesses stakeholders’ perceptions of the effectiveness of HEI strategies and policies designed to support (ME) students’ participation. It particularly focuses on exploring the experiences of (ME) students in HE through their own narratives in the five HEIs participating in the research.

By exploring stakeholders’ assessments and perceptions of HEIs, the aim of the project is to improve HEI provision for minority ethnic students during the admissions, on-course and employment phases of their educational careers. This aim leads to four core project objectives:

- To obtain a better understanding of the ways in which minority ethnic students and other stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of institutional strategies and initiatives designed to promote student success.
- To comment on the relationship between perceived learner needs and institutional provision for minority ethnic students in HE.
- To develop a clearer appreciation of the relationship between widening participation initiatives, strategies and measures designed to support minority ethnic student groups.
- To develop recommendations for building on existing work and developing new approaches to minority ethnic student support.

1.2 Central Themes of the Project

The original research plan did not contain any research questions, therefore these were developed in the early stage of the project in order to give a framework for the research. The central questions developed were:

1. To what extent does the University replicate or challenge the socio-cultural and economic norms and power hierarchies of wider society?
2. How do Universities shape, constrain and/or enable students’ abilities to function within and negotiate the wider socio-cultural and economic context?
3. How are student identities constructed within the HE context?
4. How does the University interact with employers to enhance employment and employability and how does the University influence employers to change their working practices?

5. What is the University’s role in the education culture of the local community?

6. How are students’ perceptions of space and geography mapped and identified and how does this shape their choices, aspirations and expectations of HE and employment?

In order to explore the above questions, stakeholders were identified. These stakeholders were students, senior managers, academics, and support staff in HEIs; and employers outside of the HE sector. Not only ME students, but also non-ME students are stakeholders in HEI strategies and measures promoting student success, therefore the whole student community were considered part of the research process. Exploring students’ voices is central to the research questions, therefore the following core student interview themes were developed based on above central questions.

1. Students’ self-perception of their ethnicities and identities – i.e. how ethnic categories applied in monitoring are significant or relevant to them.

2. Motivation for entering Higher Education – i.e. what are their expectations and aspirations.

3. Reasons for choosing the HEI.

4. Preparedness for entering HE.

5. Preparedness for employment through their curricula – i.e. how their courses equipped them to obtain a (graduate level) job.

6. Preparedness for employment through extra curricula activities – i.e. what other activities, if any, they think help them prepare for employment.

7. Overall experience of HE – i.e. what they understand by ‘employability’ and whether it is an important aspect of their HE experience.

1.3 Research Framework and Structure

The project was carried out by the University of East London as the lead agency, in partnership with the University of Bradford, Brunel University, Edge Hill University, and Leeds Metropolitan University. UEL has been accountable for monitoring the progress of the project. Partners communicated through WebCT (a virtual learning environment) and e-mail, as

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1 For more information on each university profile see section 4.1
well as more conventional communication methods such as one to one telephone conversations. In addition, all project teams met twice a year for a full day project meeting. Having identified the central questions, the core interview questions were jointly identified by partners at these meetings. As the topics covered by the project are wide ranging, and in order to maximise the limited resources, partners were given some degree of freedom to choose their own research priorities. Their case studies were still required to follow the themes and guidelines but they also had a remit to explore issues specific to their own institutions. This enabled the project to gain a picture of the experiences of (ME) students in a range of HEIs. A rigorous contextualisation of every stage of each case study was required in order to carry out an informative analysis that could lead to the development of policy recommendations.

It was decided that the research team should not select one or two common subjects of study, on which all partner HEIs to conduct fieldwork. This is partly because the partners’ institutional profiles were so different from each other that the project team found it difficult to identify one or two programmes that were offered in every partner institution. Therefore, partners chose their own student target groups, but presented rationales for their decisions, which took account of each institutional context and the common research framework. Similarly, partners carried out fieldwork using their own methodologies, although the focus has been on qualitative methods, and above all, interviews. The project has been supported by an Advisory Board made up of senior academics and practitioners with considerable research and practical experience of WP to HE.

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2 See Appendix A for further details of Advisory Board functions and membership.
2 CONTEXTUALISING THE RESEARCH

2.1 Social Change in Britain
The drive to widen participation in higher education institutions, particularly for people from minority ethnic backgrounds is linked to broader socio-economic changes in Britain and British society. In this section the multiculturalism discourse will be examined, highlighting how this term masks social inequalities amongst different ethnic groups. Secondly, the processes and the impacts of immigration and settlement will be explored to illuminate some possible reasons for the under-achievement of certain ME groups, whilst at the same time deconstructing the essentialist idea of ethnicity. This will also disentangle some of the factors relating to minority ethnic economic under-performance, in order to draw a more comprehensive picture of ME higher education experiences.

2.1.1 Multiculturalism and Racial Equality
Multicultural societies are not a creation of the 20th century, however it is the post Second World War migration from the former colonial territories that has raised ‘the multicultural question’ by challenging the perceived homogeneity of Britishness (Hall, 2000, 217-218). British society today has multicultural characteristics, with communities of diverse cultural heritages living together and trying to build something in common (Hall, 2000). Minority Ethnic communities are still only a small part of the British population: in the 1991 census, only 5.5% of the entire British population identified themselves as non-White (CRE, 1999). Given this context, for the past decade the term multiculturalism has been frequently used to describe the state of British society; however, its meaning is far from settled and is still very much contested (Hall, 2000; Hesse, 2000). The concept is challenged by those who argue for the cultural integrity and the purity of Britain (Hall, 2000, 210-211). It is also contested as a threat to the universalism of the liberal state (Hall, 2000; Hesse, 2000). According to Hall, multiculturalism ‘references the strategies and policies adopted to govern or manage the problems of diversity and multiplicity which multicultural societies throws up’ (Hall, 2000, 209).

What needs to be stressed is that due to its ‘ism’, the term multiculturalism seems to refer to a single political doctrine or strategy and to a fixed and completed social state (Hall, 2000). However, it only describes the processes through which a wide variety of social ideas and practices are articulated without any decisive meaning (Hall, 2000). It is precisely this contested status and the different meanings it contains that demonstrate a widely shared awareness of the impact and importance of cultural diversity. This is why the existence of the discourse of multiculturalism itself is more important than its definition, as it provides a space for engagement with the associated ideas.

However, a positive approach to diversity and difference is not something which can be achieved instantly. The Stephen Lawrence Murder Inquiry Report (MacPherson, 1999), recognised that social exclusion, racialised disadvantage and informal and institutionalised racism were being
experienced by migrants and their offspring (Hall, 2000). The report highlighted the issue of institutional racism which, it claimed, was deeply rooted in parts of the police service and other organisations (Back, 2004; Turney et al, 2002). It should be noted that this was not the first attempt by the Government to acknowledge the social disadvantage suffered by ME groups. A report by Lord Scarman published after the Brixton Riots in 1981 described the racial disadvantage experienced by ME groups as one of the factors that caused the riots. Institutional Racism is defined in the MacPherson Report as:

The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people (MacPherson, 1999, 6.34).

The Report led to the amendment of the Race Relation Act 1976 in 2000, by which public authorities were given 'a statutory duty' to promote racial equality (CRE, 2002b and 2006). Under Section 71(1) all public authorities are required to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination; and to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups. Additionally, Further and Higher Education institutions are required to prepare and maintain a race equality policy; to assess the impact of institutional policies; to monitor the admission and progress of students, as well as the recruitment and career progress of staff by racial group; to publish the race equality policy and the results of assessment and monitoring exercises (CRE, 2002c). The necessity for legislation on racial equality shows that racial equality is not inherent to a multicultural society; this is the issue that the multiculturalism discourse has to begin to engage with. This is why, as will be discussed later, that although HEIs express their commitment to diversity, there are some gaps between policies and practices in these institutions regarding equal opportunity practices.

2.1.2 Social and Geographical Mobility of ME groups

The discourse of multiculturalism is also related to population movement and mobility which creates and is created by multicultural societies. Mobility here refers to both geographical movements such as international migration, as well as social (inter-class) mobility. The experiences of the post-war migrants from the West Indies and the Indian subcontinent are not uniform or homogenous, however, they share experiences which are marked by 'unequal colonial power relations' (Robinson and Valeny, 2005). Although migrants from invisible minorities, such as the Irish, have also encountered xenophobia, it is these historical colonial power relations that make the experience of post-war migrants exceptional (Robinson and Valeny, 2005). As Castles and Miller (2003) argue, those migrants from former colonial territories were British citizens and often had some form of preferential entitlement to work and live in Britain. However, they also faced the continuation of the colonial racial
hierarchy in Britain and their otherness was felt to be more threatening than White immigrants from Europe (Cesarani and Fulbrook, 1996).

The patterns of post-war migration have been influenced by the needs of the British economy (Castles and Miller, 2003), which led to a variety of opportunities for different groups of immigrants. Although over-generalisation should be avoided, from immediately after the War until the 1950s, workers from the Caribbean were directly recruited to the transport and hospitality industries as well as the National Health Service (Champion, 1993; Jackson, 1998; Robinson and Valeny, 2005). Following this there was a flow of independent migrants from the Caribbean, many of whom had relatives or contacts in the first group of Caribbean migrants. These migrants often found jobs in industry, such as engineering in the West Midlands and car manufacturing in London, Coventry or Birmingham. Although some migrants from the Indian sub-continent worked in similar sectors and settled in similar geographical areas to the Caribbean migrants, their spatial and occupational distribution was far greater than that of their Caribbean counterparts. They found employment in the transport industry in Manchester and Preston; but predominantly in the textile, woollen and clothing industries of Lancashire, Yorkshire, and East Midlands (Robinson and Valeny, 2005).

Migrants from the Indian Sub-continent were not a homogenous group and although the majority of South Asian migrants came from Punjab, Gujarat, and Sylhet District and from peasant farming backgrounds, they were diverse in terms of their religion (Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Zoroaster, Christian), social class (peasant farmer, craftsmen and business people), caste, place of settlement, and the jobs they took after arriving in Britain (Ballard, 1994; Robinson and Valeny, 2005). Many of these migrants took up low-skilled employment on arrival in Britain, which led to downwards social mobility for some compared to their positions in their countries of origin (Heath and McMahon, 2005). One reason for this is that when people migrate to richer countries, they tend to enter the labour market at a lower level, because they do not have knowledge of local working environments, or have fluency in the local language (Castles and Miller, 2003). However the extent to which this claim is valid clearly depends on the social positions that their families occupied prior to migration. In the second generation, it is clear that many migrant communities show greater upward social mobility than the British born White population (Heath and McMahon, 2005). This may be partly because the starting points of ME groups are lower than that of their British born White counterparts (Heath and McMahon, 2005), but is also due to the educational success of some ME groups (the second or third generation of immigrants). However, two issues need to be noted regarding the impact of education on social mobility of ME groups; firstly, the educational achievement greatly differs among (and within) different ME groups (Cuneo et al, 2001; Modood and Berthoud, 1997); and secondly, even those ‘successful’ groups are less likely to be rewarded by their educational achievement (Cabinet Office, 2003). This means, in general, ME groups are more likely to be disadvantaged in the labour market than their White counterparts; therefore for many ME groups achieving upwards mobility is no simple matter. It must, however, be borne in
mind that there are huge variations in performance between different ME groups.

Both academic and policy making communities have had an increasing interest in these differential outcomes from education and economic achievement, but there are no straightforward explanations for the causes of differential outcomes of different ME groups. Often religion (especially Islam) is given as a cause of disadvantage, but Ballard stresses that religious difference often comes with other interconnected factors, such as the economic situation of the immigrants’ place of origin, and thus cannot be considered necessarily causal (Ballard, 1994; Cabinet Office, 2003). The social class of ME groups is often suggested as a factor that impacts on their achievement, although many ME groups are categorised as working class due their jobs; their aspirations and expectations in life are often considerably different from their White working class counterparts (Ballard, 1994). Being a migrant does not mean that they came from impoverished families, as in general, most migrants would have needed capital to fund their migration (Ballard, 1994). Most differences between ethnic communities have developed during the process of migration and settlement (Ballard, 1994), and have been influenced by the kinds of jobs that migrants obtain after arrival in Britain, the places where they have lived as well as the degree of segregation in the locality (Champion, 1993; Pilkington, 2002; Castles and Miller, 2003).

ME groups are ‘more likely than others to live in deprived areas, be poor, be unemployed compared to people with similar qualifications, suffer illness and live in over-crowded housing’ (Cuneo et al., 2001; Cabinet Office, 2003). Living in deprived areas and social housing can be a huge barrier for effective labour market participation. Business activity is low and access to efficient public transport is limited in deprived areas, which affects their physical mobility and employment prospects (Cabinet Office, 2003). A barrier to ME women participating in the labour market can be the lack of access to appropriate childcare, this is often due to the deprived or inner city areas that their communities live in (Cabinet Office, 2003). However, this is not the case for all ME groups of women and the significant differences between different ME groups should not be forgotten (Pilkington, 2002). To some degree, the geographical concentration of ME groups in deprived areas can be explained by the effect of social class; however, when income level is controlled, some ME groups, such as Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are more likely to live in deprived areas than their White counterparts, and thus are more likely to experience the problems linked to these deprived areas (Cabinet Office, 2003). Also, because Pakistani and Bangladeshi families have, on average, more children than White families, their concentration in the inner-cities or deprived areas, where childcare provision is expensive and limited, disproportionately affects these women’s labour market participation (Cabinet Office, 2003). However, it needs to be stressed that a high concentration of ME groups in itself cannot be directly correlated with high unemployment rates or deprivation, some areas with a population with a high ME percentage have high employment rates (Cabinet Office, 2003).
Interest has been growing in social capital as an explanation for educational and economic low achievement amongst some ME groups. Social class prior to migration (though the class system in their original country might be different from the British system), community networks and support systems, English language skills, and ease of access to British qualifications are now considered key factors influencing achievement. The effect of ethnicity on social capital has become a recent area of research in both the USA and UK (Zhou, 2005; Department of Sociology, 2006). Zhou argues that:

\[
\text{the ethnic effect is distinctively linked to particular ethnic groups – positive for some and negative for others – which suggests that ethnicity interacts with broader structural factors in such a way as to reinforce the advantages or disadvantages associated with racial/ ethnic group membership (Zhou, 2005, 133).}
\]

Based on a case study of the Chinese community in New York City, Zhou maintains that Chinese schools and other after-school programmes provided in Chinatown helps to bridge the gap between their community and mainstream society. In these schools and programmes, immigrant children spent time on their homework, as well as being offered direction on how to move up in the mainstream society – the advice that their parents cannot give (Zhou, 2005). However, Zhou also points out that this form of social capital is only effective to a certain extent; beyond high school level, the social capital available in the community is not sufficient to give suitable guidance on career opportunities for young people. At this point, the support mechanism can reinstate their traditional social values (which can sometimes have an adverse effect), leaving the younger generation without the social networks to facilitate educational, employment and social mobility (Zhou, 2005). However, it needs to be stressed that this behavioural pattern or ethnic organisational structure is not innate to a specific ethnic group. This is the result of the adaptation process of each community to the community they are living in (Zhou, 2005). Therefore, where participation in, and the impact of (higher) education for ME groups in the UK is concerned, socio-economic experiences such as those described above need to be taken into account when considering educational and economic achievement and opportunities.

Economic restructuring since 1980s is also often presented as another reason for the diverse economic outcomes for ME groups (Cuneo et al, 2001; Cabinet Office, 2003). The decline in manufacturing industries, through globalisation processes that lead to countries like Britain specialising in high skill technological goods and service industries, leads to decreased demand for low-skilled labour (Held et al, 1999). This has resulted in lower wages and high unemployment amongst low-skilled labourers (Held et al, 1999). Both ME groups and White groups suffered from deindustrialisation, and some ME groups are actually said to have done better than their White counterparts in the situation. However, due to the high numbers of ME people working in the manufacturing industry, the ME population experienced more disadvantage from economic restructuring than the White population in general (Held et al, 1999; Cabinet Office, 2003; Castles and Miller, 2003). It is shown that the ME population’s unemployment rate has remained higher than the overall
population into the 21st century. This is because, in the current skills economy, there are more jobs available in the highly skilled sector, which requires higher educational backgrounds; this significantly disadvantages first generation immigrants (Castles and Miller, 2003).

British society has experienced a rapid change over the past thirty years in terms of economic structure and the profile of its population. However, as explained above, such socio-economic changes were experienced differently by different ME groups. In this context of economic restructuring, the role of education has also been required to change. As the focus of this research, in the next section, the changes and developments in HE policy and participation rates in recent years will be explored.

2.2 Recent Policy and Research Developments in HE

2.2.1 Widening Participation

The publication of the Dearing Report in 1997 provided a new direction for Higher Education in the 21st Century, it was to widen participation and enhance graduate employability (The National Committee of Inquiry into HE, 1997). Reform in the HE sector has been further encouraged by the White Paper, The Future of Higher Education, which also emphasised the crucial role of government to invest in these initiatives; it states that the government will 'continue to increase participation towards 50 percent of those aged 18-30, mainly through two-year work-focused foundation degrees' (DFES, 2003a, 7).

Following the White Paper, the Government published Widening Participation in Higher Education, which outlined proposals to establish the Office for Fair Access (OFFA), and identified four key areas for development: to promote HE; to improve attainment, to increase aspiration, and to make application and admission more accessible (DFES, 2003b; 2003c). The Higher Education Funding Council in England (HEFCE) also identifies Widening Participation as one of their primary missions.

Widening Access and improving participation in higher education are a crucial part of our mission. Participation in HE will equip our citizens to operate productively within the global knowledge economy. It also offers social benefits, including better health, lower crime and a more tolerant and inclusive society… Widening and increasing participation must therefore be a permanent goal for the higher education sector (HEFCE, 2005, 11).

In addition to the Office for Fair Access, various initiatives have been taking place through Aimhigher, Action on Access, and the development of Lifelong Learning Networks in partnership with DFES, HEFCE and Learning Skills Council. These initiatives are being used to increase and widen participation, in addition to the launch of Foundation Degrees and further developing the Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) process.
The term ‘Widening Participation’ is often associated with ‘access’, ‘equal opportunity’, and ‘social inclusion/exclusion’ (Woodrow, 2000). It is, however, loosely defined, having diverse meanings and comprising of a variety of research, policy and practice (Andreshak-Behrman, 2003). *Strategies for widening participation in higher education: A guide to good practice* uses the term to ‘denote activities to target the individual groups that HEIs have identified as under-represented and to ensure their success’ (HEFCE, 2001, 2). It has been shown that most staff members interviewed in a case study in a new university equated WP with an increase in the number of students from under-represented groups (Andreshak-Behrman, 2003). However, in a growing number of studies, WP is interpreted more broadly. Such interpretations encompass all phases of a student’s experience in the higher education sector from the point of entry, through retention, and onto graduation. However, Woodrow (2000) argues that the term has some limitations due to it’s association with funding councils and particular WP projects run by them and the fact that it does not convey any requirement for institutional change.

Therefore, a key issue for research into WP is how it can lead to institutional change, mainstreaming itself in a broader institutional policy context, and to what extent the HEIs are ready to transform themselves. If WP means not only increasing the number of students who enter HE, but also making their whole experience of HE more accessible, it will be necessary to review various areas of activity in HEIs, such as the curriculum design, in order to be more inclusive.

### 2.2.2 Graduate Employability

Increased enrolment at higher education institutions, due to the expansion of UK higher education in the early 1990s, resulted in the growth of public interest in graduate employability (Mason *et al*, 2003). The Dearing Report (The National Committee of Inquiry into HE, 1997) has also played a key role in raising the profile of employability as one of the central aims of higher education (Harvey *et al*, 2002; Harvey, 2003). Employability is a difficult concept to define comprehensively, however, some researchers emphasise the difference between employability and employment (Lees, 2002; Harvey, 2003; Yorke, 2004). Yorke produces a working definition for the term employability:

> A set of achievements – skills, understanding and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (Yorke, 2004, 7).

This working definition highlights the fact that employability involves more complex issues than simply getting a job, neither does it just mean ‘bolting on’ skills to existing academic courses (Harvey *et al*, 2002; Lees, 2002). Enhancing employability has been focusing on preparing students for lifelong learning so that they can adapt to the rapidly changing employment market (Layer, 2004). Until recently, practitioners and researchers in HE have not
recognised any clear link between WP and employability, although now some have started to integrate employability into their WP strategies (Brennan and Shah, 2003).

To support HEIs in enhancing student employability HEFCE established the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT) in September 2002; their work has since been taken over by Higher Education Academy (HEA). Awareness of the importance of building students’ skills has been enhanced through the introduction of the HE Progress File. The concept emerged from the Dearing Report, and one feature is the introduction of Personal Development Planning (PDP) for all HE awards. Each HEI has developed skills curriculum to incorporate the PDP element of the degree, making the development of employability skills for students an integral part of Personal Development Planning.

2.2.3 The Race Relations Amendment Act

Under the Race Relations Amendment Act (RRAA) of 2000, higher and further education institutions as well as other public authorities, have a duty to commit to diversity and equality. In addition to developing and publishing a race equality policy, HEIs also have a duty to conduct an Impact Assessment exercise. The Commission for Racial Equality states that:

*The purpose of the assessment is to see whether the institution’s policies help to achieve race equality for students and staff from different racial groups or whether they have, or could have, an adverse impact on them* (CRE, 2002a, Paragraph 6.30).

In 2004, the Department for Education and Skills and HEFCE jointly assessed the impact of the Future of Higher Education White Paper and published this assessment in July 2003, which was updated in August 2004 to incorporate the changes effected by the Higher Education Act 2004, particularly by the student finance proposal (DfES and HEFCE, 2004). HEFCE also published a guide for HEIs on how to conduct impact assessments (HEFCE, 2004); the impact assessment should be a ‘thorough and systematic analysis of a policy or practice to determine whether it has a differential impact on a particular group’ (HEFCE, 2004, 3). The guide also emphasises that the exercises are not one-off events, but should be integrated to the three year cycle of policy and practice evaluation and review as recommended by the Commission for Racial Equality (HEFCE, 2004). So far, amongst HEIs, only the University of Westminster has completed the initial Impact Assessment exercise, which found that ‘policy and procedures can illustrate commitment, but it’s the way individual people behave that makes the crucial difference in respecting diversity’ (University of Westminster, 2006).

2.2.4 Introduction of Top-Up Fees

In January 2004, following considerable debate, the Higher Education Bill was passed, which allows HEIs to charge students up to £3000 tuition fees from the 2006/7 academic year, which will be repayable after students start to earn
over £15,000 per annum. The Government and the funding bodies have been trying to reassure those opposed to the scheme that, based on international experience, the introduction of fees will not have an adverse effect on the access of lower socio-economic groups to HE (DfES, 2003b). They also estimate that through a new upfront grant around 50-55% of English and Welsh students will receive either a full or partial grant (DfES and HEFCE, 2004). Any institutions that plan to charge more than the 2005/06 fees level of £1175 from the academic year 2006/07 also had to submit their Access Agreements by November 2005 to be approved by OFFA. Access Agreements set out institutional fee limits, the institution’s plans for bursaries and other measures to ensure fair access, and its own milestones for monitoring efforts to ensure fair access. Although HEIs have been explicit in their attempt to safeguard fair access through their Access Agreements, the concern about the debt likely to be incurred by future students is widespread, and it is reported that UCAS applications for 2006/7 have dropped by 3.4% (UCAS, 2006). OFFA acknowledges that the issue of retention is crucial to WP; however, support to increase retention is not considered an integral part of Access Agreements. Nevertheless, measures to help retention are still taken into account in the approval of Access Agreements. Therefore, it is yet to be seen what the impact of variable fees will be on widening participation in HE.

2.3 Existing Research on Student Experiences of HE

Until the early 1990s, the underachievement of Minority Ethnic (ME) groups within higher education was the generally accepted view. Modood (1993) challenged the generalised perception of ethnic minority under-representation in HE, and although the under-representation of Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Black Caribbean and Black Other groups was demonstrated, he claimed that there were significant differences between ethnic groups, institutions, and degree subjects.

The increase in participation of ME students in higher education had been highlighted throughout the 1990s, and in 1995 the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) published data that provided the first comprehensive analysis of the ethnic profiles of Higher Education Institutions (HESA, 1995, Connor et al, 1996). This data again supported and strengthened Modood’s arguments. According to the report, in 1994/95, 13.5% of all UK domiciled students at undergraduate level (first degree level, as well as HND and DipHE) were from ME groups. Compared with their representation in the UK population, at 5.8% for the general population and 8.0% for 18-21 year olds, they had a far greater representation in HE (Connor et al, 1996). However, it was also shown that the distribution of ME students was uneven between institutions and subjects (Connor et al, 1996).

Studies such as Cohen et al (1995) and Modood and Acland (1998) have informed the research community of the necessity of research into equal opportunities in Higher Education that looks into the range of experiences for ME students in HEIs. Such research should go beyond an examination of the increase in the number of ME students in higher education alone. At the
same time, it is suggested that addressing equal opportunities and race issues through the implementation of practices for change need to become the priority for the institutions involved (Modood and Acland, 1998).

There has been a growing body of research looking at the rising participation of ME students in Higher Education, but less research has been conducted into the outcomes of HE for ME groups (Connor et al, 1996). A small number of studies have revealed that ME graduates enjoy fewer advantages from their qualifications in the labour market than their White counterparts (Arora, 1995; Connor et al, 1996; Layer, 2004). Moreover, the impact of initiatives to enhance employability is said to be different for different students (Brennan and Shah, 2003). Existing research therefore shows that there are wide differences in academic and employment performance between individual ethnic minority groups; some disadvantages still exist for a certain group of ME graduates in obtaining jobs, although the differences are not consistent and vary between different ME graduates (Connor et al, 1996; Brennan and McGeevor, 1987; 1990).

Many studies indicate various factors that could lead to different outcomes for different groups of ME students. Osler (1999) suggests that although racism is not the main factor in restricting educational or career development of ME students, it does affect them in the contemplation and planning of their independence and careers. For Pathak (2000), it is the length of time spent in obtaining qualifications that has an impact on participation in the labour market. In addition, Pathak (2000) indicates that the socio-economic deprivation of some ME groups, such as Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, has an influence on their ability to obtain qualifications and subsequently employment, thus reproducing the disadvantages of these groups.

Studies such as CHERI (2002) and Brennan and Shah (2003) explore whether equality of access to higher education could lead to equality of outcome, both question a simplistic interpretation of outcome as successful employment. They stress the multi-dimensionality of success, which consists not only of various ‘objective’ measures, but also subjective and specific notions (CHERI, 2002; Brennan and Shah, 2003). Brennan and Shah (2003) point out that social and ethnic backgrounds, age, gender, the course and institution attended all have impacts on the graduate outcomes, and these factors are therefore interconnected.

Brennan and Shah (2003) as well as CHERI (2002) suggest that work experience, term-time working, extra-curricular activities, overseas experiences, and job-search techniques could all be intervening factors, whose advantages are experienced by all graduates, regardless of their social and educational backgrounds. However, they also show that the effect can vary, with a lesser advantage being enjoyed by graduates from working class backgrounds, ethnic minorities, or by older graduates, as they are not making full use of these opportunities due to already existing disadvantages (Brennan and Shah, 2003). Therefore, initiatives to enhance graduate employability in general could involuntarily lead to these already disadvantaged students suffering a further disadvantage (Brennan and Shah, 2003). This illuminates
the importance for the individual HEIs to design and develop initiatives to target specific groups of students to enhance their employability. It is suggested in these studies that social inequality at the point of entry corresponds with inequity at the point of exit. Although the significance of the benefits that HEIs do offer, including employment opportunities should not be underestimated; these benefits will not remove the detrimental effect of previous social and educational backgrounds (Brennan and Shah, 2003).

The most recent and most comprehensive study of ME graduates and Higher Education, which contains a substantial analysis of employability is Connor et al (2003). They report that, in general, ME graduates are less likely to be employed in the initial stage after graduation compared to their White counterparts. In particular, a high proportion of Pakistani and Chinese males are unemployed, while Black Caribbean students show the lowest level of unemployment (Connor et al, 2004). Female unemployment is lower than male, but on average higher for ME females than the White female group. The research also suggests that although their initial employment rate is low, ME graduates are likely to get better jobs than White graduates in the longer term. There is a tendency for ME graduates to undertake further study, the Black group is more likely to pursue a vocational qualification, whereas the Asian group tends to seek further academic qualifications (Connor et al, 2004). The research highlights the diversity of student populations, as well as their diverse experiences in HEIs, showing that they do not participate in HE in a uniform way and their profiles are extremely heterogeneous (Connor et al, 2004). It is suggested that when differences in educational, social, and family background are controlled for, the differences between different ME groups narrow. This indicates that ethnicity might not be a decisive factor for students’ educational outcomes, that is to say, that other factors may be as important as ethnicity (Connor et al, 2003).

Another issue raised in the reports is that, in general, ME students obtain lower classes of degrees than White students (Connor et al, 2003; 2004). This is partly explained by the difference in entry routes and entry qualifications, however, even when these factors are taken into account, the under-performance still exists (Connor et al, 2004). Racial bias in assessment in HEIs is suggested as a possible explanation, as well as the negative impact of term-time working. This is an important issue to address because degree results have a huge impact on graduate employment outcomes. Compared to their participation rates, there are less positive statistics for ME student retention and outcomes in HEIs.

The diversity of outcomes, despite the overall trend of under-performance of ME groups, as well as limited statistical analysis of these groups, hinders us in drawing definite conclusions. Although ethnicity affects students’ experiences in HE, there is, as yet, no convincing argument as to how, and in what way, it has an impact on their experiences, interacting with other factors such as educational and social backgrounds, degree choices, and career aspirations, or job seeking behaviour (Connor et al, 2004).
2.4 Project Rationale

2.4.1 Ethnicity, Education and Employment

Existing research therefore shows that ME students are not under-represented in HEIs, however, the distribution of ME students between institutions and courses is uneven and there are differences in participation rates between different ME groups. In contrast to the high rates of participation, it has been shown that ME students are not achieving the same graduate outcomes, as their White counterparts.

In her research into the high unemployment rate of Asian youth in Bradford in the 1970s and 80s, Brah (1996) observed the tendency of Asian youth to stay in full-time education as a realistic choice to occupy themselves, because their employment opportunities were limited. Educational qualifications were seen as assets, at least in the long term, and could improve their employment prospects. However, much has changed since Brah highlighted these issues and as discussed previously, the participation rates of ME students in HEIs have improved.

Recent research, based on the 2001 Census, shows that all ethno-religious groups aged 16-19, both male and female, stay in full-time education longer than Christian White British. A similar trend can be observed for the 21-24 age-group, except for Muslim Indian and Muslim Bangladeshi women (Khattab, 2005). However, Khattab (2005) also argues that Muslim Pakistanis and Muslim Bangladeshis still face some disadvantages in accessing higher education. These groups, the report points out, not only are disadvantaged in obtaining qualifications, but also in converting their educational experiences and qualifications into job opportunities (Khattab, 2005). Other groups, such as Sikh Indian, Christian Black Caribbean and Christian Black African also experience disadvantages in relation to the labour market, although they have educational profiles similar to Christian White British (or better in the case of Christian Black African) (Khattab, 2005). Hindu, Indian and Chinese groups enjoy a far better level of educational achievement than Christian White British groups do; but they are unable to convert this advantage to obtaining employment. In contrast, Christian Irish and Jewish White British, who also perform better academically than Christian White British, are more successful than the Christian White British in the labour market. For the Muslim Indian group, although they experience an initial disadvantage in accessing higher education compared to Christian White British, once they are in education they are more likely to move into non–manual jobs (Khattab, 2005). Therefore, this shows that some ‘visible’ ME groups suffer disadvantages, even when they acquire relevant higher qualifications.

It needs serious consideration, therefore, as to why, more than twenty years after Brah (1996) conducted her research, educational qualifications have not had an impact on the ability of certain groups of ME graduates to obtain a job at graduate level. Khattab (2005) argues that neither religion nor ethnicity can be a decisive factor for a certain ethno-religious group to be disadvantaged in education and the labour market, as there are huge polarities between the ethno-religious groups. As described above, some explanations, such as
differences in pre-degree qualification or degree class obtained, have been given as possible causes of such ME under performance. Many now agree that the interrelationship between ethnicity and other social factors has an impact on the students’ experiences of and outcomes from HE, but in what ways they are related is yet to be established.

Future research is, therefore, required to conduct a disaggregated analysis to identify how different factors interact to influence graduate outcomes, and in what way, if any, ethnic attributes have an influence on these outcomes. The general trend in thinking, is that ethnicity is not the decisive factor behind ME students’ low employment rates. It is suggested that even if these other differentials are controlled, ME graduates still do less well in getting jobs. Moreover, ME graduates tend to obtain lower degree classes, which also affects their employment prospects. Given these factors, the curriculum and other provision for students in HEIs needs to be examined to consider whether current provision either directly or indirectly disadvantages certain groups, particularly ME groups, and to what extent HEIs work towards becoming truly multicultural institutions. In addition, as graduate employability becomes one of the key interests of HEIs, how HEIs link themselves with employers in promoting equal opportunity needs to be investigated further.

In order to understand some of the complexities of student experiences, it is important to focus on students and hear their own perceptions of, and experiences in HE. Although we use the ethnic categories widely adopted in the national census and other research, whether these categories are relevant to these students, and how their identities are formed, namely how they form certain identities and how institutions influence them in constructing these or other identities, is something that needs to be examined closely.

2.4.2 Conceptualising Identity

It is often considered that ethnicity only affects ME groups. However, White groups who are often described as a non-ME group are merely constructed as someone without any ethnicity. White groups also have social and cultural characteristics, and they share a history and a present with ME groups. ME groups do not form a homogenous group, but also show diversity and differences amongst themselves. Similarly, non-ME, or White groups are heterogeneous, fractured by many social and cultural divisions such as class, gender, sex, age and origins. Ethnic differences are, therefore, non-fixed and constructed categories, which can change through time.

Based on this understanding of ethnicity and difference, we have investigated how such identity construction, which is intrinsically linked with social and spatial mobility and students’ perceptions of belonging in places and spaces, affects the different phases of the student experience in HE and influences the outcomes of HE. It is important that ethnicity is not considered the decisive factor in any disadvantage, which would pathologise ethnicity and reproduce stereotypes. Rather, although any disadvantage that ME students experience has to be addressed, it is necessary to explore how other factors are interacting with ethnicity to create this disadvantage.
3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Methods Employed

As discussed in the introduction, the design of the case studies in the five participating institutions was flexible allowing each to investigate issues pertinent to their own institutional situations within the framework of the central themes and research questions. This also meant that partner institutions had flexibility in choosing their own research methods including identifying the target groups of students for the study and the number of stakeholders to contact. The methods employed included: institutional data analysis, institutional policy analysis, questionnaires, interviews and participant observation. The focus of the mode of enquiry, however, was given to qualitative methods, in particular, interviews. This approach was considered to be useful because, as the following section demonstrates, the five institutions are very different in character, having different courses and different ethnic profiles, which made a straightforward comparative study impossible. Pursuing their own institutionally relevant enquiries and using their own methodologies allowed a greater insight into students’ experiences of HE in each of the partner institutions. The table below presents an overview of the methods employed in each partner institution, more detailed information can be found in the individual institutional reports in Appendices B to F.

3.2 Reflections on the Research Process and Methodology

All research projects encounter challenges during the research process. These challenges are not often addressed explicitly in research reports despite their value for researchers. This section therefore reflects upon some of the challenges that the research team experienced, in order to illuminate potentially better approaches for similar future research projects.

The project team decided to adopt a case study approach, rather than conduct comparative studies of the five institutions, because the courses offered and the ethnic profiles in each institution were very different, therefore limiting the comparability of the institutions. Each institution designed their own case study within the research framework; however, due to the diversity of institutions, it was difficult to maintain consistency across the whole project whilst allowing partners the freedom to develop their own individual case studies. Although working in a loose partnership and maintaining a flexibly designed case study approach has its own strengths, during the project lifetime partners experienced various challenges in partnership working as well as in conducting their own fieldwork.

With hindsight, it is clear that the initial research questions were too broad and extensive. Some institutions therefore opted to investigate only a limited area of the research, which created difficulties in maintaining consistency in the research. The differences in resources and time available in each institution, and the variable expectations of partners and the lead institution (UEL) in
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods Employed</th>
<th>Bradford</th>
<th>Brunel</th>
<th>Edge Hill</th>
<th>Leeds Met</th>
<th>UEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional Data Analysis</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional Policy Analysis</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Questionnaires Conducted?</strong></td>
<td>Yes – paper based open ended questions</td>
<td>Yes – paper based open ended questions</td>
<td>Yes – paper based open ended questions</td>
<td>Yes – paper &amp; web based, open &amp; closed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure?</strong></td>
<td>Final Yr Ugrad Students, humanities, nursing &amp; social work</td>
<td>Grads (2003) &amp; Final Yr Ugrad, computing &amp; business</td>
<td>1st and Final Yr Ugrad Students, education and health</td>
<td>Final Yr Ugrad, sports, education, computing &amp; technology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target Group(s)</strong></td>
<td>Graduates: 103/645 Final Yr: 204/250</td>
<td>355/400</td>
<td>186/1438</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Response Rate(s)</strong></td>
<td>120/120</td>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>Staff Interviews</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td><strong>Senior Management</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Other Staff</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Employer Interviews</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Student Interviews</strong></td>
<td>20, full time final yr Ugrad, humanities, nursing &amp; social work</td>
<td>9 ME 1st and Final Yr students in education</td>
<td>9. Final Yr Ugrads in sports, education, computing &amp; tech.</td>
<td>24 Ugrads all Yrs, in media &amp; advertising, psychosocial &amp; IT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Graduate Interviews</strong></td>
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<td>48</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Focus Groups</strong></td>
<td>3 groups, Final Yr Ugrad, recruited from questionnaire</td>
<td>1 group, Final Yr Ugrad, computing &amp; business</td>
<td>4 groups of White 1st and Final Yr Ugrads in education</td>
<td>2 groups, 2nd Yr students in media and advertising</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Participant Observation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity of Students Targeted</strong></td>
<td>Humanities &amp; Social Work 41% ME, Nursing 21% ME. Half ME students were British Asian Pakistani</td>
<td>Business 79% ME, with Asian Indians 32%; Computing 89% ME, with Asian Indian 37%</td>
<td>3% ME students, slightly more Asian students in education &amp; more Black students in Health</td>
<td>Computing &amp; technology 28% ME with 22% Asian. Sports &amp; Education 7% ME with Black 2%</td>
<td>Media &amp; Advertising 68% ME, with 30% Black; Psychosocial 71% ME, with 50% Black; IT 80% ME, with 36% Asian and 32% Black</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For more details on the methods used in each case study, see individual institutional case studies in Appendices B - F.
terms of responsibilities and commitments contributed to these problems as well. There were a number of institutionally specific issues, including human resource problems, a lack of effective communication, different interpretations of the research aims and objectives and the lack of availability of institutional data, which led to further challenges in the research. Each of these problems needed different management and effective communication at institutional and partnership levels in order to find acceptable solutions. These were not all simple situations to resolve.

With five different case studies taking place, it was essential to maintain communication between partners. Occasionally, it proved to be extremely difficult for all project partners to engage in discussions on the general research direction or design at one time. This was due in part to time and resource constraints, and to the different expectations from UEL, the lead university and the other partner universities. There was a lack of clarity about UEL’s responsibilities as the lead institution and therefore the expectations of partners varied.

The members of the project team met twice a year for a full day meeting, where concrete research issues were discussed. However the time constraints meant that partners were not able to discuss in detail every issue arising at the meetings; therefore WebCT was introduced as a means of communication for follow-up discussions. Although WebCT proved to be useful as a document repository; as a tool for discussion it was not ideal. The discussion board was not as suitable for holding complicated discussions as originally envisioned, and although discussion through the chat function offered a degree of real-time communication, that the discussion board had failed to provide, it was difficult to arrange times for most partners to participate in WebCT chat. Despite these challenges, when WebCT chat occurred, most participants felt that the sessions were quite useful. Most of the communication therefore took place via e-mail or telephone, where issues could be more effectively dealt with bilaterally, however this made difficult to establish extensive multi-lateral discussion, and UEL, as the lead institution had to try, not always successfully, to keep all partners informed at all times. The lessons from the use of WebCT and the other modes of communication illuminate the importance of further exploring the effectiveness of these technologies for communication, learning and research. This is particularly crucial given an increasing number of HEIs are using Virtual Learning Environment technologies as teaching and learning tools.

Each partner university identified their own target groups of students for their fieldwork, meaning that there was a clear rationale for each case study individually, but a lack of consistency between partners in the project. This resulted in a focus on more vocationally related courses, with more traditional academic courses such as Arts, Humanities and Sciences being under-represented. This will have some implications for the findings of this research, which can not represent the experiences of all students at all five partner institutions.
All institutions faced some degree of difficulty in accessing respondents, particularly students. This was often due to students not being interested in the research project, not seeing the benefit of the project or feeling that they were over-researched. However, in most institutions, it was clear that this was also due to the type of students in the institutions, who were already overburdened by multiple commitments to study, work and family, and were unable to spare any time for further activities. It was also clear that many students were not aware of what they should expect from their institution, and therefore were unaware of what they were missing out on; because of this they could not see why the research topics were relevant to them.

Recruiting students from various ethnic groups proved to be another challenge. In some cases, this was because the sample was too small to include all ethnic groups, and in others because data protection legislation prevented the research teams in some institutions from targeting specific minority ethnic groups. Partner institutions therefore used high level ethnicity data, making a detailed analysis of ethnicity more difficult. However, the unrepresentative sample of students interviewed, compared to the institutional student ethnic profile, provides the opportunity to look at ethnicity in a more exploratory manner, allowing issues of identity and ethnicity in certain places to emerge organically rather than being categorised immediately.

Timing was critical in contacting students; most partner institutions contacted students during the second semester of the academic year 2004/5 and found that this was not the best time to arrange interviews with them. Students were under considerable pressure to submit their assignments and to prepare for exams at this time and once exams were over, locating students proved to be near impossible, as with their multiple roles, many students were not at the universities and were more likely to be working and with their families. When partners tried to recruit students for interview in the beginning of the following academic year, most had much better response rates, partly due to timing, and partly due to the more effective use of gatekeepers such as course leaders to overcome the previous recruitment problems.

At the beginning of the project there was a discussion between partners about the conceptualisation of ethnicity, which groups should be considered minority or majority ethnic and whether to target them specifically in different institutional contexts. The whole research team subsequently agreed that to examine the needs of ME students, it was vital to investigate, and particularly to interview, non-ME students as well. Some partners found it difficult to ask direct questions about ethnicity in an interview, because this exposed a very sensitive issue they opted to include such questions in a questionnaire. Other partners, who did not use questionnaires, also found it challenging to initiate discussion on ethnicity in the interviews unless the issue was raised by the student interviewees themselves. Each institution handled this issue sensitively and found a range of solutions including flexibility in the use of questions according to each individual situation.

Some partners experienced other problems such as obtaining institutional data (particularly on ethnicity); encouraging participation of Senior Managers;
and making the distinction between home and overseas students. All of these challenges have affected the sampling strategies, particularly of the interviews; therefore affecting the degree to which the samples can be considered representative. However, as ‘each stage of inquiry is constructed through social process’ (Charmaz, 2005, 510-511), and generalisability relies not only on statistical representativeness but also on social representativeness (Gobo, 2004), it can be argued that this is not of crucial importance in a mostly qualitative study. In qualitative research, analysis based on convenience samples are increasingly acceptable (Punch, 2005). Therefore whilst the variable sampling strategies employed and the innate biases they contain should be noted, they do not reduce the robustness of the data. Full details of the methods employed and the challenges faced in each individual institution can be found in the institutional case studies in Appendices B to F.

All the challenges that the project experienced can be considered part of the learning process. However, with hindsight, establishing good communication channels between the lead university and partner universities at an early stage of a project and maintaining them, as well as the lead agency being more proactive in clarifying the expectations, resources and responsibilities of each institution seem to be crucial for the successful management of a large partnership research project.
4 INSTITUTIONAL PROFILES

The remaining sections of this report will analyse the data acquired from the five case studies at UEL, Bradford, Brunel, Edge Hill and Leeds Metropolitan Universities. Firstly, the background of the project will be explained by highlighting the differences and similarities between the profiles of these five institutions. Detailed institutional profiles can be found in the individual institutional reports in Appendices B to F. The data used in these comparisons is that which was provided by each individual institution, unless otherwise stated, and whilst every effort has been made to ensure comparability, some differences in the data availability and comparability have been inevitable due to the various institutional approaches to data collection. They are marked in the footnotes to each table.

The following sections are an analysis of all the case study reports, where institutional policy documents as well as fieldwork data are analysed. Section 5, Embedding Institutional Policies and Strategies explores institutional policy and practice on WP, graduate employability and Equality & Diversity through policy documents, Senior Managers’ and other staff interviews. The Student Cycle, section 6, looks at students’ experiences of HE from the point of entry to graduation and onto employment, mainly through their own accounts of their HE experiences.

As the comparison of institutional profiles shows, each institution has its own character with different pressing issues to deal with. This has caused some difficulties when trying to draw together common issues across the different institutions. However, the issues that are a concern to most institutions involved in the project can be identified, and section 7 is an attempt to highlight these issues, so that all the institutions involved in the project, as well as other HEIs, can learn from the research project.

4.1 Background to the Institutions

The five partner institutions have similarities and differences in their origins and sizes as table 1 demonstrates. All grew out of technical colleges originally established in the 19th Century. Bradford and Brunel were designated universities in 1966, UEL and Leeds Metropolitan were both polytechnics, prior to being designated universities in 1992, and Edge Hill was a university college accredited by Lancaster University until 2006, when it gained degree awarding status.

The locations of the institutions are also varied, with UEL, Leeds and Bradford mostly located in inner city environments, whilst Brunel is in a more suburban location in West London and Edge Hill is in rural West Lancashire. This is understood to have an effect on their recruitment of students, both in terms of the distances that the students come from, and the type of students the institutions can attract. All the institutions recruit a similar number of students in total with the exception of Leeds Metropolitan, where the larger number of students is explained by 50% of the total students studying on sub-degree level and FE courses.
All these institutions stress a keen commitment to widening participation and increasing access to HE from under-represented groups. All institutions mention a commitment to some aspect of widening participation in their mission statements, visions or other official policy documents; several institutions house key initiatives and figures relating to WP such as Action on Access or Aimhigher. UEL and Bradford particularly stress the importance of diversity, student retention and employability in their mission statements, whilst Brunel focuses more directly on employability which has been a particular strength and focus of the university in the past 40 years. Edge Hill and Leeds Metropolitan place more emphasis on widening the diversity of their student bodies.

### 4.2 Student Characteristics

The characteristics of the student bodies at the five institutions, which have remained fairly unchanged over the past couple of years, are quite varied as table 2 demonstrates. UEL, Bradford and Brunel all have minority ethnic populations making up more than 50% of the student body in total, whereas Leeds Met has 19% and Edge Hill just 5%. This reflects to a certain extent the locations in which they are situated, as will be discussed further below. All institutions except Brunel have over 50% mature students, defined as those aged over 21 on entry to HE. Students studying part time make up a significant proportion of the undergraduates at UEL, Leeds Metropolitan and Edge Hill, where there is more flexible course provision to allow these non-traditional students to study in ways that suit their lifestyles.

All five institutions are very close to or exceed the HEFCE benchmarks for Performance Indicators to increase the participation of students from non-traditional backgrounds; these are the percentage from low socio-economic groups; the percentage from low participation neighbourhoods; and the percentage that are state school educated. The differences between them, however, are quite large. UEL admits significantly more students from low socio-economic groups than the other institutions, whilst Edge Hill is particularly good at admitting students from low participation neighbourhoods, and all institutions admit over 90% of their students from state schools. Many of these variations could be due less to different university admission policies and practices, than to their location. For example, UEL recruits the vast

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Main Characteristics of the Partner Institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Origins of University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Bradford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brunel University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edge Hill University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leeds Metropolitan University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of East London</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Campus now closed

Source: University Websites and HESA Data 2004/05
Table 2: Characteristics of Undergraduate Students 2004/05

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bradford</th>
<th>Brunel</th>
<th>Edge Hill</th>
<th>Leeds Met</th>
<th>UEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% ME Students on entry</td>
<td>58 *</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Mature Students</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Part time</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Low Socio-economic Groups</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Low Participation Neighbourhoods</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% State school educated</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% on FE level courses</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source
Universities own data sources * All Ugrad Students
HESA PI 03/04 - all undergraduates
HESA Returns 04/05 - all undergraduates
HESA PI 03/04 - full time under 21 undergrads only
HESA PI 03/04 - full time under 21 undergrads only
HESA PI 03/04 - full time under 21 undergrads only
HESA Returns 04/05 - all students

Table 3: Ethnicity of Students at Entry (%) 2004/05 (Low Level Ethnicity)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bradford*</th>
<th>Brunel</th>
<th>Edge Hill $</th>
<th>Leeds Met</th>
<th>UEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian British</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Asian background</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or Black British</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Black background</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese or Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ethnic group</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White and Black Caribbean</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White and Black African</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White and Asian</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Mixed background</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>76.1</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other White background</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Refused</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% ME Students</td>
<td>58.4</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* All undergraduate full time students
$ Only high level Ethnicity data available at Edge Hill due to small numbers of ME Students
majority of it's students very locally within the East End of London, an area that is has very low HE participation rates and with the vast majority of people from low socio-economic backgrounds.

As previously mentioned the percentage of ME students at the institutions varies quite significantly, but as table 3 demonstrates the makeup of this ME population is also highly varied. Both Bradford and Brunel have ME populations dominated by people who are Asian. Bradford’s ME students are mostly Asian Pakistani whereas Brunel’s ME student body is dominated by Asian Indians. UEL and Brunel reflect their location in London with higher percentages of Black people. UEL is the most diverse university, and the only one in which Black people are the largest ME group. Leeds Met has a lower overall ME population, but again it has significant numbers of Asian Indians and Asian Pakistanis. Leeds Met also has a significant group of students who come from an Other White and Irish background; however in comparison to Bradford, Brunel and UEL all these groups are small and make up less than 5% of the total Leeds Met population. Edge Hill has an extremely small ME population, which it is actively working to increase, but as with the other institutions, the student population broadly reflects the area in which the university is located. All these institutions, despite the variations in numbers, not only reflect but are actually more diverse than their local area, with Bradford, Brunel and Leeds Met being significantly more so.

### 4.3 Qualifications at Entry

In universities such as these five institutions, students are admitted with an increasingly diverse range of qualifications, reflecting the many routes that they have taken to reach HE. As table 4 demonstrates, in Brunel, Leeds Met and UEL where the data is available; the range of qualifications is very large, and this suggests differences in the admissions practices of the different universities. At Brunel the vast majority of students enter with ‘A’ level or equivalent qualifications, however Black and Mixed race students are less likely to enter through this traditional route, and are much more likely to enter through Access Courses. Asian students at Brunel are least likely to have postgraduate, graduate or professional qualifications or to have no formal qualifications at all. This reflects the age profile of the Asian students at Brunel, who are mostly under 21 when they start their degrees. Students holding no formal qualifications (entering through APEL) and those holding graduate or postgraduate qualifications are almost always mature students. It is also clear at Brunel that White students are much less likely to enter with foundation level and vocational qualifications than students from ME communities.

At Leeds Metropolitan there is less variability between the different ethnic groups in terms of mode of entry; however, it is clear again that Black students are the least likely to enter with ‘A’ level qualifications, and are much more likely to enter with only GCSE level, or access level qualifications. There are very high numbers of students from all ethnic backgrounds entering Leeds Metropolitan with other qualifications (unspecified). This is partially due to the categorisation process, but it is likely that some of these will be students
### Table 4: Ethnicity of Students by Qualifications at Entry (%) 2004/05 (High Level Ethnicity)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brunel</th>
<th>Postgraduate, Graduate or Professional Qualifications</th>
<th>Access Course</th>
<th>GCE A-Level, SQA Highers and equivalents</th>
<th>Foundation course HND/HNC, NVQ/SVQ etc</th>
<th>No Formal Qualification Held</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian British</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or Black British</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese or Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Refused</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leeds Metropolitan</th>
<th>GCSE/ O-Level Quals only and SCE O grades and SQA Standard Grades</th>
<th>Access Courses</th>
<th>GCE A-level, SQA Highers and Equivalents</th>
<th>Other Qualifications</th>
<th>No Formal Qualification Held</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian British</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or Black British</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese or Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Refused</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UEL</th>
<th>Postgrad, Graduate, or Professional Qualifications</th>
<th>Access Courses</th>
<th>GCE A-level, SQA Highers and Equivalents</th>
<th>Other Qualifications</th>
<th>No Formal Qualification Held</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian British</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or Black British</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese or Other</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Refused</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: Data for Bradford and Edge Hill is not available  
* Categories of qualifications are not entirely comparable across universities, however every effort has been made to make categories equivalent.
entering with vocational qualifications. This highlights the importance of these qualifications in the admission of non-traditional students, and especially for those from Black or Other ethnic backgrounds.

UEL has a different pattern of qualifications at entry: Black and White students are the least likely to enter with ‘A’ level qualifications. This is possibly because the local White population has a very low HE participation rate and is therefore unlikely to have pursued traditional routes into HE. Black students at UEL are, as at Brunel, most likely to have entered through access courses and with other qualifications, although White students are more likely than the average to have entered with these vocational qualifications as well. The groups who are more likely to have entered through the traditional ‘A’ level route are Asians and Chinese or Other ethnic groups, where over 50% of each group entered via this route. The number of postgraduate, graduate and professional qualifications reflects the mature population that UEL admits, and it is interesting to note that this is the same across all ethnic groups.

4.4 Subjects Studied
The degrees that students choose to study broadly reflect the backgrounds that they are from, with more students from ‘non-traditional’ backgrounds opting to study vocationally oriented courses (Brennan and Shah, 2003). Existing research also shows that at an aggregated level, ME students are over represented in subjects such as Computer Science, Medicine & Dentistry, Law and Engineering & Technology, although at a disaggregated level Black African, Black Caribbean and Black Other are under-represented in Medicine & Dentistry (Connor et al, 2003). Such trends can also be observed to some extent at the five institutions in this study, as presented in table 5. The Social Sciences reflect most closely the diversity of the whole institution across all three universities providing data (Brunel, Leeds Met and UEL); however this is not the case in most other subject groups. Across all three institutions it is clear that subjects within Maths and Computer Sciences are dominated by ME groups (depending on the universities own ethnicity profile) and particularly by Asian students. This is a pattern that has been observed in other universities across the UK (HESA, 2004). Brunel shows considerable differences between different subject groups, with Maths and Computer Sciences and Business Studies having very high percentages of Asian students. Other areas such as Education, Creative Arts, Design and Architecture, and Health and Biosciences are heavily White dominated; although Health and Biosciences has a higher percentage of Black students than any other subject group.

At Leeds Met, Computer Science and Law also have an ME population heavily dominated by Asian students but they do not outnumber the White population. The same differences between subject areas and between ethnic groups that is present at Brunel is also present at Leeds Met; despite the ME population being much smaller. UEL, too, has a large difference in ethnic structure between different subject groups. Law and Business Studies are very dominated by the Black population and they also have significant numbers of Asian students. This means that White students make up only 20% of the students in these two faculties. The opposite is the case with the
Table 5: Ethnicity of Students by Course Studied (%) 2004/05 (High Level Ethnicity)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Brunel</th>
<th>Leeds Met</th>
<th>UEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whole University</td>
<td>Health and Biological Sciences</td>
<td>Mathematical and Computer Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Asian British</td>
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<td>57</td>
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<td>Black or Black British</td>
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<td>Chinese or Other</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td>7</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% ME Students</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Law is included with Social Science: it is therefore not directly comparable with other data

NB: Data for Bradford and Edge Hill is not available. Subject groupings are for the purpose of comparison only and do not relate to the schools or faculties in each institution.
Creative Arts, Design and Architecture, where White students are dominant and Black and Asian students each make up less than 15%. Other subject groups reflect the ethnic mix of the university as a whole fairly accurately. There may be several explanations for this degree of polarisation, but it could be suggested that many students from non-traditional backgrounds are inclined to take more vocationally orientated courses such as Computer Science, Business Studies or Law because they want to be assured of their employability on leaving university.

4.5 Degree Class Awarded

The degree class awarded is often considered a measure of the success of an individual student within the institution. Therefore, by considering the difference in overall degree result across ethnicity, it may be possible to suggest whether any interventions are required to ensure that students from all ethnic groups can achieve equally well during their time in HE. This is particularly crucial, as seen above, when there are differences between ethnic groups in routes of entry and subjects studied.

As table 6 demonstrates, the data from Edge Hill does not show any decisive trends in student’s achievement by ethnicity due to the very small ME community at the university. Data from Bradford was not available. At Brunel, there are some clear differences between the ethnic groups in terms of class of degree awarded. Whites are overrepresented in the 1st and 2:1 classes and underrepresented in the 2:2 class and below, compared to the whole university average. Asians appear to achieve slightly better than average as well, being slightly over-represented in the 1st and 2:1 classes. Black students are under-represented in the 1st class degrees and over represented in the 2:2 class compared to the university average. At Leeds Metropolitan a similar pattern can be observed with less Black students and more White students obtaining the upper degree classes; however Asian students at Leeds Met appear to do significantly less well than Asian students at Brunel, and are considerably more likely to get a degree of 2:2 class or below. At UEL similar patterns are observable again although the differences are less stark. White students appear more likely to achieve higher degree classes than Black and Asian students who are over-represented at 2:2 class and below. Students from a mixed background seem to be achieving roughly in line with the university average, although they are over-represented in the 1st class group. Overall, it is therefore clear that White students tend to achieve more higher class degrees, whereas Black students tend to achieve more lower class degrees. The Asian student population fits two different trends, at Brunel it follows the same pattern as the White students, and those at Leeds Met and UEL follow the same pattern of relative underachievement as the Black students. However it must be remembered that ethnicity is not necessarily a causal factor in these differential outcomes, with educational and social background, age and gender also likely to play a role.
### Table 6: Ethnicity of Students by Degree Class (%) 2004/05 (High Level Ethnicity)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Brunel</th>
<th></th>
<th>Edge Hill*</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Chinese or Other</td>
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<table>
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<th></th>
<th>Leeds Met</th>
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<th>UEL</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
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<td>2:1</td>
<td>2:2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Whole University</td>
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<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NB:** Data for Bradford is not available  
* Due to very small ethnic minority population at Edge Hill, some of these percentages represent very small numbers
4.6 First Destination of Students on Graduation

The first destination of graduates gives an indication of the success of graduates’ career choices six months after graduation, and it is also used as a government indicator to measure the success of the universities performance in graduate employability. There are problems with comparing this data across institutions, due to differences in return rates from different ME groups. However, as it is a national level policy driven indicator it is important to consider whether there is equality in employment opportunities and outcomes between different groups of students. As table 7 shows, the differences between ethnic groups in terms of employment outcomes appear to be much less obvious than in previous indicators discussed, however some patterns can be established. The data from Edge Hill and Bradford, once again does not give a fully comprehensive picture between different ethnicities, due to, respectively, the small number of ME students and the lack of detailed data available. However, it suggests that at both institutions White students are more likely to be in employment than their ME counterparts. In fact, the data from all institutions, except Leeds Met, showed that White students were more likely to be in employment six months after graduating than all other groups. At Leeds Met it was Black students that were most likely to be employed, but with White students close behind in ranking. Those students most likely to have gone onto further study from Brunel were Asian students, whereas at Leeds Met it was students from Mixed backgrounds who went into further study, and at UEL it was students from Chinese and Other Ethnic backgrounds.

The students who were most likely to be unemployed and still seeking employment also varied between institutions. At UEL and Brunel, Asian students were most likely to be still seeking employment, whereas at Leeds Met it was again students from a Mixed ethnic background. However, it is not just the ethnic background of an individual student, or the actions of the university, but also the location they are in and the job market they are searching in that can affect the employability of the graduate. The high numbers of Asian students still seeking employment may reflect the predominance of that group in computing courses, because the IT sector is not very active in the recruitment of graduates at present. At Leeds Met, high percentages of White and Asian students; and at UEL high percentages of Black students fall into the ‘other’ category. This reflects the types of students that these universities recruit from these ethnic groups, such as mature students with care responsibility, as the majority of students in the ‘other’ category are those who are not seeking employment due to other responsibilities such as family care.

Therefore, it has been demonstrated that there are clear differences between the institutions in terms of the profiles of students from the different ethnic groups. However it must be emphasised for all the data presented in this section that the category of ethnicity that has been used for the analysis is only one of the many axes of difference that could affect the experiences that all these students have in higher education.
Table 7: Ethnicity of Students by 1st destination (%) 2004/05 (High Level Ethnicity)

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<tr>
<th>Bradford</th>
<th>Employed</th>
<th>Further Study</th>
<th>Still Seeking</th>
<th>Other</th>
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* There are very low numbers of ME students at Edge Hill therefore some of the percentages can be misleading.
5 EMBEDDING INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

This section examines the institutional policies and practices on WP, Graduate Employability and Equality & Diversity through policy document analysis and interviews with Senior Managers and non-Senior Managers. The aim of this section is to explore the extent of policy implementation through the views of staff members, and to discuss their opinions on the success and challenges in their institutional policy and practice.

Over the project lifetime (from January 2004 to August 2006), most institutions involved in the project saw some form of institutional restructuring and/or the development of new institutional strategies. Therefore, in looking at the institutional strategies and embedding policies for WP, Graduate Employability and Equality and Diversity of these institutions, the transitional nature of these strategies, policies and practice should be taken into account.

5.1 Widening Participation Policy and Practice

5.1.1 The Institutional Commitment to Widening Participation

Institutions expressed their commitment to WP, Graduate Employability and Equality through the development of policy documents such as Corporate Plans, Learning and Teaching Assessment Strategies, Widening Participation Strategies, Employability Policies and Strategies and various other related documents. Each institution differed in terms of its strategic focus on these issues and the degree to which each policy was implemented. However, institutions shared similar concerns around policy and practice in these areas.

All the institutions believed that one of their missions as HEIs was to contribute to local communities, both socially and economically; and WP was considered an integral part of such a strategic focus. The dedication to WP was clearly addressed in institutional policy documents, for example, the UEL Innovation and Renewal: Strategic Plan 2002-7 stated that:

The principles underpinning the plan include: Widening participation in higher education, in line with the government’s goal of 50% participation, through the provision of academic programmes that attract, and enhance the employability of, applicants from lower socio-economic groups and diverse multicultural communities in the Thames Gateway region.

Widening the participation of ME groups appeared to have been quite successful, most institutions had a higher percentage of ME students than the sector level and/or the ME population of the local area, although different Schools, Departments and Programmes varied in their relative numbers of ME students. As many students in the institutions also came from lower socio-economic backgrounds, these institutions regarded themselves as either successful in WP or as fully committed to WP and inclusivity. In order to
implement WP policy, various initiatives, both generic and institutionally unique ones, were taking place in each institution. Generic ones included: the establishment of WP teams and offices; the development of local school and college links; and the development of Foundation Degrees and Level 0 programmes. In general, Senior Managers shared the notion of institutional commitment to WP.

It is absolutely the par-excellence of WP institution – we have the high numbers of working class students, we have very high number of Black and ME students – it very much reflects the locality we are in… (Senior Manager 4, UEL).

Senior Managers also felt that the overall awareness of Widening Participation was high amongst staff in their institution.

I think that people are aware that Leeds Metropolitan University is interested in Widening Participation. I think there’s a commitment to it […] I don’t get a sense that people don’t want to do Widening Participation and they’re reasonably familiar with concepts around [it] (Senior Manager, Leeds Met).

However, as the interview below clearly illustrates, WP was also considered a never ending project.

I think another significant challenge […] is WP in relation to, well, it seems to me the last time I looked at it that another very severely under-represented group is White, working-class males (Senior Manager, Leeds Met).

Many Senior Managers admitted that their institutions needed to make a continuous effort to widen participation from still under-represented groups, such as White working-class males or mature students.

5.1.2 Success in Widening Participation?

Although institutions claimed success in WP, Senior Managers raised many concerns about the concept of success in WP or more generally the way in which WP strategies and initiatives were organised. For example, some expressed a concern that success was only a reflection of broader changes in HE; whilst others suggested that HEIs were lowering entry requirements and retention rates in order to appear successful in WP, when in reality they were only widening access. These opinions illustrate the dilemmas that HEIs faced in order to meet the Government targets for WP.

It looks like WP but you are sweeping up anyone who walks by and this creates issues around motivation, retention etc….now every other person goes to university and ends up on courses not right for them (Senior Manager, Bradford).

…the whole area of retention is an issue – I think we’ve done a brilliant job of getting students into college and onto programs in the last few years and because you’re getting students in who need an awful lot of
support one to one or in groups they need that extra support that is not there in the normal university curriculum (Senior Manager D, Edge Hill).

Many Senior Managers also felt that due to the number of initiatives running in the institutions at any one time, it was extremely difficult to obtain a clear direction or any overview of what was really happening institutionally. The Senior Managers’ scepticism about the way that WP policy was translated into practice was also shared with some non-senior management staff, both academic and support. They observed that WP initiatives could result in the devaluation of programmes and the lowering of retention rates due to the lack of appropriate support for students.

To me British widening participation is doomed to fail [...] because you have to, you have to push everyone through an academic track whether or not they’re suited to it (Non-Senior Manager, academic, Leeds Met).

And [the vice chancellor] says, well look at Huddersfield, or something, they don’t have similar drop out rates and they have similar social class [...] but I don’t believe they do, because we have students with these massive social problems. Yeah and many of us who have, have come from different countries. It’s first generation, African Caribbean, whatever, and they don’t always have the same support, family support, it’s much more difficult for them, much more difficult for them (Non-Senior Manager 3, academic, UEL).

5.1.3 Embedding WP Policy and Practice

Senior Managers often felt that there was a need to see WP in a wider context; interlinking it with other institutional strategies such as Learning and Teaching, and Employability. For example, the WP Office at Brunel stressed that their WP strategy is strongly linked to the University’s Learning and Teaching Strategy and that the University also focused on developing and supporting students to prepare them for their future careers.

However, in the other institutions Senior Managers generally considered that more integration between different policies and strategies in their institutions was necessary. As in the HE sector generally, in the institutions studied, WP policy has been developed focusing mainly on access rather than the whole student cycle. Having WP and/or Widening Access teams as a separate service in institutions, independent of other services, can allow them to focus on WP policy. However, such a structure can pose challenges in the institution as Bradford’s experience showed, where the WP strategy had been developed without any clear connection to the Learning, Teaching and Assessment or Employability Strategies. Bradford felt that they needed to pay more attention to retention and student support than recruitment and that they had embed WP policy and practice across university in all schools and departments.

5.1.4 Continuity and Communication Problems in WP

Senior Managers considered both the missing linkage between strategies, and the lack of communication within institutions a challenge for developing effective practices in WP.
I think we could do more actually to try and co-ordinate what [the Access Institute] do with some of the one-off initiatives that go on in Schools and Faculties and then I think we ought to blow our own trumpet a bit more [...] We do good work, but we’re not very good sometimes at saying we are good at this (Senior Management, Leeds Met).

The lack of communication was expressed in various ways in different institutions. Senior Managers in one institution felt that their WP policy and practice was top down and being decided at the senior management level, whilst WP practitioners in another institution described their institutional practices as bottom up run by practitioners relying on very limited resources and they suggested that they did not receive enough institutional support.

The quote above also highlights the nature of many WP initiatives which are often one-off and run on short-term funding. This can lead to a lack of continuity, partly caused by insufficient communication, which makes it difficult for WP projects to be fully implemented within institutions. One such example is from Edge Hill where a Minority Recruitment Officer was placed in the Education Faculty, funded by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA), to build ‘awareness within communities towards initial teacher training (ITT) courses and getting them interested’ (Non Senior Management Staff A, Edge Hill); and although he claimed that the students had found it easy to raise various problems with him, the post did not continue after a year, because the funding stream ended.

5.2 Equality and Diversity Policy and Practice

5.2.1 Diversifying the Student Body

At policy level, all institutions involved in the project indicated their commitment to equality and diversity; for instance, in terms of equal opportunities in student admissions and staff employment. For example, the Leeds Met Corporate Plan 2004-08 stated:

Leeds Met people have always shared a strong commitment to making a difference to students and communities who would otherwise risk being disadvantaged. This spirit is reflected in the term 'equalising' and is manifested in the daily encouragement of widening and deepening participation in lifelong learning. This is part of a broader concern to promote an ethnical culture throughout Leeds Met so that individuals and groups treat one another with respect and dignity, valuing and celebrating diversity.

In institutions with a large proportion of students from ME backgrounds, their Senior Managers believed that their institutional culture was very diverse and they saw such diversity as their institutional strength. As seen in the quote below, diversity was also recognised as a positive characteristic of the institution by non-senior management staff as well.
It is successful in achieving [cultural diversity]. There are people from all over the world which is quite refreshing. It is quite genuine, not just a paper exercise (Non-Senior Manager, non-academic, Leeds Met).

In an institution that has a relatively low representation of ME students, the issue of Race Equality was linked to a series of strategies to widen participation from minority ethnic groups. However, in other institutions, Senior Managers expressed mixed opinions on directly targeting ME students in relation to WP. They were concerned about singling out and targeting particular ME groups because they felt that such initiatives may cause disadvantages for other groups; that targeting particular groups can miss the point; that the category of ME students was too broad to be a useful category for planning; or that class and gender can interact with ethnic factors making ME targeting unhelpful. Interviewees in all five institutions often expressed ambivalence to using (only) ethnicity as a targeting criterion.

When you try and create a particular strategy to encourage different groups you kind of miss it and in a good business you actually start with your customer and how you are going to attract them and look after them… (Senior Manager 14, UEL).

I mean you’ve got […] clear success groups, students of certain ethnic backgrounds actually doing very well, those from professional Asian backgrounds [who] have got very supportive families, […] the Chinese community […] but I still think we struggle with young Muslim boys […] in parts of the city where you have a Black African Caribbean population, the girls work harder than the boys (Senior Manager, Leeds Met).

5.2.2 Creating a Culturally Inclusive Environment

Many Senior Managers agreed that providing culturally sensitive timetabling, an inclusive curriculum, and a variety of extra-curricular activities which do not involve alcohol, are indispensable for the institutions in creating an inclusive environment. Senior Managers were also aware of the need to provide culturally specific student support in some cases.

[Brunel University promotes equality of opportunities] in different ways. I mean, for example, we do have separate and special job fairs and learning experience for people from minority backgrounds and they are particularly aimed at lifting their horizons and honing the skills and motivating. People are from various sorts of backgrounds. Minority meaning not just racial minority but religious, ethnic and even people with disabilities to raise their aspirations and to help them in any way we can (Staff, academic, Brunel).

Most universities considered a multicultural curriculum as well as the recognition of cultural and religious calendars sufficient for meeting the diverse needs of the students. Most institutions in the project were aware of the importance of developing an inclusive curriculum, as discussed in their various institutional strategies and/or articulated by Senior Managers. However, the interviews with non-senior management staff highlighted some confusion around the extent to which they should take account of specific student’s needs.
There is sensitivity in terms of the development of our programme curriculum. In other words many of our staff are very committed to developing programmes that explore critically contemporary social and cultural life. Inevitably to do that effectively you have to explore questions of race, gender, the development of international and domestic social, political, cultural and economic circumstances (Senior Manager 9, UEL).

Ethnic background shouldn’t impinge on how the university runs – no! Obviously in regard to religious festivals, if there is a clash it should be discretionary, down to the school. I don’t think timetables, agenda etc should be different according to ethnic background (Non-Senior Manager, non-academic, Leeds Met).

Not only was there a need for institutions to develop inclusive strategies, but the Senior Managers in some institutions were critical of their institutional practice on Equality and Diversity as it lacked awareness of these issues. This raises the question of the ‘extent to which staff really understand and engage with some of the issues that our students from minority groups might be concerned about’ (Senior Manager Interview, Edge Hill). This lack of awareness was an issue in several institutions, and raised concerns about the message it sent to ME students. As the interview below shows, it could create a humiliating experience for students.

Maybe it’s just on this site and the people I’ve met here… I’ve felt that people’s attitudes towards the students were maybe colonialist – you know – really do gooding. […] I don’t know about the teaching body because I don’t know the statistics, but if I look at the service I inherited – all female, all White until this year when they had xxx come who is Asian, but you have a body of people who are supposed to work with people who to me were not culturally sensitive, not necessarily maliciously, but they are not culturally sensitive (Senior Manager 14, UEL).

This calls for a need for more staff training to raise awareness of equality and diversity.

I think it’s getting better but I wouldn’t say every member of staff fully understand the diversity they are going to encounter so we do need to do more in terms of staff development (Senior Manager C, Edge Hill).

As the quote also demonstrates, some Senior Managers felt that another challenge for their institution in creating a diverse institutional community was the different ethnic profiles of their staff and student bodies. However, this dilemma was more often addressed by non-senior management staff.

We’re still predominately White and the few Black faces that are there are really noticeable because it’s really the exception to the rule (Non-Senior Manager, academic, Leeds Met).

I did feel uncomfortable yesterday in the 1st year [subject] induction with one… there was one mixed race member of staff, the rest of us were all solidly White and I am looking at a sea of Black, brown faces, that does
These narratives illuminate many challenges that institutions, even those with diverse student bodies, face in developing a truly diverse culture in their institutions.

### 5.3 Graduate Employability Strategies

#### 5.3.1 The Role of HEIs

All institutions recognised enhancing graduate employability was a key objective and it was mentioned in policy documents such as Corporate Plans and the Learning and Teaching Strategies. Various initiatives have taken place in the institutions such as the provision of a central Career and Employability service, developing a skills curriculum, building work experience into the curriculum, and focusing on entrepreneurship. Some institutions have drafted Employability Strategies to clarify the provision for students and to share good practice within their institutions. For those institutions that stressed their tradition in providing vocational education, the issue of employability has always been a strategic priority and an integral part of the curricula. For example, in Bradford, which was the second most successful university in the country for student transition to employment, according to HEFCE performance indicators, the Corporate Plan states that the University:

- was a leading member of one of the pilot consortium developing foundation degrees and has since developed a range of foundation degree courses;
- has established a Centre for Workforce Development which is the focus for developing employer led foundation degrees and vocational continuing professional development courses;
- has established and employability sub-group to respond to the governments key skills agenda and work with University schools and departments to identify and develop cores skills provision (Bradford Corporate Plan, 2005-9).

Similarly in Brunel which has a long tradition of focussing on graduate employability, Senior Managers stressed that employability was a strategic focus they planned to develop further.

*There is something that we are planning to do: to build the whole employability agenda more deeply into the courses themselves. So, we try to integrate it a bit more, or that, for example, students learn as part of their curriculum what the employment structure is in the industry, what career paths there are, and so on. So it would be part of their learning experience (Staff, academic, Brunel).*

Even for the institutions which did not particularly stress their vocational strengths, enhancing employability has become a pressing issue in the last few years as addressed in their institutional policy documents. The UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-5 stated that:
We recognise that we must do more to prepare our students for future employment. The Corporate Management Team has approved an Employability Action Plan which this Strategy will implement. Five actions have been agreed which specify the introduction or extension of:

1. Level one skills units
2. Personal Development Planning
3. Work-related learning units
4. Careers Conference days for levels 2 and 3
5. Careers liaison

As the quote below illustrates, many Senior Managers in these institutions accepted this new role for HE: to provide better career opportunities for their learners.

Well it’s fairly obvious that people need to get a job and people need to start thinking about getting a job when they set foot in the institution and the old model I mentioned before will not work. So it’s got to build into the curriculum, they have to start thinking about it sooner and acquire skills early on in their programme that will be useful in the labour market and as long as that is done in the right way there is nothing in conflict with having a good academic experience and work (Senior Manager 12, UEL).

There were, however, some Senior Managers who argued that enhancing employability should only be one of many opportunities that HEIs should offer to their students. Although students’ vocational achievements are important, these Senior Managers considered that an HEI’s role should be much broader.

I don’t think it is just a straight forward answer saying HE is all about employability. I think that diminishes the importance of HE, so I think it is an intellectual and human development that one should expect HE to at least provide the opportunity for someone to achieve. If you do that well then actually you do create someone who has the confidence and the skills to get a decent job (Senior Manager 9, UEL).

5.3.2 Questioning the Employability Agenda
As has already been observed, the interviews with Senior Managers demonstrated quite varied views on an HEIs’ role in enhancing employability. This highlighted the confusion with the term ‘employability’ itself. When discussing employability, some Senior Managers focused on the provision of subject-based vocational skills, while others emphasised the importance of transferable skills. With the current competitive employment market, where graduates are not necessarily gaining graduate jobs, the meaning of employability was also questioned.

Employability in the UK over the last 10 years has been pretty good as you know and unemployment is very low but what many people’s concern about getting a graduate job, a job in which they can use the skills they have. And that’s an anxiety for some students. They may end up with a job but it may not be a job that they were really trained to do and therefore
would not have benefited sufficiently from the time they put into HE (Staff, academic, Brunel).

In an institution that had many vocational courses and where employability skills development was an integral part of teaching and learning; identifying generic key (employability) skills as well as developing a key skills curriculum had been a huge challenge, as it reduced the time available for subject specific skills and knowledge.

The ambiguity of the term was also reflected in how different Senior Managers situated the employability agenda differently within the broader context of their institutional policies and practices. Despite the proposal that there should be increased links between WP and employability (Brennan and Shah, 2003), some Senior Managers interviewed in the project were unaware of this link as demonstrated below.

In the sense that as we undertake our WP activities […] we increase the number of students, purported students, on our courses that come from ethnic minority groups, therefore, because our provision does have an employability focus on it then, you know. […] though I don't see a direct link between WP and employability (Senior Manager, Leeds Met).

Other Senior Managers, however, considered WP and employability as closely linked or actually the same issue, and that the university had responsibilities in all phases of the students’ experiences.

I think it is about our students and I don’t think that they are two separate issues actually – I think that for our student body and our student profile that WP and employability are part of the same issue (Senior Manager 4, UEL).

Despite the complexity of the term employability, most Senior Managers agreed that employability was one of their strategic priorities. However, as the interview below demonstrates, some Senior Managers expressed the view that academic staff were still unclear about how the employability agenda should be embedded in the academic curriculum.

I think there are still quite a lot of staff who think that it [graduate employability] is not really their responsibility and it is because of the expectations of particularly the people we are now marketing our courses at, I think we are doing them a disservice if we don’t get more involved (Senior Manager 7, UEL).

Indeed, the doubts about employability can be underlined more clearly in the interviews with non-senior management staff, where they presented mixed views on the employability agenda in HEIs. Although many agreed that it is crucial for students to develop their knowledge and skills through their courses in order to become more employable, academic staff were more likely to be sceptical about their own and their HEIs’ role in actively enhancing graduate employability.

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I think it’s the responsibility of the student to access what the university is offering with regard to employability skills, but I do have to say I find it quite worrying that at university we’ve got to teach students how to be employable, which means that they’ve come out of their schools completely unemployable! (Non-Senior Manager, academic, Leeds Met).

Also, a few were very critical of employability being used as a government target for education institutions.

I don’t fully subscribe to the government view that a degree has the purpose to make people more employable, but a degree can give you skills. HE should educate and impart a body of knowledge and, as a by-product, you get skills and this is useful for the state… (Staff, non-academic, Brunel).

The lack of clarity about employability also influences the different levels of awareness and approaches to the employability agenda amongst members of staff. Some non-senior management staff members also considered employability as crucial in HEIs, and they welcomed a more integrated approach to the issue.

I think that when students first come to the university they are not thinking about employability at all. I think that’s one of the reasons why career planning should be key in the first year (Staff, non-academic, Brunel).

One institution appointed its first Head of Employability at the end of 2004, in order to provide a centralised service with effective communication between academic schools and departments. After two years, this proved to be key in developing more consistent and integrated employability practices within the institution.

5.3.3 The Value of Work Placements
Whatever the contested notions of ‘employability’ that exist in the institutions, work placements were widely accepted by Senior Managers, non-Senior Managers and employers as a vital tool in enhancing students’ employment prospects. At Edge Hill, its strategic vision clearly states the importance of work experience.

All undergraduate students will have opportunities for academically accredited work experience within their programmes. Wherever possible, relevant professional accreditation will be sought for academic programmes: we will seek to provide our students with a recognised currency in their future careers (Edge Hill, Mission Statement, 2005).

Another institution that has a strong vocational provision had also been attempting to embed work experience into students’ learning and to develop an employability skills curriculum on all courses. As seen below, the view that work placements are important for students’ career development was shared by many staff throughout the institutions.

[HE institutions] should offer a placement year out and they should manage that and they should try their very best to have employers out
there who are willing to take them [...] it’s our responsibility to bring the workplace in here [...] we need to give them the skills and the confidence to go to interviews, to get past the barriers into the workplace (Senior Manager, Leeds Met).

I think that I would probably feel most passionate about getting work placements accredited so that students very early on start thinking about that, you know, from year 1. That would encourage students to think about what they would like to do quite early on. Hopefully this would equip them with the skills employers are looking for once they’ve graduated (Staff, non-academic, Brunel).

However, in relation to ME students, a few Senior Managers were aware that ME student were less likely to apply for a work placement or a study year abroad. Senior Managers suggested various reasons for this, including: student’s reluctance to spend time on non-accredited activities; their desire to complete the programme in the shortest period; and cultural barriers.

Even when ME students had access to work placements, they seemed to face many issues that they only felt comfortable talking about within a specialist support service. A support staff member who worked closely with ME students admitted that many students complained about their placements.

I think placements is a strange one because placements can make or break you know a person whether they’d want to go into teaching full time – if they have a bad experience then it really disheartens them I’ve been talking to a few students who have found their placements quite racist (Support Staff, Edge Hill).

In this respondent’s view, the HEI has a responsibility to ensure that all students have a good work placement experience by equipping them with the knowledge of their rights in the work place. The above case suggests that the successful outcome of work placement depends on the quality of the arrangements for the work placement. This can be applied to students from all backgrounds. Some senior managers stated that their provision of work placement was not as good as it could be.

There is a lot to do. The placement learning model is outdated; the way they operate now is 20 years old. We need to think differently about this (Staff, academic, Brunel).

It was also found to be important for HEIs to develop good contacts with (local) employers that were open to diverse needs and could provide work placement or employment opportunities without much travelling involved.

There’s a problem in terms of placement and graduate recruitment of ethnic minorities, particularly with Asian girls. This is because they cannot move away from the place because for many of them the parents won’t let girls move away from home (Staff, non-academic, Brunel).

The lower participation in work placement by ME students and the different experience that they encounter in the work place also illustrates some of the
possible disadvantages that these students face in finding a job after graduation. This may partly explain their different employment patterns upon completion of their studies, as some Senior Managers pointed out, those students who participated in work placements can get better degrees, and therefore better employment prospects.

5.3.4 Other Approaches to Enhancing Employability

Senior Managers felt that mentoring schemes for (ME) students were an effective measure to develop student employability through raising the awareness and aspirations of students.

We have the mentoring scheme at Brunel. [...] What happens is that we enlist mentors who are professionals, normally in areas that these kids wouldn’t have much experience in. For example, merchant bankers from the City or high paid barristers, and they give 2 hours a month and they take an ethnic minority student. And what we want them to do is to motivate these students, give them the feeling that even though they come from backgrounds where they wouldn’t necessarily expect to be bankers or lawyers and so on ... that experience can be close to them (Staff, academic, Brunel).

Mentoring can also offer various opportunities for students such as exploring career options, developing useful contacts and preparing them to confront possibly discriminatory work environments. Senior Managers thought that students generally gave very positive feedback on it.

Three institutions involved in the project had an institutional strategic focus on developing entrepreneurial skills, as a method of enhancing employability.

We seek to promote self-employment and entrepreneurial skills energetically and systematically throughout the curriculum so that our students are exceptionally able to find success in the job market and contribute to the business birth rate. We recognise that many students will wish to build their own business (Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-2005, UEL).

These institutions had various initiatives to support student and graduate entrepreneurs in setting up their own business, by providing opportunities for consultation, workshops and linking with necessary business contacts. These initiatives were supported by many Senior Managers.

5.4 Institutional Policies and Strategies Conclusion

In summary, the policy analysis and Senior Managers’ interviews above highlight the necessity of good internal institutional communication on various initiatives with clear and integrated strategies.

There is a lot going on at Brunel but all the initiatives appear to be disjointed (Staff, academic, Brunel).
We need to be a bit more focused and a bit clearer about what we are doing. I feel we are still trying to do everything and I think that is probably something that is common across the sector because we have had so many new initiatives that is probably time to sit down and work out what we are really doing with WP and what we are really offering people (Senior Manager 7, UEL).

The feeling that there is a lack of clarity in the rationale and direction for these policies and strategies can also be partially explained by the lack of rigorous monitoring and assessment of these initiatives.

I think part of the problem is there isn’t a clear enough linkage being made between WP activities and outcomes, so I think a lot of staff would look at the whole [range of] activities that are put on and they would say, ‘is any of this working? If so, how do we know?’ (Senior Manager, Leeds Met).

For appropriate policy development and implementation, institutional data, particularly that on monitoring and assessment is crucial. However, in many institutions, such data was not collected or available for members of staff, and in some cases data was not used to develop policies.

What is the purpose of analysing monitoring reports? Surely it is to identify key issues so if you are not talking about ethnicity in these it is surprising....We are not expected to analyse data and action this (Senior Manager, Bradford).

Thus the rigorous monitoring and assessment of data needs to be part of institutional practice for the efficient development and implementation of policy initiatives where this is possible within the constraints of funding body requirements.

It [evaluation and dissemination on policies and practice] used to be very structured and HEFCE driven and now it isn’t which makes it so much easier to look at the whole institution in terms of reporting and discussion and dissemination...it means this time it will be a lot more inclusive (Senior Manager C, Edge Hill).

This also leads to the problem of the way in which student success is measured by funding bodies, where diverse student outcomes can be devalued by inflexible measurement instruments.

We measure the average time a student here takes to complete their degree and of course it’s a three year degree and you expect to complete it in three years. Well in fact the average is something like 3.6 years. And what often happens is a student will drop out for a semester while they raise some cash and then they’ll come back in and we’re quite comfortable about that but actually our funding councils regards that as a failed student (Senior Manager 2, UEL).
6 THE STUDENT CYCLE

With more non-traditional students entering HE, HEIs are now facing new challenges in meeting their students’ diverse needs. This section, based largely on student narratives, will look at their experiences of all phases of HE from the point of entry to graduation, and will attempt to highlight students’ needs for successful participation in HE. It will explore the three stages of their contact with HE, namely; Access to University, Progression through University and Transition from HE to work.

6.1 Access to University

6.1.1 Aspirations and Motivations

The students’ motivations for coming to university were often a combination of interacting factors. These factors included a wish to change their lives, to enhance their career prospects, or to meet family expectations. As seen in the quote below they were, to some extent, a reflection of individual and social circumstances.

I am a mature student; I left college at a young age and worked. It came a point in my life where I was not going anywhere. I wanted to do something with my life, be someone, go somewhere. The only thing would be to get a decent education, to go to university. So I attended an access course and then I came to Brunel. I felt that I needed the degree to enhance my career, my pool of knowledge. There was also a level of expectation from my family. Especially if you come from my background Asian background, your parents want you to be a lawyer, a doctor, a pilot, all of these high flying jobs that you probably don’t like, so there was a level of pressure from my family as well (Final - year male student, focus group, Brunel).

However, both survey and interview results have shown that the prospect of developing a future career was the most common motivation for participating in HE. For 90% of students responding to the questionnaires in Bradford and Edge Hill, enhancing their career prospects was the primary reason for attending HE.

I wasn’t considering nursing but over a 6 year period I found I was able to do the job. I spent about 6 years in care jobs e.g. hospital porter, assistant in emergency departments. The next natural step seemed to be to train to be a nurse because I had had enough of being a dogsbody (Final-Year female student, Bradford).

I was in assisting in a school and I was watching the teachers and they were doing a really good job but then some of the children started to ask me questions instead and I thought I can do this and get paid more for it like a ‘real’ teacher (First-Year mature student, Edge Hill).

It needs to be stressed that for a significant number of students, entering HE is a turning point in their personal development, as well as an opportunity to
develop their professional career. For some of them, simply attending higher education is an important goal to achieve.

I always wanted to do HE, but I couldn’t. Because after I finished my AAT [Association of Accounting Technician]. I started ACCA [Association of Chartered Certified Accountant] but I dropped it because I couldn’t cope with my children, so I was in a kind of blocked away [i.e. trapped] I went to do my English course, and that English teacher, she is the one who advised me to do a degree rather than waiting around and wasting my time. That how I started it. [...] I thought everything will be, I mean, all my negative thought about myself will be changed to be positive, by doing a degree. I don’t know it was for me, having a degree is like something prestigious that how we feel back home. And I just wanted to be educated; I will be educated knowing everything (1st Year, female, student 22, UEL).

An interest in the subject was another key factor in choosing to enter HE. Many interviewees thought that a degree was important, but they also felt that they have to enjoy the subject they study. The questionnaire and interview results in some institutions demonstrated that students of ME backgrounds tended to have more complex reasons for coming to HE rather than solely vocational goals, whilst White students were more likely to give vocational aims as the sole reason. For example, at Brunel, family expectations and the wish to change their life were the two most common reasons for coming to HE given by Asian Indian groups. The quote below from an Asian female student from Bradford also portrays how the decision was influenced by different factors of ethnicity, gender and family environment.

When I was 15 my mum died and I left school with no qualifications and spent a long time looking after family but in 1999 I decided I was not spending all my life being skint and a housewife, looking after babies and going to neighbours. There is more to life than family… I had no time for myself (Final - year, female student, Bradford).

For some students from ME backgrounds, entering higher education can be an expression of respect for family values by following family advice, whereas for others it was a challenge to the fixed gender roles in their family. It should be noted, however, that challenging gender roles was also an issue for female students from non-ME background, who may have wished to have different identities from those of housewives or mothers. Some students from all ethnic backgrounds, but more from ME backgrounds explained that they entered HE in order to become a role model for their children through learning and to pass something on to the next generation of their community. This indicates that some of these ME students had a strong sense of family or community, which they saw as the basis for wider social improvement.

6.1.2 Choice of Institution

Interviews and survey results show that students choose the institution they study at by reputation; the quality of the course, including the provision of good work placements, facilities, and location (locality); or a combination of
these factors. For reputation, students acquired information through league tables, and recommendation from teachers in schools, past and current students and family members.

Bradford had a good reputation in the university league table for nursing. It was teaching quality that brought me here (Final-year student, Bradford).

I knew of the reputation and I've got some friends who have done degrees here (Final-year, non-mature student, Edge Hill).

Many students chose their institution because it offered the course they wanted to study; because it was suitable for their learning needs; or because it offered work placement opportunities. Also for students who study a subject such as sports science, the facilities that the university could offer were an important factor in the decision to study there.

I was interested in Information and Communications Management; there weren't many universities that did it as it was quite a new thing (Final-year, mature female student, Leeds Met).

I knew that if I did want to do the maths degree in Liverpool and then do a PGCE that would be 4 years but this course is 3 years and at my age one year is huge (First-year mature student, Edge Hill).

I chose Brunel for the reputation of work experience, especially for my school, DISC, my department. We have a lot of individuals going to very well established companies like Microsoft, Merrill Lynch, and accounting firms and the like, so I based my choice on the university (Final-year, male student, focus group, Brunel).

In all the institutions involved in the project, students said, both in questionnaires and in interviews, that the locality and the geographical accessibility of the university was one of the most important reasons for choosing the specific institution. This answer corresponds with the findings of recent studies which show that the location of the institution has become an increasingly important factor in students’ choice of institution (Moogan et al., 2001). The location is important for various reasons including financial pressures and family and work commitments. This is of particular importance when students are mature with family commitments or are from certain ME backgrounds, and need to stay close to their family.

I had to come here because it was the nearest University to my parents (for childcare) and also I want to work at Airedale where I have got a job as an auxiliary nurse (Final-year student, Bradford).

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3 Only in answers to the questionnaire at Leeds Met was the distance (either close of far away) from home and family was not considered important. As the importance of locality was stressed in the interviews in the institution, this divergence may be explained by the questionnaire sample, which includes more White, young and full-time students.
I had to stay in Leeds or go somewhere that was commutable. I had a place down South but my parents would not allow me to move. That is why I chose Leeds Met (Final-year, female student, Leeds Met).

My parents recommended it – it was close (Graduate, female, questionnaire, Brunel).

Accessibility not only refers to the geographical location of the institution, but also to having flexible entry requirements, a flexible academic calendar (such as a providing February start), funded courses, rapid application processing, and various inclusive admission practices including APEL, which are all important in particular for mature students.

The University did not mess me around with cancelling interviews or put me on waiting list waiting for my results (Final-year student, questionnaire, Bradford).

For students from ME backgrounds, the diversity of the culture at the institution also affected their decisions. In many cases, a large population of ME students, or a specific ME group gave a sense of safety and familiarity.

At Bradford the main thing is there is a lot of Asians. Even now if I’m in a place like Blackpool you feel good if you see an Asian person. It is important here because here there is plenty of things like Halal food (Final-Year, female student, Bradford).

Those ME students who attended an institution with a lower representation of ME students felt that the institution needed to make more effort in order to promote the institution to ME students and to encourage them to apply. The lack of ‘visibility’ of ME students often had an adverse effect on the student’s decision.

I watched the promotional video and was disappointed at the lack of ME students in it- in fact some of my friends back home did not apply to Edge Hill after seeing the video and thinking this place wouldn’t be right for them (First year, non-mature student, Edge Hill).

6.1.3 First Contact with University

In addition to careers guidance in schools, recommendation by friends and family, and league tables; the interviews and questionnaires with students demonstrate that students found information about the institutions through prospectuses, open days and university websites. For some students open days had a positive impact, providing a friendly atmosphere which was appealing to prospective students.

Yeah it was good- I just sort of felt like I belonged here (Final-year, non-mature student, Edge Hill).

However, there were some students who felt that the friendly and organised atmosphere of the open day was quite different from what they experienced
after they started their course. Some students from one institution felt that having an open day at a different campus from where they were going to study, and without any major facilities and services, such as the library or cafés open did not give a good impression. Only a few students made contact with teaching staff for information before they applied to the programme. Compared to younger students who received a lot of careers advice, thus giving them initial contact with HEIs, mature students in some institutions received little careers advice and were more likely to seek information about courses and universities by themselves via the internet or public media. However, if mature students attended Access Courses at Further Education Colleges, they tended to get more advice on HEIs from their tutors, thus providing a link to the HE institutions.

Senior Managers in all universities stated that their institutions have various WP initiatives that have been working with their (local) communities. However, only students from one institution stated that their first encounter with the university was through WP-related activities undertaken by that institution. A number of students progressed to degree programmes from short courses including an intensive access course, and a taster course in Psychology, which provided the first contact with HE through that institution.

I was drifting so I actually went on a, in fact, I went on, it was called, New Beginnings One course [...] Yeah, there’s a New Beginners’ One, New Beginners Two. New Beginners One was like a careers thing, you know that one? [...] then I enrolled in New Beginnings’ Two which you get your 20 credits and debate with your teacher how to go to university, don’t they? And I really enjoyed that and, she gave me the, the lecturer or, they’re not lecturers, the teacher, or whatever, she really was very encouraging and she made me feel that I had what it, you know, what was needed to go to university as a mature student (Final-year, female student 7, UEL).

6.1.4 Entry Route

With more non-traditional students coming to HE, a higher percentage of students enter with a diverse range of qualifications. Although the majority of students still come to HE with ‘A’ levels, many others come through vocational qualifications, international qualifications, access courses, or work experience. Institutional data, questionnaires and interview results show that in general, non-traditional entry is prevalent amongst ME students. However, more Asian students tend to come with traditional ‘A’ Level qualifications than Black students, who are more likely to enter HE through access courses or vocational qualifications. This can be explained in part by the difference in age at entry, as more Black students tend to be older than their Asian counterparts. Also, to widen access to those who cannot provide documentary evidence of formal qualifications, institutions often set exams for potential mature learners to assess whether they are suitable for the programme.

I didn’t actually do my GCSEs in England here [...] I left my result back in Nigeria so when I came here and I wanted to do IT, I was expecting them
to say to me right you need to bring in your GCSEs, your A ‘levels but I didn’t actually have them here, but they said to me you know I’m a mature student, so I was just being interviewed, [...] and they said to me alright, ok – I should do a test, a little test. I did a test and they said to me, after the test they said to me they said to me alright, ok you’ve been given a place – I said alright, you know and that was it really (Second-year, male, student 3, UEL).

At some institutions, access courses or vocational qualifications are the most common pathways into HE for all Black students and mature White students.

For a number of students, the institution they are studying at is not their first experience of HE. Interviews at UEL show that a few students had initially attended other HEIs, but they had moved to UEL as second year students (sometimes after an HNC), or started to study a completely new course at UEL. These students who transferred from other institutions often felt that their previous institutions did not meet their needs.

It [UEL] is a good place to learn, it is very diverse and they support you quite well [...] and [I] got support from the teachers but I get good support from [name] my counsellor and you know I have found [...] more support since my illness than [name] University, definitely. When I was at xxx I had to go to hospital, my sister was desperately trying to get to tell the university and she couldn’t get through, you know [...] you know my personal tutors, not here but at xxx, she was desperate trying to get hold of them and they never phoned her back so… (Final-year, female, student 13, UEL).

Such interviews underline the importance of HEIs providing appropriate support to students to increase retention rates and so the students can complete their degrees in their first institution.

6.2 Progression through University

6.2.1 Arrival

Students tended to arrive at HEIs with a mixture of excitement and apprehension. Some students immediately felt content with their choice of courses and institutions.

As soon as I got here I though ‘whoa!’ [...] the emphasis on PE and sport made me feel comfortable doing sport here (Final-year, mature female students, Leeds Met).

A number of students were confident in their academic ability to study at degree level, but many others, especially those who had not been in an educational environment for a long time or who had been less successful academically in the past were anxious about the academic demands of their programmes. Prior to coming to university, some of these students made the assumption that all the other people on the course would be young, middle
class, high achievers and often felt that they were not good enough to study for a degree.

*I didn’t know about my capabilities and didn’t want to be with 18 year old academics. That was a big concern. The reality was that there was a mixed intake and a lot of people older than me.... You think it is going to be all 18 year olds (Final-year, mature student, Bradford).*

As the quote above demonstrates, these students who initially felt that they did not fit into a HE environment gradually realised that there were many students like them, who were mature and without formal qualifications. In addition to their ability to study at HE level, as evident at Bradford, many students were also concerned about maintaining the balance between study, work and family responsibilities, as mature students often had care responsibilities at home.

Most institutions offered induction events for newly arriving students, and many Senior Managers believed that the induction programme was vital for students to settle into the university and to feel that they are welcomed (BBC, 2004; Crooks and Parmar, 2006).

*We have done a lot during induction week and throughout the first year. Also the effective learning week targets students of the first years. And there is evidence that if you manage to keep students throughout the first year, they will stay (Staff, non-academic, Brunel).*

The questionnaires administered in Edge Hill show that around two thirds of students who attended induction events felt that they received enough support as newcomers. However, the questionnaires also show that just half of students who responded attended the institutional event; whilst only just over 40% of students attended the faculty-based events. A study by Crooks and Parmar (2006), which explores the induction experience at Brunel and another HEI in London, also highlights the low attendance at these events. They propose that the reason for this is the different understandings of the purpose of induction events. It is indicated that staff consider the induction event as an integral part of a student’s learning, and therefore, compulsory; whilst students are more likely to interpret it as a means of obtaining general information therefore see it as optional (Crooks and Parmar, 2006). Nevertheless, there were still some students who thought that their institution should offer more opportunities for them to meet new people and provide more ‘academic’ events in the first few weeks after arrival, to allow them to settle into their university life more easily.

Although the importance of induction events was stressed in institutions, those students who do not start their course in September/October or transfer into the second year of programmes do not seem to be provided with the same amount of information as September/October start first year students. These students repeatedly referred to their difficulties in accessing information about the kinds of student services available in their institutions. This suggests that the induction needs to be extended to all students who are newly arrived in the institutions, regardless of their start time and year of study.
That's why. And no one, no one asked me look you’re straight in year two. You haven't been here so we need to explain more about the, this university, procedures, departments, if you need this help, that help. But others they've, they've been on that induction course. I haven't had and I, I have to be honest. I haven't had time to ask someone give me a student handbook. I'm sure they've got something like a student handbook (Second-year, male, student 9, UEL).

6.2.2 Learning Experiences

In general, most students were positive about their (learning) experience at the institutions. For them, it was exactly what they expected, or exceeded their expectations. However, due to the voluntary nature of the participation in the data collection, it is possible that the positive responses are overrepresented.

I would say that it was very successful so far – the course content has lived up to the standards of what I anticipated (Final-year student, non-mature, Edge Hill).

I think they’ve exceeded them because I've not only learnt about sport but, because of the way the course is, […] I've learnt about politics, I've managed to gain general knowledge (Final-year, mature female student, Leeds Met).

Students who had sufficient support from tutors or other members of staff are more likely to give positive comments on their (learning) experience.

Generally I have found that it's been really easy getting along with staff and […] you can have a less formal relationship than with six form tutors, that’s really helped (Final-year, mature female student, Leeds Met).

Many students, however, felt overwhelmed by the amount of coursework and were anxious about the transition from college to university, where the focus was on a more independent style of study.

It is a different way of studying, you get fed. With assignments and coursework here it is ‘get on with it’. I found this difficult at first. There is a big gap between study before and at university. I expect it to be—well, I didn’t think I’d have to take so much responsibility (Final-year student, Bradford).

The poor organisation of programmes was often identified as a factor that added another burden to students' sometimes overwhelming learning experience. Continual, and often clashing, deadlines for assignments, and work being due before all the lectures were delivered were also common areas that students identified for improvement. Some students believed that a positive change in these areas would allow them to perform much better.

For example, next week we are going to hand in an assessment [assignment], and then I think the week after next week we are having an
exam […] I just feel you know sometimes we are being pushed into, you know we are rushed into doing courses and given a short period of time to finish it because it does put a lot of pressure […] I put a lot of effort into what I’m doing but I don’t feel I put in 100% into that work, not that I don’t want to but because there isn’t enough time to you know sit down and put in as much as I can in order to get the good marks (Second-year, male, student 3, UEL).

Coursework load could sometimes be too high to allow you to fully apply yourself. You had to divide up your time carefully to be able to learn every subject in great detail, especially in final year where coursework seemed very duplicated, and sometimes a waste of time as we did not learn anything from doing comparative essays twice over, when we should have been getting on with our dissertations (Graduate, female, Brunel).

Students also felt that the way they received feedback was crucial for their academic improvement, and believed that it was often not adequate. Some felt that the timing of the feedback was not appropriate, as they did not receive feedback for submitted assignments until after examinations. In addition, feedback often addressed only whether their coursework met a certain criteria or not and failed to inform them of how to improve. Institutions may need to consider the way in which they provide feedback to their students, as meeting a minimum requirement for feedback is not enough to allow students who require more guidance to improve.

In terms of their classroom experiences, some mature students felt that younger students could be sometimes very distracting and this was a concern.

Their attitude to life is quite immature and some of them are very lazy or distract others which I wouldn’t expect from future teachers – I would say I don’t want you to teach my children when you are qualified! (First-year mature student, Edge Hill).

Sometimes students felt that it was the tutor’s lack of intervention which allowed younger students to behave in a distracting manner. However, as discussed in the section 5.1.2, some Senior Managers interpret this tendency as one of the (negative) effects of Widening Participation.

A side effect of changing entry levels was that we saw a new problem and this was a problem about behaviour – large scale bad behaviour in lecture rooms. […] This was a transformation because we had large numbers of kids from the same schools attending the same university and carrying their behaviour forward (Senior Manager, Bradford).

Amongst the negative experiences of HE, the lack of tutors or individual support is one of the most common complaints. Many students have built a good relationship with tutors or other academic members of staff, which has helped them through the programme; however, a number of students also believed that the lack of tutor support had a significant impact on their studies. Most of the institutions in the study state in their policy documents that they provide a personal tutor system and implement the policy. However, many
interviews with students demonstrated that the system is not working effectively.

You get a personal tutor and they say it is up to you to make the first contact. You have to find out where they are, where their office is, their phone number. In my first year I emailed and phoned but didn’t see her (Final Year, Bradford).

Some students felt that personal tutors were not helpful because the timing of appointments was inflexible. For example, some tutors are only available to meet students one hour a week, or part-time evening students were allocated tutors who only can see students during the day. They also doubted the reliability of personal tutors as they rarely knew which modules their tutees were taking. Students felt much more comfortable talking to lecturers or class teachers. For students who are taking combined honours programmes it can be very frustrating when their tutors only knew about one of the subjects the student is studying.

The importance of a personal tutor system or equivalent individual support for students was widely recognised in institutions both by Senior Managers and teaching staff, particularly for those students without appropriate study skills. However, some interviews with Senior Managers and other staff highlighted a lack of support and training for academic members of staff in providing the necessary support to students.

Most people in higher education have no teaching qualifications; traditional academics may not have the skills to cope. Our PGCE has few observed teaching sessions and no stuff on behaviour management (Senior Manager, Bradford).

Some teaching members of staff felt that they are not supported enough to allow them to offer extra support to students. This issue became more significant when teaching staff were visiting or hourly paid lecturers who were not paid for overtime.

Although many students were satisfied with their choices, some students felt that their course was not what they expected. This was partly caused by students’ interests having developed in a different direction during their course of study, but also partly because there was not sufficient information provided beforehand on the programmes and modules that they would cover.

I think it [the course] is what I wanted to do and the outcome, but I thought we would be taught how to teach each of the games and the rules and stuff but we’re not – you are expected to do that with your own money (Final-year, mature female student, Leeds Met).

I mean I, I had different image from this course before going to, to the course. Yeah. And I, I wasn’t expect what … It, it was in, into the course itself. I mean um I mean they said look this is the uni so this is the modules you’re going to do. Yeah. But I wasn’t… I mean there was, there wasn’t enough information about the modules, about the, about the uni’s. I think they can, they can put more, more than as they’ve already
put the information about the course itself. So I… No, it wasn’t what I, I expected (Second-year, male, student 5, UEL).

6.2.3 Challenges
The two major challenges students felt they had faced during their time studying were, the balance between studying and the rest of their lives; and financial problems. A significant number of students had multiple responsibilities of study, work and family care. Students with care commitments often called for flexible timetabling.

I know they can’t do timetables round individuals but at first the timetable was hectic and didn’t take account of people with children (Final-year student, Bradford).

Students faced problems dropping off and picking up their children from school, applying for childcare, and coping with the different timings of school and university half terms which caused some to feel they had to juggle their studies and family commitments. Many coped with the situation with support from their families and tutors.

If I didn’t have the support of [my] mother-in-law, mum and husband arranging childcare I couldn’t do this course. I have to study when my kid is in bed. It is very hard because I’m tired and had a day at University. I study in the evening and have to give a weekend a day and my husband has to take my kid out (Final-year student, Bradford).

Last year they were good to me. I was pregnant and they supported me. My personal tutor was there to solve issues (Final-year student, Bradford).

As the quotes below demonstrate, the careful planning of the programme and having prior access to course materials were identified by students as key for a successful learning experience.

It is easier to do an essay a week. Here you get all the essays at once. You should get your essays assignments at the beginning of the modules not five weeks in. You can’t do essays all at once. We have five now and a presentation (Final-year student, Bradford).

Financial matters were an on-going concern for many students, which sometimes restricted their learning experience as well. As students at both Leeds Met and UEL explained, mature students faced more barriers in terms of getting funding for HE study.

I feel I’m not doing enough work, then I think I will work […] then still I think I have to do uni work as well. It’s harder to have a part-time job (Final-year, mature female, Leeds Met).

Although students expressed a desire for their needs to be accommodated; when they had difficulties, such as family or financial problems, they tended to think that it was their own responsibility to sort it out. This seemed to be due,
in part, to the lack of service provision at the institutions or the lack of information about services. However it was also due to the students' perception that they were not typical students and therefore that they should deal with these problems alone.

You see, that was a problem for me because all my lectures are at ten, now, I drop my son off at, um, at school at ten to nine and I could not actually get to Docklands for ten o'clock by public transport. I was not guaranteed to get there for ten o'clock so I always had to ensure that I had a lift off somebody one way or another and sometimes it was a nightmare. And...but I always got there for ten o'clock, you know. […] My husband used to take me sometimes if he could. If there were problems, I'd... a couple of students who used to come through, and I'd, you know, I used to ring them up, sometimes at the drop of a hat and say, oh, gosh, can you pick me up (Final-year, female, student 7, UEL).

Many staff members, both senior managers and non-senior managers indicated that the vast majority of their students lack study skills, which puts a lot of pressure on those delivering the programmes and produced barriers to students' learning. There was some awareness amongst them that a different approach should be developed to engage with these students who need more non-traditional learning styles.

We probably need to be more radical about the first year we still expect students to come in with the same level of preparing and same expectations and I think we're beginning to see quite clearly that that isn't the case any longer... and that sometimes we just assess too much in the first year (Senior Manager A, Edge Hill).

The need for study skills support and clearer academic guidance was also expressed by students themselves.

We need more information on study skills and the expected level of work (Final-year student, questionnaire, Bradford).

Some students who came to HEIs after attending Access Courses said they felt that they were prepared for their degree programme and equipped with the academic skills they required. However, they felt that many of their fellow students did not have such study skills and they had to support them. Skills that students identified that they need more support with were: essay writing, exams, presentations, library catalogue searching, and computer skills. With the move towards developing e-learning, some programmes in some institutions are using Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) heavily. However, many students were not confident using computers, and thus missed the opportunity to access course materials which were posted on VLEs.

6.2.4 Student Service Provision

In addition to academic support, many students thought that good administrative and pastoral support were vital for academic achievement. The issues identified as important were: sufficient library resources, provision of
public computers, and more provision of and publicity for social events. In UEL students felt that the 24 hour library opening was helpful, although they also complained about insufficient numbers of course textbooks, the relatively short loan periods (one week), and no catering facilities for late night library users. Flexible provision for students who were studying part-time evening courses seemed to be crucial in enabling them to access different services and facilitating their learning experiences.

They have a telephone line you can actually phone and pay your fees through that – I’ve done that before. [...] if the reception or the cash office is closed I can always call that line and make payments through that line (Second-year, male, student 3, UEL).

Developing a support network and sense of community was also seen as crucial to a positive HE experience and it could act as some students’ main survival mechanism. These networks were built through engaging in group based activities in the study programme and living in halls of residence.

I think that [living in halls] contributed to my experience at university, amazing! [...] When I consider my group of friends now there are at least 2 of us on the same course, so that was good because we knew people from the Brewery (halls) and on the course [...] it was like a community all walking up together and it was really, really nice (Final-year, mature female student, Leeds Met).

Handing in essays and that we have helped each other out. It is part of our social life getting to see each other. Without these I wouldn’t have a chance to get out the house. Other days we come in and go for something to eat (Final-year, Bradford).

However, a significant number of students felt that they had only limited opportunities for socialising. Some of them ascribed it to the atmosphere and culture of institutions or the insufficient provision for different needs.

My values and attitude to life are different – quite often I just sit in the corner doing my own thing whilst the others are doing lots of things together and sometimes I feel isolated although haven’t focused on this coz I don’t have time to waste socialising (First-year mature student, Edge Hill).

Mature students can’t go for a pint after lectures or be as involved in clubs and stuff because they have got children, jobs, partners and mortgages (Final-year, mature student, Bradford).

Other students, in particular mature students, did not expect to develop a social life at university. Many mature students said that their purpose in coming to HE was to study and get a degree and they felt that they simply did not have time to develop new social networks, as they either already had their own social circle, or were busy with family commitments, which traditional students were less likely to have.
Most of them commuted anyway - they were all living at home, commuting from York or the outskirts of Leeds so there wasn't really that kind of 'let's all go to the pub' [...] I chose that, I was only here to get the degree (Final-year, mature male student, Leeds Met).

### 6.2.5 Cultural Diversity

As already discussed, students thought that the cultural diversity of the university was one of the most important factors when they decided which institution to study at. As the quote below shows, many students felt that they had a valuable opportunity to interact with groups different from their own whilst at university; however, few White students considered their own ethnicity or felt that it had any impact on their studies.

> You walk into UEL and there are a mixture of faces, a mixture of accents, um, and it’s [the course] made me realise, you know, be careful with assumptions and, um, you know, I used to think, and now if I see a White person at university I think they’re probably not from this country because I used to think if they’re White, they’re English. And that was it. And then I realised that’s very narrow, um, so, yeah, it’s done that (Final-year, female, student 7, UEL).

Some students felt that they did not have anything to learn from other groups of students, and some White students felt that they did not fit into the atmosphere of a university where ME students were dominant. Considering the issue of ethnicity as an identity, many students felt that their ethnicity was not a barrier to HE. However, a significant number of students also admitted that their ethnicity has had some impact on their experience of HE, often in very complex ways interacting with gender, family commitments, religion and age.

> I think Leeds is very multicultural […] I don't think [ethnicity] is important as in it doesn't really affect my studies (Final-year, mature male student, Leeds Met).

> It's like two people, my ethnicity doesn't affect university as such but I have to have two lives, one as an Asian mum and one as a student (Final-year, female, Bradford).

In an institution that only had a small proportion of ME students, not having appropriate provision for their needs could be sometimes problematic and affected their HE experience.

> I don’t think Edge Hill has any extra activities for multicultural students.... and in the beginning when everyone was going on pub crawls I did feel a bit left out… I do think more people would come here if there were other things for ME people (Final-year, non-mature student, Edge Hill).

Only a few students said they had experienced being discriminated against or harassed on the basis of their ethnicity, but more students had experienced being treated differently because of their ethnicity or of being stereotyped. These incidents happened both in their HEI and in their work placements.
One thing I found not offensive, but no, not shocking but different was when I had my interview...one of the questions was on my appearance and if you were at a school and a boy becomes racist to you about what you wear what are you going to do... and I thought is this a question directed because of the way I was dressed or would that have been asked anyway (First-year, non-mature student, Edge Hill).

I get offended if people assume things like all Muslims arrange marriages or we are doing nursing because we are not allowed to do anything else. You get this on placement. I pray 5 times a day and I’ve been told off by staff nurses and my prayers are really important. I usually go for breaks when I need to pray but wards can be really funny. Nurses who smoke are allowed to go for extra breaks (Final-year student, Bradford).

Even in culturally diverse institutions, some students were aware that there was a limited amount of interaction between different ethnic groups, and that some segregation was occurring.

The Asian girls are completely separate from the White. People on the course don’t really socialise together. In lectures Asian girls always sit apart in own groups and mostly interact on their own terms (Final-year student, Bradford).

Some people, I’m afraid, leave university without the slightest idea of how they can actually interact and mingle with different people with different cultures, they have just been brought up within one culture... so you have these people who are like mainstream and those who are trying to be a bit more liberal and other stuff – you have that split my argument is that (Final-year, male, student 18, UEL).

This issue was also raised by some members of staff particularly to those below senior management level.

You know, what I was saying about students interacting with each other, I think it’s interesting when you go into, say, seminar groups and obviously students will go and sit with their friends, so they tend to cluster in, in the same groups week after week and it’s always a, a question, do you want to break this up just for the sake of causing interaction or is that going to cause more problems than it, than it solves? I, I’d be interested to know to, to what extent there is real interaction across the different social groups (Non-Senior Manager 4, academic, UEL).

Only a few students raised the disparity between the ethnic profiles of staff and students, but, as seen in section 5.2.2, teaching members of staff tended to be more concerned with this issue. However, when students raised the issue, they emphasised the importance of having a genuine role model in a member of staff. Some ME students felt strongly that diversity should be everyone’s issue and were uncomfortable about being singled out. These students believed that regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, experiencing different cultures was a vital part of their learning at HE.
Do you know people on my course want to be teachers and go into schools and teach them different views and no one has a solid background in it so when they go into schools they might shy away from talking about Islam which will lead to those children not knowing anything later on in life (Final-year student, Edge Hill).

6.3 Transition from University

6.3.1 Preparedness for Work

Many students came to HE to enhance their career opportunities; therefore how well they were prepared for the labour market was an important issue. The degree to which students felt that they were equipped for employment varied. Students who knew how to articulate the transferable skills that they had acquired during their programmes such as presentation, team work, and IT skills believed that together with their subject-specific knowledge they were employable.

My skills [are] communication, people, marketing, organisation. I enjoy project management and group work. I tend to be a group leader and am organised on all levels (Final-year, mature male student, Leeds Met).

Indeed, employers identified the need for generic skills and qualities as well as industry specific skills and knowledge. For example, they listed: communication, presentation, team working, IT, managerial, and problem solving skills, and the need for their potential employees to be flexible, motivated and focused. However, even when students felt confident finding a job, both members of staff and employers emphasised that they often had very unrealistic expectations about their future career prospects, which can result in not finding employment.

Graduates have to have an interest in developing a career. […] It is important that they are open to the different opportunities that may come their way. And I think that’s important because we cannot predict what the work would be in 3-4 years time. So people need to have that flexibility, that ability to learn new things (Partner, Financial Services Company, Brunel Employer).

Some students pointed out that careers services failed to provide appropriate support both within their programme and in central services. However, some students’ responses also demonstrated that students were not aware of the career services that were available to them in their institutions.

I did not feel that there was much guidance for future careers. Tutors along with career advisers should be more helpful (Final-year, mature female, questionnaire, Brunel).

I did not receive any advice on CVs, application forms, covering letters or interviews. I now know that there are services to help, but was not made aware of them at the time (Graduate, male, questionnaire, Brunel).
Although those on vocational courses were more confident about their employment opportunities, those students that were on more academic courses were not very sure how much use their degree would be in getting a job. However, they still believed that a degree was important. Many students, both those from theory-based and vocationally-based courses, felt that their programmes should incorporate some aspects of employability, although they had different expectations of the extent to which their programmes should take employability on board. As the interview below shows, those in more vocationally related courses thought that the programme should be more practically oriented.

I believe that [...] 1.1 person [the person with the first] [...] can go to the work [...] and still don't understand what the accounting is all about. Because we do a lot of theory than we suppose to be covering the accounting itself (Second-year, female student 22, UEL).

Some students who expressed a concern that programmes were too theoretical and not practical enough, showed a degree of ambivalence towards the introduction of a more employability–focused curriculum. This was because many students were very concerned that spending more time on employability modules would reduce the time spent on subject specific study and teaching. As we have seen in section 5.3.2, this concern was also expressed by some teaching members of staff.

6.3.2 Work Placements

Many students were aware of the importance of work placements or work experience to enhance their employability. They thought that work experience provided them with industry knowledge and skills, as well as self-confidence.

[The placement] was very hard work, but yeah, it is an experience. I think sometimes you don't feel like doing it when you are doing it, but when you sit down at the end of a six week placement you think, 'yeah, I have actually achieved something there' (Final-year, mature female, Leeds Met).

Employers who were unsure if the degree programme could equip students with the skills that they require believed that work placement was a good opportunity for students to develop practical and industry based skills.

These are experiences that you don't necessarily have by being in the library and reading books and getting a 1st class, these are experiences that you get by [...] doing the extra bit. At the interview, those who have lots of experiences outside of their university environment would always come with a second level of maturity and lots of different example to draw from (Graduate recruiter, International Corporation, Brunel Employer).

However, for those students whose course did not offer work placement opportunities finding a place to obtain experience could be very time consuming.
These things [setting up your own business] take time – you have to first of all have the experience […] I am now looking for IT work now because as work experience […] I spoke to [tutor’s name] about this about 2 months ago and she gave me a website to go into to actually search for IT companies which I’ve done […] I’ve sent about roughly 10 [applications for work experience] in the last 3 or 4 weeks (Second-year, male, student 3, UEL).

Some graduates were aware that the opportunities were not equally available to everyone and believed that it was the university’s responsibility to see that all their students were offered the same opportunities.

I personally took advantage of all the opportunities which were on offer at Brunel, however, I think it is essential everyone is encouraged to do a work placement, join social clubs and do some form of voluntary work during their time at Brunel. Brunel should also ensure the modules studied reflect the wants and needs of the relevant businesses and industries, for which people are preparing to enter (Graduate, female, Brunel).

The quality of work placements, the availability of a supportive mentor and informed guidance were very important for student learning. Some students and members of staff, such as the Minority Recruitment Officer in Edge Hill believed that it was the university’s responsibility to ensure that students got proper advice and fruitful work experience.

The University does not give clear guidelines on how to complete and mentors are not trained and students get conflicting advice (Final-year student, Bradford).

6.3.3 Impact of Ethnicity
Students had mixed views on the impact of ethnicity on obtaining jobs. Some ME students thought that their ethnicity worked against them if employers were racist or prejudiced and others had already experienced barriers in their work placements such as being stereotyped or singled out as different. However, other students thought that it was ME students’ lack of awareness of what employers required that caused barriers in accessing employment.

I used to think I’ve got a degree I can get into any work I want but he’s [the trainer for the mentoring scheme] like you can have the highest degree but that’s not what they’re looking for, they’re actually looking for certain skills that I didn’t know, that I would need to have that in order to get into work. A lot of Black people or Asian they don’t really know that, they’re just thinking ‘yeah I’ve got a degree I can get into any job I like’, it’s not exactly like that. So I think that is why they tend to choose, it’s not like they’re being racist or anything like that, I don’t see it that way (Second-year, female, student 17, UEL).

Employers explained that communication skills and the ability to articulate thoughts clearly were vital, and they stated that some ME students whose first language was not English, may have had some disadvantage in obtaining a
job when English is used predominantly in the work environment. Employers stated that language was particularly crucial, for example, in an assessment centre where potential employees had to debate an issue with other candidates, this could impact on the confidence of candidates from ME backgrounds.

*Language remains an incredible barrier. We expect people to be able to speak English and to write in English because that's the main way in which we communicate, you know, you cannot have an employee who speaks only Swahili, because [s/he] has to work in a Swahili community, because that just doesn't work. And the argument is why shouldn't it be? Because that's the language of the country (Recruiter 1, Public Sector, Brunel Employer).*

However, employers were also aware that people from ME backgrounds could often bring enhanced cultural awareness to work environments, which employers welcomed. This was why many employers appreciated the opportunities to meet students from universities with great cultural diversity, but they also stressed that the most important factor in gaining employment was whether the students or graduates could demonstrate the skills required.

*[Our company] very much look for people with that added value so definitely they bring that cultural sensitivity that is always an added value for us. This is important but at the same time if for example you think of someone who had that cultural sensitivity but then cannot project it or cannot show it so in a group situation that person certainly needs to demonstrate that added value. We look for people who have got that but that can actually demonstrate it through language, but it is something that is not always easy to demonstrate (Graduate recruiter, multinational banking society, Brunel Employer).*

Employers participating in a careers fair at UEL also explained that although the university had an interesting culturally varied student body, they tended to be unprepared for a competitive selection process and failed to stand out. Some teaching staff believed their students find it difficult to find employment due, in part, to discrimination.

*I see students and the students still keep in contact with me after they’ve left the university and they are finding it difficult to get jobs and I, for me, that is because I think an element of it is racism in this country. We have a lot of students from ethnic backgrounds who are wonderful people, talented people, have done extremely well, and I would have no hesitation in employing them myself and I’m absolutely amazed that they find difficulty in getting jobs. And my only conclusion can be that they’re not getting jobs because there is still an inherent racism within this country (Non-Senior Manager 9, academic, UEL).*

### 6.3.4 Broader Benefits of HE

For many students, educational outcome was not only measured by vocational achievement. Students gave various other outcomes that they hoped to gain or actually gained through their study. These included, gaining
self confidence, interacting with different people, and gaining a broader horizon.

I had a violent relationship with my husband and that stripped my self-confidence and dignity and assertiveness and while I'm on this course I am trying to rebuild those things and that is my main issue (First-year students, Edge Hill).

The benefits are that there is a good cultural mix, it encourages awareness of diversity and improves understanding (Final year student, questionnaire, Bradford).

…I mean I walk down the street with my head up basically, I mean what I'm saying is this – I feel much, much more confident, I feel marketable now, whereas in the past I felt limited, but now I feel marketable because I have a degree and obviously employers are not always looking at the degree that you have, they are looking at the disciplines (Final-year, male, student 18, UEL).

It is true that many students now enter HE in the hope of getting better career opportunities, and HEIs are moving towards better accommodating these students’ needs for the future. However, students’ narratives such as the ones above remind us that HE can broaden horizons and offer new experiences to learners and that this should not be forgotten in the quest for employability. With more non-traditional students with various expectations and learning needs entering HE, students’ accounts of their experiences illuminate the need for HEIs to develop tools and measures to support students on a more individual basis.
7 CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Findings

These findings below are based on the comparative analysis of five case studies as well as 10 institutional findings submitted by each institution. Although different institutions have their own institutionally specific findings, the aim of this section is to highlight areas that are pertinent to most of the partners in the study.

- Career development is the most common reason for students to come to HE.

Most students explain that the primary reason for entering HE is to improve their career prospects. Significant numbers of students also see the experience of HE as an opportunity to develop themselves personally, by building their confidence, broadening their horizons and interacting with different groups of people.

- Academic and geographical accessibility are two of the most important factors in a student’s choice of institution.

Many students choose the institution they study at by reputation and the range and types of course offered by the institution. Whether the institution offers the types of courses which meet their interests or learning needs, such as uniqueness of the subject, the length of courses, the form of assessment and the provision of work placements are some of the most decisive factors. However, for a growing number of students the locality of the institution is as vital, as many of them have family care responsibilities, work commitments or financial issues. For some young ME students the locality is also an issue, as they are discouraged from moving away from home. Academic accessibility, in terms of flexible admission policies, also impact on student’s final decisions of which institution they study at.

- At an institutional level the awareness of WP is considered high; however embedding good practice in WP across an institution can be difficult and contentious.

There is a great amount of support for WP principles and aims in institutions. However, with many initiatives taking place at the same time, it is difficult for many members of staff to map an overall view and direction for these initiatives. Also, many WP activities are organised separately from academic schools and externally funded, which can be a disadvantage when embedding WP practice across an institution.
Measuring the success of WP initiatives is difficult, and has brought new challenges to HEIs.

Institutional policy documents state their commitment to WP and Senior Managers reiterated their success in admitting more students from non-traditional backgrounds. However, this success is mostly limited to widening access and has brought various challenges that HEIs, and in particular teaching members of staff, have to face. These include low retention rates, providing support to ensure that diverse students’ learning needs are met, and meeting the expectation to equip students for employment.

Employability has become a contested issue between managers and teaching staff within HEIs, partly fuelled by the multiple interpretations of the term.

Although many Senior Managers strongly support the HEIs’ role in improving students’ employability, this view is not always supported by academic staff and students. In particular, there is a widespread concern amongst academic staff that the employability agenda could compete with their curriculum, this is also shared by some students. These academics are also bewildered by the fact that enhancing students’ employability is becoming their responsibility, despite this not being their areas of expertise. Such conflicting attitudes towards employability within institutions can partly be explained by the ambiguity of the term, which attracts diverse and open-ended interpretations. Some see employability as actual employment, while others consider it to mean vocationally-specific skills, or transferable skills.

Students’ understandings of their own employability on graduation vary, as do their attitudes towards an employability curriculum.

Whether or not students feel that they are employable depends upon the types of courses they are studying (vocational or non-vocational) and their awareness of skills and knowledge that industries require. Sometimes students cannot identify the transferable skills that they acquire in their programmes. Although many students think they should be employable after completing their studies, their expectations of how far their institutions and programmes should prepare them for employment varies: some students expect HEIs to enhance their employability through their curriculum, whilst others prefer more centralised support through student services.

Work placements are considered one of the most effective measures to enhance student employability.

Student participation in work placements while they are on the degree programme is understood to be a key factor in enhancing a student’s employability by staff, students, and employers. However both students and staff acknowledge that there is currently unequal access to them for different
groups of students. Control over the quality of work placements and the issue of work placement accreditation are also areas for further consideration by HEIs.

- The diverse culture of HEIs is recognised as a positive characteristic, but the extent to which students of different background mix with each other is variable.

In institutions that have diverse student populations, the diverse culture of the institutions is usually positively acknowledged both by students and staff. In these environments, students have valuable opportunities to interact with groups different from their own. However, the segregation of different (ethnic) groups has also been observed on campuses, showing that in some cases there can be limited interaction between different (ethnic) groups. This can prevent students exploring how difference and ethnicity are constructed categories rather than real ones; and can lead to issues relevant to all students being linked to one particular ME group only.

- Ethnicity is one of the many interconnecting aspects of students’ identities, which interact to create their HE experiences.

Many students do not see ethnicity as a central factor in their experience of HE. Instead, it is seen to interact with other factors such as gender, age, religion, and family responsibility. Still, ethnicity as an interconnecting factor does have an impact on their HE experience, through the choice of institution, the access to work placements and the constant pressure to deal with other people’s expectations of them.

- HEIs need to transform themselves to meet the needs of non-traditional students.

Most students now have multiple responsibilities of family, work and study, which means that they have limited time to study. Although students are generally quite positive about their experience of HE, these students, struggle to fit study demands into their already busy lives. Many students manage the work/family/study balance and deal with financial difficulties by themselves or through their own support networks. Organising courses and services, such as flexible timetabling and the late opening of libraries and cafes, to take account of these student life styles is helpful in lessening the student burden and maintaining good retention rates.
7.2 Emerging Issues

Based on an analysis of the case studies, the following are suggestions for ways in which HEIs could improve their services, so that students can fully achieve their potential and can have a positive experience of HE:

- Provide effective induction events for all new arrivals to ensure that all students can easily settle into the HE culture. These events also need to focus on the academic side of induction so that students are well prepared for an independent style of learning and are informed of the support services available to them.

- Provide more individualised and flexible academic support to meet the diversity of the students’ learning needs, such as increasing access to personal tutors, teaching study skills, offering different teaching and learning tools (including VLEs), varying assessment practices, and providing constructive feedback on time. Such provision should also be monitored for its effectiveness.

- Ensure that all members of teaching staff, regardless of their contract status (full-time, part-time, or hourly paid contract) are provided with adequate staff development opportunities and support to respond to diverse learning needs. These include training to teach skills modules (both key study skills and employability skills); providing various assessment methods; giving constructive feedback to students; and a briefing on the provision of student services and social activities.

- Consider how the curriculum and timetabling could be developed further to reflect the cultural values of a diverse student body. The increase in the number of students from non-traditional backgrounds has made this a pressing issue for HEIs. Timetabling needs to be reviewed to take account of students’ other responsibilities, such as family care and work, possibly providing more opportunities for distance or e-learning as well as evening and weekend classes.

- Involve more ME alumni and employers in various academic and social events for mentoring purposes. Be aware of the ethnic diversity of students and staff and recognise the importance of providing role models within HE to encourage high aspiration and achievement amongst ME students.

- Increase opportunities for work placements and remove barriers for certain groups wishing to access placements by developing good communication with (local) employers. It is also crucial to clarify what each party expects from work placements so that students are treated fairly and are provided with enough guidance to have a productive work experience.

- Provide better support and services outside teaching programmes, such as catering to meet diverse dietary requirements, ensuring good transport
links to the campus (including car parking), and counselling to deal with various personal and financial matters.

- Through collaborative practice, strengthen linkages between WP and employability strategies, with enhanced communication between services, academic schools and departments. This would help WP and graduate employability to be focused within the institution as a whole, whilst policy initiatives are embedded across institution through each academic programme.

- For students with multiple roles and with no previous family history of HE, completing a degree in four or more years instead of three years or even completing a single module can be a huge achievement. HEIs and funding bodies need to question how institutional success is currently measured and to seriously consider new ways to give more value to individual students’ achievements.
7.3 Final Conclusion

HEIs are currently experiencing a period of transformation in the context of the government’s initiatives to widen participation in HE, and the rapid economic change, locally and globally. With more non-traditional students entering HE, HEIs now need to carefully consider their role in supporting these students to succeed. They need to accept that traditional teaching and learning methods may not always be the most effective methods for teaching students from non-traditional educational backgrounds, or indeed any students. In this new environment surrounding HE, the project has explored students’ experiences of HE through their own narratives as well as those of other stakeholders. It has also attempted to illuminate what students’ needs are, and how HEIs can provide support to enable their students to reach their full potential.

Widening Participation is often interpreted rather narrowly as Widening Access. The case studies of the five institutions in this project have highlighted the challenges that this rather narrow approach to WP poses. When institutions claim success in WP, this could, in part, be due to the institution’s location, for example, in socio-economically disadvantaged areas with a large ME population because an increasing number of students study at local HEIs. Staff also identified difficulties facing their institutions, which they linked to WP initiatives, such as falling retention rates and a perceived devaluation in the quality of programmes.

Students also feel the impact of these problems associated with WP. Many, particularly those from non-traditional backgrounds, appreciate the opportunity to study at university; suggesting that some students do believe that HE can have a transformative effect on individuals and their lives. However, their narratives also show how they often have to struggle to balance study, work and family commitments. As it was not within the scope of the project to interview students who did not complete degree programmes, no firm conclusions can be drawn on the reasons why some students do not complete their studies in HE; nevertheless, some interviews with students and graduates have illustrated the fact that the lack of study and pastoral support, or insufficient information on services available in institutions can affect the academic performance of students. When students experience personal difficulties whilst at HE, many, particularly those from non-traditional backgrounds, feel that they cannot seek support or advice from their HEI, or they are unaware of services available. This is because some of these students feel that they are not typical students, and that their problems therefore cannot be dealt with by the university services. The result is that they try to cope alone or by using their own personal support networks, which may mean that their academic work suffers. This demonstrates the way in which universities do not always challenge or overturn the existing inequalities in society, rather in some cases, by not providing sufficiently accessible support, they can replicate the existing social and cultural inequalities that some non-traditional students already face in their everyday lives.
The case studies have shown that the ambiguity of the term student employability can cause a great deal of confusion within institutional practices. Despite this, student employability is now considered one of the key concerns of HEIs by Senior Managers. However, the extent to which enhancing employability should be integrated into the curriculum and the best methods for doing this are still being debated in some institutions. Employability modules are increasingly being introduced; however, the content and responsibility for the delivery of the employability curriculum remain areas of contention. Measuring student outcomes through employment success has become important to HEIs, not only because it is a government target, but also because most of their students expect to gain better career prospects by attending HE. However, there are also significant numbers of students who expect other outcomes, such as raising self-confidence or broadening horizons. To meet such a broad range of expectations HEIs need to critically re-evaluate their roles as HE education providers, and to consider engaging further with employers to change working and recruitment practices in order to enable non-traditional students to engage more successfully with potential employers.

It is clear from this research that ME groups are actively participating in HE, and that this is true for all ME groups, not just those who have traditionally had higher participation rates. The project has highlighted differential educational outcomes between ME groups and White groups, which corresponds with findings in existing research. However, the project also observed the varied outcomes for the same ME group in different institutions. This reinforces the argument that ethnicity is not a central factor in educational achievement. Indeed, many ME students expressed the opinion that ethnicity is not an important factor in their HE experience at all, but that other factors such as gender, age, religion, and family circumstances interact with their ethnicity to create their own unique student experience. Nevertheless, this research has shown that ethnicity does impact on a student’s life in HE in various ways: such as in their choice of institution to study at; their access to a work placement or in everyday interactions at university, where they can be constructed as ‘different’ by other groups, even if they themselves do not construct their identity around their ethnicity.

The diverse cultures of the HEIs have, in general, had a positive impact on both staff and students. Through encounters with students and staff from a range of different backgrounds, many students had started to question, re-evaluate and re-invent their own identities in relation to their new experiences. However, with the huge pressures on many students to carry out multiple roles as worker, student, and carer; students often now have less time to socialise with each other, and therefore less time to create these transformative encounters. With more students coming to HE with specific vocational goals, and less interest in, or time for, engaging with the general HE experience; HEIs need to consider how they can broaden their learners’ horizons by facilitating interaction between different groups on campus, and therefore also prevent any racial or ethnic segregation based on unchallenged essentialised understandings of racial, ethnic and community differences.
The HEIs claim to be committed to WP, Equality and Diversity, and graduate employability; however, as Ahmed argues these terms are non-performative, and organisations ‘do not always do what they say’ (Ahmed, 2006, 20). The success of these policies can only be realised when these terms are seriously addressed by those who have the ability to instigate change. In addition, they need to be addressed in a way that offers space to reveal the social injustices and inequalities within and outside the institutions. Otherwise, as Ahmed suggests, these policies become merely an organisational ‘brand’ (Ahmed, 2006). In the context of widening participation, HEIs can offer students, particularly those from non-traditional backgrounds, an opportunity to change their lives. However, in order to do so, HEIs also need to go through a critical transformation, developing innovative teaching methods in order to accommodate different learning needs and to support students in achieving academic success.

Widening Participation strategies have been offering non-traditional students valuable opportunities, which can be turning points in their lives. Through their experiences of HE, many students gain better career prospects, as well as less tangible outcomes, including greater self-confidence and broader horizons. In this sense, HE provides a transformative opportunity to students, their families and to their local communities, which can challenge the socio-economic hierarchy of society. However, if these students are more likely to attend their local university, which may have a student body of predominately non-traditional students, and they are less likely to attend distant and more traditional or prestigious universities, it is possible that WP may simply result in the reproduction of existing social, economic, and spatial divides, by failing to fully widen access and participation to the whole diverse community.

Many students, who were unfamiliar with HE culture, felt that their experience of attending HE had empowered them; however, some students still believed that they did not fit into HE culture and they felt isolated. Unless HEIs consider new ways to accommodate these students, and to make them feel part of the culture, HE will only allow these students to internalise their self-perceived social inferiority and accept social inequalities in society. With the drive to meet the government targets for employability, many universities are forced to move towards more vocationally oriented goals. However, if HEIs have a specific educational role, which is different from other learning providers, it is the opportunity to offer students a space for wider social interaction, as well as an opportunity to learn about social structures and inequalities. Within the context of the current challenges to the discourse of multiculturalism, providing a space for learning about and challenging societal and cultural norms is an important role for universities to take on to contribute to changing our wider society.
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Appendix A: Advisory Board Members

The project has been supported by an advisory board made up of senior academics and practitioners in the field of WP. The membership of the advisory board was determined primarily by the UEL team. The Advisory Board was set up in order to:

- Assist the research team in developing a coherent theoretical framework and rigorous methodology.
- Assist in the further development of key themes and issues shaping the research.
- Facilitate and support dissemination of research findings and recommendations across the HE sector.

Some partner HEIs had their own Advisory Boards. In contrast to these Advisory Boards, which provided advice on institutional case studies, the focus of the Project Advisory Board was to oversee the whole research process of the project. Academics and practitioners with diverse (research) expertise and experience were invited to be Advisory Board Members. They were consulted about the issues both specific to UEL case studies and common to the entire research project. The Advisory Board met twice a year at the University of East London and meetings lasted approximately two hours. The Membership of the Advisory Board was as follows:

- Prof. John Brennan (CHERI, Open University)
- Dr Yasmin Gunaratnam (Freelance Researcher) (for 2004/5)
- Dr Barnor Hesse (Dept. of African American Studies, Northwestern University)
- Dr Ian Law (School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds)
- Ms Sandie Miller (Final Year Student, BA in Psycho-Social, UEL)
- Ms Sinead Theresa Fiona McCarthy and Ms Deirdre M Okelly (Staff Members of Student Union, UEL)
- Prof. Gavin Poynter (School of Social Science and Cultural and Media Studies, UEL)
- Dr Bobby Sayyid (School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds)
- Prof. John Storan (Continuum, UEL) – Chair of Advisory Board

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4 Ethnicity and the Labour Market (Ethnicity, Education and Employment Project), Advisory Board – Terms of Reference
5 Corresponding member of Advisory Board.
Appendix B: Bradford Case Study Report

Final Report

Ethnicity, Education and Employment:

University of Bradford Case Study

by

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August 2006
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1. Introduction

This report provides the findings from the Bradford Case Study conducted as part of the ESF funded Ethnicity, Education and Employment Project. The report provides:

- an institutional profile of Bradford University;
- an outline of the overall methodological approach taken in the case study;
- findings from an analysis of:
  - policy and strategy documents;
  - 14 in-depth interviews with senior staff;
  - a student survey conducted with 120 final year nursing and social science students;
  - 20 in-depth interviews with final year students who took part in the above survey;
- discussion of key findings;
- recommendations for future development.

2. Bradford University Profile

2.1. Background

The University was established as a Chartered University in 1966, prior to that it had been a College of Advanced Technology. It is a small (10,000 students), split-site University with three campuses, the main one being in the city centre and sited in one of the most socio-economically deprived wards in England. Indeed, the city itself is one of the most socio-economically deprived cities in England. It also has a unique socio-demographic profile in that it has a significant percentage of people with a self-classified British Pakistani/Asian Pakistani ethnicity and one of the fastest growing youth populations in England.

2.2. Vocational Strengths

The 2005 Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) performance league tables show that Bradford is the second most successful University in the country in securing graduate level jobs for its students. The University has historically had a strong vocational orientation with strengths in subjects such as engineering and pharmacy. It has also always had a strong regional economic focus. Its vocational and regional focus has remained a strength of the University although, reflecting national economic and technological changes, the focus of vocational provision has changed. Current strengths are in areas such as pharmacy and health-related professions e.g. optometry and radiography.
The University’s Corporate Plan (see below) identifies the development of vocationally flexible courses as one of its priorities. In particular, the University:

- was a leading member of one of the pilot consortium developing foundation degrees and has since developed a range of foundation degree courses;
- has established a Centre for Workforce Development which is the focus for developing employer led foundation degrees and vocational continuing professional development courses;
- has established an employability sub-group to respond to the government’s key skills agenda and work with University schools and departments to identify and develop core skills provision.

### 2.3. Course Provision, Academic and Teaching Strengths

Bradford has a number of unique and highly regarded academic courses and departments, for example, the Interdisciplinary Human Studies course, the Peace Studies Department, which has an excellent national and international reputation, and the School of Management, which has an internationally recognised MBA. Since 1999 the institution has had 6 consecutive excellent scores in subject reviews, which include: Pharmacy, Physiotherapy, Radiography, Optometry, Nursing and Midwifery and Archaeological Sciences. Top marks have been given to the Peace Studies and Interdisciplinary Human Studies courses.

However, as discussed further below, the University’s ‘academic footprint’ is limited. Student numbers fell in the wake of the 2001 riots and have only just recovered to pre-2001 levels. The University’s Corporate Plan identifies growing student numbers as a priority. Consequently, new courses are being developed which exploit growth areas in student and employer demand. These include Law and Psychology. A particular issue for Bradford is the lack of ‘traditional’ as opposed to non-traditional students.

### 2.4. Student Profile

The student profile is outlined below. As the figures show, non-traditional locally-based students, of whom a very high percentage are Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students, form the majority of the student body. Two fifths of Bradford’s student body coming from the Bradford district. Unlike most other pre-1992 Universities, Bradford has a comparatively low percentage of traditional ‘A level’ entry 18-21 undergraduates.

The Bradford University Student Profile 2004-5 first year full time entrants domiciled in the UK:

- 64% of students come from West Yorkshire;
- 40% of students are from Bradford;
• 46% of students come from low socio-economic groups, well above the English average;
• 16% of students come from low participation neighbourhoods, 3% above the national average;
• 50% of students come from BME groups against a national average of 14%. British Pakistani/Asian Pakistani constitute 39.9% of the student intake, Indian 6.4%, Black African 2.8%, and Bangladeshi (2%);
• 33% of students are mature full-time undergraduates.

As the statistics show, Bradford is a widening participation (WP) success. Indeed, when judged against HEFCE performance figures, the University is a national leader ranked number one for social inclusivity.

2.5. Corporate Priorities 2005-2009

Over the next 5 years the University is aiming to build on its strengths by positioning itself at the hub of the regional economy, further developing its strong vocational focus, and providing students with the skills and knowledge to live in an information society marked by culturally diverse communities. This is reflected in the strategic aims of the University’s Corporate Plan which are to:

• deliver a flexible framework of vocationally relevant quality courses to anticipate and meet the requirements and employment expectations of students of all ages and backgrounds and the needs of employers;
• develop the skills of students and staff to ensure they can communicate effectively in an information age and have an understanding of living and working in a culturally diverse community;
• produce research of international quality in focused areas which contribute to wealth creation, social cohesion and the quality of life;
• support and enhance economic regeneration and opportunities in the City of Bradford, district and region by developing and commercialising technology and by delivering relevant consultancy, research and training services;
• contribute to urban regeneration and social cohesion in the City of Bradford, the district and the region;
• ensure that the University continues to be a community which recognises, supports and values the contribution made by its staff and students, and others associated with it.

The Corporate Plan is an attempt to:

• transform institutional provision so that the University can compete in the increasingly consumerist university market. The University wants to both increase student numbers and broaden its student base so that it is not so reliant on local students and foreign students who predominantly come from one country;
• engage with the government agenda of developing core employability skills for undergraduates;
• further develop institutional provision so that new students can be attracted to the University and existing ones retained. The University recognises that it has a limited academic footprint. The interdisciplinary nature of many of its degree courses is a limitation, and new course areas, such as cultural studies, sports and health care, could be developed to tap into national demand trends;
• build on the success of the University in widening participation, a consequence of which is that teaching, learning and assessment structures have to be reviewed to ensure they meet student needs.

The plan integrates WP objectives into other strategies. WP remains as a distinct strategic focus but the plan aims to address the issues raised by the University’s success in opening up access to non-traditional students who, interestingly, can now be perceived as ‘traditional’ students. The issues posed include:

• improving student retention;
• ensuring staff structures give equal opportunity to all groups;
• reviewing LTA strategies so that they meet the diverse needs of the student body;
• revising course provision to better reflect changing student demand across the higher education (HE) sector;
• developing an understanding and focus on core employability skills across all University course provision.

A central component of the Corporate Plan is the development of a new Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (LTA) which addresses the following themes: equality and diversity, employability, HE portfolios and e-learning. From Autumn 2006 University schools and departments will be required to produce LTA strategies which demonstrate how the above issues will be addressed and how the needs of students are being addressed.

The University has already taken account of its diverse student body by moving toward a University wide Equality and Diversity Policy which ensures that the setting of exams and assessments takes into consideration students’ religious and cultural needs. Also, as part of the TLA strategy, from 2005/6, there are plans to:

• develop a mapping tool to audit diversity and inclusion achievements and opportunities;
• identify best practice in relation to inclusion;
• review and develop curricula and student support systems;
• develop social skills and professional competence in diversity/inclusion practice;
• explore the potential to promote diversity studies at programme level;
• review policies on recruitment reward and performance for staff.

Existing WP initiatives for young people are to be brought together under one central service umbrella through the creation of the Bradford Academy.
Further, a monthly working group has been established to collate and analyses retention statistics.

Such developments may address the difficult question of how WP, employability and LTA issues should be articulated and may also link the stages of the student life cycle together more coherently in strategic planning. If successful, they may progress the issues raised and discussed in section 4. However, it is too early to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the Corporate Plan, LTA and associated developments on student recruitment, retention, progression and teaching and course provision. Many of the identified actions will only begin to be implemented in School Action Plans from 2006/7.
3. **Methodological Approach to the Research**

3.1. **Research Remit**

Bradford is one of 5 partner institutions involved in the Ethnicity, Education and Employment research project. As originally devised the project had the following aims:

- to obtain a better understanding of the ways in which minority ethnic students and other stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of institutional strategies and measures designed to promote student success;
- to comment on the relation between perceived learner needs and institutional provision for minority ethnic students in HE;
- to develop a clearer appreciation of the relationship between WP initiatives and strategies and measures designed to support BME student groups and so enhance their employability;
- the development of recommendations for building on existing work and developing new approaches to minority ethnic student support.

The above aims were to be met by gathering data based on a qualitative methodological approach.

Each partner institution had scope to tailor the overall project aims to its own institutional context and issues. The particular focus at Bradford has been on:

- the development and implementation of WP, equalities and LTA strategies, as they relate to issues of race and ethnicity;
- student experiences of university life, study and transition to work, in the context of student’s own understanding of issues of ethnicity.

All the partners agreed that the research approach would primarily be ethnographic because the research was designed to explore and capture the perspectives and experiences of a range of key stakeholders on issues such as the development of University policy and strategies; implementation of such strategies; the experience of being a student and transition into employment.

3.2. **Bradford Research Strands**

The principal strands of the research at Bradford were:

- analysis of University policy and strategy documents;
- in-depth interviews with 14 senior managers. The interviews explored the development and implementation of WP, equalities and LTA strategies; transition and employability; and the issues faced in meeting the needs of a diverse student body;
• 120 self-completed, open-ended questionnaire schedules with final year students. These were conducted by students under the guidance of a researcher with explanations of what each question theme was exploring, and the researcher encouraging students to complete each question. It is crucial to understand that the questionnaire was designed with the specific assumption that the researcher would guide the students through completion by explaining what each question was designed to explore. The questionnaire could not be conducted with students without this guidance because the general and open-ended nature of the questions required a process of contextualisation so that students could understand each question. The interviews covered the following themes: student preparedness for university life, reasons for study, experiences of being a student, preparedness for life after university and understandings of ethnicity and its impact (if any) on student life;

• 3 focus groups with final year students conducted with volunteers after completion of the questionnaire;

• 20 in-depth interviews with final year students, conducted on an individual and group basis at a campus café bar during students free periods. These interviews were designed to further explore the themes covered by the self-completion questionnaire schedule but were conducted as open-ended conversations to allow the students interviewed to control the direction of the interview and the specific issues to be explored.

The open-ended questionnaire was piloted on 40 students and the interview themes for the open-ended interviews were discussed in 3 focus groups. Both showed that:

• students were very suspicious of being asked questions about ethnicity;

• understanding the significance of ethnicity required a much fuller discussion of broad areas such as race, place, family history, religion, gender, family obligations and personal biography than was possible in the in-depth interviews;

• students did not particularly want to take part in the research.

The questionnaire design and layout was changed. The student experience was explored through general, open-ended questions while specific questions which asked about the impact of ethnicity were moved to the back of the questionnaire. The in-depth interviews were designed so that they did not concentrate on ethnicity, only asking about this toward the end of the interviews. Both these changes were made to allay students concerns and encourage greater involvement.

3.3. **Target Groups for the Research (Sample Selection)**

At Bradford the decision was made to gather primary research data from two groups – staff, particularly senior staff involved in policy and strategy
development, and final year students. All the partners agreed that interviews with students should include ethnic majority as well as ethnic minority students.

Selection of samples relied on purposive (theoretical) sampling techniques which matched the intended qualitative methodology of the research. The aim of purposive sampling is to include in the research individuals or groups who can provide data on issues and themes. The research is aimed at exploring issues and themes that develop during the course of the research. The sampling technique is flexible and allows researchers to target new groups as the research develops. Statistical representativeness is not the goal of sample construction. Rather, the goal is to construct samples which allow in-depth exploration and understanding of the situated activity of particular individuals and groups in specific settings.

Staff were selected for interview on two grounds. First, they were in positions to comment on one or more of the following:

- development of the University LTA strategy from 2005 onwards and the key themes of equality and diversity, employability; e-learning and HE portfolios;
- provision of student support services, and careers advice;
- development of WP initiatives.

Secondly, they were senior figures in the schools from which the final year student samples were chosen and, consequently, could comment on the impact of policies in departments and the issues raised as a consequence of widening participation in student intake.

In total 14 staff, mostly senior management, were interviewed. 11 were directly involved in working groups developing the following strategies at a corporate level: WP; Teaching Learning and Assessment (LTA) and Equalities and Diversity Policy.

For the survey interviews, full-time, final year students were selected because they:

- would be in a position to reflect back on the student experience at all stages of the student lifecycle (pre-entry, transition, learning support and employability);
- offered the prospect of follow up interviews after they had graduated and attempted to make the transition into employment.

The students were selected from two schools – The School of Social and International Studies (SIS) and the School of Health (SoH). The three courses were Interdisciplinary Human Studies; Social Work and Advanced Diploma in Nursing.

The schools and courses were selected because they:
• offered the possibility of accessing students on vocational and academic degrees and a vocational diploma;
• contrasted in terms of the percentage of minority ethnic students present on courses;
• contrasted in terms of the age profiles of students;
• agreed to support the research and help organise data collection.

The two courses in SIS contained a higher percentage of BME groups than the courses in SoH - 41% compared to 21%. The dominant BME group was British/Asian Pakistani accounting for 48% of all BME groups on the two courses in SIS and 45% on the course in the SoH.

Importantly, the courses chosen from which the student samples were selected did not fit easily into the stereotypes of typical Asian minority ethnic courses e.g. pharmacy, and the courses reflected the fact that Bradford is dominated by degree and diploma provision of a vocational nature.

The course chosen in the SoH has a comparatively low percentage of BME students, compared to other schools in the SoH and across the University (although not the lowest). This was a vocationally oriented school and the specific course from which students were selected was a vocational diploma course. The SoH had introduced a range of initiatives to raise the recruitment of BME students in the past few years and witnessed an increase in recruitment. Consequently, this school offered the opportunity to explore policies in action and the factors which may lead to low take up of particular kinds of course for particular ethnic groups.

3.4. Methodological Limitations

The research was not designed to be based on randomly selected representative samples. Consequently, the ability to generalise from the findings may be limited. The sample is not representative of all final year students at Bradford let alone all students at Bradford.

The questionnaire sample is small at 120 and dominated by white British students. While 30% of the sample would be classed as members of a BME group, the numbers are small and dominated by British Pakistani/Asian Pakistani students.

The in-depth interviews provide good individual case studies of the student experience but are limited to two groups; white British and British Pakistani/Asian Pakistani students. The research provides no insight into the experience of other ethnic groups e.g. Chinese students.

Attempts were made to increase the sample size of both the questionnaire and in-depth interview samples through student follow up and offering and opportunities for other departments and schools to become involved, but time, cost and lack of participation from students resulted in such attempts being unsuccessful.
Moreover, there are two groups not included in this research who may be particularly important for understanding the student experience; these being, part-time students and students who have dropped out of University. Also, there are a range of issues around employability which would probably be best explored either with employers or students who have made the transition into work.

Arguably, the original project design was too ambitious. The themes which partners were asked to cover, such as: the impact and effectiveness of institutional strategies; understandings of employability and development of employability skills; student preparedness for and experience of studying; and understanding of ethnicity and its impact on the student experience; could each form the subject of a research project.

The breadth of issues was an important constraint on the design of research instruments and the depth to which any one issue could be explored with students. For example, it is very difficult in the context of a questionnaire or an hour long in-depth interview to explore all the themes above in detail. Also, the reason Bradford adopted an open-ended questionnaire as one of the main research instruments was directly as a consequence of attempting to capture a large enough group of students to ensure robust findings while maintaining a qualitative focus. Left free to decide on matters of research design, Bradford would have conducted the research in a different manner.

The primary research data presented in this report presents a snapshot from particular groups of students and particular staff at a point in time. Given that the policy and practice of Bradford is evolving, and that the student experience develops and changes over time, the findings should be interpreted with caution. This is especially so when one considers the limitations of the sample base and the broad remit of the research. At best, the research may offer insights into questions such as how ethnicity impacts on the student experience. It has not been possible to explore such issues in great depth.

Finally, it is clear that, contrary to the intended design of the research, a common methodological approach has not been maintained across the 5 partner institutions. Consequently, as a whole, the research is at best mixed-method, combining quantitative and qualitative data rather than being truly ethnographic, as originally intended.
4. Findings from Senior Management Interviews and Analysis of Policy Documents

4.1. Introduction
As noted in section 2, a total of 14 staff, mostly senior management, were interviewed, 11 of whom were directly involved in working groups developing WP; LTA and Equalities and Diversity strategy and policy.

The precise breakdown of the staff sample was as follows: 1 PVC, 1 Acting Dean, 3 Heads of Department; 1 Senior Administrator; two Senior Management figures from the Careers and Student Support Services; the Equalities Policy Officer, 2 members of the Access and Widening Participation Team, 1 member of the Action on Access Team and 2 members of the Teaching Quality Enhancement Group.

The interviews took place in late 2004 and early 2005 but key findings have been checked with senior management.

4.2. Widening Participation Policy
Bradford is considered a success in terms of WP and student transition into employment. In part, WP strategies will have contributed to this success but disaggregating the effect of factors which affect participation and employability is difficult. All senior staff interviewed were conscious of the extent of initiatives running across, and within, University schools and departments, though, as shown later, there were concerns expressed about how difficult it was to gain a corporate overview of what is happening and understand practice in schools and departments. However, while all agreed that the large increase in participation of BME and non-traditional students can be correlated with the development of WP strategies, it also reflects much broader changes across HE, for example, students increasingly living at home while studying. This would help explain why Bradford had a high proportion of BME and non-traditional students.

The obvious reason is the geography. For our degree we are taking a far higher proportion of home students and this is geography and finance.

Moreover there was a suspicion that the success, as one of the interviewees argued,

Is as much by default as it is by design. We have so many non-traditional students because we dropped the entry level.

Factors outside of University policy were considered to be important determinants of student choice and participation. In any case, as was stressed by a very senior management figure, the WP strategy,

Is not about ethnic minority students per se and the term ethnic minority is too broad a category to be of much use in planning.
As this interviewee went on to stress, the WP strategy focussed on access and Bradford could be considered successful on raw figures. However, if the WP was to be fully effective it had to be linked in with the LTA strategy and issues of retention and transition into employment. This was one of the reasons the University’s Corporate Plan for 2005-9 contained proposals for a new LTA strategy under which departments to will be required to develop their own LTA strategies, designed to show how, among other things, schools and departments are taking addressing issues of: provision for diverse student cultures; employability skills, student retention and success.

Originally, the WP strategy had been developed in isolation from the LTA strategy and other university initiatives aimed at developing key employability skills. The University’s Widening Participation and Access team is based in a school rather than being a central service. While this offers the key strength of ensuring that the policy is focused and driven, the interviews with senior staff suggest that it also may be seen to raise questions about how the University:

- ensures that WP initiatives link to wider teaching and learning strategies and that a greater focus is paid to issues of retention and student support rather than recruitment;
- embeds WP policy and practice in all schools and departments;
- ensures that each school or department has a University-wide picture of policy and practice, particularly in relation to what works;
- ensures that senior management involved in the development of University-wide policy are informed about what is happening within schools and departments.

A further problem is that WP and LTA initiatives are often based on short term funding so sustainability is a pressing issue. For example, a range of projects were funded in 2004 from WP monies aimed at piloting approaches to improve retention. An assessment of these initiatives concluded that none of the projects would have happened without ring fenced additional funding. Even then, the limited funds available prevented many projects from being fully implemented.

Whether or not the proposal to put the responsibility for developing LTA strategies within departments will address the questions above remains to be seen. The plans are innovative and ambitious but build on existing good practice. At present, the interview data suggest that:

- at the corporate policy level the University ‘was not very good at linking up strategies’;
- strategies and policies developed at a high corporate level were differentially implemented in range, quality and extent on the ground;
- additional support for students required additional funding.

For those on the ground involved in the provision and development of teaching and student support it was thought that a corporate overview of what was happening in relation to issues of WP and the student experience was
difficult to develop. Within schools or departments awareness of strategies and institutional policy was not high and there was a perception that strategies developed at a high corporate level did not necessarily articulate with practice on the ground. More particularly, as one interviewee argued, a top down approach was adopted to policy and strategy development and this left little space for the student voice.

_We do not work bottom up but top down. We should listen to what students are asking for before provision._

### 4.3. The Impact of WP and Diversification of the Student Body on Teaching and Learning practice

The changing nature of the student body has implications for the development of teaching strategies and teaching skills but it is not clear that all staff either ‘buy into’ the WP agenda or have the time to develop the skills and knowledge required to support the new student body. Drop out rates on some courses are very high but, as yet, there is no systematic analysis of retention and drop out data. A working group has been established to address this.

High drop out rates may be seen to raise issues around guidance, student selection, early intervention and tutor support but also may be because of factors that lie outside of University control. For example, there was a strong feeling, articulated by those involved in providing teaching or support services, that high drop out rates were a direct consequence of the drive to widen participation. As one interviewee candidly argued,

_It looks like WP but you are sweeping up anyone who walks by and this creates issues around motivation, retention etc...now every other person goes to university and ends up on courses not right for them._

There is a tension here that policy has to negotiate between internal and external drivers affecting student recruitment, retention and success. On the one hand, there are rigidities built into the current higher education system which may adversely affect retention rates and student success, on the other, drop out rates, and difficulties students experience when studying, may be an inevitable by-product of successful WP strategies and the resulting diversification of the student body.

That said, three clear examples were provided during interviews of rigidities in the University system. Firstly, there is a difficulty in ensuring flexible pathways for students whereby they could alternate, say, between full-time and part-time studies, or study modules instead of degrees, and receive accreditation for stages they have reached if they do not complete a degree. As one of the interviewees argued,

_Students who have reached a level and do not progress should get some awards that the University does not give e.g. a diploma when enrolled on a degree. We would change our retention rates by 1.5% if we did that. We_
shoot ourselves in the foot around lifelong learning because students should be able to get on and off.

Secondly, there is wide variation in the availability and quality of individual student support especially in terms of personal tutor support and academic guidance. This is crucial because as the student body becomes more diverse demands for personal tutor support and guidance increase. A consequence being that the University,

*Needs better, more personalised personal support tutors. There is so much variation… There is no University wide policy or training.*

Thirdly, the new kinds of students, which expansion in student numbers has brought, may demand different kinds of teaching skills from academics and this has particular implications for training and staff development. As one of the interviewees argued,

*Most people in higher education have no teaching qualifications, traditional academics may not have the skills to cope. Our PGCE has few observed teaching sessions and no stuff on behaviour management.*

The above three examples can be seen to show that the traditional model of a student around which University provision and practice has been constructed is out of touch with the reality of contemporary student bodies. As entry routes become increasingly diverse it becomes difficult to assume that students have common sets of skills and knowledge. Academic learning support needs to be much more intensive and capable of meeting the needs of a diverse range of students. Also, the range of factors which affect students’ ability to study and participate in University life multiply. Demands intensify for pastoral support and consequently,

*The model of a student as full- time, captive and away from home no longer applies…the idea that you study something of interest voluntarily has gone.*

The changing student body poses real dilemmas for teaching staff. The interviews identified three interrelated concerns about the preparedness of many students for HE, these being:

- the low skill and knowledge levels of students who enter university and the consequences this has both for retention and levels of support required to ensure student progression;
- the difficulties students have making the transition from highly supported learning, in which they are seen to be ‘spoon fed’ at school and college, to a more independent, reflective form of learning at the University;
- inappropriate behaviour of students, especially locally based students who have attended school and college in Bradford and maintain the same school and college friendship groups in the University.
All of these concerns are neatly illustrated in the quote below.

_Widening Participation means some students have less (sic) coping skills in terms of self-directed forms of study. A side effect of changing entry levels was that we saw a new problem and this was a problem about behaviour - large scale bad behaviour in lecture rooms…we had students texting, making phone calls in lectures, threats to lecturers, a mob attack because one student had put course work in earlier than the others. This was a transformation because we had large numbers of kids from the same schools attending the same university and carrying their behaviour forward. This led to the introduction of a series of behaviour agreements across different schools. All Deans of schools think this is a direct result of the increase in local students._

There is a real concern about the impact of WP on the quality of teaching and learning at University which is not necessarily an opposition to the principle of WP but the practical implications of:

- increasing class sizes and workload and providing less time to devote to students;
- reducing academic rigour in courses to ensure recruitment, retention and progression.

One of the key questions for Bradford, given that almost a fifth of students ‘drop out’, is whether or not implementation of WP in its current form is setting students up to fail.

Both the type and quality of support varies between and within departments but a key issue is that, as one of the interviewees argued, the students who most need support appear least likely to use available services. A review of a series of pilot initiatives designed to develop better teaching support strategies across schools and departments in the University concluded the same.

The issues identified above are recognised and addressed in the TLA strategy for 2005-9. Plans to:

- ensure Personal Development Planning occurs on all course or programme with regular student review and guidance;
- ensure all staff receive support and guidance in good assessment practice and that a range of assessment methods are used on courses and programmes;
- develop e-learning provision;
- review pre entry student engagement and induction processes;
- ensure that programme culture and structures support student success.

### 4.4. Promoting Employability

Bradford has strong vocational provision and successful transition to employment. Indeed, it is the most successful university in the north of England in ensuring transition into employment, according to national league
Many of the University courses are vocational in nature and tied to employment pathways with good prospects of employment for students. Data on transition into employment for different groups of students is difficult to gather, prone to non-response and difficult to interpret. However, basic figures supplied for 2004-5 graduates (see Table 1) shows that BME groups had lower rates of transition into employment than White British students.

Table 1: Graduate Pathways 2004-5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Employed</th>
<th>Further Study</th>
<th>Still Seeking</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BME</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, the figures are not necessarily reliable because there are higher non-response rates among BME groups. Further, higher numbers of BME groups stay on in further study. Finally, the range of factors which affect transition rates, from type of course studied to employer recruitment practices, means that it is difficult to know what, if anything, the data means.

The University is attempting to maintain and further develop its successful record by:

- examining the feasibility of developing new courses in the following vocationally linked fields: cultural studies, education, sports and events management,
- expanding the range of foundation degrees offered, particularly in public sector fields;
- further developing the use of Personal Development Planning across all courses and programmes, with an emphasis on identifying the development of key skills;
- planning to monitor how courses are addressing employability and using first destination statistics to influence course development.

A challenge for the University will be to maintain its employment record with the new courses being developed designed to attract more students by offering courses which are in demand across HE such as psychology and sociology. Such courses may require core vocational skills to be built in because employability skills development needs targeting toward students who are not on vocationally tied courses.

The University careers service ran an innovative careers advice programme aimed specifically at BME groups and this is to be expanded to all students. Also, the careers service works with departments to ensure that advice and guidance on compiling CVs and interview techniques is attached to course provision although, as shown later, very few of the students in this research appear to have had such support.

Over the past three years the University has attempted to build in work experience as part of students’ learning opportunities and develop core
employability skills in all courses. The interview data suggests that the University has faced protracted difficulties attempting to develop a key skills agenda in some areas. In part, the difficulties are practical. For example, at Bradford:

- many courses are vocational in nature and clearly develop employability skills;
- developing separate key skills curricula is time consuming, imposes more demands on students and runs the risk of cramming out other subject areas within existing degree modules.

However, there are also difficulties created by tensions in the wider national policy agenda on employability. For example:

- it is not clear how generic employability skills can be defined for different subjects and employment fields. Either such skills are defined so generically that they become meaningless or, if more specifically defined, lose their generic applicability. After all, the communication skills necessary for a social worker are not the same as those required for an engineer;
- it is not clear either at what level or by what method(s) employability skills should be assessed;
- there is a potential conflict between teaching and training. Universities, as one of the interviewees noted, are not simply vocational training centres.

Overall, the development of key skills has proven contentious and difficult. The approach has now moved to attempting to develop HE portfolios and encouraging departments to develop graduate profiles which define outcomes attainable by learning. However, as reported in interview the following issues are limiting take up of the portfolio concept:

- demonstrating the relevance and usefulness of portfolios to departments and students;
- ensuring sufficient staff time is available for development;
- ensuring curriculum space to allow use and development of portfolios.

### 4.5. Ethnicity, Participation, Retention and Student Support

BME groups form half of the student population at Bradford, although the BME profile is dominated by British Pakistani/Asian Pakistani students. On many courses the ethnic minority would be white students. Senior management argued that it was difficult to use terms like BME because there are a range of different ethnic groups with varying participation rates across courses. A particular difficulty in policy development was created by the lack of good information on participation, retention and graduate destiny analysable by ethnicity. As one of the interviewees argued,
We have not mapped properly what the issues are in terms of LTA diversity.

We do not have the information in the system to get out. Even in departments I’m not sure there is that feel for the statistics.

The factors which affect participation of BME groups are not necessarily within the control of the University or affected by its policies and strategies. It is not ethnicity per se that appears to be crucial to the student experience but rather the interaction between factors such as gender, religion, class and domestic circumstances, type of course studied and departmental practices. The complexity of the interaction between ethnicity and other factors is experienced in schools and departments in varying ways. For example, recruitment and participation on some courses in the health studies field is thought to be affected by the cultural expression of attitudes formed out of the interplay between gender, ethnicity and religion.

More particularly, some of the students with Pakistani heritage (the vast majority of BME students at Bradford) were thought to raise complex student support issues which may not similarly affect other groups such as White British students. This is reflected in the following quotes:

_We have loads of students who beg us to pass them because they are going to get shipped off to Pakistan. This is the stuff of our work. This is culture specific to an extent._

_Very few will do a language degree and part of this is that a year abroad is impossible for them in the culture that they are in. We have had no Muslim students who have completed, they go 2 years and then transfer._

A particular difficulty for Bradford is thought to lie in the extent to which local Asian students appear to prefer and value traditional course teaching and assessment methods and specific types of course e.g. pharmacy, management, and law.

As yet, there has been no mapping of the key issues raised for school and department LTA strategies in supporting the diverse student body. A working group has been set up to address this issue and examine how equality and diversity issues can be built into the LTA strategy but this is in its infancy, as the following quote shows.

_A working group on diversity is running which has membership from all schools. We will look at ways of classifying levels of engagement. This might allow us to determine where different schools are and decide where we want to be by the end of the current Corporate Plan in 2009._

That said, as noted in section 1.5, the University has already approved plans to ensure that exam timetables and assessment deadlines take account of observance of main religious festivals, given that Bradford has a very high percentage of Muslim students and as part of its LTA strategy for 2005-9 is planning to:
• develop a mapping tool to audit diversity and inclusion achievements and opportunities;
• identify best practice in relation to inclusion;
• review and develop curricula and student support systems;
• develop social skills and professional competence in diversity/inclusion practice;
• explore the potential to promote diversity studies at programme level;
• review policies on recruitment reward and performance for staff.

4.6. Developing Evidence Based Policies

Evaluation of WP and other university initiatives has not always been systematic. In particular, a range of monitoring and assessment data which could aid policy development, implementation and evaluation was not always readily available to people on the ground. For example, in areas like student support and careers one of the interviewees noted,

_We don't breakdown data by gender, ethnicity etc. We provide services but do not collect data. It is not part of what service providers are required to do._

At departmental level, one of the interviewees noted,

_It feel quite concerned about the choice and priorities of information we choose to collect. I have to check retention and success separately for my course because of the requirements of the professional body. I have to check things like proportion of people that have failed from specific backgrounds. By contrast at an annual monitoring meeting, after 3 hours, I would not have got this information. It is not an issue that is a priority._

At a policy development level, the problem is not confined to the nature and quality of data available for monitoring and assessment but also to the uses that such data is put. As one of the interviewees argued,

_What is the purpose of analysing monitoring reports? Surely it is to identify key issues so if you are not talking about ethnicity in these it is surprising…We are not expected to analyse data and action this._

Overall, this led to a situation where, as one interviewee argued, the University is

 very poor at monitoring our strategies and we are not finely tuned yet.

The LTA for 2005-9 contains plans to develop best practice information and use this to inform School and department policy and planning processes.
5. Student Questionnaire Findings

5.1. Sample Details
The total final year student population on the three courses selected for the research was 175, of which 120, 69% of the population, completed the questionnaire. Where sub-groups have been big enough, the data has been analysed by gender, ethnicity and age. Differences which would be significant at the 0.05 level using Chi square have been reported on. For analysis, ethnicity was split into two groups, White British and BME; for age, traditional age entry students (18-21) and non-traditional age entry students (22 plus).

Table 2: Percentage of Population Captured in the Questionnaire Sample by Gender and Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Profile</th>
<th>Percentage of Population Covered in the Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White British</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Pakistani/Asian Pakistani</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Indian/Asian Indian</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Bangladeshi/Bangladeshi</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black British/African/Caribbean</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Irish</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 2 shows, roughly similar proportions of the population in relation to gender, White British and British Pakistani/Asian Pakistani ethnicity completed the questionnaire. The one ethnic group most significantly underrepresented in relation to the others is Black British/African/Caribbean. However, it should be remembered that the total population was only nine. There is a slight over-representation of British Indian/Asian because one more student self-classified as British Indian Asian in the questionnaire than was recorded on the ethnicity data for the course.

Charts 1 & 2 provide both the sample and population profile for gender and ethnicity. Chart 3 provides the age profile of the sample. Accurate age data on the population was not available.

As can be seen, the sample profile is similar to that of the population profile. No groups are significantly underrepresented. The key limitation is that the sample groups are small and almost a third of the population are missing from the sample. This prevents detailed analysis by sub groups.
Chart 1 Percentage of White British and BME groups in the Questionnaire Sample and Population

Chart 2 Percentage of Men and Women in the Questionnaire Sample and the Population

Chart 3 Sample Age Profile
5.2. Reasons for Going to University Reasons for Choosing Bradford

5.2.1. Reasons for Going to University
Perhaps not surprisingly, given that the vast majority of students were on vocational courses, the primary reason for going to University was vocational, this was the case for 80% of the students. Typically, the students argued that they came to University to get a good job, improve career prospects, to become a nurse (or social worker) and to get a professional qualification.

Around 10% of students came because they were interested in studying their course and around 10% came for personal development.

As Table 3 shows, White British students were more likely than BME students to have come solely for vocational reasons, as were non-traditional age entry students (21 plus) and female students when compared with traditional age entry students and male students. However the numbers are too small to read any significance into the statistics or separate out the relative impact of gender, age and ethnicity.

Table 3: Percentage of Students Coming to University Solely for Vocational Reasons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>White British</th>
<th>BME</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Traditional Age Entry (18-21)</th>
<th>Non-Traditional Age Entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>85%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2.2. Reasons for Choosing Bradford
By far the most significant reason for choosing Bradford University was because it was local. 58% of students stated that this was an important factor. Indeed, for 37% of students it was the sole reason they chose Bradford. Typical replies being that Bradford was local; near where I lived; close to home; easy to get to, convenient, and nearest to home which allows me to manage childcare. For a further 17% of students it was location combined with course reputation that was important. For 18% of students it was the type of course and its reputation that determined choice and for 9% the speed with which replies were made to applications, particularly for nursing students, As one of the students stated:

*The University did not mess me around with cancelling interviews or put me on waiting lists waiting for my results.*

Non-traditional age entry students were almost twice as likely to identify location as the sole reason for choosing Bradford as traditional age entry students.
As Table 4 shows, those identifying as British Asian or Asian British were much more likely to identify the importance of Bradford being local as a reason for choosing the University, as were non-traditional age entry students and female students.

### Table 4: Percentage of Students For Whom ‘Being Local’ Was An Important Factor in Choice of University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>White British Male</th>
<th>BME Female</th>
<th>Traditional Age Entry (18-21) Male</th>
<th>Non-Traditional Age Entry Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>59%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The numbers involved in the survey are too small to provide detailed breakdowns that would allow analysis of ethnicity by controlling for age, gender, course etc. However, the figures suggest that gender, ethnicity and age are crucially important in determining the extent to which students are free to decide which University to choose without having to take into account how close the University is to where they currently live. Moreover, although class background data was not collected for students, it is clear both from comments on the questionnaire, and especially from the in-depth interview data, that finances play a key role in determining choice.

It seems clear, both from the comments on the survey and made in the in-depth interviews, that mature students were much more likely to be tied into already established family, friendship and work networks and this limited the extent to which they could or would travel. Also, especially for mature students and students on vocational courses, the decision to go to University was primarily linked to vocational development. Degrees were seen as being useful to career, job prospects, income etc. While such students want to enjoy being a student and may welcome the opportunities it may open up for new social experiences this was not their primary concern. They did not want to experience living away from home or the independence of ‘campus life’, as might an 18 year old experiencing their first transition from the parental home.

### 5.3. Preparedness for University Life and Studying

#### 5.3.1. Fitting into University life

Just over a half (57%) of students reported experiencing no difficulties fitting into university life. Of the 43% of students who reported having difficulties fitting into university life, female students were twice as likely to report difficulties fitting in as male students but there were no significant differences by age and ethnicity.

The single most commonly cited difficulty was coping with workload (44% of those reporting difficulties). Mainly, this was because students with families found it difficult to balance university work demands and home life. Typical comments here included:

*I’m unable to stay behind and socialise due to family commitments.*
Yes, it is difficult coping with university and family social life.

Yes, I have difficulties working unsocial hours and fitting the hours around my home life.

Following this in importance were:

- coping with the financial difficulties created by studying (23% of those reporting difficulties);
- lacking time to have a social life (15% of those reporting difficulties);
- coping with the academic demands of the course (10% of those reporting difficulties);
- struggling with a lack of clear guidance (10% of those reporting difficulties).

5.3.2. Suggestions for Help With Participation in University Life

Students were asked to reflect on their 3 years of studying and say whether or not they thought there were any ways in which the University/their department could have helped them to further participate in university life. 67% of students did not think there were any ways in which the University could have helped them to further participate in university life. The only significant difference here was that traditional age entry students were more likely than non-traditional age entry students to report that the University could have helped them to participate further in university life (47% traditional age entry students compared to 26% of non-traditional age students).

It was clear from comments made on the questionnaire that many students often did not want to participate further in university life, or thought that the University had little control over the factors which affected participation, for example, family demands. Of the 32% that did think the University could help them participate more in university life, the most common suggestion was by providing students with more publicity and information about events reflected in comments such as we are often not aware of activities or publicise more events.

5.3.3. Coping with study demands

70% of students reported having difficulty adjusting to the study demands of their chosen course, with female students being twice as likely to report difficulties as male students. There were no significant differences by age and ethnicity.

As with reported difficulties fitting into university life, by far the most commonly cited difficulty was balancing work demands with looking after children. Comments illustrating the problems faced included:

Finding sufficient time to study has been difficult due to family circumstances.
Take into account you need a personal life, children visiting doctors, dentists etc, coping with school holidays.

A fifth of students had difficulty trying to juggle studying with part-time work. This was reported as creating problems of time management, meeting deadlines and ensuring a high quality of work. As one of the students argued,

*I have had to work part time to subsidise myself and this has affected my course marks.*

In addition to workload, almost a quarter of those students who had experienced difficulty adjusting to the study demands of their course reported finding it difficult coping with the academic demands of studying or adjusting to an independent learning style.

### 5.4. Use of Student Teaching and Learning Support

The University offers a range of student teaching and learning support services. Students were asked in the questionnaire if they had used the following services: additional study support service; personal tutor support; Blackboard (the University’s e-learning service); and email tutorials; and, if so, whether or not they found the services useful.

As Chart 4 shows, both personal tutor support and Blackboard had very high rates of take up; 88% for the former and 95% the latter. 61% of the students who had used personal tutor support reported finding it useful and 66% of those using Blackboard. However, this leaves a large group of students who did not report either of these services to have been useful.

40% of students had used additional study support but only half reported finding this useful and 42% had used email tutorials with 62% finding it useful.

The only significant difference by age, gender and ethnicity was that BME students were twice as likely to use email tutorials as White British students.
5.5. **Improving the Student Experience**

5.5.1. **Student Suggestions for Ways in Which the University Could Help Them to Better Cope With University life**

69% of students thought that there were ways in which the University could help students cope better with University life. While there were no significant differences by ethnicity and gender, 75% of mature students made suggestions compared to 58% of traditional age entry students.

Most of the suggestions could be grouped into three themes:

- better personal support and understanding of personal circumstances, especially for students with dependent children;
- better academic support, advice and guidance;
- more flexible timetabling of courses, a particular grievance for nurses being the lack of leave time allowed.

Typical comments illustrating the above included:

*Better academic supervision and support from tutors would help us to cope better.*

*Academic support could be improved and we should have better support for personal problems.*

*We need more support with study for mature students with children…It should be more family friendly.*

*We need more guidance for working at this level.*

*Coincide the University school of health holidays with school holidays.*
21 hours is not enough time allocated for absence and does not allow for family commitments or sickness.

5.5.2. Student Suggestions for Ways in Which the University Could Help Them to Be Better Prepared For Studying Their Chosen Course

54% of students thought there were ways in which the University/their department could help them to be better prepared for studying their course. There were significant differences by gender, with 62% of female students making suggestions compared to only 32% of male students.

The dominant suggestions were for better advice and guidance about the course and its study demands and more personal support. Typical suggestions being:

- We need more information on study skills and the expected level of work.
- It should be explained that there is very little support and direction where academic supervision is concerned.
- More information on responsibilities in academic work, it should be made aware that a lot of success depends on students and private study.
- There is a lack of direction regarding academic work and we need more student support regards study.
- We need more academic supervision.
- Better support from lecturers and more constructive criticism rather than negative criticism.

Such comments may reflect the difficulties some students face in making the transition to studying in a HE environment; coping with the academic demands of studying; and adopting a more independent style of learning.

5.5.3. Student Suggestions for Ways in Which the University Could Help Them to Successfully Complete Their Course

The students were also asked to draw on their experience of studying over 3 years and say whether or not they thought that the University/their department could have helped them to successfully complete their course. Just over two fifths of students thought that the University/their department could have helped them more to successfully complete their course. White British students were more likely to make suggestions than BME groups (45% compared to 29%).

Principally, the suggestions were for better academic guidance and personal support from tutors (almost three fifths of students who made a suggestion). Typical of comments made are the ones below:
Provide clearer guidance on assignments…I don’t really feel like we have much support from staff.

Much more help is needed from the lecturers for academic supervision.

We need better support from personal tutors.

More approachable personal tutors that understand that coming back into study is hard.

In addition the following were suggested by students (but only by small numbers):

- better course organisation and timetabling;
- better understanding of the demands of being a mature student with commitments;
- more practical, relevant course material.

5.6. Promoting Employability

The questionnaire asked students in what ways, if any, their course had helped them to develop a range of vocational skills. As Table 5 shows, in all skill areas but one - numeracy skills - the majority of students thought that their courses were helping them to develop key vocational skills. However, in each of 3 skill areas a full third of students did not think their courses were helping them to develop skills and the majority of students did not think they were developing numeracy skills.

| Table 5: Percentage of Students by Course Who Report Developing Key Skills |
|-----------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Vocational Skill           | % of all students | Nurses | IHS | Social Work |
| Information Technology     | 64% | 73% | 60% | 48% |
| Communication Skills       | 85% | 94% | 80% | 68% |
| Numeracy Skills            | 26% | 41% | 0%  | 12% |
| Working with others        | 88  | 94% | 80% | 80% |
| Problem Solving            | 64% | 79% | 32% | 56% |
| Improving Own Performance  | 64% | 58% | 21% | 21% |
The main differences between students (as Table 5 shows) were by course type. However, gender also appears to be important. Male students were much less likely to think they were developing ICT skills (48% compared 68% of female students), communication skills (71% compared to 89% of female students) and problem solving skills (48% compared to 68% of women). The survey does not provided data explaining why this difference exists. It could be, for example, that male students think they already possess these skills.

The types of examples given by students to show how their course was developing key skills are illustrated in Table 6 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocational Skill</th>
<th>Typical examples provided by students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>Use of word processing for assignments, email communication, use of Blackboard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
<td>Seminar discussions, group work, presentations; placement work; becoming more confident and aware, intrinsic to course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy Skills</td>
<td>Drug calculations, statistics module.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with others</td>
<td>Group work, working with other students, working with people on placement, intrinsic to course; becoming more confident and aware.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>Completing assignments; group work tasks; developing thinking skills; working on placement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving Own Performance</td>
<td>Asking questions; developing professional practice skills; working on assignments.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fact that the majority of students think they are developing key employment skills needs to be interpreted with caution. First, it is easy for students to argue that there course is developing skills such as communication skills, working with others or problem solving since these are intrinsic to most courses. Second, the answers provide no indication of the quality of any developed skills or their applicability in specific work contexts. Third, student self assessment does not mean that, for example, employers would think students were developing key employment skills.

Almost a quarter of students thought that they could have been further helped to secure employment after graduation; principally through being provided with better guidance within the department on preparation of CV’s, developing interview techniques and finding jobs. However, few of the students had used the careers service either for careers guidance (13%); help with interview skills (4.2%) and job applications (5%). Those that had on the whole did not find the service to be specific enough to their chosen field to be of much use.
5.7. Ethnicity and Impact on Participation, Study and Employment

During the piloting phase of the questionnaire both white and non-white students had expressed concerns about being asked about their ethnicity and how they would personally define ethnicity. As a consequence, the questionnaire was revised and a question put in which asked ‘if you were describing yourself to somebody else, what would be the three most important things you would mention?’ The majority of students did not identify ethnicity, race or nationality as one of the most important things. Predominantly students listed personality features. Indeed, many were hostile to the idea of describing themselves in terms of ethnicity as judged by some comments on the questionnaire. However, non-white British students were twice as likely to use ethnicity as an identifying characteristic as white British students.

Even for those students who did consider ethnicity, race or nationality to be important things to mention when describing themselves, this did not mean that they thought these features affected their participation in university life; had any impact on their experience of studying; or would have any impact on their transition to employment.

The survey data suggests that the overwhelming majority of students did not think that ethnicity had any impact on their participation in university life, their experience of studying or their career choice and prospects. 92% reported that ethnicity had no impact on their participation in university life; 97% thought it had no impact on their experience of studying and 88% thought that it had no impact on their career prospects.

Of the 9% (10 students) who reported that ethnicity affected their approach to participation in university life two were White British and one of whom was the only man among the 10. The main impact reported (six students) was on socialising. This is reflected in the following comments:

a segregation between Asian and white international culture at Bradford that is difficult to overcome.

I'm a Muslim and don't like socialising in pubs and clubs but enjoy other activities.

One female British Pakistani/Asian Pakistani student stated that there was racism against Asians and one thought that her ethnicity makes it harder to take us seriously possibly they think we are only here on a ‘positive’ level. One female British Indian student felt that sometimes people are more hesitant in approaching me. Finally, one mixed ethnicity student thought that her ethnicity was a real advantage because I have multi-ethnic friends that have opened my mind to new things. One White British student thought that her ethnicity made her open minded.

Asked to identify what, if any, were the most important influences on their participation in university life 65% of students did so. For the vast majority of
these (72%) the main influence on their participation in university life was the development of friendship groups.

Only three students reported that ethnicity had an impact on their course studies. One British Pakistani/Asian Pakistani female student thought that *lecturers use vocals linked to middle class backgrounds* and two White British students reported that being from Northern Ireland had reduced their eligibility for bursary funding.

Asked to identify what, if any, were the most important influences on their course studies, just over half of students did so. A wide range of influences were identified but the three most common were:

- family factors including getting family support for study, juggling study and family demands and having the ability to work at home;
- coping with the heavy workload of studying;
- good tutor support.

There were no significant differences by ethnicity, age or gender.

14 (12% of the sample) reported that ethnicity would have an effect on them finding a job. Six were White British, of whom one was the only male in the group of 14, five were British Asian Pakistani, one British Bangladeshi, one British Indian and one Irish.

One of the Asian heritage students thought that *People don’t employ you if they are racist and don’t want Asian people* and another three thought that it was possible that interviewers may be prejudiced. Four thought that having Asian heritage was an advantage in the job market. Three thought it opened up opportunities, as one argued, *more Asian nurses are needed at the moment so that might be an advantage*. For the White British students, and the Irish student, ethnicity was thought to affect the places they would look for work e.g. the NHS and the availability of work.

### 5.8. Benefits and Problems of Going to University

Students were asked, if they were talking to someone of their own background what would they say were the benefits and problems of studying at Bradford. 62% of students identified benefits and by far the most common benefit was the fact that Bradford was a multicultural University (two fifths of those identifying benefits and a fifth of all students). This was seen as an advantage by both White British and BME groups. As one White British student argued,

> The benefits are that there is a good cultural mix, it encourages awareness of diversity and improves understanding.

A British Pakistani student argued:

> I honestly feel at Bradford there are no serious difficulties for an ethnic minority student.
After the benefit of Bradford being a multi-cultural University the next most commonly cited benefits were:

- good support offered by lecturers and tutors (19% of those identifying benefits);
- studying a really good course (16% of those identifying benefits);
- a good social life and friendships (13% of those identifying benefits).

44% of students reported problems, the main ones being:

- difficulties coping with the demands of studying, particularly for those with families (around a quarter of those identifying problems);
- lack of lecturer and tutor support (a fifth of those identifying problems);
- financial difficulties (11% of those identifying problems).

Four students identified possible difficulties of prejudice which a student like them might face coming to Bradford. Two White British students though such a student might face prejudice, one British Pakistani student thought they might experience lack of cultural awareness and one British Bangladeshi student that a student might face racism or ignorance by some groups.
6. In-depth Interview Findings

6.1. Sample

20 in-depth interviews were conducted with final year students who had completed the questionnaire and volunteered to be interviewed. The key findings are presented below, following a brief outline of the interview sample:

Four of the students were male and 16 female. Nine were social work students, two IHS students and nine nursing students. 10 were White British students (including all the male students); nine were British Pakistani/Asian Pakistani and one was British Bangladeshi/Asian Bangladeshi.

6.2. Reasons for Going to University and Choosing Bradford

As with the survey data, the in-depth interviews show strong vocational drivers for attending University as the following quotes show:

There is no point in doing something if you are not going to get a job and you have placements in social work which is work experience.

It's the only reason I'm doing the degree to get a job.

I'm doing it to get a job, the degree doesn't bother me.

Behind the vocational driver lie complex pathways of development and transition. Getting a better job is about improving prospects for self and family, transforming life chances and changing circumstances. Consequently, the vocational driver links narratives of past and future opportunities structured by the effects of gender, ethnicity and class and their influence on familial, educational and employment histories.

For example, for the following two female Asian mums interviewed coming to university was, for the first, a way of breaking free of gender and family roles and personally developing and, for the second, about negotiating the implications of divorce, drop in income and providing role models for children.

When I was 15 my mum died and I left school with no qualifications and spent a long time looking after family but in 1999 I decided I was not spending all my life being skint and a housewife, looking after babies and going to neighbours. There is more to life than family…I had no time for myself.

I had to think how will I put dinner on the table. Can I support children on income support and can I be a role model for them being in education? These things give me motivation. If I was not separated from my husband I would not be here. I could not support kids on my own, I needed a job with good money.
For the following White British male and female students coming to University was about developing wider expectations about career, overcoming limited occupational opportunities and, for the female student, moving beyond traditional gender roles:

I wasn’t considering nursing but over a 6 year period I found I was able to do the job. I spent about 6 years in care jobs e.g. hospital porter, assistant in emergency departments. The next natural step seemed to be to train to be a nurse because I had had enough of being a dogsbody.

It was a huge change to my life because I saw myself as a mum and wifehousekeeper but this gives me a whole new identity and I enjoyed having this as just for me. I had always wanted to do it. I feel like I have got a bit of freedom.

Four of the 20 students chose Bradford because of the course reputation. As one argued,

Bradford had a good reputation in the university league tables for nursing.
It was teaching quality that brought me here.

A further three chose Bradford because of the course reputation combined with the advantage that Bradford was local and 12 primarily because the University was local. The four students for whom location was not important were white British, single, young, and free of family demands and three did not have a vocational reason for studying. The three who combined course reputation with the advantage of Bradford being local were female British Pakistani students who were in their early twenties with no family commitments.

For the 12 for whom locality was crucial, limited finances, family responsibilities, ethnic identity, and educational/occupational history seemed to be important in determining the importance of locality. In particular, for mature students with families, it was essential that the University was local as the following quotes show:

I had to come here because it was the nearest University to my parents (for childcare) and also I want to work at Airedale where I have got a job as an auxiliary nurse.

I live in Bradford and I am a single parent so I can’t travel.

I’m a single parent and can’t travel.

I have children, my tutor wanted me to go to Lancaster but I had kids. It was money and transport. I got in at H but I had to turn it down because of the cost and travelling.

For four mature female British Pakistani students the large Asian student population was a particular attraction. This provided reassurance, made them feel safe and meant that there was a degree of cultural awareness they could rely on. This is reflected in the following quotes:
I feel better here with friends. At Bradford they know things like you get Halal food.

I only applied here. I’ve heard X University is quite racist. It’s by word of mouth.

At Bradford the main thing is there is a lot of Asians. Even now if I’m in a place like Blackpool you feel good if you see an Asian person. It is important here because here there is plenty of things like Halal food.

When I went to Skegness the majority of people were all white and I felt quite intimidated. Here I have Asians all around me but actually people were quite nice in Skegness.

6.3. Preparedness for University
Concerns about being prepared for University centred on:

- coping with the academic demands of the course and adjusting to independent styles of studying;
- juggling study demand with family commitments;
- coping with the financial consequences of studying;
- fitting in with what, for some of the mature students, was thought to be an academic, youth oriented and middle class culture.

However, the extent to which one or more of the above were important to any particular student varied according to the following:

- previous educational pathway;
- length of time away from studying;
- family commitments and demands;
- social characteristics such as age, class, gender and ethnicity.

For example, two of the interviewees already possessed degrees and two argued that they had been academically capable at school. They did not find the study demands of their course onerous. They were familiar with the HE environment and were not intimidated by it. As one argued,

I found it very easy academically but I didn’t work conscientiously but I have always found it quite easy.

For students whose educational pathways had been less successful when younger, or who were re-engaging with education after years of working and/or raising families, then concerns about coping with study demands and settling into university life were more prominent. As shown in section 6.5, a difficulty for some students was the transition to a more independent style of learning.
For mature students concerns about whether or not they had the right academic skills were underpinned by concerns about how they would fit into a university culture, the University being perceived as an academic, middle class, youth oriented institution. The fact that the student population at Bradford was non-traditional was a specific attraction to all mature students, as the following quotes show.

I didn’t know about my capabilities and didn’t want to be with 18 year old academics. That was a big concern. The reality was that there was a mixed intake and a lot of people older than me…you think it is going to be all 18 year olds.

There is a good mix…people married with kids. It makes a big difference and I didn’t feel out of my depth. If it was all 18 years olds I might have been thinking ‘I can’t be with these intellects’.

It’s not bad at Bradford, its not snobby I thought it was going to be toffee nose it is informal…it is very working class.

The type of course is important. When I first went to University, everybody lived in residence and older people were people who had had a gap year but here loads of people are in their 40s and 50s. 18-21 are in minority.

Also, as shown in section 6.2, for the British Asian students interviewed, Bradford’s multicultural student population was a particular attraction and helped them to feel that Bradford was a place for them.

**6.4. Experience of University Social Life**

For most of the students interviewed experience of university social life was limited. However, this was not necessarily a problem because most were mature students with established family and social networks. They were not concerned with developing a campus or student social life and had not come to University as part of a youth transition to adulthood, with its associated search for new social friendships and experiences. This is captured in the following quote,

*My social life is separate from the University and campus. I don’t go drinking here, really I’m just friends with M and L and we have dinner together.*

In any case, for mature students with families there were very practical limitations to involvement. As one of the students argued,

*Mature students can’t go for a pint after lectures or be as involved in clubs and stuff because they have got children, jobs, partners and mortgages.*

Age, gender, family responsibilities and ethnicity were all noted as being significant influences on the extent of interaction between students and their attitudes toward socialising at university. The white British students interviewed stressed that a particular difference was the extent to which
socialising for many white British students would centre on pub/club culture and this particularly seemed to exclude Asian students. As one commented,

There is a definite split between ethnic groups. N will not come with us really into a pub. Originally we all went to the pub but four Asian girls did not stay.

For the Asian British women interviewed, family commitments, religious beliefs and cultural norms about appropriate female behaviour were all said to limit the extent to which they became involved in university social life. As two argued,

This is gender culture and religion - the question of getting out. We all have slightly different situations but the same religion and culture. Family is very important, if they say you can’t go out then you can’t.

We have demands...neighbours, family, school... especially for a woman...University doesn’t take account of things like that.

6.5. Coping with Study Demands

Five of the students interviewed thought that their course work was easy – all these had good academic backgrounds, and 10 thought that the support which the University provided, both personal and academic, was very good. As one put it,

I've had no difficulties academically and course related and I love being at University and doing what I'm doing.

However, there was a range of issues which concerned other students and which they thought influenced their ability to cope with studying, principally these centred on:

- coping with studying independently;
- course workload, especially the perceived lack of awareness of the demands placed on students with families and the extent to which the timetabling of assignments exacerbated work demands. For nurses a specific problem was the limited time to take leave from the course;
- poor or variable personal tutor support, both with academic and personal problems.

6.5.1. Studying independently

For eight of the students the transition to studying independently was difficult to get used to, particularly if they had previously been used to a much more supported and structured form of study. This is expressed in the following quotes:

It is a different way of studying, you get fed. With assignments and coursework here it is 'get on with it'. I found this difficult at first. There is a
big gap between study before and at university. I expected it to be – well, I didn’t think I’d have to take so much responsibility.

You get spoon-fed in college and help with essays... and you can see the tutor at any time...if I had not done social work prior to coming to university I would not have had a clue.

We need more problem based learning and things that give responsibility from the start should be built in from the first year so it is not so much of a shock in the second year.

This is not just a question of how well prepared students are when entering University, it is also a question of preferred learning styles and how conducive or not the University environment is to independent learning. In particular, the quality of advice, guidance and feedback was argued by 6 of the students to be crucial to developing as an independent learner. This is illustrated in the following quotes:

I don’t know if I’m working at Level 3. They are good on buzz words and where to put full stops, etc, but they should give examples... they want us to critically analyse things but what is that? I don’t know if I’m analysing something... they give you a feedback sheet but it says things like outcomes adequately addressed but - I don’t know what that is.

You are supposed to find out yourself...how do we improve if we don’t get feedback?

A further bugbear was the fact that students thought they had to show all the initiative in arranging personal tutor support. As one argued,

You get a personal tutor and they say it is up to you to make the first contact. You have to find out where they are, where their office is, their phone number. In my first year I emailed and phoned but didn’t see her.

If this acts as a barrier to students accessing personal tutor support the implications may be very serious for student progression because, as shown in section 6.6, personal tutor support appears to be crucial to some students’ ability to study successfully.

6.5.2. Course workload

13 of the 20 students thought that managing the workload on their course difficult, eight being specifically concerned about the difficulties faced by balancing workload and family commitments. Specific issues raised included: receiving multiple assignments at the same time; finding time and space to study; getting leave to cope with things like child illness; difficulties in getting to and attending placements; and linking childcare arrangements with the time-tabling of courses. These are reflected in the following quotes:

It is easier to do an essay a week. Here you get all the essays at once. You should get your essays assignments at the beginning of the modules
not five weeks in. You can’t do essays all at once. We have 5 now and a presentation.

I know they can’t do timetables round individuals but at first the timetable was hectic and didn’t take account of people with children.

The essays and assignments are okay but managing family. Dropping the kids off at school is very difficult and I have to arrange pick ups because lectures finish at 4. Also, the placement arrangements are very difficult.

Placements have been difficult because we get placed around Bradford. This is a real problem for childcare, especially as a single parent.

It is really difficult to juggle childcare. I’m knackered when I get home…I put my kid to bed and then have to make a start on work… I’m thinking that our average day is 10-3.30 but it will be difficult, say, for me to get A to school and most schools finish at 3. University offered a nursery facility, but practically it does not work, because when on placement I would have to come to the University then go to placement. It is an issue people have to consider when doing the course.

A particular difficulty for nursing students, identified by 7 of the nursing students interviewed, was created by the limited amount of leave time they were allowed sickness, bereavement etc. In total this was 21 hours. Students recounted how they had variously come in after operations, sickness and family bereavement because they were not allowed to take time out over the 21 hours without completing additional work. Apart from the insensitivity to personal circumstance, what particularly angered the students was that this did not seem to be a standard practice across universities. Further at Bradford lecturers reportedly varied in the extent to which they required students to do additional work. This is captured in the following quote:

**Bradford say it’s a professional requirement but Huddersfield doesn’t do it. It is not sympathetic…also there is no set standard; some tutors say you don’t have to do anything, others will give you a 2000 word additional assignment.**

### 6.6. Successful Completion

Taken as a whole the interview data suggests that three factors were particularly important for ensuring students successfully negotiated their student careers. First, for all the students interviewed, bursaries and/or the financial support of families was reported as being crucial to ensuring continued participation.

*Mum and Dad could pay for my accommodation and tuition fees so I got a lot of parental support. It has remained throughout my degree and it has been very important. I’ve never not had that financial support.*

*Finances are important. I have got a mortgage and couldn’t have afforded a normal course, but that is not why I came into nursing. My partner pays for everything. If I had to pay my own mortgage I couldn’t do the course.*
I’m married so my husband’s wage pays for the bills. I was getting more from the bursary though, because I only had a part-time job before, but it evened out with having to apply for childcare. Money was very significant.

The bursary doesn’t stretch that far but I couldn’t afford to do the course without it.

Second, the support of family networks was crucial both for emotional support and for helping with childcare responsibilities.

If I didn’t have the support of mother in law, mum and husband arranging childcare I couldn’t do this course. I have to study when my kid is in bed. It is very hard because I’m tired and had a day at University. I study in the evening and have to give a weekend day and my Husband has to take my kid out.

I couldn’t do this without [Partner]. I don’t particularly need him financially but I couldn’t do it without his emotional support.

You make support networks; family, partners, friends. Without support networks you can’t do the course. My partner says that I am doing the course for us and it is positive and it will be great when you qualify, but if he complained about paying for everything, etc, I wouldn’t do it.

Third, personal tutor support was considered crucial to successfully completing course studies. For two students, the quality of personal tutor support available had prevented them from dropping out:

I have a good relationship with mum but I wouldn’t be here without the support of an individual tutor in the University. It was because a tutor took a personal interest and allowed me to open up – made me because I hadn’t told anyone. I wasn’t allowed to keep this personal tutor though. I got a man next but that was not that useful given the issues.

Last year they were good to me. I was pregnant and they supported me. My personal tutor was there to solve issues.

As one of the students who had been well supported argued the personal tutor system is a great system if the personal tutor is good.

However, the in-depth interviews suggest that the quality of support offered varied markedly:

I have not been supported well. There is a culture here about being careful what you say. You need to know who to go to. They just give you a name you have to find out contact details and they don’t get back to you.

My personal tutor is a waste of time.

Some personal tutors are crap.
You can’t go any time you want. I had to see mine on Wed at 4 but couldn’t make it and they wouldn’t change the time, but there are students who see there’s all the time.

You can’t get hold of him and he does not take things seriously. When I complained about placements he just said all you need to do is pass, it was no help.

Fourth, the support of small friendship networks could be crucial in ensuring successful progress:

We had each other to depend on. I’m still dependent on them, I am not totally confident. We have been dependent on each other. We have been one group so it will be difficult. We have supported each other academically. We supported each other doing essays.

Handing in essays and that we have helped each other out. It is part of our social life getting to see each other. Without these I wouldn’t have a chance to get out the house. Other days we come in and go for something to eat.

### 6.7. Employability

For three of the students the term employability skills was meaningless. All three thought that the attempt to identify generic key skills was doubtful. This was either because if generally defined skills, such as communication skills, became so broad as to lack occupational applicability or, if more specifically defined, lost their generic applicability. Two specifically stated that the attempt to make courses develop employability skills was likely to switch them off studying. This was because they did not come to university for training but to study.

For the remaining 17, perhaps because they were studying vocational courses that conferred professional licence to practice, employability skills were understood in occupationally specific ways. Consequently, the term employability meant little because they were interested in the acquisition of specific professional skills.

The concerns of students in terms of developing employment skills centred on two areas:

- the quality of work placements;
- the quality of mentor support offered on work placement.

There were three interrelated concerns about work placement: variation in the quality of placement setting; the limited opportunity work placements allowed for learning specific skills in-depth and the extent to which placements provided experience in a range of professional settings. The following quotes illustrate these concerns:
My first one (work placement) was different from the second because I had no responsibility. In the first, I shadowed someone who wasn’t even social work trained. In the second one, I had a caseload. It’s daunting but I think it prepared me very well because I was doing the job of a social worker.

I’ve had four adult nursing placements. Two have been good and two not so good. In one, the ward was being closed down so they were not very happy about students being on the ward and I didn’t learn a lot.

Placements only have some aspects of social work. We are supposed to be learning social work but I didn’t have any statutory sector placements. We don’t get a choice of placement.

Students were also concerned about the quality of mentor support which they thought could determine the effectiveness of work placement. In particular: continuity of mentor; consistent and informed guidance; and willingness to make time to support students; were all regarded as crucial and, at least for some students, had been lacking. The following comments illustrate this:

I should work three shifts with my mentor and they should support you but on my last placement I had three mentors in three months and this created difficulties is signing off my competencies.

Sometimes mentors don’t want to teach… you feel as though you are in the way;

Every mentor I have had has told me something completely different, so I read up myself.

You get a mentor on placement but if they are not good… some of them are not mentor trained by the University.

The University does not give clear guidelines on how to complete and mentors are not trained and students get conflicting advice.

6.8. The Role of Ethnicity

The white UK students interviewed did not think about their ethnicity or how it impacts on their experience. However, as shown in section 5.4 and 6.4 they did think that ethnicity was important in terms of determining the extent of socialising between students. In particular, they recognised that their own socialising cultures were often pub and alcohol based. They also recognised that Asian female students tended to stick together. As one of the students argued,

The Asian girls are completely separate from the white. People on the course don’t really socialise together. In lectures the Asian girls always sit apart in own groups and mostly interact on their own terms.

For the British Asian female students interviewed ethnicity affected their experience of being a student but in complex ways. It affected:
• the opportunity for socialising;
• the importance placed on Bradford having a large Asian student body;
• the cultural norms surrounding family obligations and child care duties;
• experience of work placement.

However, none of the students singled out ethnicity as either determining their identity or student experience. Ethnicity was one possible structuring of identity alongside other factors particularly gender, religion, family circumstances and age. This is reflected in the following quotes:

It’s like two people, my ethnicity doesn’t affect university as such but I have to have two lives, one as an Asian mum and one as a student.

This is gender, culture and religion the question of ‘getting out’. We all have slightly different situations (speaking of her and 3 friends) …we get classed as Asians but we are different, different countries and languages but we share a lot of traditions.

In our culture the norm is to get married when 16 but that is changing. Now parents expect children to have an education. I was surprised at how many young girls are here. When I was their age it was not like that.

A particularly complex issue was how ethnicity and gender interacted to determine opportunities to engage in studying and cope with childcare. In a focus group held before the in-depth interviews began with 8 social work students there had been a discussion between two mature white female students with children and two mature British Asian students with children. The discussion focussed on whether or not ethnicity or gender was more important in determining assumptions about gender roles in the family. The British Asian students could see commonalities with the two white British students but thought that there was less freedom for Asian Muslim women to escape family obligations.

This was the view of the students interviewed in-depth who thought that the pressures on British Asian Pakistani women were greater than on White British students but also other ethnic groups, as the two quotes below demonstrate:

The family is very important if they say you can’t go out then you can’t and the influence of culture and religion.

Indian’s are not as restricted as we are. There religion allows them more, for example, they can drink and they also go out more. This is culture and religion.

None of the students thought that they had experienced racism or discrimination at University. This may have been because Bradford has a large British Asian student population. As one of the students argued, I don’t think racial discrimination exists in Bradford. That said, two did think that their course should allow them leave for religious festivals.
However, outside of University, while on work placement, three of the students thought that they had experienced cultural ignorance or stereotyping, as the following quotes show:

I don’t get racial abuse but a lot of you should be married to your family. On placement you get questions like are you married? Will you marry your cousin. Everybody assumes I am Muslim but I’m not. One guy said I would not be celebrating Christmas because I’m a Muslim but I’m a Sikh.

I get offended if people assume things like all Muslims arrange marriages or we are doing nursing because we are not allowed to do anything else. You get this on placement. I pray 5 times a day and I’ve been told off by staff nurses and my prayers are really important to me. I usually go for breaks when I need to pray but wards can be really funny. Nurses who smoke are allowed to go for extra breaks.

Qualified nurses need to update on cultural diversity. In Asian culture, loads of people visit relatives and nurses won’t allow more than three people at a bed. They don’t know about different cultures, nurses say the families are making a big deal.

The students were not inclined to describe this as racism but as ignorance or stereotyping, as one argued people are not being racist.
7. Discussion of Findings

7.1. Policy and Strategy

Judged by Government performance indicators Bradford is considered a success in terms of:

- widening participation;
- ensuring students develop employability skills and move into employment;
- recruiting and retaining BME students.

Indeed, a problem faced by Bradford is how to grow the population of traditional, as opposed to non-traditional, students who are studying on single honours degrees.

However, Bradford’s success in WP and employability may, in part, depend on factors other than University policy and practices, such as:

- the local demographic profile;
- the general trend across HE toward students studying locally;
- the University’s historical development around vocational provision.

This latter point helps explain why Bradford has a large number of degree pathways linked to occupational destinations but a relatively limited ‘academic footprint’.

Hard evaluation data is lacking by which to assess the impact of strategies. Both the development of the Corporate Plan and new LTA strategy together with the interview findings, suggest that strategies and policies:

- are not clearly linked at the corporate level;
- are differentially implemented in range, quality and extent on the ground;
- lack comprehensive and accessible monitoring and assessment data.

Further, initiatives run to support the strategies and polices are often short-term, insufficiently funded and lack rigorous assessment.

7.2. Teaching, Learning and Assessment Issues

For those responsible for planning and delivering teaching, diversity brings challenges because the historically dominant student model, around which higher education has been constructed, no longer applies. In addition, at a national policy level, WP and associated agendas, such as, the key skills agenda, contain tensions and challenges which have to be negotiated.

There are both challenges and opportunities raised by the expansion in student numbers and diversification of the student body including:
• challenges to traditional curriculum provision and LTA practices;
• increases in class sizes and demands on teaching staff;
• increase in demands for personal support both academic and pastoral;
• a rise in drop out rates;
• developing student provision and pathways within the constraints of existing HEFCE funding frameworks.

At a teaching level, there were particular concerns raised in interview, about the:

• preparedness of students who enter university and the consequences this has both for retention and levels of support required to ensure student progression;
• difficulties students may have making the transition from the highly supported learning they may have experienced in school or college and the more independent, reflective form of learning encouraged at University;
• behaviour of students, especially locally based students, who have attended school and college in Bradford and maintain the same school and college friendship groups in university.

These concerns were influenced by the ethnic composition of Bradford. Staff interviewed reported specific issues raised by the cultural background of students in relation to:

• course choice;
• preference for traditional course teaching and assessment methods;
• the rage of personal difficulties students might face;
• the behaviour of locally based students.

7.3. Recruitment, Retention and Student Success

The factors which affect recruitment, retention and success of non traditional students (including BME groups) are not all within the direct control of universities or affected by university policies and strategies. There are internal drivers, such as the quality and level of tutor support offered by universities, and external drivers, such as changes in personal circumstances of students, or being unable to cope with the pressure of studying while working and meeting family demands. The University will have direct control over some of the factors and in-direct control over others.

One of the pressing issues is to develop better data on the factors affecting recruitment, retention, achievement and transition, particularly in relation to different groups of students. This would allow for a better understanding of the internal and external drivers which could influence future policy and practice. At Bradford, it is not possible to easily access data on, for example, drop out rates for different ethnic groups or the factors which affect such rates.
Examples were provided in staff interviews of forms of practice and provision which were historically constructed around a model of a traditional student. This being someone who was: 18-21 years old, academically able and self-directed, studying full-time, single, living on campus and in little need of extensive personal support. For example:

- study pathways which assume that students did not switch between full and part-time study and study in limited time period e.g. 3 years and progress in a consecutive linear fashion. Consequently, switching between full and part time study is either difficult or not possible on most degree courses offered. It is very difficult to study modules at a range of levels within a degree programme, to vary the number of modules being studied to better meet personal circumstances or to prolong the total study period;
- accreditation systems which assume full completion of a degree before award. Consequently, it is difficult for students who may not complete a full-time degree to achieve awards for different stages of achievement short of degree;
- personal tutor systems which depend on students showing the initiative in take up; don’t fully integrate academic and pastoral support and, in any case, vary in both the quality and range of support offered. Consequently, such systems may not be capable of dealing with the range of academic and pastoral issues students present.

The need for, and importance of, developing flexibility in curriculum content and delivery, developing extra academic support, recognising the impact on student performance of personal problems; developing more innovative approaches to assessment and tailoring learning support to better meet student needs have all been raised as issues in internal University research and briefing papers and form a key part of the LTA strategy for 2005-9.

The student data presented in this report suggests that current practices may not fully meet the needs of non-traditional students regardless of their ethnicity. For many students, particularly mature students and students with families, university is simply the place they go to study. Being a student is only one dimension of their identities. They do not live on campus or base their social life around university. They have established lives and commitments such as spouses/partners and children and are often studying for specific vocational reasons. Their pathways into university are diverse and they do not necessarily have the skills and experiences that courses have traditionally assumed. Nor can it be assumed that they have any desire to fit the traditional student model around which universities have historically been constructed.

Consequently, their view of university, and their expectations about what support they can expect, may be very different to that assumed in the traditional student model, around which universities, and their teaching and learning provision, have historically been constructed. For example, from the student data presented above, it appears that:
the University could develop more social events based around a variety of socialising cultures which are not alcohol and pub based;
the personal tutor system is crucial to student success but variable in quality and needs developing to meet the kinds of demands now placed on it;
timetables, study demands, study leave, leave entitlements and the organisation of work placements could be better suited to the realities of studying while bringing up families;
assignments could be provided at the beginning of modules rather than midway through modules;
more guidance around assignment criteria and expected work levels and better feedback on assignments may be required. This latter point is particularly important in helping students adjust to and cope with the demands of independent studying;
financial support schemes may be crucial to the recruitment and retention of many non-traditional students. Consequently, further development, and careful targeting, of bursaries and financial support schemes may have an important role to play in the future.

It is important to note that the LTA strategy for 2005-9 anticipates and addresses some of the issues above but how effective implementation of the strategy will prove is an open question.

7.4. The Impact of Ethnicity
The findings presented in this report suggest that ethnicity does not appear to be the dominant structuring factor in relation to the student experience at university. As noted earlier, the questionnaire data shows that 92% thought it had no impact on their participation in university life; 97% thought it had no impact on their experience of studying and 88% thought that it had no impact on their career prospects. It may be that the ethnic profile of Bradford ensures that the British Pakistani/British Asian students in particular do not experience it as an alien institution. For around a fifth of students studying in a multicultural university was considered an advantage of studying at Bradford.

The White British students interviewed in-depth did not think about their ethnicity or how it impacted on their experience. The Asian female students recognised the fact that ethnicity affected their experience of being a student but in complex ways. The interviews suggest that the relationship between ethnicity, student experience and future pathway is complex and contingent. It depends on a whole range of factors including:

- ethnicity;
- religion;
- age;
- gender;
- family circumstances;
- class;
- course type;
• student tutor relationships.

However, the evidence from the in-depth interviews shows that ethnicity, especially when combined with gender, may be particularly important in affecting the following:

• the opportunity for socialising and developing informal support while studying;
• the importance placed on Bradford having a large Asian student body;
• the cultural norms surrounding family obligations and child care duties;
• experience of work placement.

Also, as shown in section 7.2, ethnicity was considered an important influence, on course choice, teaching and learning style preferences; the range of personal problems presented by students; and student behaviour in lectures and seminars by some of the senior management and teaching staff interviewed.

The British Asian female students talked about ethnicity in complex ways which simultaneously seemed to deny and affirm the structuring effect of ethnicity. This may be related to the fact that University provides a contradictory space for contesting identity. On the one hand, it offers the possibility of developing new identities and pathways, for example, by enhancing career opportunities, adding the identity of student to that of, say, a wife and mother, or providing a space for the development of a social life and new friendships. On the other, the process of studying often creates new constraints on the development of identity, for example, managing workload might reduce the space for developing a social life or the demands of studying may reinforce the importance of relying on traditional networks and relationships, for example, the family for support.

7.5. Employability

Judged in terms of HEFCE league tables, Bradford is one of the most successful universities in the country in ensuring transition into employment for its students. However, this might simply reflect the type of course provision which Bradford offers. Further there is no reliable data available which allows analysis of the type of employment pathway students follow and whether or not different ethnic groups have different pathway outcomes.

The research data presented above suggests that, even on vocational courses, students may not think that they are developing the range of practical skills needed for employment. For example, while the vast majority of students who completed the questionnaire thought that they were developing communication skills and skills for working with others, very few thought they were developing numeracy skills. Moreover around 40% did not report developing IT skills, problem solving skills or skills for independent learning.

For students on vocational courses the quality of work placement; the range of practice settings covered in work placement; and the quality of mentor support
were regarded as being crucial to determining how effective the placements were in developing occupational competency.

More broadly, the University has been innovative in developing Foundation Degrees, work-based learning and supporting the use of progress files across the University but as an internal report concluded if the full potential of such initiatives are to be realised further development of University-industry partnerships, more and high quality workplace mentors and more effective distance tutoring techniques will need developing.
8. Conclusion

For both staff and students, the University is a site for de-traditionalisation and re-traditionalisation. For students from non-traditional backgrounds going to university is a form of de-traditionalisation because they can be seen as breaking free from traditional pathways and developing:

- new identities and roles;
- new skills and knowledge;
- new friendship groups and socialising cultures;
- social, educational and vocational pathways which can provide social and geographical mobility.

Set against this re-traditionalisation may also occur in a range of ways:

- students may choose the University and course they study as a result of the social, economic, educational, familial and cultural contexts in which they have been brought up and currently live;
- the student experience may be limited by the constraining effect of the above contexts;
- the extent to which students can cope with study demands and successfully complete their studies may reflect the extent to which they can negotiate the impact of the above contexts.

For staff, de-traditionalisation occurs as the student body becomes increasingly diverse and the historical model of both a typical university and typical student is challenged. This creates demands for:

- new LTA strategies;
- new forms of student support both academic and pastoral;
- changes in timetabling, and course delivery;
- more flexible study pathways;
- new types of course and qualifications.

Re-traditionalisation occurs through:

- fitting the new student body into existing student provision and pathways;
- attempts to maintain academic teaching standards and course boundaries;
- attempts to resist or modify policies and strategies which challenge traditional policies and practices;
- attempts to maintain and further develop traditional university provision, ethos and forms of study.

The challenge for a university such as Bradford is to negotiate the tensions generated by process of de and re-traditionalisation. It has to steer a course between:
• broadening the student intake and growing student numbers without diluting educational standards; placing to great a demand on capacity or recruiting students who may not be sufficiently prepared for study at HE;
• developing teaching, learning and assessment strategies to meet the challenges posed by the diversification of the student body, without undermining the development of independent study skills among students or placing demands on teaching staff which they are not in a position to deliver;
• transforming the traditional model of a university by diversifying provision, broadening student intake, creating a range of flexible study pathways and qualifications, without destroying the distinctive type of education and student experience the University can provide or undermining the value of the courses offered.

Negotiating these processes is challenging and risky for both the University and its students. For students risk lies in areas such as: taking on debt; adjusting to new cultures of study; course failure; and changing familial and social relationships. For the University and its staff risk lies in: securing student numbers and finances in an increasingly competitive HE market; responding to the range of policies which are helping to transform the context of HE and the role of universities; changing curricula and LTA strategies to meet the diverse student body.

For Bradford, negotiating these risks will require an understanding of which risks it can directly control, because they are internally manufactured by institutional policies and practices which are less effective in the new HE context, and those which it can only indirectly control, because they are ‘externally’ manufactured. For example, drop out rates may depend on factors outside of university control, such as, students choosing to obtain better paid employment.
9. Recommendations

9.1. Introduction
Below a series of recommendations are made which follow on from the research findings and are designed to provide ways in which the University might negotiate the issues raised by the processes of de and re-traditionalisation, to which they, and their students, are subject. Many of the recommendations build on, and refine, initiatives contained in the LTA strategy for 2005-9 but have specifically emerged from the research data presented in the report.

9.2. Strategy and Policy
The University needs to concentrate its strategies and policies on understanding the internal drivers which influence recruitment, retention and success. This requires more research into how different groups of students experience, and cope with, the demands of studying. In particular, the development of effective policy and practice may be limited by the ways in which data is collated, analysed and used and the extent to which strategies are integrated. Consideration should be given to:

- improving the quality, collation and use of monitoring and assessment data. There is still a need to map the key issues around recruitment, retention, completion and transition in relation to different groups of students and bring this together in a coherent institution wide document;
- pulling together, in an easily accessible format, evaluation and assessment data on best practice in supporting different types of students through their student careers.

9.3. Involving students in Strategy and Policy Development
Given that strategies and policies are designed to support students through their student careers, consideration should be given to reviewing the mechanisms for ensuring student views are fed into the policy making process. Ideally, this should go further than consultation with established student groups and provide opportunities for students to be involved in the design and development of policies and strategies aimed at them.

9.4. Ensuring Preparedness for HE
Pre-entry guidance becomes more important as the student body diversifies. If students are to enter university with a full understanding of what is expected of them and what kinds of support they can expect, and if they are not to be steered onto courses which neither match their interests or aptitudes then, effective guidance is crucial. Whether or not such guidance is effective is a question the University could usefully investigate.
The extent to which student induction processes effectively identify the academic strengths and weaknesses of students should be assessed. New students could be supported through personalised learning plans to support the development of study skills in the first two terms. In particular, more intensive support to ease transition into independent studying may be required.

9.5. Improving Retention and Achievement

The personal tutor system appears to be crucial in ensuring students successfully negotiate their student careers but it appears to vary in quality. Moreover, the personal support required by students covers academic and pastoral issues, the range of which increases as the student body diversifies. Consideration should be given to:

- providing training for staff in tutoring skills; particularly in relation to coping with the range of pastoral demands that might be made;
- taking responsibility for making personal tutor appointments away from students, making attendance at a minimum number of tutor sessions compulsory and ensuring that there is a follow up system for students who miss tutor sessions;
- examining how integrating the academic and student support services may help improve the quality of tutor support.

Strategies for supporting students with family and other demands may need developing. While responsibility for managing study demands and family commitments rests with students, there are ways in which the University may be able to better support such students. For example, this may be through:

- developing e-learning support strategies for different student groups;
- creating more flexible pathways between full and part-time forms of study or allowing periods of sabbatical;
- developing childcare support networks among students or better on-site facilities;
- assessing the potential for revising course timetables;
- providing assignment titles at the beginning of modules;
- planning placements with students to take account of family demands.

The feasibility of developing more flexible student pathways, which allow students to ‘step on and step off’, for example, by switching between full and part time periods of study during a degree or progressing through a degree in a non linear fashion, for example, by studying modules at different levels, should be assessed. Despite diversification of the student body, and of the range and type of qualifications available to students, the study model is still dominated by the assumption that students on full-time degrees should study full-time throughout their degree and complete in three or four years.
The flexible pathway should be supported by accreditation systems which reward students for achievements short of full degree and which can be banked and count toward final degree award if students stop studying and re-engage at a later date. Currently only one school uses such a system and that for part-time students only. In effect this requires a culture change where studying for a degree is not seen as a time-limited event but a process in a lifelong learning career.

The quality and usefulness of academic guidance, support and feedback could be reviewed and assessed to ensure it meets the needs of the diverse student body at Bradford. In particular, a better understanding of how effective students think current guidance and support practices are and how they might be improved is required. The evidence in this report suggests that such guidance is viewed as being essential by students but the quality of provision is not always of the highest order.

9.6. Enhancing the student experience

As the student body diversifies so the University may need to change and develop its understanding of how to enhance the student experience. For example, in a diverse cultural student body it should be expected that a range of social spaces and events may be required on campus which for example, may be alcohol free or aimed at specific groups e.g. mature students with family commitments.

Many students will have no desire to participate in the wider social dimensions of university life, however, the evidence presented above suggests that more alcohol free social events and social spaces and events which take into account the circumstances of mature students with families, for example, by being putting on events during the day, may help enhance the student experience.

Further, the University could set up pilot projects to investigate the utility of setting up different kinds of social groups to support the development of learning networks. For example, it may be possible to support mature students with families through, say, a mums and toddlers study group running in school holidays or to set up learning support mentors for specific groups of students.

9.7. Promoting employability

For a university such as Bradford, with its excellent graduate employability record, the challenge is to ensure that work placements and mentoring systems are working well and that, for non-vocational courses, students have the opportunity to develop key skills.

The evidence from this research suggests that:
• the range of work placements and the types of practice which occurs on placement needs to be regularly reviewed and assessed to ensure students are developing appropriate vocational skills;

• the quality of mentor support should be regularly reviewed and assessed;

• there is wide variation between courses and by gender in the extent to which students think they are developing key skills. The reasons for this are not clear and would bear further investigation if the University intends to pursue the development of a key skills agenda.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The findings and recommendations within the report are attributable to the authors and are not necessarily endorsed by the institution.
1. INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE

Brunel’s mission is “to produce high quality graduates and research of use to the community”. The Strategic Plan emphasises that the University “remains committed to providing degree programmes which prepare graduates for the world of work. To that end all subject areas are expected to provide excellent teaching which is focused on student learning”. Originally a technical college based in Acton, West London, Brunel moved to its main Uxbridge campus, and was awarded University status in June 1966. Today, it provides degree programmes across seven Schools.

Brunel University’s Learning and Teaching Strategy\(^{ii}\) aims to build upon the University’s Strategic Plan\(^{iii}\) so as to further enhance the quality of the teaching and learning culture within the University. The strategic objectives that particularly relate to the Ethnicity, Education and Employment project, include:

- Promoting innovation and creativity in course design and delivery in order to attract students and meet their diverse needs.
- Gaining employers’ recognition for students and graduates because of their knowledge, skills, experience and judgement.
- Developing routes through colleges and workplace to the University so as to identify and support those students who have the potential to benefit from higher education.
- Gaining recognition for the University’s teaching and learning and its commitment to equal opportunities through internal and external audits.

In the 2004/05 academic year, Brunel had a student population of 13,407. The student body includes students from over 113 different countries and Brunel boasts an international population of around 2,000 students\(^{iv}\). The University has a large proportion of students from minority ethnic (ME) groups that makes up over 60% of the current student population. Brunel exceeds its benchmarks for widening participation (WP) students from social classes IIIM, IV and V. Thus the student body is very diverse. The ethnic diversity set out in Section II-a below.

The most recent Institutional Audit of Brunel (2004: 31) undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency concluded that “broad confidence can be placed in the soundness of the University’s present and likely future management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards.”\(^{v}\) The audit also added that this management “reflected a level of self-evaluation which gave the team confidence that the University would maintain a level of rigorous scrutiny and would continue to act to enhance its provision.” The QAA identified some specific areas as representing examples of good practice within the institution:

- “the liaison with external examiners at University and departmental level;
- the University's commitment to the development of placement opportunities and the communication of their benefits to students and its efforts to enhance the employability of its students through the opportunities provided by the placement scheme;
- the dissemination of experience of, promotion and support for blended e-learning;
- the series of networks within and across formal structures which contribute to the development of ideas and the exchange of good practice;
the coordinated support for students with special needs; and
the University's development, operation and monitoring of its collaborative provision" (QAA, 2004:31).

In relation to this project, the second example of good practice is particularly relevant.

2. METHODOLOGY

a. Methods applied in the case study

The themes to be examined were agreed by the five national partners. These were:

Motivation for Higher Education
Motivation for choosing to study at Brunel University
Preparedness for Higher Education
Preparedness for Employment
Preparedness for the Future

At Brunel, data addressing these themes were collected through a mixed-method approach including the analysis of institutional policy and publications, semi-structured questionnaires, the Delphi technique, focus groups, and interviews with members of senior management and with employers.

Questionnaires

A questionnaire, including both closed and open questions, was designed, piloted by graduates and amended accordingly. Revised questionnaires were sent, with a letter about the project and stamped addressed envelopes to all 645 students (excluding international students) who had graduated in 2003 from two of the subject areas of the university which formed the target groups for the project. 103 (16%) of 645 responded and, of these, 48 (47%) indicated that they were willing to be contacted to take part in a Delphi technique survey. The final questionnaire for graduates can be seen in Appendix A.

A second questionnaire, closely based on the first, was designed, piloted by Level 3 students not involved in the data collection for the project and amended as a result. Revised questionnaires were administered to students in the two target subject areas. This was undertaken during a normally scheduled lecture, in order to maximise response rate. This non-selective method did mean, however, that we are not able to distinguish between “Home” and “International” students. Questionnaires were completed and returned by a total of 205 students (from a possible sample of 250). The final questionnaire for Level 3 students can be seen in Appendix B.

The data from both questionnaires were collated in SPSS for analysis.

Delphi technique

The Delphi technique is a research tool that allows the collection of information from participants without face-to-face interaction, for example through the use of mail or email. Since the technique was developed by the RAND Corporation at the beginning of the Cold War, it has been received with mixed reactions. By some, it has been seen as a method for achieve consensus (or dissensus) and for manipulating the public in a short period of time. For this reason the appropriateness of the Delphi
Technique in the second phase of data collection with Brunel’s 2003 graduates was extensively discussed among the researchers and the members of the project steering group at Brunel University. The initial doubts relating to the suitability of the technique were soon dissipated by the awareness that none of the researchers involved in the project would have wanted to steer the data towards specific results. On the contrary, it was thought that the data acquired would be more ‘reliable’ due to the absence of face-to-face interaction among the people taking part in the research. Indeed, they would not have been influenced by other people’s responses or the presence of the researcher. Moreover, the application of this technique would be useful to achieve a wider response from graduates without the impractical and costly alternative of meeting them in person, as they now might possibly be working in different parts of the world. As argued by Howze and Dalrymple (2004: 18), “recent technological advances also make Delphi even more attractive. The speed, ease, and decreased expense of corresponding via electronic mail and the possible attractions of completing surveys on the World Wide Web increase possibilities or modifications of the standard Delphi method”.

The technique consists of several phases:

1. The moderators identify the main issue to be investigated;
2. They prepare a questionnaire with open-ended questions, which require the participants to respond creatively and freely, in order to produce a variety of answers;
3. The moderators send out the questionnaire;
4. As soon as the responses to the questionnaire are received, they collate and analyse them; and
5. Produce a new questionnaire asking the respondents to give their feedback on short anonymised versions of other participants’ previous responses.

The process should continue until it is apparent that the process of ideas solicitation is over (Keeney et al., 2001). At Brunel University a questionnaire was devised and sent via email to the forty-eight 2003 graduates who had agreed to take part in the following phase of the research. The responses received through the same medium where collated and analysed by the moderators. These formed the basis for a second questionnaire based on more specific issues, which was sent to the same group of graduates. However, due to the high - although predicted - drop in the response rate (85.4%), it was decided that no further iterations would be made.

**Focus groups**

In order to provide a qualitative counterbalance to the input provided by the questionnaires and to explore further students’ attitudes towards education and employability, two focus groups were organised, involving Level 3 students from Information Systems and Computing and Business and Management. It can be argued that focus groups are not representative of general views; nevertheless, they are useful to understand various people’s opinions and expectations in relation to issues that are meaningful to them. In order to maximise the likelihood of participation, lunch was provided, as well as a £10 high street voucher. This however did not lead to the level of participation originally envisaged in two planned focus groups; one group was held with only four students and the other became a one-to-one interview as six of the seven students who had agreed to participate did not arrive. The small number...
of students who took part in the focus groups was not dissimilar from the experiences of other partners’ in relation to the recruitment of respondents.

Interviews with staff and graduate employers

Nine members of staff were invited by letter to take part in the research. Six members of Brunel University holding key roles in the institution agreed to be interviewed on a one-to-one basis. The interviews focussed on their personal views on a variety of issues ranging from education, to employability, to minority ethnic (ME) students in the institution to the role of HE in current society. The semi-structured interviews were recorded digitally, transcribed and subsequently analysed.

Six graduate employers, who are also stakeholders in the process of graduate recruitment, were also interviewed. They belong to large and small companies working in different fields; for example, IT, Business and Communication, Financial and Public sectors. Their viewpoints are fundamental for the clarification of issues related to graduate employability. Many of them, however, were keen to underline that theirs were personal views and did not represent those of their company. For this reason, consent forms were signed by both the researcher and the participants through which the researcher agreed to preserve the anonymity of the respondents. The interviews, recorded digitally, were subsequently transcribed and analysed. All the interviews are currently stored in a digital folder only accessible to members of the team. In all cases the respondents asked for their company name not to be mentioned in the report and suggested alternative ways to refer to them. On one occasion, the interviewer was asked to provide the interviewee with a copy of the voice file of the interview.

b. Role of the project steering group

The project steering group comprised two Widening Participation Officers, the Director of Careers and Student Employability, an academic from Brunel Business School (initially), the Director of the Learning and Teaching Development Unit (LTDU) and the LTDU’s Education Development Projects Manager. It was felt that this membership reflected the complexity and interdepartmental nature of the issues being explored.

The role of the project steering group was fundamental to the case study as its members, in their roles, provide information and recommendations concerning Brunel's students’ needs and provision for them to senior management. In relation to the project, they provided advice on a variety of practical issues including methodology, questionnaire design and potential interviewees.

The project steering group met approximately three times each year, directly prior to each meeting of the national partners – to discuss progress, the proposed agenda and to raise any points to be taken to the national meeting. After the national partners’ meeting, the project steering group was updated on decisions made via e-mail. Project steering group members were invited to attend the national partners’ meetings and did so on a number of occasions.

c. Target student groups

It was necessary to focus the data collection from students on groups within the total student body. Taking into consideration, the particular character of the project and its timing in relation to the academic year, the following groups were identified:
2003 graduates from two subject areas (see below) 
Level 3 students (Academic year 2004-5) from the same two subject areas 
Level 3 students (Academic year 2005-6) from the same two subject areas

In the way, the study included both current students and recent graduates. Two subject areas were identified as being of particular interest: Information Systems and Computing (ISC) and Business and Management (B&M). The rationale for this choice included size of cohort, ethnic diversity of students, opportunity for work placement and susceptibility to employment trends. Overviews of the selected subject areas follow. The research was not limited to previously identified target groups (Asian Indian and Asian Pakistani) due to the desire for inclusivity and comprehensiveness. This allowed the opportunity to take a more exploratory approach, drawing on grounded theory methodology to find patterns in the data from students and graduates of all ethnic groups.

**Business and Management Subject Area**

Brunel Business School is relatively new, having been established approximately ten years ago. Nonetheless, it is now one of the largest Schools in the University. The programmes offered are:\n
- Business Economics BSc; 
- Business and Management BSc; 
- Business and Management (Accounting) BSc; 
- Business and Management (eBusiness Systems) BSc; 
- Business and Management (Marketing) BSc; 
- Business Studies and Sport Sciences BSc; 
- Economics and Business Finance BSc; 
- Economics and Management BSc; 
- International Business BSc.

All of these degrees are taught on a full time basis only. Work Placements are not mandatory in Brunel Business School; however, many students choose to follow the four-year thick sandwich degree programme. This programme allows students to gain paid professional experience in prominent companies or organisations, often including graduate-like responsibilities.

Brunel Business School places an emphasis on providing students with the skills they need to maximise employability upon graduation. The School aims to achieve this by:

- Maintaining good links with industry and commerce. The School liaises continually with industrial advisers and past students regarding how to ensure that students are prepared for the working world of management; 
- Placing an emphasis on gaining “employable knowledge” which is highly up to date; 
- Equipping students with the conceptual and analytical means for understanding Business and Management that will enable them to progress in the working world of the future; 
- Working to develop those skills that students need to get a good job when they graduate; 
- Enhancing students’ abilities to communicate ideas and to take responsibility for their own learning, essential once students enter the world of employment.
Graduates from Brunel Business School have a wide range of career options. According to the School, they will leave university with key skills and knowledge, which are in great demand.

Brunel Business School has a population of 1343.5 students (students taking joint degrees with other subject areas are counted as 0.5). Of this population 78.5% are from ME groups. Amongst the 2004/05 Level 3 cohort the largest ethnic group was Asian-Indian, with 109.5 students making up approximately 32% of the total cohort. Further details are provided in Table 1 below.

In terms of the labour market, in the last few years the outlook for Business and Management students has been fairly promising, and indeed, the feedback from the 2003 Destination of Leavers from HE (DLHE) Survey indicates that Brunel’s graduates from the Brunel Business School have fared particularly well in relation to gaining employment, six months after graduation.

**Table 1: Level 3 Business and Management Students by Ethnic origin (2004/05)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic origin</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White - British</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White - Irish</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White other</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White and black African</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White and black Caribbean</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian - Indian</td>
<td>109.5</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian - Pakistani</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian - Bangladeshi</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White and Asian</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian - Other</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other mixed background</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black - Caribbean</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black - African</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black - Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian - Chinese</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Refused</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Brunel Registry data support*

**Table note**
0.5 indicates that student is taking a joint programme involving another subject area.
Information Systems and Computing Subject Area

Brunel University’s Information Systems and Computing programmes focus on both programming and design. The subject area’s application-oriented research ensures that the undergraduate programmes are kept at the forefront of thinking in Computer Science. Three undergraduate programmes are offered:

- Information Systems (BSc);
- Computer Science (BSc);
- Network Computing (BSc).

In 2005, Brunel’s Computer Science degree was ranked 12th out of 111*. Students taking sandwich courses can gain practical experience alongside professional computer scientists in placements in industrial, commercial or research organisations. Work placements can be within a variety of organisations, for example large and small software producers, computer manufacturers or public service organisations. Most placements organised by Information Systems and Computing are paid. The four-year thin sandwich courses are accredited by the British Computer Society (BCS), leading to exemption from parts 1 and 2 of BCS’s entrance examination. Participation in the BCS Professional Development Scheme can also lead to earlier Chartered Engineer status. Students who go on placement and submit a report at the end of it will see it counted towards the award of the Brunel Diploma in Professional Development.**

The subject area has very good links with the business community, which means that the curriculum can be designed to meet the needs of the industry and the market place; that the latest developments in the commercial world are fed into the programmes; and that the subject area has more contacts to aid students with finding a job upon graduation. The subject area suggests that its graduates are in high demand with every sort of company and enterprise dependent on computer technology. It is suggested that, initially, a degree in Information Systems and Computing may lead to positions in areas such as software production and that this is usually followed by progression into supervisory, then management, positions. Other options include general analyst/programmer appointments, whilst many large companies have openings for well-qualified personnel in this field. Furthermore, graduates may choose to join a consultancy firm, often a first step towards setting up their own business. Students with sandwich experience are in particularly high demand, with increased chances of being offered better graduate appointments than those taking the three year programme.

Information Systems and Computing has a population of 1,164 students. Of this population, 88.5% are from ME groups. Amongst the 2004/05 Level 3 cohort there were a total of 107 Asian-Indian students. This constituted 36.6% of Level 3 Information Systems and Computing students and, again, made them the largest ethnic group. See below for more details.

In terms of the labour market, the outlook for graduates of Information Systems and Computing degrees at the time of the survey was not particularly good as, nationally, IT graduates have an unemployment rate which, according to Prospects.ac.uk’s survey “What do graduates do?”, is substantially higher than the average for all subjects.***
Table 2: Level 3 Information Systems and Computing Students by Ethnic origin (2004/2005)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic origin</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White - British</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White - Irish</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White other</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White and black African</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White and black Caribbean</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian - Indian</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>36.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian - Pakistani</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian - Bangladeshi</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White and Asian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian - Other</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other mixed background</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black – Caribbean</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black – African</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black – Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian – Chinese</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Refused</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Brunel Registry data support

**d. Challenges**

Among the challenges encountered, the most significant one was encouraging students to participate:

Taking part in the research was voluntary. Low participation rates in activities involving final year students are however difficult to pinpoint precisely. Low participation might be caused by the one or more elements including the following:

Difficulty to reach target group: As one of the target groups was 2003 graduates, who were no longer at the University, two factors may have reduced their participation rate; not receiving the invitation (e.g. due to an incorrect ‘home’ address) and a lack of interest in engaging now that they have ‘moved on’ to the next life phase.

Survey fatigue: students are becoming more and more targeted by members of staff and outside researchers who would like them to take part in their research.

Timing: Conducting surveys and focus groups with the 2004/05 Level 3 (final year) students was problematic due to a restructuring of the academic year. We wanted to collect students’ perspectives at the end of their University experience in May but as formal teaching sessions ended in March it was very difficult to contact students. In response to this, it was necessary to adjust the project schedule;
Students’ perception: that the topics discussed were not relevant to them or that the expected benefits might have been too low.

In order to overcome the challenges, an attempt was made to encourage students to participate by providing book/high street vouchers as a sign of appreciation for the time spent in focus group activities. However, these, as indicated above, proved to be of little use in influencing students’ participation. There have been several discussions on whether respondents should be paid for their input/time. The issue is, however, being still debated in the field of qualitative research (Hensher et al., 2005).

3. DATA ANALYSIS

I. DESK RESEARCH

The following subsections provide an overview of the institution in terms of student numbers, qualifications at entry level and first destinations in relation to the students’ ethnicity.

a. Consideration of Statistical Data

Ethnicity at entry

Table 3 shows the number of Home students in each ethnic group across the University as a whole.

Table 3: Undergraduate Home*** Student population by ethnic group (2004/05)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic origin</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>% of overall population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White British</td>
<td>3508</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Irish</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other white</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White &amp; Black African</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White &amp; Black Caribbean</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Indian</td>
<td>1705</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Pakistani</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Bangladeshi</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White &amp; Asian</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>any other Asian</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other mixed</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Caribbean</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black African</td>
<td>791</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other black</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other background</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>476</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9108</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Brunel Registry data support*
The table shows the ethnically diverse nature of the student body at Brunel University and illustrates the proportion of minority and majority ethnic groups within the institution. The equivalent data in relation to the particular subject areas studied for the project were given above in section 2-c. Comparison of these tables confirms that the two subject areas selected for study are more ethnically diverse than the university as a whole. In relation to the three groups of particular interest, the comparative data are, for the White British group: University; 38.5%, B&M; 25.5%, ISC; 9.9%. For the Indian Asian group the figures are: University; 18.7%, B&M; 32%, ISC; 36.6%. For the Asian Pakistani group, they are: University; 5%; B&M; 4.9%; ISC; 11.3%.

**Ethnicity and qualifications at entry**

While the proportion of entrants applying to Higher Education Institutions with A-Level qualifications has recently increased\(^\text{xiv}\), widening participation activities have promoted the acceptability of GNVQ and BTEC qualifications. According to Connor et al (2004: XV)

> “Overall, minority ethnic degree entrants have lower entry qualifications on average, fewer take the traditional A-Level route, and are more likely to come into HE from FE colleges, than White entrants. However, these overall results mask divergences between groups of minority ethnic students in their HE entry route and prior qualifications. In summary: Indian and Chinese groups are the most likely to take the traditional ‘A’ level highway’ to HE and are better qualified as HE entrants; they are also more likely to have been at an independent or grammar school. Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups do not gain as high A-Level qualifications as Indian or Chinese, but do better than Black students. Black groups, and Black Caribbean in particular, are generally older on entry, with a wider range of entry qualifications than the average; more progress to HE via the FE college and work routes, and more are likely to have vocational entry qualifications”

Entry qualifications at Brunel University are very diverse. Degree-level courses have very different minimum entry requirements\(^\text{xv}\). These are also very different in nature and range from Foundation Courses, UCAS Tariff, GCE A-Level/GCSE, BTEC, Scottish Certificate of Education, International Baccalaureate, to the Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) and Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CATS)

The relevant data are presented in Table 4 below. The table indicates that the qualifications with which various ME groups enter Brunel partially reflect the situation reported by Connor et al. (2004). Over 80% of the Asian-Indian and Asian-Chinese groups enter with A-Levels and associated qualifications (88.2% and 83.6% respectively). These are the groups with the highest percentage of A-Level holders, but, contrary to expectation based on Connor’s report, the group with the next highest percentage of A-Level qualifications is Asian-Pakistani (with 78.7% compared to that of the White British group – 76.9%) .

With regard to Black groups, the table indicates that qualifications on entry to Brunel are in line with expectations based Connor’s findings reported above. Although not supported by statistical analysis, the data point in the same direction; that is, that a higher percentage of Black ME groups access higher education as mature students and they are well represented in those who take access courses in preparation for higher education.
Table 4: Home students enrolled on UG degrees, by qualification on entry and ethnic group (2004-05), % within ethnic group – (% in brackets)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Access Course (Not in USE)</th>
<th>ACCESS course QAA Accredited</th>
<th>First degree of UK institution</th>
<th>HNC or HND (Note 2)</th>
<th>Mature student (Note 3)</th>
<th>Mixed GCE 'A' &amp; GNVQ/GSVQ Level 3 (Note 1)</th>
<th>ONC or OND (Note 2)</th>
<th>Other Non-UK Qualification, level not known</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White - British</td>
<td>38 (1.0)</td>
<td>73 (2.0)</td>
<td>106 (3.0)</td>
<td>50 (1.4)</td>
<td>272 (7.8)</td>
<td>2683 (76.9)</td>
<td>111 (3.1)</td>
<td>6 (0.1)</td>
<td>3486 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-Irish</td>
<td>5 (3.9)</td>
<td>4 (3.1)</td>
<td>2 (1.5)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18 (14.2)</td>
<td>77 (61.1)</td>
<td>2 (1.5)</td>
<td>2 (1.5)</td>
<td>126 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-Other</td>
<td>9 (2.2)</td>
<td>16 (3.9)</td>
<td>10 (2.4)</td>
<td>2 (0.4)</td>
<td>39 (9.6)</td>
<td>219 (53.9)</td>
<td>12 (2.9)</td>
<td>28 (6.8)</td>
<td>406 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White &amp; Black African</td>
<td>3 (5.8)</td>
<td>2 (3.9)</td>
<td>1 (1.9)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (3.9)</td>
<td>37 (72.5)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>51 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White &amp; Black Caribbean</td>
<td>2 (2.9)</td>
<td>5 (7.3)</td>
<td>1 (1.4)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8 (11.7)</td>
<td>46 (67.6)</td>
<td>3 (4.4)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>68 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian - Indian</td>
<td>12 (0.7)</td>
<td>11 (0.6)</td>
<td>30 (1.7)</td>
<td>16 (0.9)</td>
<td>31 (1.8)</td>
<td>1504 (88.2)</td>
<td>52 (3.0)</td>
<td>3 (0.1)</td>
<td>1705 (100)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian - Pakistani</td>
<td>8 (1.7)</td>
<td>9 (1.9)</td>
<td>11 (2.4)</td>
<td>2 (0.4)</td>
<td>12 (2.6)</td>
<td>359 (78.7)</td>
<td>29 (6.3)</td>
<td>1 (0.2)</td>
<td>456 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian - Bangladeshi</td>
<td>0 (2.6)</td>
<td>3 (3.5)</td>
<td>4 (1.7)</td>
<td>2 (0.4)</td>
<td>7 (6.1)</td>
<td>81 (71.6)</td>
<td>8 (7.0)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>113 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White &amp; Asian</td>
<td>0 (4.6)</td>
<td>4 (2.3)</td>
<td>0 (6.9)</td>
<td>6 (6.9)</td>
<td>62 (72.0)</td>
<td>3 (3.4)</td>
<td>1 (1.1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>86 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian - Other</td>
<td>13 (3.2)</td>
<td>21 (5.2)</td>
<td>8 (1.9)</td>
<td>12 (2.9)</td>
<td>24 (5.9)</td>
<td>266 (66.0)</td>
<td>26 (6.45)</td>
<td>4 (0.9)</td>
<td>403 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other mixed background</td>
<td>2 (1.6)</td>
<td>7 (5.6)</td>
<td>3 (2.4)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8 (6.4)</td>
<td>91 (72.8)</td>
<td>7 (5.6)</td>
<td>1 (0.8)</td>
<td>125 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Access Course (Not in USE)</td>
<td>ACCESS course QAA Accredited</td>
<td>First degree of UK institution</td>
<td>HNC or HND (Note 2)</td>
<td>Mature student (Note 3)</td>
<td>Mixed GCE 'A' &amp; GNVQ/ GSVQ Level 3 (Note 1)</td>
<td>ONC or OND (Note 2)</td>
<td>Other Non-UK Qualification; level not known</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------</td>
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<td>------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Caribbean</td>
<td>18 (4.3)</td>
<td>24 (5.7)</td>
<td>8 (1.9)</td>
<td>9 (2.1)</td>
<td>46 (11.0)</td>
<td>248 (59.7)</td>
<td>23 (5.5)</td>
<td>1 (0.2)</td>
<td>415 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black - African</td>
<td>36 (4.5)</td>
<td>76 (9.6)</td>
<td>18 (2.2)</td>
<td>17 (2.1)</td>
<td>68 (8.5)</td>
<td>463 (58.5)</td>
<td>49 (6.1)</td>
<td>5 (0.6)</td>
<td>791 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black - Other</td>
<td>1 (1.0)</td>
<td>11 (11.3)</td>
<td>2 (2.0)</td>
<td>4 (4.1)</td>
<td>14 (14.4)</td>
<td>59 (60.8)</td>
<td>3 (3.0)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>97 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian - Chinese</td>
<td>8 (7.2)</td>
<td>2 (1.8)</td>
<td>1 (0.9)</td>
<td>1 (0.9)</td>
<td>5 (4.5)</td>
<td>92 (83.6)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (0.9)</td>
<td>110 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5 (2.5)</td>
<td>9 (4.6)</td>
<td>3 (3.6)</td>
<td>7 (6.7)</td>
<td>13 (6.7)</td>
<td>134 (69.4)</td>
<td>5 (2.5)</td>
<td>1 (0.5)</td>
<td>193 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Known</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28 (6.5)</td>
<td>14 (3.2)</td>
<td>5 (1.1)</td>
<td>82 (19.1)</td>
<td>121 (28.2)</td>
<td>22 (5.1)</td>
<td>52 (12.1)</td>
<td>429 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Refused</td>
<td>1 (2.1)</td>
<td>0 (2.1)</td>
<td>1 (2.1)</td>
<td>0 (12.7)</td>
<td>6 (40.4)</td>
<td>19 (40.4)</td>
<td>2 (4.2)</td>
<td>1 (14.8)</td>
<td>47 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>155 (1.7)</td>
<td>305 (3.3)</td>
<td>225 (2.4)</td>
<td>127 (1.3)</td>
<td>661 (7.2)</td>
<td>6561 (72.0)</td>
<td>358 (3.9)</td>
<td>113 (1.2)</td>
<td>9108 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Brunel Registry data support

Notes to Table 4:
1. including SCE Highers
2. including BTEC and SCOTVEC
3. admitted on previous experience/ins. entrance exams
Ethnicity and destinations of leavers

In relation to graduates’ performance in the employment market six months after graduation, according to the data collated by Brunel’s Placement and Careers Centre, the number of graduates in full-time employment six months after graduation in 2004/05 was 50.8%. The cumulative percentage of Brunel graduates in employment, study, or both, was 65.2%.

As Table 5 below shows, the percentage of graduates in work, study or a combination of both from two specific ethnic groups is above 70; White British and Black Caribbean. The data also show that students from six ethnic groups (white Other, Asian Indian, Asian Bangladeshi, Other mixed background, black Other and Other) are involved in work, study or a combination of both in a percentage above the Brunel overall figure of 65.2%. Within these groups, a high percentage of graduates from the Asian Bangladeshi background have embarked in part-time further study (14.2%). This is more than twice the percentage combining work and study in the overall figure (5.7%). However, the data available seem also to demonstrate the existence of a high percentage of graduates from three specific ethnic groups (Asian Pakistani (12.4%), Asian Indian (10.7%) and black African (9.4%) who are still unemployed six months after graduation. It is also important to note that the percentage of unemployed graduates belonging to the Asian Pakistani (12.4%) group is almost three times as high as that of their White British (4.5%) and White Irish (4.6%) counterparts.

It should be borne in mind that, although, these data, collected across the Higher Education sector, provide a useful starting point for examining the relationship between ethnicity, higher education and employment, they do not provide information about the nature of the work obtained by the graduates. The extent to which higher education has led to graduate level jobs for those of different ethnic groups is not addressed by these data.
Table 5: 2004/05 Destinations of leavers by ethnic group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Working</th>
<th>Comb. of Work and Study</th>
<th>Not Available for Work or Study</th>
<th>Studying</th>
<th>Working and/or studying (cumulative)</th>
<th>Un-employed</th>
<th>Refused to Participate</th>
<th>Grand Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White-British</td>
<td>579 (55.6)</td>
<td>69 (6.6)</td>
<td>45 (4.3)</td>
<td>90 (8.6)</td>
<td>739 (70.8)</td>
<td>47 (4.5)</td>
<td>211 (20.2)</td>
<td>1041 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-Irish</td>
<td>18 (51.4)</td>
<td>1 (2.8)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 (8.5)</td>
<td>22 (62.8)</td>
<td>1 (2.8)</td>
<td>12 (34.2)</td>
<td>35 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-Other</td>
<td>58 (53.7)</td>
<td>5 (4.6)</td>
<td>4 (3.7)</td>
<td>9 (8.3)</td>
<td>72 (66.6)</td>
<td>5 (4.6)</td>
<td>27 (25)</td>
<td>108 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White &amp; Black African</td>
<td>6 (42.8)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (14.2)</td>
<td>8 (57.1)</td>
<td>1 (7.1)</td>
<td>5 (35.7)</td>
<td>14 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White &amp; Black Caribbean</td>
<td>8 (47.0)</td>
<td>3 (17.6)</td>
<td>1 (5.8)</td>
<td>0 (64.7)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>5 (29.4)</td>
<td>17 (100)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian - Indian</td>
<td>237 (50.1)</td>
<td>36 (7.6)</td>
<td>21 (4.4)</td>
<td>43 (9.0)</td>
<td>316 (66.8)</td>
<td>51 (10.7)</td>
<td>85 (17.9)</td>
<td>473 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian - Pakistani</td>
<td>58 (44.9)</td>
<td>5 (3.8)</td>
<td>5 (3.8)</td>
<td>12 (9.3)</td>
<td>75 (58.1)</td>
<td>16 (12.4)</td>
<td>33 (25.5)</td>
<td>129 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian - Bangladeshi</td>
<td>15 (53.5)</td>
<td>4 (14.2)</td>
<td>2 (7.1)</td>
<td>0 (67.8)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>7 (25)</td>
<td>28 (100)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>White and Asian</td>
<td>6 (30)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>2 (10)</td>
<td>1 (5)</td>
<td>7 (35)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>11 (55)</td>
<td>20 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian - Other</td>
<td>44 (39.6)</td>
<td>5 (4.5)</td>
<td>3 (2.7)</td>
<td>15 (13.5)</td>
<td>64 (57.6)</td>
<td>10 (9.0)</td>
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<td>111 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other mixed background</td>
<td>15 (51.7)</td>
<td>2 (6.8)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 (10.3)</td>
<td>20 (68.9)</td>
<td>2 (6.8)</td>
<td>7 (24.1)</td>
<td>29 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Group</td>
<td>Working</td>
<td>Comb. of Work and Study</td>
<td>Not Available for Work or Study</td>
<td>Studying</td>
<td>Working and/or studying (cumulative)</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Refused to Participate</td>
<td>Grand Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black-Caribbean</td>
<td>69 (58.9)</td>
<td>4 (3.4)</td>
<td>1 (0.8)</td>
<td>10 (8.5)</td>
<td>83 (70.9)</td>
<td>8 (6.8)</td>
<td>25 (21.3)</td>
<td>117 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black-African</td>
<td>86 (45.0)</td>
<td>3 (1.5)</td>
<td>5 (2.6)</td>
<td>14 (7.3)</td>
<td>103 (53.8)</td>
<td>18 (9.4)</td>
<td>65 (34.0)</td>
<td>191 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black-Other</td>
<td>12 (52.1)</td>
<td>0 (4.3)</td>
<td>1 (8.6)</td>
<td>14 (60.7)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>8 (34.7)</td>
<td>23 (100)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian-Chinese</td>
<td>13 (40.6)</td>
<td>3 (9.3)</td>
<td>1 (3.1)</td>
<td>3 (9.3)</td>
<td>19 (59.2)</td>
<td>2 (6.25)</td>
<td>10 (31.3)</td>
<td>32 (100)</td>
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<td>Other</td>
<td>23 (56)</td>
<td>1 (2.4)</td>
<td>2 (4.8)</td>
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<td>10 (24.3)</td>
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<td>3 (7.3)</td>
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<td>23 (55.9)</td>
<td>4 (9.7)</td>
<td>11 (26.8)</td>
<td>41 (100)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1247 (50.8)</td>
<td>141 (5.7)</td>
<td>93 (3.7)</td>
<td>215 (8.7)</td>
<td>1603 (65.2)</td>
<td>167 (6.8)</td>
<td>566 (23.1)</td>
<td>2450 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Brunel Registry data support*
b. Institutional policy and practice (initiatives) on widening participation, employability and equality and diversity.

Within its Student Action Plan (SAP), the University monitors student progression and assessment by subject area, course and programme, using HESA ethnicity codes, reports on its findings and makes use of these findings to ensure a culture of equal opportunity. The University employs personnel specifically to do this and in the student progression data analysis for the 2006/2007 cycle, ethnicity monitoring has been given a stronger focus.

This section provides information related to institutional policy and practice (initiatives) on employability, equality and diversity, and widening participation. This is derived from official documentation, the source of which is acknowledged both in endnotes and in the references. The text appearing in the boxes is a summary of reports provided by the Director of Careers & Student Employability, the Deputy Head of Student Services and the Widening Participation Officers.

**Employability**

The Placement & Careers Centre is working to improve employability for all students through enhanced links with subject areas; closer linkage between skills development, personal reflection and career planning; increased employer contacts and uptake of placements; development of careers education in the curriculum; and effective promotion of key messages to students and new graduates. Brunel University’s Placement & Careers Centre, preferring to promote general inclusiveness, implements several employability initiatives which are provided for all students.

Brunel University is also a partner of WestFocus, a network including HEIs, businesses and community groups. Based in South and West London, and in the Thames Valley, the partnership supports the exchange of information and expertise across the country. WestFocus aims at creating the possibility for individuals to become entrepreneurs, to “gain funding, recruit graduate staff, find employment or placements (for students or graduates), and gain new skills”\(^\text{xvi}\). The network organises a variety of activities “designed to support and encourage entrepreneurship amongst undergraduate and postgraduate students across all disciplines”\(^\text{xvii}\). The development of entrepreneurship at Brunel also benefits from the support of the members of the Brunel Angels Club, a network business people who are open to support students with new business ideas and to engage in individual or group mentoring.
The 2005 Placement & Careers Centre (PCC) Activities Annual Report highlighted the desirability of making placement preparation and careers education accessible to all students through the curriculum. It also identified significant variations in practice between Schools. The Director of Careers and the Director of the Learning and Teaching Development Unit were thereafter requested to draft an Employability Strategy for the University to facilitate sharing of good practice and to ensure student entitlement to core provision. Discussions with Heads of Schools highlighted the need to establish core principles and objectives for this and to differentiate the provision in relation to the various Schools and disciplines.

In the last academic year, careers education and placement preparation within the curriculum has increased in many Schools through a variety of activities including career planning, workshops, input to professional modules and tutorial days. The PCC is looking forward to developing this work further with other disciplines.

Other collaborative activities with Schools include placement officers’ negotiations between Biosciences and Pharmalink with a view to introducing some form of joint module.

PCC staff are also getting much more involved in forums such as School Boards and Staff/Student Liaison Committees to establish an ongoing dialogue on how to best meet student needs.

The Placement Team is introducing a new Service Level Agreement to forge better working relationships with Schools. This will be implemented in the new academic year. The Placement Team has also developed a new way of working with Schools’ Disability Representatives to better serve students with disabilities.

Other initiatives that have taken place in 2005/2006 include:

An Employer Masterclass series, which attracted leading experts on employability topics.

May Week 2006: a brand new suite of workshops organised around the annual Recruitment Fair plus an exciting Dragons’ Den competition for entrepreneurial students.

A new facility for videoed mock interviews, including feedback on the non-verbal aspects of communication.

Workshops and events specifically for international students.

A Graduate CareerStart course, held over a three day period. Employer input included Workbase Resources a local recruitment agency that helped to deliver an excellent workshop on ‘Breaking into tough jobs and creative job-hunting’.

Jane Standley, Director of Careers & Student Employability & member of Brunel University’s ‘Ethnicity, Education & Employment’ project steering group. Widening Participation
Equality and Equal Opportunities

Brunel University is statutorily committed to the principles of equal opportunity in employment, admissions, and in its teaching, learning and research activities, welcoming staff, students and visitors from all over the world.

The University has established a Race Equality Review group, for both staff and students. It includes members of the Senior Management Team and other staff and student representatives. This group meets once a term and reviews impact assessments on University policies. All academic Schools and administrative departments have drawn up action plans to ensure that the University continues to enjoy a culture of Equality and Diversity. These follow students from admission throughout their university career, and involve:

Admissions Policy: Senate endorsed the principles of Fair Admissions in 2005. The revised Admissions policy has Equality and Diversity embedded within it. Admissions are continuing to follow the Fair Admissions Policy, dealing with cases on an individual basis.

Learning and Teaching Strategy: The Action Plan states that student training resources will be enhanced to foster good relations between persons of different racial groups.

Pre Admissions Procedures: The marketing and promotional material is reviewed periodically to ensure the University reflects a diversity of culture and attracts a cultural mix of students.

Student Admissions and Induction: Schools are encouraged to include equality and diversity statements in all School handbooks. The University’s Statement of Intent and Purpose for Equal Opportunities and an invitation to participate in the ‘Valuing Diversity @ Brunel University’ VISTA Web base will be included in the 2006/2007 Student Handbook, the Research Student Handbook, the Pre-Arrival Handbook and the BOLD guide. This web-based programme for students made “Brunel...one of the first universities to roll out diversity training to students” (Guardian, 2005).

Learning and Teaching (L&T): In order to achieve our aim of building equality and diversity into the fabric of the University much work has been done by the Learning and Teaching Development Unit (LTDU) and the Quality Standards Unit to integrate Equality and Diversity into the curriculum. Course approval procedures have been altered to take into account race equality and diversity. The procedures for periodic review are currently being revised for the L&T committee. An impact assessment is now carried out on all policy proposals considered by the L&T committee. The committee is revising its approach to the monitoring of student progression and achievement including the monitoring of Equality and Diversity.

Denise Bufton, Deputy Head of Student Services
Widening Participation

The Widening Participation Strategy is closely linked to the University’s Learning and Teaching Strategy. Brunel is committed to delivering a high quality learning and teaching experience which develops and supports students through their studies and prepares them for employment and a range of careers.

A number of activity strands have been developed under the original WP Strategy 2001 – 2006:

- Improving transition, progression, retention and employability by ensuring pre-entry and in-course support;
- Increased collaboration with schools and colleges in West London and in particular the London Borough of Hillingdon, targeting those in areas of social and economic disadvantage;
- Provision of promotional support materials.

HESA Performance Indicators 2005 show that the number of students admitted to Brunel from state schools has increased each year since 2001. In 2003/4 this figure had risen to 92% against a benchmark of 89.6%. Recruitment from under-represented social classes has also improved from 31% in 2001/2 to 37.5% in 2003/4, exceeding the benchmarks of 28% and 30.8% respectively. This increase is particularly pronounced and exceeds the UK average by almost 10 percentage points.

Despite this achievement in relation to social class, Brunel remains below the benchmark in attracting students from low participation neighbourhoods and mature students. The lack of flexible, part-time degree and sub-degree provision at the University may be a contributory factor.

The 2006 – 2009 Widening Participation Strategy builds upon the strategy and action plan agreed in 2001 and the additional activities developed subsequently in response to new government initiatives. Activities will be targeted at students from the under-represented groups with particular emphasis on disabled and mature students.

The new strategy has two main strands:

1) Raising aspirations, and
2) Improving transition, progression, retention and employability

In addition, the University, through its ACCESS agreement, will allocate additional funding to outreach activities to encourage appropriately qualified low participation applications.

*Beverley Crooks & Lesley Mortimer, WP Officers & members of Brunel University’s ‘Ethnicity, Education & Employment’ project steering group.*
FIELDWORK

This section presents and discusses the main findings from the study. The subsections refer to the themes established for the project by the national partners: motivation for Higher Education; motivation for choosing to study at Brunel University; preparedness for Higher education, for employment on graduation and for the future. Each section draws on the data collected from students, staff and employers. In relation to the statements of participants, the reference to the specific source used (UG or graduate questionnaire, focus group, Delphi technique, interview) can be found in parentheses at the end of each quotation.

Questionnaires were completed by a total of 205 Level 3 students from a possible total of 634. This represents a sample of 22% for B&M students and 45% for ISC (75 and 130 respondents respectively). The ethnicity of the samples is presented in Table 6 below. Comparison with Tables 2 and 3 above indicates that the samples are a fair reflection of the student population of interest. The figures of particular interest are, for the respondents in Level 3 B&M: White British, 25.6%, Asian Indian, 40.5% Asian Pakistani, 8.8%. These compare with 25.5%, 32% and 4.9% respectively in the total cohort of Level 3 B&M students. For ISC, the respondents figures are White British, 8.9%, Asian Indian, 47.2%, Asian Pakistani, 9.8% comparing with the total cohort figures of 9.9%, 36.6% and 11.3% respectively.

103 graduates returned the questionnaire and Table 6 also indicates the constitution of this sample in terms of ethnicity. This sample is similarly diverse with the groups being represented as follows: White British, 40.8%, Asian Indian, 25.2% and Asian Pakistani, 8.7%. It provides a reasonable match with the university population of students in 2004/2005 as presented in Table 3 above (White British, 38.5%, Asian Indian, 18.7% and Asian Pakistani, 5.0%).

Staff perspectives on the research themes were obtained from interviews with six members of the university staff, holding academic and non academic posts and involved in university life at different levels and for different lengths of time. Four of them agreed that the interview be digitally recorded as long as their anonymity was preserved. Two of them (one academic and one non-academic) preferred the researcher’s extensive note-taking. Quotations derived from the notes will be highlighted in the text through the use of an asterisk (*). This explains any stilted character they might have.

Employer perspectives were obtained from interviews with six graduate employers from different backgrounds covering both large and small companies: banking, financial, IT and the public sector. Most were contacted directly by the researcher though their participation at graduate careers fairs at Brunel University; in two cases, contact was through members of the project steering group. All of them, however, routinely take part in graduate recruitment fairs across the country as they believe that it is a relatively successful form of recruitment.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Grads All N (%)</th>
<th>Grads B&amp;M N (%)</th>
<th>Grads ISC N (%)</th>
<th>Subject Area Unknown N (%)</th>
<th>Level 3 All N (%)</th>
<th>Level 3 B&amp;M N (%)</th>
<th>Level 3 ISC N (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White British</td>
<td>42 (40.8)</td>
<td>29 (53.7)</td>
<td>12 (26.0)</td>
<td>1 (0.9)</td>
<td>32 (15.6)</td>
<td>21 (25.6)</td>
<td>11 (8.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Irish</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (1.0)</td>
<td>0 (1.2)</td>
<td>2 (0.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other white</td>
<td>1 (1.0)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (2.1)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 (1.5)</td>
<td>2 (2.4)</td>
<td>1 (0.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White &amp; Black African</td>
<td>2 (1.9)</td>
<td>1 (1.8)</td>
<td>1 (2.1)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (1.0)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (1.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White &amp; Black Caribbean.</td>
<td>1 (1.0)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (2.1)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (0.5)</td>
<td>1 (1.2)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Indian</td>
<td>26 (25.2)</td>
<td>11 (20.3)</td>
<td>15 (32.6)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>83 (40.5)</td>
<td>22 (30.5)</td>
<td>61 (47.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Pakistani</td>
<td>9 (8.7)</td>
<td>2 (3.7)</td>
<td>6 (13.0)</td>
<td>1 (0.9)</td>
<td>18 (8.8)</td>
<td>5 (7.3)</td>
<td>13 (9.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Bangladesh</td>
<td>1 (1.0)</td>
<td>1 (1.8)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2 (1.0)</td>
<td>1 (1.2)</td>
<td>1 (0.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White &amp; Asian</td>
<td>1 (1.0)</td>
<td>1 (1.8)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 (1.5)</td>
<td>1 (1.2)</td>
<td>2 (1.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>any other Asian</td>
<td>3 (2.9)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 (6.5)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10 (4.9)</td>
<td>2 (2.4)</td>
<td>8 (6.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other mixed</td>
<td>2 (1.9)</td>
<td>1 (1.8)</td>
<td>1 (2.1)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5 (2.4)</td>
<td>3 (3.7)</td>
<td>2 (1.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Caribbean</td>
<td>2 (1.9)</td>
<td>2 (3.7)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7 (3.4)</td>
<td>5 (6.1)</td>
<td>2 (1.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black African</td>
<td>5 (4.9)</td>
<td>3 (5.5)</td>
<td>4 (3.7)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12 (5.9)</td>
<td>3 (3.7)</td>
<td>9 (7.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>any other black</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 (6.5)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (0.5)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (0.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>6 (5.8)</td>
<td>2 (3.7)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (0.9)</td>
<td>1 (0.5)</td>
<td>1 (1.2)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other background</td>
<td>1 (1.0)</td>
<td>1 (1.8)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6 (2.9)</td>
<td>1 (1.2)</td>
<td>5 (4.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>1 (1.0)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (2.1)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17 (8.3)</td>
<td>7 (11.0)</td>
<td>10 (6.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total respondents</td>
<td>103 (100)</td>
<td>54 (100)</td>
<td>46 (100)</td>
<td>3 (2.9)</td>
<td>205 (100)</td>
<td>75 (100)</td>
<td>130 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Questionnaires
### a. Motivation for Higher Education

#### Student Responses

The first item on the questionnaire offered ten reasons for entering Higher Education and respondents were asked to rate each of them in terms of very important; important; unimportant or not relevant.

#### Table 7: % respondents indicating reasons for entering Higher Education as very important or important.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Grads All % (Rank)</th>
<th>Grads WB % (Rank)</th>
<th>Grads AI % (Rank)</th>
<th>Grads AP % (Rank)</th>
<th>Level 3 All % (Rank)</th>
<th>Level 3 WB % (Rank)</th>
<th>Level 3 AI % (Rank)</th>
<th>Level 3 AP % (Rank)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interested in Course</td>
<td>93.9 (1)</td>
<td>95.1 (1)</td>
<td>88.4 (3)</td>
<td>100 (1/2)</td>
<td>91.9 (1)</td>
<td>100 (1)</td>
<td>91.4 (1)</td>
<td>87.5 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Progression</td>
<td>87 (2)</td>
<td>85.3 (2)</td>
<td>92.3 (1)</td>
<td>87.5 (3/4)</td>
<td>88.8 (2)</td>
<td>81.3 (2)</td>
<td>83.5 (4)</td>
<td>81.3 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific qual. &amp; career</td>
<td>86.8 (3)</td>
<td>80 (3/4)</td>
<td>84.7 (4)</td>
<td>87.5 (3/4)</td>
<td>85.2 (4)</td>
<td>81.2 (3)</td>
<td>85 (3)</td>
<td>76.5 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue studying</td>
<td>84.9 (4)</td>
<td>80 (3/4)</td>
<td>92 (2)</td>
<td>100 (1/2)</td>
<td>85.8 (3)</td>
<td>68.8 (5)</td>
<td>87.5 (2)</td>
<td>93.8 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience University life</td>
<td>79.6 (5)</td>
<td>77.5 (5)</td>
<td>76.9 (5)</td>
<td>75 (5)</td>
<td>70 (5)</td>
<td>75 (4)</td>
<td>77.8 (5)</td>
<td>37.6 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Expectation</td>
<td>47 (6)</td>
<td>30 (6)</td>
<td>65.4 (6)</td>
<td>25 (7/8/9)</td>
<td>58.1 (6)</td>
<td>28.1 (7)</td>
<td>62 (6)</td>
<td>52.9 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change my life</td>
<td>46.9 (7)</td>
<td>20 (9/10)</td>
<td>42.3 (7/8)</td>
<td>25 (7/8/9)</td>
<td>46.9 (7)</td>
<td>15.7 (10)</td>
<td>35.1 (7)</td>
<td>29.4 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends going to University</td>
<td>27.6 (8)</td>
<td>20 (9/10)</td>
<td>42.3 (7/8)</td>
<td>25 (7/8/9)</td>
<td>28.1 (8)</td>
<td>21.9 (8/9)</td>
<td>31.3 (8)</td>
<td>25.1 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Move away from home</td>
<td>24.5 (9/10)</td>
<td>27.5 (7)</td>
<td>11.5 (10)</td>
<td>12.5 (10)</td>
<td>21 (9)</td>
<td>31.3 (6)</td>
<td>19.7 (9)</td>
<td>0 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No right job</td>
<td>24.5 (9/10)</td>
<td>25 (8)</td>
<td>12 (9)</td>
<td>37.5 (6)</td>
<td>20.4 (10)</td>
<td>21.9 (8/9)</td>
<td>15.2 (10)</td>
<td>12.5 (9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source: Questionnaires**

The frequency with which each reason was identified as very important or important by respondents in the various groups is shown in Table 7 above. A total of 591 responses were identified as such by the graduates and 1218 by Level 3 students. The reasons are set out in the rank order obtained from the responses of the graduates. The fifth column refers to the responses made by the Level 3 students and the similarities and differences between the rank orders provided by the two groups.
can be seen. The remaining columns indicate the rank order for three groups within the main samples: these are minority ethnic groups of interest and present in sufficient numbers within the sample to justify examination (White British (WP), Asian Indian (AI) and Asian Pakistani (AP)).

Considering the graduates, the table indicates that the reason most frequently identified as very important or important is “interest in the course” and “continue studying” is ranked 4. Providing a contrast with these study-related reasons are two work-related motivations: “obtaining a specific qualification and career” ranked at 3 and “no right job” at 10. A fifth reason of particular interest was “family expectation” and the table indicates that this sits in the middle of the order at rank 6.

The question arises as to how specific this relative importance of reasons is to the particular group of participants. On this, a comparison with a different cohort of students studying in the same subject areas at the same university but two years later provides some evidence. The table above indicates that there are commonalities in the two rank orderings. Six out of ten of the reasons are in the same rank position.

As regards students at Brunel from ME groups, the responses indicate that there is very little variation in the rank order of reasons. For the graduates, the same five reasons appear in the top five positions. There is some indication that not being able to find the “right job” may have been more of a motivation for the Asian Pakistani group – it being ranked higher than for the other ME groups and for the graduate group as a whole.

In relation to “family expectation”, this reason is ranked similarly by the Level 3 students as by the graduates – it again sits in the middle of the order at 6. There is very little change in the rank position of this reason across the ME groups. However, the percentage indicating this reason is generally rather lower in the White British group of both graduates and Level 3 students.

Nonetheless, the data do not suggest that there are substantial differences between the pattern of reasons which make up the motivations to enter HE within the samples and groups included in this study.

As expected, students identified more than one reason as being important or very important. The motivation for embarking on a three/four year degree programme is unlikely to be uni-dimensional. The quotation below is from the focus group with the Level 3 students. It is particularly apt as it summarises the intricate nature of the choice, which depends on a variety of intertwined elements.

“I am a mature student; I left college at a young age and worked. It came a point in my life where I was not going anywhere. I wanted to do something with my life, be someone, go somewhere. The only thing would be to get a decent education, to go to university. So I attended an access course and then I came to Brunel. I felt that I needed the degree to enhance my career, my pool of knowledge. There was also a level of expectation from my family. Especially if you come from my background, Asian background, your parents want you to be a lawyer, a doctor, a pilot, all of these high flying jobs that you probably don’t like, so there was a level of pressure from my family as well” (British Pakistani, Level 3, male, Focus Group).
Notwithstanding the recognition that motivation is multi-faceted, respondents were asked to indicate what the single most important factor was for them. Table 8 below presents the responses obtained.

Taking both samples together, of the ten reasons suggested, only five were indicated as the single most important reason by more than 10% of the students. In the graduate sample, of the 89 respondents answering this question, the greatest number (32.6%) indicated that the single most important reason for entering HE was “to obtain a specific qualification and career”. The next most frequently identified reason was “to continue studying” (24.7%). The same two reasons are ranked first and second by all Level 3 students and by each of the ME groups considered in both the graduate and Level 3 samples.

Table 8: % respondents identifying a reason as the single most important one.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Grads All N=89</th>
<th>Grads WB N=35</th>
<th>Grads AI N=24</th>
<th>Grads AP N=8</th>
<th>L3 All N=205</th>
<th>L3 WB N=32</th>
<th>L3 AI N=83</th>
<th>L3 AP N=18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific qual. &amp; career</td>
<td>32.6% (1)</td>
<td>37.1% (1)</td>
<td>20.8% (2/3)</td>
<td>37.5% (1/2)</td>
<td>29.8% (1)</td>
<td>40.6% (1)</td>
<td>25.3% (2)</td>
<td>44.4% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue studying</td>
<td>24.7% (2)</td>
<td>17.1% (2)</td>
<td>37.5% (1)</td>
<td>37.5% (1/2)</td>
<td>21% (2)</td>
<td>12.5% (2/3/4)</td>
<td>26.5% (1)</td>
<td>16.7% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural progression</td>
<td>16.9% (3)</td>
<td>14.3% (3/4)</td>
<td>20.8% (2/3)</td>
<td>12.5% (3/4)</td>
<td>18% (3)</td>
<td>12.5% (2/3/4)</td>
<td>20.5% (3)</td>
<td>11.1% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in the course</td>
<td>9% (4)</td>
<td>14.3% (3/4)</td>
<td>4.2% (5/6)</td>
<td>12.5% (3/4)</td>
<td>5.4% (4)</td>
<td>3.1% (6/7/8)</td>
<td>4.8% (6)</td>
<td>5.6% (4/5/6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change life</td>
<td>4.5% (5)</td>
<td>8.6% (5)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1% (7)</td>
<td>3.1% (6/7/8)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5.6% (4/5/6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience university life</td>
<td>3.4% (6/7)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8.3% (4)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6.8% (5)</td>
<td>12.5% (2/3/4)</td>
<td>8.4% (5)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family expectations</td>
<td>3.4% (6/7)</td>
<td>2.9% (6/7)</td>
<td>4.2% (5/6)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6.3% (6)</td>
<td>9.4% (5)</td>
<td>6% (4)</td>
<td>5.6% (4/5/6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not find right job</td>
<td>1.1% (8/9)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.5% (8/9)</td>
<td>3.1% (6/7/8)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reason</td>
<td>1.1% (8/9)</td>
<td>2.9% (6/7)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.5% (8/9)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Questionnaires

Although the figures do not warrant firm conclusions, some variations in the pattern of reasons are perhaps worthy of note. First, only in the White British Level 3 group did more than 10% indicate that the main reason for entering HE was “to experience university life”. Second, in no group did “family expectations” produce more than 10% response. The highest was 9.4% produced by the White British Level 3 students – this percentage being higher than that for the group as a whole and for the ME groups within the sample. There is, therefore no indication from these data to support what has been observed on a national level as suggested by Connor et al. (2004:37): that “parental, and other family, encouragement plays a greater role for ME than White potential entrants, and more for Black African, Pakistani and Indian than other ME students".
In order to further explore motivations for entering HE, the third item asked respondents to indicate what they hoped to achieve by going to university. Ten possible responses were provided including “other reasons”. Any number of responses could be identified. The graduates identified a total of 649 and the Level 3 students, 1205. Table 9 provides the frequency with which each was indicated by respondents within each group.

Table 9: What did you particularly hope to achieve by going to University?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other reasons</th>
<th>Grads All % (Rank)</th>
<th>Grads WB % (Rank)</th>
<th>Grads AI % (Rank)</th>
<th>Grads AP % (Rank)</th>
<th>L3 All % (Rank)</th>
<th>L3 WB % (Rank)</th>
<th>L3 AI % (Rank)</th>
<th>L3 AP % (Rank)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improving my career prospects</td>
<td>91.2 (2)</td>
<td>90.4 (2)</td>
<td>92.3 (2)</td>
<td>100 (1-3)</td>
<td>95.1 (2)</td>
<td>100 (1/2)</td>
<td>97.5 (2)</td>
<td>88.8 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadening my horizons</td>
<td>81.5 (3)</td>
<td>78.5 (3/4)</td>
<td>88.4 (3)</td>
<td>100 (1-3)</td>
<td>66.3 (3/4)</td>
<td>59.3 (4)</td>
<td>69.8 (3/4)</td>
<td>55.5 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intell. growth &amp; stimulation</td>
<td>75.7 (4)</td>
<td>78.5 (3/4)</td>
<td>69.2 (4)</td>
<td>66.6 (5)</td>
<td>64.8 (5)</td>
<td>56.2 (5/6)</td>
<td>62.6 (5)</td>
<td>66.6 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting new people</td>
<td>68.9 (5)</td>
<td>66.6 (5)</td>
<td>26.9 (9)</td>
<td>11.1 (10)</td>
<td>66.3 (3/4)</td>
<td>84.3 (3)</td>
<td>69.8 (3/4)</td>
<td>38.8 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proving something to myself</td>
<td>51.4 (6)</td>
<td>40.4 (7)</td>
<td>51.5 (5)</td>
<td>88.8 (4)</td>
<td>44.8 (6)</td>
<td>31.2 (8/9)</td>
<td>43.3 (9)</td>
<td>44.4 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A diff. culture &amp; environment</td>
<td>48.5 (7)</td>
<td>33.3 (9)</td>
<td>50 (6)</td>
<td>44.4 (6/9)</td>
<td>40.9 (9)</td>
<td>31.2 (8/9)</td>
<td>46.9 (6/7)</td>
<td>33.3 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living an independent life</td>
<td>45.6 (8)</td>
<td>50 (6)</td>
<td>38 (8)</td>
<td>44.4 (6-9)</td>
<td>44.3 (7)</td>
<td>56.2 (5/6)</td>
<td>44.5 (8)</td>
<td>16.6 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving my social life</td>
<td>37.8 (9)</td>
<td>35.7 (8)</td>
<td>38.4 (7)</td>
<td>44.4 (6-9)</td>
<td>41.4 (8)</td>
<td>43.7 (7)</td>
<td>46.9 (6/7)</td>
<td>11.1 (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining respect</td>
<td>29.1 (10)</td>
<td>26.1 (10)</td>
<td>23 (10)</td>
<td>44.4 (6-9)</td>
<td>23.4 (10)</td>
<td>18.7 (10)</td>
<td>19.2 (10)</td>
<td>22.2 (8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Questionnaires

Among the graduates, and ignoring the “other” category, the four most frequently indicated aspirations were to improve career prospects (91.2%) broaden horizons (81.5%), experience intellectual growth and stimulation (75.7%), and meet new people (68.9%). The same four aspirations were indicated most frequently by Level 3 students (95.1%, 66.3%, 64.8 and 66.3% respectively).

There is one variation from the overall pattern which is worthy of note in these data. As can be seen from the table, within the graduate sample, both the Asian Indian and the Asian Pakistani groups produced very low rank orders for the aspiration of “meeting new people”. However, this variation in the pattern is not maintained in the Level 3 sample – suggesting that such differences are not robust.

Unfortunately, respondents were not asked to indicate the nature of the “other category” which all respondents chose to indicate in addition to one or more of those suggested. Their analysis would probably have proved to be of interest.
Staff Perspectives

In considering the staff perspective in relation to motivation for entering HE, it was not the intention to try to ascertain from them what they thought the students reasons were. Rather, part of the interview asked for their views on the role of HE – particularly in relation to employability. The views expressed are recognized to be those of individuals rather than that of the institution – the latter is represented by its strategic statements and policies presented earlier in this report. Excerpts from interviews are presented here as indications as to the range of views to be found amongst university staff and, where relevant, to provide commentary on student responses.

Among the six interviewees were those who were sceptical and critical of the governmental targets for universities in relation to HEIs’ role in graduate employability. One respondent clearly stated that they did not fully subscribe to the government view that a degree has the purpose of making people more employable, but stated that a degree, in his/her opinion should enable students to develop skills. These, according to the non-academic member of staff, should be a by-product of education which should be every HEI’s main task. On the other hand, other interviewees stressed the fundamental role that employability plays within the institution; this will be discussed further in the next section.

“I think it [the role of HE in graduate employability] varies from university to university”

The following response to a question about student motivations while at university does suggest that this respondent thinks the classification of degree is what is most important to them:

“Getting a first or 2.1. Everyone tells you that if you do, you’ll get a good job…….Many of them do not want to engage with employment while they are at university because they are only interested in chasing higher marks. For example, if we run a workshop ‘Improving Your Interview Skills’, this would be poorly attended. We had tried this in the past with employers running the workshop and that was the result” (Academic*).

Employer Perspectives

When reviewing the employer perspectives revealed in the interviews given for this project, it is interesting to note a difference in the attitude to the particular course studied to that identified in the motivations of the students.

When asked about the attributes or skills that they think are essential to work for their organisation, all employers referred to the importance of transferable skills. On some occasions, employers’ requirements in terms of qualifications can be very broad but stringent. In other words, interviewees did not consider a degree in a specific field as fundamental for the performance of many of their posts, but it did have to be a good degree in terms of classification. The reasons for this are twofold: because they would provide tailored training for the people who join their graduate programmes and also because they are more interested in the graduates’ transferable skills, including communication and team working.

“We don’t actually screen people out. Any degree discipline with a minimum of 2.1. So we don’t actually ask for a business degree. We
have got people on the programme who have done genetics…it is more to do with the soft skills” (Graduate recruiter, banking and financial services organisation).

If such an approach to graduate recruitment is widespread, it would appear that it might be considered to be an effective strategy, on the part of students, to concentrate on achieving the best classification possible (despite the rather negative view of such an approach implied by the staff interviewee quoted above).

b. Motivation for choosing to study at Brunel University

Student Responses

In examining this theme, respondents were first asked to indicate “the main reason that you chose to study at Brunel University in particular”. Eight options were offered including “other”. The responses can be seen in Table 10 below.

As can be seen from the table, the two most common reasons for choosing to study at Brunel University are the reputation of the university and the particular course to be studied. Within the graduate sample, the only variation from the pattern is seen in the Asian Indian and Pakistani groups where location (combined with reputation) is more frequently offered as the main reason. However, the very small number of respondents in the Asian Pakistani group needs to acknowledged. The following is a typical comment with regard to this aspect of motivation to attend Brunel University.

“I chose Brunel University for the] reputation of the university and location. Brunel is close to home, so I wouldn’t move away from home as I had two young daughters and a job” (Asian Indian, female, 30 yrs, graduate, semi-structured questionnaire).

It is interesting to note that in the Level 3 sample, there is a different outcome in relation to this combined reason where, for the White British group, although academic reputation on its own achieves the top rank, that combined with location is ranked at 9. For this group, work-placement achieves a higher frequency (a rank of 2).
Table 10: What was your main reason for choosing to study at Brunel University?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Grads All N=10</th>
<th>Grads WB N=42</th>
<th>Grads AI N=26</th>
<th>Grads AP N=9</th>
<th>L3 All N=18</th>
<th>L3 WB N=29</th>
<th>L3 AI N=77</th>
<th>L3 AP N=15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% (Rank)</td>
<td>% (Rank)</td>
<td>% (Rank)</td>
<td>% (Rank)</td>
<td>% (Rank)</td>
<td>% (Rank)</td>
<td>% (Rank)</td>
<td>% (Rank)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course offered</td>
<td>24.3 (1)</td>
<td>26.2 (1)</td>
<td>19.2 (2)</td>
<td>11.1 (2-6)</td>
<td>11.6 (2-3)</td>
<td>10.3 (3-6)</td>
<td>9 (5/6)</td>
<td>6.6 (5-7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation &amp; location</td>
<td>19.4 (2/3)</td>
<td>16.7 (2)</td>
<td>26.9 (1)</td>
<td>44.4 (1)</td>
<td>11.6 (2-3)</td>
<td>3.4 (9)</td>
<td>12.9 (2/3)</td>
<td>20 (2/3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic reputation</td>
<td>19.4 (2/3)</td>
<td>14.3 (3)</td>
<td>15.4 (3)</td>
<td>11.1 (2-6)</td>
<td>27 (1)</td>
<td>27.5 (1)</td>
<td>24.6 (1)</td>
<td>26.6 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>8.7 (4)</td>
<td>9.5 (4/5)</td>
<td>3.8 (7-10)</td>
<td>11.1 (2-6)</td>
<td>9.3 (5)</td>
<td>10.3 (3-6)</td>
<td>9 (5/6)</td>
<td>6.6 (5-7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandwich courses</td>
<td>4.9 (5-7)</td>
<td>7.1 (6)</td>
<td>7.7 (4/5)</td>
<td>0 (7-15)</td>
<td>4.9 (8)</td>
<td>13.7 (2)</td>
<td>5.1 (7-9)</td>
<td>0 (9-15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close to family</td>
<td>4.9 (5-7)</td>
<td>2.4 (7-13)</td>
<td>7.7 (4/5)</td>
<td>11.1 (2-6)</td>
<td>8.2 (6)</td>
<td>6.8 (7/8)</td>
<td>11.6 (4)</td>
<td>13.3 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4.9 (5-7)</td>
<td>9.5 (4/5)</td>
<td>3.8 (7-10)</td>
<td>0 (7-15)</td>
<td>10.4 (4)</td>
<td>10.3 (3-6)</td>
<td>12.9 (2)</td>
<td>20 (2/3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment reputation</td>
<td>2.9 (8/9)</td>
<td>2.4 (7-13)</td>
<td>7.6 (6)</td>
<td>0 (7-15)</td>
<td>6 (7)</td>
<td>6.8 (7/8)</td>
<td>5.1 (7-9)</td>
<td>0 (9-15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only offer</td>
<td>2.9 (8/9)</td>
<td>2.4 (7-13)</td>
<td>0 (11-15)</td>
<td>11.1 (2-6)</td>
<td>4.4 (9)</td>
<td>10.3 (3-6)</td>
<td>12.9 (2)</td>
<td>20 (2/3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Away from family</td>
<td>1.9 (10/11)</td>
<td>2.4 (7-13)</td>
<td>3.8 (7-10)</td>
<td>0 (7-15)</td>
<td>1.6 (11)</td>
<td>0 (11-15)</td>
<td>1.2 (10/11)</td>
<td>0 (9-15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommend by family/friend</td>
<td>1.9 (10/11)</td>
<td>0 (14-15)</td>
<td>3.8 (7-10)</td>
<td>0 (7-15)</td>
<td>3.3 (10)</td>
<td>0 (11-15)</td>
<td>5.1 (7-9)</td>
<td>6.6 (5-7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning facilities</td>
<td>1 (12-15)</td>
<td>2.4 (7-13)</td>
<td>0 (11-15)</td>
<td>0 (7-15)</td>
<td>0 (13-15)</td>
<td>0 (11-15)</td>
<td>0 (12-15)</td>
<td>0 (9-15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open day</td>
<td>1 (12-15)</td>
<td>2.4 (7-13)</td>
<td>0 (11-15)</td>
<td>0 (7-15)</td>
<td>0 (13-15)</td>
<td>1.2 (10)</td>
<td>0 (12-15)</td>
<td>0.5 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus university</td>
<td>1 (12-15)</td>
<td>0 (14/15)</td>
<td>0 (11-15)</td>
<td>0 (7-15)</td>
<td>0 (13-15)</td>
<td>0 (11-15)</td>
<td>0 (12-15)</td>
<td>0 (9-15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reco. by school / employer</td>
<td>1 (12-15)</td>
<td>2.4 (7-13)</td>
<td>0 (11-15)</td>
<td>0 (7-15)</td>
<td>0.5 (12)</td>
<td>0 (11-15)</td>
<td>0 (12-15)</td>
<td>0 (9-15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Questionnaires

Just as the decision to enter HE is based on more than one reason, so it is the case with choosing the particular university to enter. When asked if any of fourteen other reasons (including “other”) influenced their decision, the respondents provided 1311 responses in total (511 from the graduates and 1086 from the Level 3 students). The relative frequencies of each are given in Table 11 below ordered according to the rank order of frequency provided by the graduate respondents.
Table 11: Did any of the following also influence your decision to study at Brunel?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Grads All % (Rank)</th>
<th>Grads WB % (Rank)</th>
<th>Grads AI % (Rank)</th>
<th>Grads AP % (Rank)</th>
<th>L3 All % (Rank)</th>
<th>L3 WB % (Rank)</th>
<th>L3 AI % (Rank)</th>
<th>L3 AP % (Rank)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>100 (1)</td>
<td>100 (1)</td>
<td>100 (1)</td>
<td>100 (1)</td>
<td>100 (1)</td>
<td>100 (1)</td>
<td>100 (1)</td>
<td>100 (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic reputation</td>
<td>71.8 (2)</td>
<td>59.5 (3)</td>
<td>80.7 (2)</td>
<td>66.6 (2/3)</td>
<td>66.3 (2)</td>
<td>62.5 (3)</td>
<td>68.6 (2)</td>
<td>66.6 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Its geographic location</td>
<td>68.9 (3)</td>
<td>73.8 (2)</td>
<td>57.6 (3)</td>
<td>66.6 (2/3)</td>
<td>59 (3)</td>
<td>68.7 (2)</td>
<td>59 (3/4)</td>
<td>72.2 (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was close to my home/family</td>
<td>50.4 (4)</td>
<td>47.6 (4)</td>
<td>46.1 (4)</td>
<td>44.4 (5)</td>
<td>44.8 (5)</td>
<td>50 (4/5)</td>
<td>46.9 (5)</td>
<td>50 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for work placement</td>
<td>32 (5)</td>
<td>33.3 (5)</td>
<td>30.7 (7)</td>
<td>11.1 (9-11)</td>
<td>54.6 (4)</td>
<td>50 (4/5)</td>
<td>59 (3/4)</td>
<td>27.7 (8/9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a campus university</td>
<td>30 (6)</td>
<td>23.8 (8/9)</td>
<td>38.4 (5/6)</td>
<td>11.1 (9-11)</td>
<td>33.6 (7)</td>
<td>43.7 (6)</td>
<td>36.1 (7)</td>
<td>38.8 (6/7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommended by family and friends</td>
<td>27.1 (7/8)</td>
<td>14.2 (11)</td>
<td>38.4 (5/6)</td>
<td>44.4 (5/6)</td>
<td>24.3 (10)</td>
<td>21.8 (11)</td>
<td>27.7 (9)</td>
<td>16.6 (10/11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of learning facilities</td>
<td>27.1 (7/8)</td>
<td>26.1 (7)</td>
<td>23.0 (9)</td>
<td>22.2 (7/8)</td>
<td>31.7 (8)</td>
<td>34.3 (7)</td>
<td>33.7 (8)</td>
<td>27.7 (8/9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open day/interview exp.</td>
<td>25.2 (9)</td>
<td>28.5 (6)</td>
<td>26.9 (8)</td>
<td>22.2 (7/8)</td>
<td>29.7 (9)</td>
<td>28 (10)</td>
<td>26.5 (10)</td>
<td>38.8 (6/7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voc./employment-related reputation</td>
<td>24.2 (10)</td>
<td>21.4 (10)</td>
<td>11.5 (10)</td>
<td>44.4 (5/6)</td>
<td>37 (6)</td>
<td>31.2 (8)</td>
<td>37.3 (6)</td>
<td>44.4 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities for Extra-curricular activities</td>
<td>14.5 (11)</td>
<td>23.8 (8/9)</td>
<td>3.84 (11-14)</td>
<td>0 (12-14)</td>
<td>14.6 (12)</td>
<td>28.1 (9)</td>
<td>12 (12)</td>
<td>16.6 (10/11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reco. by school/college/employer</td>
<td>12.6 (12)</td>
<td>11.9 (12/13)</td>
<td>3.84 (11-14)</td>
<td>0 (12-14)</td>
<td>21.9 (11)</td>
<td>9.3 (12)</td>
<td>19.2 (11)</td>
<td>11.1 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A long way away from my home</td>
<td>6.7 (13)</td>
<td>11.9 (12/13)</td>
<td>3.84 (11-14)</td>
<td>0 (12-14)</td>
<td>6.82 (13)</td>
<td>6.2 (13)</td>
<td>4.8 (14)</td>
<td>0 (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The only uni. that offered a place</td>
<td>4.8 (14)</td>
<td>2.38 (14)</td>
<td>3.84 (11-14)</td>
<td>11.1 (9-11)</td>
<td>4.8 (14)</td>
<td>3.1 (14)</td>
<td>3.6 (13)</td>
<td>0 (14)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Questionnaires

In this table, a similar pattern is evident as in that obtained when asked about the main reason: academic reputation and location are also major additional influences. The following quotations from the questionnaire and the focus group indicate the types of remarks that support the quantitative data.

“My parents recommended it – it was close” (Asian Indian female, 23, graduate, semi-structured questionnaire).
“I chose Brunel for the reputation of work experience, especially for my School, DISC, my department. We have a lot of individuals going to very well established companies like Microsoft, Merrill Lynch, an accounting firm and the like, so I based my choice on the university” (British Pakistani, male, Level 3, Focus Group).

In addition, “opportunities for work-placement” is revealed as a frequent other influence (although less so for the graduate Asian Pakistani group). Vocational/employment-related reputation emerges as an additional influence for more than 30% of all the Level 3 groups although this appears to have been less often the case in the graduate sample (other than the Asian Pakistani group).

A student from the School of Information Systems and Computing stated that the choice of Brunel University was based on its “excellent placements links and opportunities” (Asian Indian male, 24, graduate, semi-structured questionnaire). A student from Business and Management chose to study at Brunel due to its “sandwich course, four year thick: it is very recognised from Brunel” (Asian Indian female, 23, graduate, semi-structured questionnaire).

The Delphi technique allowed this phenomenon to be explored in more depth. The graduates who participated in this part of the research emphasised the importance of work placements in their awareness of what is needed in an employment setting. One of them stressed this issue in a very reflective way:

“The Thin Sandwich course was invaluable because it allowed me to take a step back after first year and apply my knowledge to the real world in an area of interest. This then gave me real life case studies to use on my return, and gave me a wider perspective; as well as a study break and a little extra money. Having the second set of work experience then allowed me to change direction into a new business area (especially useful for someone not sure what they wanted to do), as well as a needed study break before Final year and good dissertation material and research time. It was the experience I got from this second placement that got me work as soon as I left uni (back at the old company for a few months, and then a permanent position with another company by September due to my experience)” (White British, female, age not available, graduate, Delphi).

Not all students had been involved in work placements. One such graduate (black African, male, 22) suggested that placements should be part of all courses as he realised that relevant experience is very valuable when trying to access the job market. Others suggested that work experience gained outside the programme of study, through part-time or summer work, is also valuable. For instance:

"I did both full-time summer work and part-time work whilst studying and it definitely made me appreciate the working environment and made me appear more employable in the future" (white British female, age not available, graduate, Delphi).

Students who had been involved in placements or other forms of work agreed that they had benefited from their work experience in several ways including: enabling them to liaise with different people in different contexts; exploring various career opportunities; earning some money; gaining specific experience; motivating them
towards their courses, and directing their efforts at university towards very specific career goals.

**Staff Perspectives**

When asked to identify the primary strengths of Brunel as a Higher Education institution, respondents referred to a multiplicity of factors that would make the institution attractive for students. The importance of reputation identified by the student responses is in keeping with the views of staff as indicated by the following quotations. The first two refer to both institutional level reputation and that of specific courses (as did the student responses):

“The university has a really good name and good reputation and I think that helps students in employability [...] there are specific courses where you can actually get a job before you have even got your qualification” (Non academic).

“Placement is strong… Engineering is strong” (Academic).

The employment-related reputation which ranked second as an additional influence for graduates was mirrored by the opinions represented in the interviews of staff. Brunel was depicted as an institution which has a reputation for work-related experience, which makes it very different from other HE institutions.

“You know in universities like Brunel employability ranks very high among the reasons why students come to study here. If you want to study philosophy or if you want to study classics, there are any good universities that you could go to, but this is not the one. But if you want to roll up your sleeves and do something practical and hope that you get some job experience and a job at the other end, then Brunel seems a good place to go. So I would think it varies a lot but certainly in this university employability has got to rank among the highest reasons we are here and why students are here” (Academic).

**Employer Perspectives**

The interviewees identified several measures or initiatives that could be effective in improving graduate employability for all students, irrespective of their ethnic background. As all the respondents’ suggestions already take place within the institution, it is hypothesised that they were referring to HE in general or that they would like to see an increase in the quantity and/or quality of what was already in place. For instance, one employer suggested that universities should invite more people to take part in mock interviews as they could help students to better structure their thoughts. Mock (recorded) interviews are already offered to students at Brunel and so the important part of this suggestion and others is about maximising the take up of the opportunity by students.

“Definitely universities should invite students to do more. And I can actually say that some universities are better at preparing students. That’s not from my own work but from personal experience, because my brother is actually currently looking for some internship jobs and his careers service has sat down with him and done a mock interview. Which I’m sure that at some stage all careers service offer that, but it is
just ‘wow, that’s something that all students should do’, because it would give you an overview of how to structure your answers and how to maybe make sure that the emphasis that you are giving in your answer is more tailored to the competences that we are actually looking for. Because, for example, we look for leading performance, all organisations in some way look for leadership, how do you structure that example to show that competence is important and the interviewer has to say ‘yeah, that’s a good example of leadership’(Graduate recruiter, multinational bank).

Another employer stressed the importance of employer presentations within HEIs for the dissemination of ideas related to the world of work. This was seen as a “mutually beneficial arrangement” (Graduate recruiter, Public Sector) between HEI and employers.

Employer presentations are already in place at Brunel University and have been recognised as an invaluable source of information for students. They are thought to:

- assist students to find out about specific employers and establish whether the career paths they suggest are of interest;
- inform students of different openings for people with specific skills;
- provide students with the opportunities to ask questions.

In their presentations, employers usually present their companies, inform the audience of the opportunities available and provide tips and advice on the recruitment process. On other occasions these presentations are in a question and answer format, which is more informal, but equally informative.

Employers also suggested the importance of alumni presentations within HEIs. These have also taken place at various points within Brunel and involve past students coming to campus as experts in specific fields and participating in employment-related activities. They share their professional experiences with students and provide students with important advice.

c. Preparedness for Higher Education

Student Responses

In order to explore this theme, a questionnaire item asked “Before you came to Brunel, did you feel nervous about any of the following?” Respondents were asked to indicate as many as they felt applied. The graduates identified a total of 108 concerns and the Level 3 students, 251. Table 12, below, indicates the frequency with which each option was chosen by respondents in each of the groups.
Table 12: Concerns about entering Higher Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>All Grads</th>
<th>WB Grads</th>
<th>AI Grads</th>
<th>AP Grads</th>
<th>L3 All Grads</th>
<th>L3 WB Grads</th>
<th>L3 AI Grads</th>
<th>L3 AP Grads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic study level</td>
<td>51.4%</td>
<td>54.7%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>48.7%</td>
<td>56.2%</td>
<td>54.2%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New people</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>41.9%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a member of an ME group</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural environment</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Questionnaires

The highest number of responses in both the graduate and Level 3 samples (51.4% of graduates and 48.7% of Level 3 students) was about the “level of academic study required”. The second most frequent response was “interacting with new people” (35.9% of graduates and 41.9% of Level 3 students). The same top two concerns were revealed by the ethnic groups examined, with the exception of the Asian Pakistani group. That group more often indicated “being a member of an ME group” than “meeting new people”. Again, the small number of respondents in this group needs to be acknowledged. Whilst “meeting new people” was the second most frequently identified concern of the Asian Indian group, the percentage of respondents indicating it was very low.

A potential concern that might be deemed to be related to academic study was “being able to use the English language effectively”. However, only 11.2% of Level 3 students had been concerned about this and an even smaller percentage of graduates (5.8%).

Staff Perspectives

Lack of or inappropriate preparation for HE may well be an element in poor retention of students. None of the staff indicated that retention was considered to be a problem at this institution.

“We do very well. Our retention is very high” (Academic).

One member of staff highlighted the fact that the university does not have problems regarding the retention of its students through reference to the outcome of official statistics. However, s/he also referred to the multiplicity of activities and strategies at institutional level that contribute to this success.

“We are above the benchmark retention according to HEFCE. We have done a lot during induction week and throughout the first year. Also the
effective learning week targets students in the first year. And there is
evidence that if you manage to keep students throughout the first year,
they will stay” (Non academic*).

Induction is a major event at Brunel University. Academic, non academic and support
staff are all involved in presentations and events taking place during induction week,
through which students are informed about where their degree might take them, the
services available to them and the university’s expectations of them. Students who
enter university are, in fact, in a period of transition during which they face many
practical challenges such as settling into a new physical and academic environment,
and the socialising with fellow students from different backgrounds. A recent study by
Crooks and Parmar (2006) focusing on the role of induction at Brunel and Middlesex
Universities, argues that a large proportion of first year students fail to attend induction
as they do not believe that they can benefit from any of the talks. The majority of
people who skipped these talks were from the local area and thought that they were
already familiar with the environment (Crooks and Parmar, 2006: 185).

Despite the role of employment-related reasons in students’ motivations for HE
identified above, the following staff comment suggests that that motivation is not
necessarily translated into specific actions. The following comment refers to the
difficulty of “settling in” and thus chimes with frequent concern about meeting new
people expressed in the student responses.

“I think that when students first come to the university they are not
thinking about employability at all. I think that’s one of the reasons why
career planning it should be key in the first year. [When they first come
here they are concerned about] having a good time. The majority of
them might not be thinking about where their degrees are going to take
them. I think the majority are concerned about settling in to university life
which can be quite difficult in itself” (Non academic).

**Employer Perspectives**

The relatively low frequency with which respondents expressed concern about being
able to use the English language effectively was noted above. Comments made by
employers contrast quite markedly with this position. In discussing the selection of
graduates, reference was made to communication skills: written communication skills
are fundamental in the first phase of the recruitment process (application). Oral
communication plays a very important role at the interview stage or in assessment
centres, where candidates are required to articulate their thoughts in an appropriate
manner. This represents, for one of the employers, the main difficulty for many
members of ME groups, if compared to the ethnic majority.

“I would say that candidates from ME background tend to have much
less confidence in the way they come across. And my guess is that they
would have to maybe prepare just that bit more in an interview situation
than someone who, for example, has English as his or her first
language. If you think about the second generation, that maybe out of
the house they use one language and in the house they talk another
language, so it is very much how your mind maybe structures the
answer. And you have to remember that in an assessment centre you
have got 5 or 6 other candidates and you have got to debate an issue or
put your point across. And someone who is maybe second generation might always find it a bit more difficult” (Graduate recruiter, banking and financial services organisation).

The importance of communication in English was also expressed as follows:

‘Language remains an incredible barrier. We expect people to be able to speak English and to write in English because that’s the main way in which we communicate, you know. You cannot have an employee who speaks only Swahili, because [s/he] has to work in a Swahili community because that just doesn’t work. And the argument is why shouldn’t it be? Because that’s the language of the country’ (Graduate recruiter, Public Sector).

Interestingly, language was also seen as a barrier to candidates from ME backgrounds demonstrating particular strengths in bringing with them a more rounded cultural awareness that is very useful in a business environment.

“[Our company] very much looks for people with that added value so definitely they bring that cultural sensitivity that is always an added value for us. This is important but at the same time if, for example, you think of someone who had that cultural sensitivity but then cannot project it or cannot show it so in a group situation that person certainly needs to demonstrate that added value. We look for people who have got that but that can actually demonstrate it though language, but it is something that is not always easy to demonstrate” (Graduate recruiter, multinational bank).

The importance of English Language skills to employers was also indicated by an “off-the-cuff” remark by one of the employers. Although assured that their answers would be treated anonymously, the majority of the graduate recruiters interviewed responded to most questions with a high degree of political correctness. It is therefore possible to argue that the interviewees probably refrained from making any comments that they felt would have portrayed them in an unacceptable way. In the majority of cases the interviewees argued that there was no real difference in terms of employability between applicants from ME groups and those belonging to the ethnic majority. However, in one case, an employer owning a small company stated, with the recorder switched off, that there are still many employers who might be discriminatory in relation to people belonging to ethnic minorities. The employer argued that, through meeting many students at graduate fairs, one of the reasons might be the impression that people from a ME background might not be able to perform as well as members from the majority group because of the perceived lack of spoken and written communications skills.

d. Preparedness for Employment

Student Responses

Respondents were asked if the programme curriculum, in terms of content, structure and assessment enhanced their employability with three optional responses: yes, no and not sure. Taking the two main samples as a whole, it is clear that a majority of both the graduates and the Level 3 students said that it had (64.1% and 56.5% respectively).
Table 13: Does the programme enhance employability?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Grads All N=99</th>
<th>Grads WB N=40</th>
<th>Grads AI N=17</th>
<th>Grads AP N=6</th>
<th>L3 All N=17</th>
<th>L3 WB N=32</th>
<th>L3 AI N=72</th>
<th>L3 AP N=17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>58.8%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>58.9%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>54.3%</td>
<td>70.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Questionnaires

Table 13 provides the frequency with which these answers were provided by the groups of interest. The data indicate that a majority of graduates and students judge that their programme enhanced employability irrespective of ethnic group.

Respondents were asked to expand on the way(s) in which the curriculum enhanced employability. The responses to the small number of options provided were equally divided between “enhanced knowledge” and “work placements”. The following quotations exemplify these ideas:

“[The curriculum] made me much more aware of how the business world works” (Asian Indian, female, graduate, semi-structured questionnaire).

“[My employability was enhanced through the] relevance of real-life case study use on the course and the value of the placement year option that exposed me to industry before leaving university” (Asian Indian, female, graduate, semi-structured questionnaire).

Respondents also referred to very specific disciplinary content and highlighted the significance of elements in their courses including real-life situations, practical skills modules, group work, presentations, multitasking and working in a multicultural setting. The reasons the respondents gave for their negative reply were also very diverse and ranged from the perceived need for more practice, to the lack of relevance of some modules to their future career.

The level of uncertainty represented by the figures is worth noting. That in the Asian Indian group is relatively high. In general, the graduates were more sure that the programme was positive in this regard than are the Level 3 students although this is not the case for the White British group.

One graduate, still unemployed several months after graduation, wondered about her employability:

“I don’t have a job yet. I didn’t have any jobs when studying and maybe this is the cause” (Asian Pakistani, female, graduate, semi-structured questionnaire).

This graduate reflects on the possibility that some practical experience while studying at university could have been useful to enhance her employability. Another graduate, who stated that the curriculum did not enhance her employability, was possibly referring to something other than the curriculum itself. The statement “I am finding it hard to find a job that requires a degree” (white British, female, 22) may relate to the
increasingly competitive market for graduate jobs or may be a reflection of unrealistic expectations referred to by a staff member and quoted above.

In relation to the programme as such, however, both undergraduates and graduates felt that it was / had been beneficial on various fronts. Many respondents answered the question “which of the following is true about your programme?” by stressing that the programme gave them the possibility of meeting new and interesting people (81.6% graduates, 69.1% Level 3,), provided opportunities for intellectual growth and stimulation (75.7% graduates; 68.1% Level 3) and increased the respondents’ self esteem and confidence (68.9% graduates, 55.6% Level 3).

In general the reported experiences of HE are positive. Both graduates and students recognised the supportiveness of the university environment. It has to be acknowledged that the respondents might be inclined to emphasise the more positive aspects of their experience due to the self-selected nature of their participation in the project. It might be that the views of people who might not have experienced a positive environment at university remain unknown because they were unable or unwilling to take part in the study.

**Staff Perspectives**

During the interviews, the respondents identified a number of the initiatives at Brunel to increase graduate employability – as identified in Sections 2b and 3b above. It is not university policy to target all such initiatives at ME groups in particular, but to the whole undergraduate student body. For instance, particularly mentioned by members of staff was the University’s commitment to raising aspirations through the involvement of Brunel’s alumni in order to raise the aspirations and motivation of all students. Many subject areas have involved alumni to provide current undergraduates with examples from their first-hand professional experience a few years after their graduation.

Among employability-related initiatives, one that is specifically directed towards ME students is a mentoring scheme described below by one of the interviewees.

“We have the mentoring scheme at Brunel. There are only 15 universities in the country doing this. What happens is that we enlist mentors who are professionals, normally in areas that these kids wouldn’t have much experience in. For example, merchant bankers from the City or high paid barristers, and they give 2 hours a month and they take an ethnic minority student. And what we want them to do is to motivate these students, give them the feeling that even though they come from backgrounds where they wouldn’t necessarily expect to be bankers or lawyers and so on…that experience can be close to them. […] Last week, one of the students told me: ‘I’ve walked by these expensive buildings all my life but I’ve never thought I’d actually be in one’. And as you just go in, going through security, going upstairs, being taken to sort of the executive coffee room or wherever it is, was hugely motivating to this kid” (Academic).

The scheme being referred to is the EMUS (Ethnic Minority Undergraduate Scheme) which is managed by the National Mentoring Consortium. It involves ME undergraduates being put in touch with mentors belonging to specific professional fields. The WP Office at Brunel has coordinated the programme targeting ME final year students. The programme provides students with a mentor from either the private
or the public sector for six months. The aim is to develop students’ knowledge, understanding and preparedness for graduate level employment or further study. The staff interviewed suggested that the scheme can produce positive outcomes. Nevertheless, access to it is on a competitive basis, and therefore not open to all the students who could benefit. Currently, only a very small number of ME students are involved. As one member of the academic staff suggested, when it is the majority of the students who would benefit from specific learning experiences, the university has to find ways to provide for them.

“We need to know how to provide for students who might have cultural differences or are sensitive about certain issues. You need to do that necessarily when it relates with the majority of your students, as it is our student body that we are focussing on, not their ethnicity” (Academic*).

The desire to offer opportunities for the enhancement of the employability for all students, irrespective of their ethnic background, was clear from the words of some interviewees. They indicated that they would welcome the possibility of a more comprehensive approach to the issue. In order to allow all students to be equally exposed to the same opportunities, it was suggested that it would be effective to engage students in activities through the curriculum which would be useful for their future careers as well as for their courses.

“There is something that we are planning to do: to build the whole employability agenda more deeply into the courses themselves. So, we try to integrate it a bit more, so that, for example, students learn as part of their curriculum what the employment structure is in the industry, what career paths there are, and so on. So it would be part of their learning experience” (Academic).

It will be recalled from the previous section that student respondents were able to offer many examples of ways in which the curriculum enhanced their employability.

In line with another aspect of the student responses, the work placement option was considered an important element of the experience at Brunel. Staff unanimously stressed the value of work placements. There was general agreement that students who go on work placements come back more motivated and focussed in their studies and that this influenced their academic achievement.

“Students who do placements get better degrees. It could also be that it is the best students who get placements. So we need more placements” (Non academic).

That there is a relationship between work placements and academic achievement is supported by other research carried out at Brunel (Patel, 2005). This showed that students who did placements achieved a higher class of degree compared to their peers who did not take up a work placement. However, as suggested by Blasko et al. (2002), this might be the result of a higher level of motivation. Work placements are optional and formal credits for the degree are not awarded for them. One member of staff suggested that this should be changed to increase take-up.

“I think that I would probably feel most passionate about getting work placements accredited so that students very early on start thinking about that, you know, from year 1. That would encourage students to think
about what they would like to do quite early on. Hopefully this would equip them with the skills employers are looking for once they’ve graduated” (Non academic).

Placements are made available on a competitive basis and there is an abundant supply. However, it may not always be possible to meet student expectations in terms of location and type of placement. In particular, staff suggested that, if there is a problem in getting placements for ME students, this is often related to the difficulties in finding an opportunity that meets the requirements of females from an ME background.

“There’s a problem in terms of placement and graduate recruitment of ethnic minorities, particularly with Asian girls. This is because they cannot move away from the place because for many of them the parents won’t let girls move away from home” (Non academic).

This extract suggests that, in some cases, ME women are indeed disadvantaged in taking up some of the opportunities offered to them. This issue would provide some evidence for the real existence of a ‘double jeopardy’ in relation to ME women. According to this theory, women from some ME backgrounds would sometimes perceive themselves as being twice disadvantaged when looking for a job, due to both their gender and ethnic background (Taylor et al., 2006).

Employer Perspectives

The importance of the last point is reinforced by comments made by graduate recruiters. The view was expressed that one of the barriers for ME graduates wishing to access the labour market is their lack of familiarity with it. One of the reasons for cooperating with HEIs was to allow ME students to gain an appreciation of the world of work and its requirements and enable them to access it more easily.

Most interviewees stated that they are successful in attracting graduates with specific skills and attributes. However, they also agreed that many applicants may be at a disadvantage because they are not sufficiently aware of the attributes being sought, and/or that they are not aware that they have them, and/or that they are unable to provide evidence that they have them. Furthermore, all the interviewees agreed that these skills are not necessarily developed through the degree programmes.

“These are experiences that you don’t necessarily have by being in the library and reading books and getting a 1st Class, these are experiences that you get by […] doing the extra bit. At the interview, those who have lots of experiences outside of their university environment would always come with a second level of maturity and lots of different examples to draw from” (Graduate recruiter, International corporation).

However, as was indicated above, students did feel that the curriculum itself had provided opportunities to enhance their employability. The value of extra-curricular activities was recognised in addition to that of the curriculum itself. Nonetheless, the emphasis laid on these by the employers is rather more substantial. They stressed that the skills they look for mainly derive from the applicants’ overall experience of life outside the courses, from extra-curricular activities, such as gap year and voluntary experience, work placements and part-time jobs offered through Brunel’s Jobshop.
e. **Preparedness for Future**

**Student Responses**

The respondents were asked to rate their overall experience of Brunel in relation to preparing them for their future. On a scale from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest), 184 ratings were provided. The data are shown in Table 14 below. Of these, ratings of 7 – 10 were given by 71.8% of graduates and 52.6% of Level 3 students. Ratings of 1 – 4 were given by 6.8% of graduates and 9.7% of Level 3 students.

**Table 14: Rating of overall experience at Brunel in relation to preparing for future?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Grads All</th>
<th>Grads WB</th>
<th>Grads AI</th>
<th>Grads AP</th>
<th>L3 All N=18</th>
<th>L3 WB N=32</th>
<th>L3 AI N=79</th>
<th>L3 AP N=17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5 (low)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 (high)</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>84.4</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Questionnaires

The positive majority view across all ethnic groups represented by these figures was expanded upon by comments such as the one below:

“I personally took advantage of all the opportunities which were on offer at Brunel, however, I think it is essential everyone is encouraged to do a work placement, join social clubs and do some form of voluntary work during their time at Brunel. (white British, female, graduate, Delphi)

On the basis of these figures, it might be reasonable for the institution concerned to be satisfied that it is providing a reasonable level of appropriate educational and other experiences for its students. The commitment of the university to its work – and to ensuring that opportunities are provided which recognise diversity and meet special needs - is reflected in comments made by staff reported in the next section. However, it is also worth bearing in mind that the “future” is an unknowable quality and it may be that student responses to this question are of limited value because of this. Furthermore, the fact that graduates rate their university experience more highly than Level 3 students is positive in this regard. This is generally the case although the Asian Pakistani group of graduates shows a different pattern. It should also be pointed out that these figure indicate a high level of non-response to this item (31 for the graduates as a whole) which makes the interpretation of the graduate figures in particular problematic.

**Staff Perspectives**

When asked about the ways Brunel University’s Race Equality Policy informs the provision for students, the staff interviewed focused on different aspects of the policy, sometimes referring to a higher level of inclusivity, involving all types of diversity.

“[Brunel University promotes equality of opportunities] in different ways. I mean, for example, we do have separate and special job fairs and learning experience for people from minority backgrounds and they are particularly aimed at lifting their horizons and honing the skills and
motivating. People are from various sorts of backgrounds. Minority meaning not just racial minority but religious, ethnic and even people with disabilities, to raise their aspirations and to help them in any way we can. So we are doing that” (Academic).

The staff interviewed identified several initiatives taking place at Brunel University in order to provide services for all students, in response to their specific needs:

“We work with Widening Participation on the disability front. We have a very strong disability office also [working with PCC in] providing students with placements so that students with disabilities are not disadvantaged. We have a number of students who don’t have very good A levels. The blue chip employers look mainly at A levels results. So if you are an ethnic minority student with few [UCAS] points you are possibly disadvantaged. And there are a number of initiatives going on: we have mentors for them, people from poor background can get financial help, PDP. There is a lot going on” (Non academic).

In relation to the student “futures”, the staff displayed a conviction that students’ expectations may not always be realistic. Thus, they may be disappointed when they realise that a degree is not a passport to their dream job. When asked about what might worry graduates who want to enter the employment market, one respondent shifted the focus onto the general employment market, which is becoming increasingly competitive and answered:

“Getting a job, I suppose. Employability in the UK over the last 10 years has been pretty good as you know and unemployment is very low but what many people - concern about - getting a graduate job, a job in which they can use the skills they have. And that’s an anxiety for some students. They may end up with a job but it may not be a job that they were really trained to do and therefore would not have benefited sufficiently from the time they put into HE” (Academic).

**Employer Perspectives**

Increased competitiveness in the job market was also referred to by graduate recruiters.

“One of the biggest worries is that there are loads of graduates out there because there are so many universities, and there are not that many graduate jobs to accommodate …and very often people are scared that they won’t make it or think ‘you only recruit 30 for this graduate programme, is it worth me applying?’ […] Well I can’t tell you whether you are gonna make it but you have to give yourself a chance” (Graduate recruiter, banking and financial services organisation).

Also in line with comments made by staff, graduate employers expressed the view that graduates hold unrealistic expectations in relation to their career - graduates often expect to get too much from a job.

“Graduates have to have an interest in developing a career. People do not need to come in and say ‘I want to be this’. It is important that they are open to the different opportunities that may come their way. And I
think that’s important because we cannot predict what the work would be in 3-4 years time. So people need to have that flexibility, that ability to learn new things” (Partner, Financial Services Company).

Flexibility and ability to learn new things is what Johnson (2004) defines as “trainability”. Adaptability and versatility is a main concern, especially for companies who need to respond to the changing circumstances of the market. Recruits also need to have a willingness to develop in order to ensure that they are always equipped with the right skills required to perform their roles.

This is in line with the definition of employability defined by the Confederation of British Industry (1999): “Employability is the possession by an individual of the qualities and competences required to meet the changing needs of employers and customers and thereby to help to realise his or her aspirations and potential in work”. In some cases, it was stressed that training and education on the job was important, in order to make sure that employees keep up to date.

“This is a career which is very satisfying but also intellectually challenging, so you don’t lose that academic ability to operate in an academic world. Actually, we have a colleague who has completed his masters, is now doing a CIPD degree, in the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, so we are a learning organisation, you know, and he has just applied to go and do a scholarship in America as well, so... but we do promote lifelong learning and we offer people the opportunity to continue their education and providing that it is a discipline which is reasonably linked to a professional competence we would pay for it as well” (Graduate recruiter, Public Sector).

4. KEY FINDINGS

In the previous section, questionnaire items and qualitative statements collected from participants have been presented to address the themes agreed by the national partners. The project also provided the opportunity to obtain information about the detail of provision at Brunel (for example, about student awareness of particular services) and these will be addressed in detail elsewhere. This section presents key institutional findings of more general interest.

1. Although statistical analysis of the data presented in Section 3.1-a is beyond the scope of this project, the consideration of the statistical data presented in that section suggests some difference between ethnic groups in employment six months after graduation - with the Asian Pakistani group having a relatively high level of unemployment. In addition, statistical data on qualifications at entry indicate that this group is not entering Brunel University with qualifications substantially different from those of other groups such as White British and Asian Indian. However, these data do not refer to the same cohort of students and any further analysis of the relative importance and role of entry qualifications on the one hand and university experience on the other would need to be examined in a longitudinal study.

2. Motivation to enter Higher Education is not based on a single reason. Despite the fact that one main reason can be identified on request, it is clear that both study-related factors (including an interest in a particular course) and employment-related
factors are important elements in the motivation of individual students. This is the case for students irrespective of ethnic group membership.

3. In choosing which university to attend, reputation (academic and employment-related) and location combine to determine, in large measure, the decision made.

4. Exploration of concerns about how prepared they were for Higher Education revealed uncertainty about the level of academic study expected. For both graduates and Level 3 students, there was relatively little concern about the effective use of the English language. This contrasts with the views expressed by employers about its importance.

5. The majority of students from all the groups considered in detail felt that their programme had enhanced their employability. Several aspects of the taught curriculum were given as examples of how this is done. The value of integrated work placements was widely recognised as a means of obtaining important work experience and offered valuable skills development opportunities.

6. The value of work experience other than through work placements was identified as important in developing employability. It is one way of raising students’ awareness of what is needed in an employment setting. Bringing the “world of work” into the university through visiting alumni and employers was identified as another useful initiative in this regard.

7. The majority of graduates and Level 3 students rate their university experience highly with regard to preparation for their future; but the graduates more so.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THIS CASE STUDY

As with the institutional findings presented in the previous section, the recommendations presented below have been selected for their potential general usefulness.

1. Further research needs to be undertaken to allow findings from this project to be examined further. In particular, longitudinal research would enable the operation and the interaction of the several contributing factors to be examined more closely.

2. Based on the findings on the theme of “Preparedness for Higher Education”, consideration should be given to three areas:
   a) Level 1 students should be provided with an early opportunity to increase and test their understanding of the level of academic study required;
   b) Increased liaison between HEIs and the providers of non-traditional pre-university education should be undertaken in order to explore potential gaps in specific content and/or differences in required learning processes. These could then be addressed to assist effective transition to higher education for those students entering through such routes...
   c) The use of the English language should be maintained at a high standard and opportunities provided for its development throughout higher education curricula.
3. Innovative ways need to be explored to encourage further the take up of employability-related activities that are offered to all students in an institution. This includes the major commitment (on both the university’s part and the students’ part) to the optional integrated work placement. It also relates to ongoing activities such as volunteering in the community, accessing high-quality part-time job opportunities and, engaging with Student Union societies. Making use of one-off events such as interview practice, careers fairs, workshops on transferable skills (e.g. presentations) also needs to be encouraged. It may be that a review of tutoring systems would contribute to this area of work.

4. A second way of addressing the previous recommendation is to find ways of helping students to come to a realistic expectation in terms of their future careers. This is not straightforward as the message to be conveyed is complex. Universities need students to realise that higher education is important (so that they enter higher education in the first place), but that even a good degree is not enough. Benefiting from the “university experience” in broad terms is essential. However, students’ ability to engage with this is being jeopardised by non-educational factors such as its economic cost.

5. Employability is considered in the approval process for new programmes at Brunel. This provides the opportunity to incorporate experiences designed to promote relevant development. Where it is not already the case, the involvement of potential employers to raise their awareness of these elements of the programmes and to be involved in the development of others is recommended.

6. Consideration should be given to developing further the employability agenda specifically for ME students. As identified above, some initiatives are already in place and developments are planned at Brunel and, no doubt elsewhere. Such initiatives continue to be part of ensuring that Higher Education is inclusive, providing effective preparation for employment for all its students, taking into account their various individual needs.
REFERENCES


ENDNOTES

_____________________________________________________________________


iv Figure provided by Brunel International office (May 2006)


vi These are not Home students and, although ethnically diverse, do not qualify as belonging to a ME group.


viii Due to this, the anonymity of the participants is guaranteed.

ix http://www.brunel.ac.uk/about/acad/bbs/ps/ug/ [Accessed August 2006]

x http://education.guardian.co.uk/students/graduation/story/0,,1372792,00.html [Accessed July 2006]

xi http://www.brunel.ac.uk/about/acad/siscm/courses/undergraduate/cdata/computersciencebsc/fulldetails (accessed August 2006)


xiii “Home”, throughout, includes students from the UK, Europe and Channel Islands

xiv http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/reports/subjectLevel/q518_01_textonly.htm [Accessed July 2006]


xviii http://www.uel.ac.uk/nmc/ [Accessed July 2006]

xix Ten in the academic year 2004/05 and fifteen in the academic year 2005/06 (data provided by PCC).
Appendix D: Edge Hill Case Study Report

Edge Hill University

Ethnicity, Education & Employment

Final Report

Katherine Straker
Research Department
June 2006
1. Institutional Profile

Edge Hill is a vocationally orientated, teaching led, institution which was awarded university status in early 2006. This vocational core to its activities ensures that the institution maintains significant links with employers in order to ensure both the relevance of its programmes and preparedness for employment of its students following completion of their studies. Amongst Edge Hill’s strategic aims is enhancement of the institution’s engagement with, and active support for, the region’s economic and social communities. It is currently the largest higher education institution in the general college sector in the northern half of Britain and has over 14,000 students (2004-05) with approx 11,000 students currently registered on more than 300 degree and postgraduate routes and a further 3,000 on other programmes. Over 92% of graduates were in jobs or further study six months after the end of their course (2004 Destinations Data). The Institution is recognised as having an excellent track record in widening participation.

Edge Hill currently recruits 86% of its undergraduates from the North West and 98% from state schools. Ethnic minorities account for approximately 8% of the population of England but only 4% in North West England. However, this is very unevenly distributed with a significant concentration of ethnic groups in urban conurbations, such as the East Lancashire, Manchester, Merseyside urban sub-regions1. Edge Hill, although located in the southern part of the North West region, close to the main centres of urban population, is nevertheless locally situated within rural West Lancashire, with a very low ethnic minority population.

In terms of degree classification and employment outcomes although percentages are high, there is some disparity between student groups across the college (82.2% of full-time graduates from ethnic minorities go into employment compared with 88.1% of their White counterparts - 2003/04). Within the Faculties of Education and Health the percentages for ME students were higher than for other students. This concurs with Blasko’s research (2002) which argues that data from HESA reveals that ME graduates are just as likely to be in graduate level jobs as other graduates - although the initial unemployment period is usually longer and again this situation varies for different ethnic group with Black minority groups the most likely to be still unemployed after 6 months.

2. Methodology
   Aims and Objectives

In keeping with the main aim of the project, the objectives of Edge Hill’s research study were twofold:

- to investigate the ways in which institutions recruit, support and enhance the employability of students by exploring minority ethnic and white students’ experiences of Higher Education and in particular their experience of Edge Hill
- to explore the views held by key informants within the Institution regarding areas of racial equality and diversity, widening participation, student support and careers advice.

In order to answer the above objectives, it was felt essential to collect data not only relating to quantitative issues such as institutional data and student demographics but also students’ perceptions of their learning environment and crucially their awareness of any of the policies or interventions designed by the institution to help them succeed and increase their employability.

One main area of concern identified by the Institution itself relates to offers and acceptance figures for ME groups, particularly in subject areas where applications should be higher. The overall applications: acceptances ratio for 2004 was 5.1 for Whites and 7.3 for applicants from ethnic minorities. This suggests that applicants from ethnic minorities are less likely to accept or secure an offer from Edge Hill than their White counterparts. It was, therefore, hoped that some of the data analysed might highlight some possible explanations for this.

**Target Groups**

Due to the very small numbers of ME students at Edge Hill, it was decided that the research would focus mainly on those students enrolled within the Faculty of Education with a smaller group from the Faculty of Health included in the survey sample. Although the majority of Edge Hill’s ethnic minority students are located within these two faculties the numbers are still very small – for example in November 2004 within the Faculty of Education there were 345 white and 10 minority ethnic students studying in their first year and 303 white and 11 minority ethnic students in their third year of study. It was, however, hoped that by targeting students on specific vocational courses this may enable more direct comparison between different students and their experiences as all their courses were directed towards a specific and similar qualification. Only full-time undergraduate students were targeted – therefore, for the purpose of this study, PGCE students within the Faculty of Education were excluded. The partner institutions involved in this research all agreed to survey White students as well as ME students in order to highlight any issues specific to ME students as well as issues applicable to the whole student cohort regardless of ethnicity.

**Methods applied in case study**

In order to generate a rich source of data regarding the perceptions and experiences of both staff and students an evaluative case study approach was employed with data collected from a wide range of sources (e.g. questionnaires, interviews, institutional data and policy documentation) to
ensure triangulation. The majority of the sections in the student surveys were designed to collect quantitative information about student characteristics and background, access and entry to HE and institutional retention and support. The themes explored via the questionnaires and interviews included: why did students choose to enter Higher Education?; why did they choose this particular University?; what have been their student experiences?; how are students supported by the HEI?; how do they feel the experience has prepared them for employment?; issues relating to equal opportunities.

Data collection began in November 2004 and questionnaires were distributed to a total of 400 first year and third year students based within the Faculties of Education and Health. Students were asked on the questionnaire whether they would be interested in being interviewed either individually or as part of a focus group and they were offered book tokens as an incentive to participate. Interviews were also conducted with key informants within the institution (Director of Student Services, Head of Careers, Member of Directorate, Minority Recruitment Officer in Education, Aimhigher Co-ordinator and the Head of Widening Participation and Partnerships).

3. Data Analysis

I. Desk Research
a. Statistical Breakdown

There are 430 ethnic minority students currently enrolled across all programmes and all years for 2004/05 with 211 studying full-time and 219 part-time with 51 postgraduates. Most of the students are classed as ‘mature’ with 179 over 30 and 150 aged 21-29. With 289 females to 141 males this is a statistic which reflects the overall student population at Edge Hill and is also related to the subjects of Health and Education, traditionally female-dominated subjects. 90 students entered Edge Hill with ‘Professional Qualifications’, 76 with UK first degree or equivalent, 100 with A level/BTEC/NVQ qualifications and 108 with ‘Other non-UK qualification, unknown level’. The number of students recruited for 04/05 from ethnic minorities, although still low, has risen to 5.2% across all full-time programmes, against 3.9%, 3.4% and 3.8% recorded in earlier years. Minority representation in Health Studies has more than doubled at 7.1% compared with 3.2% in 2003. Undergraduate ITT programmes have improved in the progress towards TTA minority ethnic targets – 3.2% being recruited across all phases against 1.6% in 2003. Primary PGCE has conversely recruited 3 such students (3.5% against 7.7% in 2003), while PGCE Secondary has 35 (7.5% against 6.2% (2003), 4.9% (2002) and 4.3% (2001). The main goal is to increase percentage for minority ethnic students by 1% per year which is a realistic target given the current subject mix at Edge Hill and the semi-rural location. It is perhaps also worth noting that 42% of students at Edge Hill are recruited from lower socio-economic classes so ethnic minorities from deprived areas would not necessarily experience any more disadvantage than their White peers in this respect (DfES, 2003: 56).
b. Institutional Policy and Practice
The strategic vision of Edge Hill is clearly focused on “the development of students as rounded professionals, with high levels of academic, professional and life skills and employability.

All undergraduate students will have opportunities for academically accredited work experience within their programmes. Wherever possible, relevant professional accreditation will be sought for academic programmes: we will seek to provide our students with a recognised currency in their future careers.”

Widening Participation
In terms of ethnic minority students the aim has been to increase % of minority ethnic students by 1% per year and to continue to strive to improve recruitment of minority ethnic groups. A survey of enrolled students is planned to establish the experience of minority ethnic groups at Edge Hill to identify areas for improvement.

Sequence Edge Hill and Widening Participation - Key Activities:-
- Lancashire Compact 1999-2002
- Aimhigher Merseyside 1999-2002
- Working Together North West Business Plan P4P 2002
- P4P 2002-2004
  Regional Lead and partners in Lancashire and Merseyside
- 2004 Aimhigher North West
  Regional Lead and partners in Lancashire and Merseyside

The main outreach Widening Access project, Aim Higher: Partnerships for Progression (P4P) exceeded targets and received excellent reviews from schools and colleges for the quality of its work and the impact on young people.

Race Equality
Recruitment of Students
The Institution has adopted a number of proactive strategies over the years to widen participation from minority ethnic groups. Some have been more successful than others, for example targeting programmes at occupational groups rather than geographical areas has consistently proved more successful as illustrated by Heath Studies provision, Initial Teacher Training and Post Graduate Certificate in Teaching & Learning in Clinical Practice. Notwithstanding these small successes, the situation with regard to the recruitment and retention of students from minority ethnic groups remains a significant challenge to the Institution, as is the case for other institutions of our type. The Institution will continue to review policies e.g. admissions and assess
any adverse impact on minority ethnic groups and monitor applications, offers and enrolments as well as retention issues.

Recruitment of Staff
Assessment of Edge Hill’s performance and success in recruiting and retaining staff from minority ethnic groups reveals that we are below the national average. The only available comparative figure for higher education is 5% for academic staff in old universities.

There have been significant efforts over the years to sustain and improve the diversity of our staff base. In 2001, 14 out of 830 permanent staff at Edge Hill were from minority ethnic groups, in 2002 this figure rose to 36 and in 2003 there were 46. The recruitment of administrative and manual staff is mostly on a regional basis and the regional position needs to be taken into account.

Promoting Racial Equality
The specific challenges to the Institution and the community in relation to racial equality are, therefore, particularly important and we recognise that we need to be more proactive. The current under-representation of staff and students from minority ethnic groups inevitably limits our ability to enhance the educational, cultural and personal experience of staff and students and sits uncomfortably with our Institutional mission, which aims to provide an inclusive environment and to effectively widen participation to higher education.

Successfully tackling these issues will not be an easy task and will require resource input. We will need to involve the whole community in working with us to understand and consider issues of race and ethnicity and examine ways in which greater diversity and equality could be achieved.

Employability
One of the Institution’s priorities is to undertake a mapping exercise to discover the number of students from minority ethnic groups undertaking placement/work-based learning with confidential interviews arranged to discuss the value of the experience. Information generated from the exercise will be used to inform future placement/work-based learning. The Employer Code of Practice for the Edge Hill Job Club will be explicit in requesting that employers must be compliant with legislation regarding race and diversity. All employers who wish to advertise vacancies with the Job Club must sign the code.

ii. Fieldwork
1. Senior Management Perspectives

Purpose of Higher Education

In response to the question ‘what did they feel the purpose of Higher Education was?’ several agreed that it should enable individuals to maximise their potential as well securing a skilled workforce to economically and socially benefit society:
I think we all benefit from as many young people as possible continuing higher education as long as they will benefit and we all benefit from people having the opportunity throughout their lives…
(Senior Manager A)

I think the benefits in higher education individually and collectively are very well documented in terms of benefits of families and benefits of communities
(Senior Manager B)

It was also stressed that the higher education experience was not always right for everyone but widening participation policies allowed more individuals to choose whether it was right for them or not:

I am very convinced that HE makes a huge difference to people’s lives and the benefits they can get – I think those who miss out on education generally have much more limited opportunities. On the other hand I don’t take the view that all HE is equally good for any individual – the big thing with HE is making choices and choosing paths which suit you – many people go through to HE on an escalator which takes them straight through school to HE and the only thing they ever get told to do is what they’re good at but they aren’t always too clear at the end what they’re going to do afterwards.
(Aimhigher Co-ordinator)

All the interviewees felt that Edge Hill was an inclusive institution, which did strive to provide significant opportunities for people from under-represented groups, and did make an active contribution to lifelong learning. One Senior Manager described Edge Hill as ‘a new generation university’ and another emphasised their success rate in ensuring 85% of undergraduates leave with a professional qualification. However, they did concur with the students’ perceptions that Edge Hill could be more pro-active in its out-reach work in the community and improve its ‘visibility’ to prospective students.

**Institutional Policy**

There was general agreement amongst those interviewed that the Institution had a genuine interest and commitment to widening participation initiatives reflected through its current role as lead institution for Aimhigher North West. Whilst most commented on the commitment of the institution to developing WP policies, one of the main challenges they cited was how to embed the concept of diversity and equal opportunities across the College and not just within certain areas or departments.

I think institutionally we need to perfect our accomplishments so that the good practice that we’ve got where people are positively
going out and trying to address these very difficult issues is reflected across the entire institution...one of our biggest challenges is to get everybody to proactively see it as their personal responsibility to try and make that difference

(Senior Manager B)

One Senior Manager admitted that there was perhaps some question as to the ‘extent to which staff really understand and engage with some of the issues that our students from minority groups might’ whilst another felt that the College ‘maybe had some way to go in ensuring it was properly embedded within the Institution rather than on a more superficial level’. However, another Senior Manager was adamant that staff were aware of the issues and that communication was very good within the institution - not a view shared by all those interviewed. They were, however, unanimous in emphasising the need for evaluation of their policies and practices as well as providing clear feedback to all staff and students regarding any new initiatives or developments. One Senior Manager felt dissemination was now less restrictive since HEFCE no longer required a widening participation strategy:

It used to be very structured and HEFCE driven and now it isn’t which makes it so much easier to look at the whole institution in terms of reporting and discussion and dissemination...it means this time it will be a lot more inclusive

(Senior Manager C)

With regards to the lack of ME staff employed at Edge Hill, some managers felt there was clear reason as to why this should be the case and suggested that it would be perhaps useful for Human Resources to conduct some research into why the figures were so low. It seemed individuals felt not that there were necessarily problems but more a need to constantly evaluate and re-evaluate the institution’s position and strategies.

Another area for concern related to issues of student retention:

…the whole area of retention is an issue - I think we’ve done a brilliant job of getting students into college and onto programs in the last few years and because you’re getting students in who need an awful lot of support one to one or in groups they need that extra support that is not there in the normal university curriculum

(Senior Manager D)

and the number of Minority Ethnic student applications which are translated into acceptances although not all Senior Managers were aware of this later issue as a problem. Currently there is insufficient data to show why this should be the case so a research study has been commissioned to explore ME pupils and staff perceptions of Edge Hill in a number of local targeted schools. This early intervention by HEIs is vital if they are ever going to influence young people’s decision about entering HE:
What we are very conscious with Aimhigher is that many of the decisions that people make relevant to what happens to them are made much earlier than on and the attitudes they have about HE are formed very early on so already we are now experimenting with work in primary schools as well.

(Aimhigher Co-ordinator)

One interviewee pointed out that Edge Hill is aiming to improve its intake of ME students to 7.2% by 2006 – a realistic figure considering certain factors and one that is not usefully compared to the national figure of 17.7%. Several interviewees were keen to stress that admissions and retention should not be their only priorities and that any future widening participation policy would focus on improving employability for all students and particularly for those students who continue to face inequalities in the labour market. This was particularly resonant for another Senior Manager who outlined a new strategy being developed within one of the faculties (and to be extended to all faculties in the near future) specifically designed to improve employability for its students yet did admit that some staff as well as students were unclear about the concept of employability and how it can be effectively integrated into the curriculum. However, the point was raised that for some of the ME students, their employment opportunities were necessarily restricted by their local community.

In terms of improving things, it was interesting that several Senior Managers felt faculties should invest in ‘equality champions’ with specific responsibilities for pro-active engagement within each department. Through TTA funding, a Minority Recruitment Officer was based within the Faculty of Education for a year and despite one Senior Manager’s assurances that if the role was effective, then the post would continue, this has not unfortunately been the case. In his own words, the Minority Recruitment Officer, based within the Faculty of Education felt that not only was he responsible for ‘building awareness within communities towards ITT courses and getting them interested’ but also ‘in being a point of contact for any students who have any problems or issues’. He applied for the post because he ‘genuinely felt he could make a difference’ and whilst he stated that the facilities for teacher training were ‘outstanding’, his admitted that a lot of students had complained about the placements:

_I think placements is a strange one because placements can make or break you know a person whether they’d want to go into teaching full time - if they have a bad experience then it really disheartens them I’ve been talking to a few students who have found their placements quite racist_  

(Minority Recruitment Officer)

He argued that it had to be Edge Hill’s responsibility, not only to monitor students’ placement experiences, but to also ensure that students were informed of their rights and felt confident about Edge Hill’s support in this area. He argued that students had felt comfortable raising these issues with him but
the problem usually lies with students fearing that nothing will change if they complain so they persevere rather than raise their concerns:

At the end of the day students aren’t concerned about the processes involved they just want to know what’s going to be done about it

(Minority Recruitment Officer)

Students’ Needs and Expectations
Senior Managers were asked what they felt might be some of the main concerns of students studying at Edge Hill. Several of the Senior Managers interviewed felt they all had a clear understanding of the student profile and subsequently felt they also understood the needs of the majority of their students. Some of these needs were often based around family difficulties or financial pressures and students are often concerned about whether they will be able to pay off their debts after graduation. One Senior Manager was concerned that teacher trainees were growing increasingly anxious at the prospect of finding employment in the primary sector where there was now a shortage of jobs. All the staff interviewed agreed with the students’ views regarding the lack of social space and facilities available and stated that they did plan to address this problem in the near future. Three interviewees also expressed concern at the way the institution and specifically some tutors were perhaps prepared for the diverse type of students who chose to study here:

We probably need to be more radical about the first year we still expect students to come in with the same level of preparation and same expectations and I think we’re beginning to see quite clearly that that isn’t the case any longer…and that sometimes we just assess too much in the first year

(Senior Manager A)

I think it’s getting better but I wouldn’t say every member of staff fully understands the diversity they are going to encounter so we do need to do more in terms of staff development…

(Senior Manager C)

One Senior Manager concurred with some of the student concerns regarding tutor support in terms of academic feedback and poor communication between some departments. Another felt more confident most individuals within the Institution did recognise that the students which come to this institution are from quite diverse backgrounds and various communities and it is the majority, in this case, who will need their support – not the minority. However, they also added:

...on the other hand I find some really good examples sometimes of people who absolutely brilliantly understand students and do all sorts of interesting things but on the other hand I do occasionally find people who seem to have no understanding at all and just wish they could have the kind of students that they were and had
in the past and just think that this is just sort of selling ourselves down the river

(Senior Manager A)

It was clear that staff felt that engaging with these issues needed to be seen as everybody’s responsibility beyond those individuals directly involved with certain student groups. Staff felt that students were sufficiently aware of the support services available as materials were sent out to them before they arrived and during their three years at Edge Hill. In terms of the services provided by the Career’s Centre, they were confident that the students were aware of what was available (due to a recent independent survey) but:

…it’s about individual choice whether you choose to select the services that you want to use while you are here

(Senior Manager D)

This reflects the findings of the research although it is clear that sometimes students choose not to use a service because they have not been alerted to its relevance or importance for them. With regards to understanding institutional and faculty policy, most of the Senior Managers pointed out that all procedures relating to complaints and equal opportunities can be found in the college handbook others, in concurrence with what the students admitted, felt they probably never read most of the handbook.

As the issue of lack of facilities had been raised by several ME students, the Senior Managers were asked ‘whether they were genuinely concerned in addressing these students’ needs when there are no basic facilities like catering for them’? Many felt this was a valid point and explained that they were aware of these problems but if they were honest:

I think we sometimes hide behind the fact that we are a predominantly white community and predominantly white institution

(Senior Manager A)

One Senior Manager commented that feedback from ME students in the past had implied that they did not want to be treated differently from other students although it was clear from the research that they did not feel this in terms of acknowledging and addressing some of their specific needs. The Minority Recruitment Officer commented that:

…tutors at Edge Hill need to try and realise that once people from a certain background apply for courses like this it’s a life changing course for them where as we see it as another teacher training course for them it’s like a status symbol…

(Minority Recruitment Officer)
2. Student Perspectives

a). Questionnaire Results:

The response rate was extremely high with 355 questionnaires completed: 243 from the Faculty of Education and 112 from the Faculty of Health. Out of these 316 identified themselves as ‘White’ (for the purpose of this research those who identified themselves as Irish have not been categorised as a separate ethnic group) and 39 were from a Minority Ethnic group. In total 225 first years and 130 third years completed the survey. The design of the questionnaire was intended to generate a substantial amount of data in order to build up a picture of the type of student that chooses to come to Edge Hill in terms of their characteristics and background as well as how they make their choices and what their perceptions of higher education and in particular, one institution are in terms of first impressions, student support and equal opportunities.

i. Biographical Background:

In terms of gender the majority of the respondents (76%) were female which reflects the gender ratio for the cohort as a whole and the fact that health and education related occupations are traditionally more female-orientated. There was an even representation (with the exception of the 26-30 age range) of younger and mature undergraduates with a total of 229 students over 21. These students make up the majority in Secondary ITT and Health as a whole.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20 and under</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 to 25</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 30</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of breaking down the ethnic minority students into smaller ethnic groups it was felt, due to the small numbers involved, that no significant conclusions could be drawn from this except to highlight the fact that the majority of Asian or Asian British students were enrolled on the teacher training courses whilst the majority of Black or Black British students were enrolled on nursing courses.

Respondents were asked questions designed to explore which routes they had taken (e.g grade offer, Fastrack, qualifications and experience) to enter Higher Education. Participation rates may have improved over the years due to widening participation strategies but ME students still remain concentrated in the post-1992 institutions (Connor et al, 2004; DfES, 2003; Blasko, 2002; Coffield & Vignoles, 1997)). Concentration of ethnic groups in certain post-1992 universities cannot be wholly accounted for by factors such as location, admissions criteria and culture of institutions. There is also the issue of the selection procedures of pre-1992 universities which results in a form of indirect discrimination (Coffield & Vignoles, 1997). This is due to the fact that they rely more heavily on A level results which disadvantages ME students who are more likely to enter HE with GNVQs or BTEC or Access qualifications (particularly Black-Caribbean students) than other students (Bhattacharyya et al, 2003). This reflects the questionnaire’s findings (as well as for college as a
whole), which shows that the majority of ethnic minority students enter with non-traditional qualifications.

Out of all the ethnic groups surveyed, however, Indian and Pakistani students were the most likely to enter with traditional qualifications and tended to be younger than students from other minority groups. Age profiles should also be considered influential factors as Black groups, and Black Caribbean in particular, are more likely to enter HE as ‘mature’ students and in the case of those enrolled in the Faculty of Education all of them are mature students. This is also in many cases clearly linked to whether they have dependents or not with only 27% of the total white sample indicating ‘yes’ contrasted against 53% of the Black groups which indicated ‘yes’ (although again note small numbers). The sample was almost split between those who had been in full-time education (169) prior to entering Higher Education and those who had been in full-time employment (126) and this high figure is again a reflection of the number of mature students enrolled within the Faculties. None of the ‘Mixed’ ethnic group had been in full-time education whereas 80% of the ‘Asian or Asian British’ group had.

ii. How students make their choices…

Reasons for choosing to enter Higher Education…

A number of questions on the survey focused on students’ perceptions of the point of Higher Education and their choices in terms of choosing one particular institution. 80% (282) of the students stated they considered gaining a specific qualification to pursue a chosen career as a ‘very important’ reason for entering Higher Education with 203 participants indicating that this was in fact the single most important factor which had influenced them:

Fig 1.

The least relevant factors were having no other plans or the fact that all their friends were going to university or wanting to move away from home. There was no significant variation found in reasons for choosing to enter Higher Education by ethnicity although Indian and Pakistani students were the only minority ethnic group which cited parents and family expectations as an ‘important’ factor.
In response to the question ‘what did they think was the point of going to university of college’ 95% felt it was in order to improve your career prospects. This was followed by:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To learn more about a subject that interests you</td>
<td>288 81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To develop new and existing skills</td>
<td>288 81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To broaden your horizons</td>
<td>239 67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To prove something to yourself</td>
<td>224 63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interestingly 60% indicated that they did not think the point of going to university was to engage with others in an intellectual environment! The majority felt the point was not to have a good time socially; to gain respect in the wider community or to make your parents/family proud of you. Most of these can be attributed to the views of a large percentage of mature students within the survey (and the Faculty) who felt most of these were irrelevant to them – particularly the social side of college which they had little interest in. Again there was little variation in responses based on ethnicity except that the Indian and Pakistani students were the most likely to cite parental pride as important to them.

Reasons for choosing a particular institution...

Respondents were given a range of 16 options to choose from covering factors from location, facilities and entry routes to accommodation and work experience opportunities. 272 (76%) of students indicated that reputation was the determining factor in their decision to study at Edge Hill with 58% citing location - a finding which concurs with other recent studies (Anderson, 1999; Farr, 2001; McGrath & Millen, 2004). Other factors considered important included opportunity for professional work placement (50%); a safe and friendly atmosphere (43%) and the range of courses offered (42%) as well as suitability of access routes (41%). They were least influenced by the cost of living, the social scene, its research reputation or the fact that it was the only institution which offered them a place. Ethnic minority groups were equally likely to choose reputation and location as the single most important factors which influenced them.

Students were also given a list of options to indicate which sources had helped them find out about Edge Hill before making their decision.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prospectus</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Days</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCAS</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From a past student</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From school</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is interesting to note that a relatively high number of respondents heard about Edge Hill from past students and yet other more obvious forms of
publicity like newspaper guides, media and TV advertising and the college website registered the lowest percentages. Minority ethnic students expanded on this during interviews commenting that they thought Edge Hill could do more to promote itself in schools and colleges.

**iii. What students think of their choice…**

Participants were invited to choose 4 or 5 words which best summed up their impression of Edge Hill. The majority of all students including ME ones had positive comments to make regarding their impressions:

‘**fantastic, cool, great, supportive**’
(1st year Education student)

‘**hard work, friendly, quiet, small, safe**’
(3rd year Health student)

‘**excellent support, fantastic, daunting, good resources, rural environment**’
(3rd year ME Education student)

**friendly, professional, lively, challenging**’
(1st year Education student)

Fifty-five students expressed negative comments mainly concerned with ‘lack of tutor support and continuity’, ‘disorganisation of Faculty’ and the fact that the campus was ‘too quiet’. In terms of ethnicity, negative comments were restricted to a specific minority ethnic group (Black or Black British and note small numbers - 13). Students, particularly from the Faculty of Education were most likely to use the words ‘excellent’, ‘friendly’, ‘supportive’, ‘challenging’ and ‘professional’ as well as ‘disorganised’, ‘poor communication’ and ‘expensive’ to describe their overall impression of the College.

Recent studies (Bekhradnia & Aston, 2005) have cited the importance of student support as a integral part of successful widening participation policies so respondents were asked whether they had attended any induction events run either by the institution as a whole or by their Faculty. 51% of students claimed they had attended institutional events but only 43% stated they had attended Faculty-based ones. However, from the limited data it is not possible to tell whether this was due to a lack of organisation or publicity on the Faculty’s behalf or down to the individual student’s choice although the majority (65%) did indicate that they felt they had received sufficient support as a new student through these events. Students were also asked whether they perceived Edge Hill as an institution which promoted equal opportunities: 272 respondents felt it did with 71 claiming ‘they had never thought about it’. In response to the question ‘**have you experienced any form of discrimination, harassment or offensive behaviour whilst at Edge Hill**,’ 18 students claimed they had and 11 from that group felt they had not been provided appropriate support as a result. 15 of the 18 students were White and the others were minority ethnic students. 2 out of those 3 felt they had not been provided with appropriate support. However, it should be noted that several of the ME
students did comment on the support they had received on a range of issues from the Minority Recruitment Officer based in the Faculty.

Finally respondents were asked what changes or improvements they would like to see made with the majority citing ‘better organisation and administration’; ‘better communication particularly between departments’; ‘better car parking facilities’; ‘better catering’; ‘better nightlife’ and ‘better library resources’. Minority ethnic students were particularly concerned with improving ‘timetabling’; ‘organisation with placements and mentors’; ‘more information about assignments and assessments’ as well as ‘more events for ethnic minorities and non-drinkers’; ‘better catering for Muslims’ and ‘more personal one-to-one tutor support outside lectures’.

Preparedness for Employment

Students were asked if they were considering being involved or were involved with any extra-curricular activities as this has been shown to further develop an individual’s employability (Blasko, 2002). Only 21% indicated that they were although students often cited ‘heavy workload’ and ‘lack of suitable activities available’ as reasons. Students enrolled in the Faculty of Health were asked an additional question as to whether they had received any information from the Student Careers Centre since they had been here (103 out of a possible 112 said ‘no’). 108 also claimed not to have attended any events organised by the Careers Centre although this again may have been a result of student choice.

The final question focused on what the participants hoped to do when they completed their course with 82% hoping to find a job immediately. This is perhaps unsurprising considering the vocational nature of their courses as well, as some commented, due to financial pressures they may face.

b). STUDENT INTERVIEWS

A total of 22 students were interviewed: 9 minority ethnic and 13 White students. All the minority ethnic students were interviewed individually with interviews with White students conducted in focus groups. Both first-year and third-year students were asked a series of semi-structured questions designed to encourage them to think reflectively and critically about their experiences of Higher Education.

First-year students were asked a series of questions focusing on their motivation for entering Higher Education, their reasons for choosing Edge Hill, and their experiences to date. Third-year students were asked to respond to questions focusing on their preparedness for employment and their reflections on the overall experience. All students were asked to discuss issues revolving around the cultural and academic experience, student support, facilities, plans for the future, their understanding of the concept ‘employability’ and the skills they had gained and finally whether they felt they had made the right decision to study here. They were also asked to describe the student population as whole as well as their own perception of their ethnicity or student identity and whether they felt Edge Hill was an institution which promoted equal opportunities and valued diversity.
Why did you enter Higher Education

Most participants agreed that they had chosen to enter Higher Education specifically because they wanted to become a teacher and for some of the mature students this evolved from recent experience in a school:

I was in assisting in a school and I was watching the teachers and they were doing a really good job but then some of the children started to ask me questions instead and I thought I can do this and get paid more for it like a ‘real’ teacher

(First-year mature student)

For some of the younger students they also wanted to come to university to gain more independence and to broaden their experiences. Clearly all the students interviewed had different educational backgrounds with the younger ones generally following the traditional route of A levels then college with the older students changing career direction:

I had just done 19 years in a Post Office and although did have some ‘old’ qualifications I had to come through an access route

(First-year mature student)

I was in catering for over ten years and then I had a break to have children so I got quite involved with my children’s school and through voluntary work and thought I would like to get into teaching

(Third-year ME student)

From some of the responses it was clear their negative experiences at school had determined their future course:

I hated school with a passion and left with basic English and whatever and then got pregnant and then eventually got an Adult Teaching Certificate but ended up studying for GCSE Maths with my 15 year old son!

(First-year mature student)

School was terrible anyway and the subjects I wasn’t good at the teacher wasn’t there to help you so I didn’t bother – couldn’t wait to leave

(Third-year ME student)

One minority ethnic student was asked why she had opted for a YTS course at school instead of thinking of university:

I didn’t think I was clever enough – it’s not like today with the real push on education and the chances to go further in life’

(Third- year mature ME student)

Most agreed that they had made the choice to go to university themselves although the support of their parents and families had been a key issue. For
one mature student she also ‘wanted to be able to show my son that university is a good place to go to and there’s nothing to be scared of’. For another, mature, minority ethnic student it was the experience he had with his children’s own schooling:

\[I \text{ think the main influence was the fact that I have 2 children of my own who had very different problems in the educational system – one who didn’t want to really engage too much because her friends weren’t educated orientated and the other who was statemented with Asperger’s}\]

(Third-year mature ME student)

**Why did you choose Edge Hill**

The majority of participants were aware of Edge Hill’s reputation either from teachers in schools, from past students or from their own experiences:

\[\text{The school I was working in we had people from another university as well as Edge Hill and you could really see the difference and everyone had already said I should go to Edge Hill so it was a reputation thing as well}\]

(First-year mature student)

\[\text{I knew of the reputation and I’ve got some friends who have done degrees here}\]

(Third-year ME student)

and several students, particularly ME ones, felt Edge Hill could do more to promote itself within schools and the local community:

\[\text{I really do think they should get current students to go into colleges and say about the benefits of becoming a teacher and going into schools as well and speaking to the children…and encourage more from multi-ethnic faiths to come}\]

(1\textsuperscript{st} year ME student)

Location was an important factor for all of them but particularly for the mature students who had family commitments. It was also important for minority ethnic students to remain close to their families and communities and particularly for those female students whose parents had preferred them not to live on campus. However, some pointed out that because transport links to the College from certain areas were poor this might deter some potential students from applying.

Some ME students commented that although they had recently noticed more ethnic minority students at Edge Hill most of them seemed to be commuting rather than living on campus. They could not conclude as to whether this was due to cultural attitudes and family influence although they agreed that these can often play a contributory factor to the participation of ME women in HE.
Another overriding factor appears to be the type of course which Edge Hill offers and many confessed this was more important to them than anything else:

*I knew that if I did want to do the maths degree in Liverpool and then do a PGCE that would be 4 years but this course is 3 years and at my age one year is huge*

(First-year mature ME student)

Attendance at Open Days also had a positive impact on several students as they immediately liked the ‘feel’ of the college:

*It just seemed to have a nice atmosphere when I came round and everybody seemed really friendly*

(First-year student)

*Yeah it was good – I just sort of felt like I belonged here*

(Third-year ME student)

although one ME student who was involved with the campus tours felt the lack of ‘visible’ ME students may adversely affect some prospective students’ decision to study here:

*I wish I’d had someone like me to show me round…seem to be more this year but seem to be commuting – perhaps they think they can’t fit into this environment but they should have some kind of talk to the parents telling them that it is a good experience*

(Third-year ME student)

This lack of visibility was also apparent in the way the institution promotes itself to prospective students:

*I watched the promotional video and was disappointed at the lack of ME students in it - in fact some of my friends back home did not apply to Edge Hill after seeing the video and thinking this place wouldn’t be right for them*

(First-year ME student)

*I got the video and thought this isn’t good –there’s not enough minority ethnic students on…*

(First-year ME student)

Two ME students commented that although they had been initially attracted to the three-year course it was very intensive and some people had left halfway through:

*Quite a few left in the first year after placement…it just feels as if there’s too much pressure on…you’ve got to be determined to carry on*

(Third-year ME student)
It’s literally very very crammed - a lot of people left... in my first year I thought I would keep doing it and then in my second year I was ready to leave

(Third-year ME student)

This was a view shared by several of the White students as well who felt that they were not as prepared as they could have been for the amount of work involved.

The Learning Experience

For the younger students and particularly the ME students the learning experience had, on the whole, been a positive one:

It’s been really good and you get a lot of support from the tutors

(Third-year ME student)

I would say that is was very successful so far – the course content has lived up to the standards of what I anticipated

(Third-year student)

However, some of the older students voiced concerns regarding tutor absence and poor communication between some of their subject departments and the Faculty of Education. They also commented that this was a view shared by the younger students as well but they were perhaps less ‘vocal’ than the older ones. For one mature ME student the attitude of some of the younger students had concerned her:

Their attitude to life is quite immature and some of them are very lazy or distract others which I wouldn’t expect from future teachers – I would say I don’t want you to teach my children when you are qualified! I was surprised at the low standard of the students

(First-year mature ME student)

These perceptions were shared by a number of mature students with some commenting that tutors did not always seem to sufficiently differentiate their teaching:

I have sometimes felt that attitudes of the tutors are geared towards the younger students and sometimes the case is because you are older you can just get on with it

(First-year student)

The content itself is fine it’s sometimes with the delivery and the way it’s put across... but I don’t think there’s any benefit in splitting the mature from the straight from school students

(First-year mature student)
Several students suggested the need for more support from tutors on an individual basis although they acknowledged that most of the tutors always seemed busy. They were also almost unanimous in highlighting the need for smaller teaching groups with a higher lecturer to student ratio. Some also felt that they had could have received greater support with assignment and dissertation writing:

*We did have an academic writing lecture but the tutor was off in October when we were supposed to be doing it so we didn’t have it until late February and we’d had quite a lot of assignments by then*

(First-year student)

However, other mature students already felt confident with some aspects of their course like presentations and subject knowledge as this had been covered as part of their Access course or in previous degrees although they did suggest that more ‘academic’ events could be on offer during Fresher’s Week. Although several students commented on the support of the library and its staff concerns were also raised about the waiting lists for specific sessions which participants found frustrating.

Whilst discussing the question of work experience and placements in schools a number of issues were raised by the ME students. Although most of them felt they had gained a great deal from their placements and had enjoyed working with the pupils some felt they would have benefited from working in at least one multi-cultural school. Two third-year students explained that whilst they had enjoyed their placements this had not been everyone’s experience:

*All the schools I’ve been to have been 98% white which I did find a bit strange as I’m the only Asian in the whole school but it’s not an issue coz kids don’t see it as an issue but I have got friends who have found a lot of difficulties going to a white school from teachers and everything*

(Third-year ME student)

*I’ve been lucky I’m Asian and I’ve been put into schools with a majority of white children and in Catholic schools and I was very comfortable but I have had friends who didn’t and weren’t welcomed and felt isolated…one friend left because of this*

(Third-year ME student)

*What I found interesting and don’t know if by default but I have not been placed in any mixed, ethnic schools…all the children were blonde and blue-eyed and when they saw me I think they were a bit taken aback*

(Third-year ME student)

One ME student commented that she had only worked in a multi-racial school for her dissertation research and she had found her last placement particularly difficult:
I had a lot of children asking me where I was from and things like that but I'm not sure if that was why they were so badly behaved or not...

(Third-year ME student)

This may raise concerns not just about the way institutions welcome and support ME students but also the role they can play in supporting their students within the community and ensuring that, wherever possible, students are treated equally during work experience. Three of the minority ethnic trainee teachers interviewed had been asked to teach specific lessons on different cultures and religions during their placements because the teachers did not feel confident enough.

I did it and the children were really fascinated and enjoyed it but if you don’t do things like that then they don’t know and they grow up like that and end up at university!

(Third-year ME student)

One ME student was asked to explain the concepts of Islam to her fellow teacher trainees during a college lecture:

I just felt awkward – I don’t like to be singled out and I know they say in maths that ethnic minorities are usually gifted well I’m not one of them and she looks at me and I think ‘no’!

(Third-year ME student)

Minority ethnic students also emphasised the need for all students, regardless of ethnicity, to experience teaching pupils from different cultures and they felt there was at times a lack of focus in adequately equipping and preparing teachers in this area – a concern shared by the Teacher Training Agency (DfES, 2003:63). They also felt if this became a more integral part of their curriculum this would in turn help ‘demystify’ their culture to others:

Do you know people on my course want to be teachers and go into schools and teach them different views and no one has a solid background in it so when they go into schools they might shy away from talking about Islam which will lead to those children not knowing anything later on in life

(Third-year ME student)

I went to a COE school so we learnt about the Christian religion and all the others…but the ones round here I’m not sure they do about Islam at all or if they do very little

(Third-year ME student)

**The Cultural Experience**

Several of the white and minority ethnic students commented on the mix of students from different backgrounds albeit in geographical and ‘class’ terms rather than by ethnicity. Whilst many of the students, regardless of ethnicity,
pointed out that Edge Hill could be at times too quiet and isolating for the female Asian students, in particular, the mono-cultural aspect of the College was a concern. All ME students were frustrated by the lack of facilities aimed at them:

They don’t offer any Halal foods...so your only option is vegetarian which means chips...they now have some Halal ready meals in the shop but they are really expensive – they’ve got the same thing and the one that isn’t is 99p and the one that is is £2.65!

(Third-year ME student)

I don’t think Edge Hill has any extra activities for multi-cultural students...and in the beginning when everyone was going on pub crawls I did feel a bit left out...I do think more people would come here if there were other things for ME people

(Third-year ME student)

I think I would have liked more events or a society where you can meet other ethnic minorities...we don’t find bar areas suitable as we don’t drink alcohol so I don’t feel we’ve had that kind of support

(Third-year ME student)

One student admitted she knew there was only a small ME population at Edge Hill which did not bother her but it was only after she arrived that she realised just how small whilst another felt the culture ‘was geared more towards English people’. Other ME students complained that the Student Union did not consider their needs and that in the first year the Student Rep acted as though because they did not drink that meant they did not want to go out:

she said “don’t worry we’ll have a video night in for YOU next week” and ever since then they haven’t actually tried...like for the clubs and the nights out they do provide transport but not if you want to go out for the day somewhere

(Third-year ME student)

Although some students said they would like their own space or venue, another felt uncomfortable at the idea of ‘segregating’ students. She argued that other White students had also felt isolated although she admitted that it would be good in some respects like ‘when you are fasting and you can fast together and all that so I don’t feel the SU were doing enough to get people together’. One student admitted that she had felt scared when she had first arrived:

I thought I don’t know how I will cope coz obviously didn’t see any Asians but as the years go by there are more and you don’t feel isolated coz you’re Asian – I mean on the course no-one isolates you coz you are Asian

(Third-year ME student)
although the majority of ME students agreed that how you coped or reacted to a predominantly ‘White’ college would depend on the individual:

It depends what kind of background you come from and if they care or not – I’m not bothered but can see if you are it might affect you

(Third-year student)

Other students felt isolated because of their age rather than their culture or background:

My values and attitude to life are different – quite often I just sit in the corner doing my own thing whilst the others are doing lots of things together and sometimes I feel isolated although haven’t focused on this coz I don’t have time to waste socialising

(First-year mature ME student)

However on the whole the older students seemed to accept that they had a more work-focused lifestyle than some of the younger students because they had ‘other lives’. One male mature student didn’t even label himself as a ‘student’ because he was only there doing a course. Another student did suggest having a mature students’ club as the student union: ‘is alright for kids but once you hit 40 you want to meet people with the same worries as you’. For a mature, ME student family commitments had proved the most problematic although he did feel that the Faculty had been understanding of the situation:

The fact that I did have family commitments was a major issue - in fact I was forced to delay the course due to problems my son had with GCSEs at the time

(Third-year mature ME student)

Although one student said she didn’t feel old when she came on an Open Day and ‘only one person has made me feel old since I came here and I sorted her out!’ it is clear there may be some issues that need to be addressed in terms of supporting and acknowledging their different needs as they form one of the main cohorts of students within the Faculty.

Most students did not know how to reply to the question asking them to describe their own ethnicity or identity and this included some of the ME students as well. They mainly listed what they felt were the qualities of a ‘good’ student e.g ‘hard-working’; ‘focused’; ‘committed’. However, some ME students were clear about how they wanted to be perceived within the student community:

I am British but I can’t forget my parents are Pakistani…it’s part of me and my background so I do want to be treated as an equal
with everyone else but I want them to see my culture and I want them to enjoy it as well

(Third-year ME student)

I’m a British Asian but I’m an Indian but I don’t like to be grouped as an Asian as it has wider erm… well it’s broad you could be anything

(Third-year ME student)

All the students described the student population as a good mix of different people from diverse backgrounds: ‘a hotch-potch of people’. Very few commented on the lack of minority ethnic students until prompted including one ME student who felt ‘was just like anywhere really’ and another who when asked whether she had noticed that it was a mainly white campus commented ‘well I do but I wouldn’t say that coz we live in England anyway’. More students mentioned the high number of disabled students they had noticed around the campus.

Equal Opportunities

None of the students interviewed had experienced any harassment or discrimination during their study although one of the ME students interviewed felt she had been treated differently at the initial interview:

I thought they were rather harsh compared with when you see other people who don’t quite make the mark yet they are still accepted and given no trouble…it just made me think oh god there’s no point and I’m not one to think of racist things that’s the last thing on my mind because of how positive I am but I don’t know

(Third-year ME student)

Another also expressed surprise at the questions she had been asked during her interview:

One thing I found not offensive, but no, not shocking but different was when I had my interview…one of the questions was on my appearance and if you were at a school and a boy becomes racist to you about what you wear what are you going to do…and I thought is this a question directed because of the way I was dressed or would that have been asked anyway

(First-year ME student)

Coffield & Vignoles (1997) argue that ‘since recruitment of staff and students is predominantly decided at the departmental level, so incentives, training and policies should be targeted at this level’ (1997: iv). The Institution has highlighted the need to improve the ration of ME acceptances from offers and it may be that some ME students reject places on the basis of a negative interview experience and that this may be an issue across the Institution as a whole.
Students rarely experienced one-to-one conflict with tutors as if there was a problem or an issue that needed addressing this was generally done on a group level. Similarly, although some mature students felt the younger ones had been disruptive or disrespectful this was more of a general feeling shared by most of the mature students rather than a one-to-one clash:

*Not had conflict with tutors but students – yes, sometimes I think with some how long are they going to take to grow up a bit*

(First-year mature ME student)

One ME student revealed that at the beginning *‘there were people – not ignorant – just don’t know about our culture’* and another explained that *‘with Ramadan I do get the same questions so I think from their perspective maybe they’ve not met an Indian or Muslim person before’*. Although all the White students agreed that Edge Hill was an institution which respected and valued diversity, a few ME students disagreed:

*Personally I don’t think so coz you don’t see nothing related to anything about ethnic minorities or cultures…there’s no Halal food and the cafes don’t cater for us*

(Third-year ME student)

*Think in terms of everything really – there was one student I met he was disabled…and he was trying to find accommodation…and he was given a room and then they changed their minds coz it wasn’t ready…but if they want to make people come and to show they are diverse then they should have it ready*

(Third-year ME student)

Most students had no idea about the equal opportunities policy of the College and assumed it was somewhere in the Student Handbook or just like anywhere else. However one ME student felt confident that if she did have any specific needs tutors would try to support and accommodate you. Most students agreed that they would feel comfortable reporting any serious incidents either for themselves or on behalf of others although they were unclear as what the correct channels of support were. This was of particular concern to one ME student who felt it was vital all students were aware of and had access to support mechanisms in the first year when people are most likely to leave if they are having problems.

*I was thinking of quitting in the first year coz I felt so isolated but now I feel like it’s been brilliant and I’m glad I’ve stayed coz I’ve made some good friends but that’s partly my determination to see it through!*

(Third-year ME student)

**Preparedness for Employment**

Increasing emphasis has been placed on the role education should play in developing a person’s employability and it is vital that this notion of employability encompasses the educational experience as well as the end
qualification. In response to the question which skills do you feel you have gained students cited a range of different ones evolving from the course itself ‘good subject knowledge; ‘exploring things more critically; 'good classroom management' to ones gained via the overall university experience: ‘living on your own; ‘dealing with different people; 'greater confidence and self-esteem'. This was particularly true for one ME student:

I had a violent relationship with my husband and that stripped my self-confidence and dignity and assertiveness and while I'm on this course I am trying to rebuild those things and that is my main issue

(First-year ME student)

Students were also asked to describe which skills they thought an employer might expect from a graduate as opposed to a non-graduate:

Be professional and be confident and be comfortable with yourself and others

(Third-year ME student)

The obvious teaching skills but also my mentor said that they are not looking for only people who have just got a qualification from Edge Hill we are looking for someone with something extra to offer like good IT skills

(Third-year student)

Probably communication skills and team-work coz obviously you will be working with people all the way through your course and like presentation skills

(First-year student)

Some of the respondents only cited specific occupation-related skills e.g classroom management, planning and assessment and although most of the respondents had a clear notion of what skills they had gained some were less certain how these might translate into the workplace. Several of the students interviewed were unfamiliar with the term 'employability' whilst some tentatively suggested it was linked to how 'employable' you were. Unsurprisingly it was the mature students who having already been in employment, tended to have a clearer understanding:

Employability is how easy it would be for a prospective employer to put you into the position they’ve got so the more overall skills you have and the more you can offer them the more chance you have of getting the job

(Third-year mature student)

It is vital, however, that HEIs communicate to all students the importance and relevance of developing a wider skill base as well as actively encouraging them to critically evaluate the progress of their skill development. Students were also asked whether they were involved in any extra-curricular activities
as evidence has shown that participation in extra-curricular activities is often related to successful employment outcomes although not necessarily for mature students (Blasko, 2002). Very few students were and there was a sense that many considered the work experience undertaken as part of their own course sufficient.

In terms of awareness of the Careers Centre and the services it provides responses were varied. First year students felt they were unlikely to use it until towards the end of the course although research shows that early employment searches do ‘appear to be associated with employment success’ (Blasko, 2002:7). One third-year ME student said she ‘had no idea where to get career advice from’ although she admitted she had just assumed she would ‘get a job as a teacher so wasn’t worried’ whilst others commented on the number of ‘high quality seminars they had provided for students’ although a few did complain about the difficulty of getting appointments in advance. Another third-year ME student commented that the student information centre had been very helpful but she was unaware of the graduate employment literature they have available specifically aimed at minority ethnic students.

Over three-quarters of the students interviewed agreed that they would approach their subject tutor before the Careers Centre for career advice. Although tutors based in the Faculty of Education will clearly have some career’s advice knowledge, they may perhaps lack the specialist knowledge of the Career Advisors. This again, also points to the issue of raising students’ awareness of the relevance to them of particular student services.

**The Right Choice**

All the first years interviewed felt they had so far made the right decision to study here except one ME student:

> If I was ten years younger yes I would have gone for the proper maths degree and then the PGCE…I just think people’s perception of a certificate with a subject rather than a proper degree expect second rate teachers

(First-year mature ME student)

Generally, third year students seemed relieved to have made it through such an intensive course intact and reflected, with some qualms, that they thought they had made the right choice:

> I would definitely come back here coz I have really enjoyed it – there have been some downsides but like I say the positives outweigh the negatives

(Third-year student)

> Part of me does wish I’d chosen somewhere more multi-cultural and busy like Manchester or Liverpool but I’ve had good experiences here as well so my tutors have been really good and
supportive...I would come here again although part of me thinks I wouldn't!
(Third-year ME student)

4. **Key Institutional Findings**

1. *Students cited location, reputation and course as the main reasons for choosing the institution*

The research findings show that for the majority of students, regardless of ethnicity their experience of Higher Education has overall been a positive one. It is clear that students take into consideration a range of complex factors when it comes to choosing an institution although in this case white students were just as likely to cite location as ethnic minorities contrary to other research findings (Connor et al, 2003). This is partly due to the high number of local students, which, the college attracts generally, as well as other factors which all students face such as the cost of living and accessing public transport.

2. *Students were also motivated in their choice by the prospect of enhancing their employment outcomes*

3. *Need to improve ‘visibility’ of their Career Centres*

4. *Understanding of the concept of employability is an issue*

5. *Students greatly valued the experience of placements and the opportunity to work in their local community*

This concurs with Senior Managers’ views regarding the need for HEIs to develop more early intervention strategies with schools in order to genuinely influence young people’s future decisions about HE. The Strategy Unit’s report (2003) outlines new incentives for schools to address gaps between ethnic groups and to raise expectations of achievement in order to widen access for all students into HE. As attainment and aspiration are seen as main factors influencing the HE participation of ME students (Connor et al, 2004) more emphasis has been placed recently on the importance of role-models for pupils. Currently, although a priority for the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) to improve the situation, only 7% of trainee teachers are from ethnic minorities (Bhattacharyya et al, 2003).

6. *Need to improve presence of Edge Hill within the wider community*

Respondents in this research emphasised the need for Edge Hill in particular to increase its visibility in the community with more visits to schools and colleges. One mature ME student interviewed stressed the need to start addressing the needs of particular minority ethnic pupils as early as possible:

‘If the purpose of the study is to recruit more inputs from the ethnic minorities I suppose partly the issue is that a lot of the problems stem
from the fact that people particularly from the West Indian community – my view is that they tend not to be switched onto education as an activity – regardless of what is said about the employment prospects…I think there are significant groups who feel that even if they did have a relevant piece of paper they wouldn’t be offered a job anyway so they choose not to bother getting a piece of paper…at Edge Hill you only see the end of the chain – so you’d have to go a lot further back down the chain in order to have any influence whatsoever’

(Third-year, mature ME student)

7. ME students highlighted certain areas that they felt needed addressing, in particular - provision of social activities, student representation, catering facilities and professional placements in multi-ethnic schools.

These findings have highlighted the need for not only improving cultural aspects of the institution but also certain curricular-based aspects specifically a greater emphasis on preparing teachers from all ethnic groups to teach in multi-faith schools. There is perhaps also a concern regarding the way ME students are interviewed and although clearly this is only based on the experiences of two students there is perhaps a need for more departmental training across the institution in this area.

8. Mature students felt provision was at times designed too much in favour of younger students

The findings reveal that mature students have more concerns regarding their learning experience in terms of tutor support and delivery than the younger ones and sometimes felt tutors perceived them as being more independent and in less need of support than some of the younger students. It is important that this group of students’ needs are acknowledged particularly for certain ethnic minority groups e.g. Black groups who statistically are more likely to enter Higher Education as mature students (Connor et al, 2004): in the case of this sample, all Black and Black British students were over 30.

9. Senior Managers were committed to, and knowledgeable about, WP and employability policies but were concerned at the level of commitment across the institution

10. Senior Managers acknowledged that they often assumed rather than genuinely evaluated students’ level of awareness of equal opportunities policy and the channels of support open to them
5. **Institutional Recommendations**

**Student Issues**
- Need for an Asian Student Rep – both institutionally and Faculty-based
- Catering facilities to be provided to cater for ME students’ needs
- Poor transport links may deter ME students who would choose to live at home

**Faculty Issues**
- More focus on multi-cultural issues at curriculum-level
- Greater evaluation and monitoring of placements
- Improved tutor support for all students e.g. academic writing
- Embed concept of employability and skill development within modules
- Increase staff development re: support for diverse range of students

**Institutional Issues**
- Continued need for Black and Minority Recruitment Officer – positive role-model
- Embed concept of diversity and WP across whole institution
- More out-reach work in schools and the community
- Better marketing and promotion e.g. video, campus tours
- increased visibility/presence of Student Information Centre/Career’s Centre
- Staff interview training at departmental level
- The need to constantly monitor and evaluate practice

However, in conclusion, Minority Ethnic students enrolled within the Faculty of Education at Edge Hill perform as well as their White counterparts and are just as likely to have found employment 6 months after graduating, although, this is in some respects, clearly related to the vocational nature of the qualification. Therefore, it is crucial, that research should not just be concerned with highlighting problems or ‘failures’ but, as this research indicates, with the success stories as well (Connor et al, 2003).
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1. Institutional Profile

a) Key Features of the Institution

i) Main Characteristics
Leeds Metropolitan University is a modern university (designated in 1992), though its origins can be traced back to 1824 when the Leeds Mechanics Institute was founded. It has an inner city Civic Quarter Campus, the Headingley Campus and Hornbeam Park, Harrogate. In 2003/04, the total student population was over 41,000, including those studying at sub-degree and FE level, and around 2,500 staff. Approximately 60% of students study part-time at the university and around 15,500 students are aged 21 or above.¹

ii) Mission/Objectives/Policies
Leeds Met is striving to be a world-class regional university with world-wide horizons, using all its talents to the full. The university’s key strategic aims are Student Experience, Learning, Student Recruitment & Widening Participation, Learning Environment, International, Citizenship, Community & Partnership, Regional, Research, Staffing and Sustainability.²

iii) Local/Regional Context³
Leeds is one of the most popular student cities in the UK with over 50,000 students. 7.5% of the population of Leeds is constituted of minority ethnic (ME) groups, compared to 10% in West Yorkshire and 8.5% in England. A large percentage of Leeds’ total ME population is made up of people of Pakistani and Indian origin (24% and 23% respectively), with a much smaller proportion of people of Black-Other and Bangladeshi Origin (2% and 4% respectively). Overall, 63% of Leeds’ total ME population are from Asian/Asian British groups, 20% are from Black/Black British groups, 12% are from Mixed groups and 5% are from other ethnic groups. People from Black–Other, Asian Bangladeshi and Mixed ethnic groups have the highest rates of unemployment in Leeds (10.5%, 12% and 7.5% respectively), whereas those from Asian Indian, White and Chinese groups have relatively low unemployment levels (3%, 3.1% and 3.4% respectively).

The ethnic groups with the highest qualification levels in Leeds are Other Ethnic, Black African, Chinese and Other Asian groups. 54.7% of people from Other Ethnic groups have a Level 4/5 qualification, as do 47.4% of people from Black African groups, 39.8% of people from Chinese groups and 36.5% of people from Other Asian groups. The ethnic groups with the lowest qualification levels in Leeds are Asian Bangladeshi and Asian Pakistani groups, both of which have the highest percentage of people with no qualification at all.

¹ Data sources: http://www.lmu.ac.uk/about/ataglance/student_profile.htm and http://www.lmu.ac.uk/about/ataglance/staff_profile.htm
² For further information see: http://www.lmu.ac.uk/about/ataglance/mission_aims.htm
³ Data Source: 2001 Census [National Report for England and Wales] based on those aged between 16-75 years unless otherwise stated
iv) Student Intake
Leeds Met has a high percentage of students from ME (minority ethnic) backgrounds, with 12.84% of the university’s Higher Education enrolments from ME backgrounds, compared to 7.49% of the population of Leeds. The university also has a relatively strong non-traditional entry with 39.96% of students studying part-time and 39.02% of students aged over 25. 23.41% of students are studying at sub degree level and a further 29.13% are studying at FE level.

b) Student statistics

i) Ethnicity Profile
Around 13% of students at Leeds Met are from ME groups (Asian/Asian British 7.93%, Black/Black British 2.64%, Chinese or other ethnic group 1.01%, Mixed 1.26%, not known 4.63% and White 82.53%). There is wide variation among Faculties, for example, whereas 29% of students in Innovation North – Faculty of Information and Technology (INN) are from ME groups, just 7% of students in the Carnegie Faculty of Sport and Education (CSE) are.

The profile of Asian/Asian British students at the university tends to be quite 'traditional' with most students in this group studying full-time (76.36%), being under 21 (62.88%), male (55.45% - the only ethnic group to have more male students than female) and entering with GCE A-level/A-level equivalent qualifications as their highest qualification (47.54%). The profile of Black/Black British students is much more diverse, however, with just over half of the students in this group studying part-time (50.35%), only 30.25% being under 21 and just 27.40% entering with GCE A-level/A-level equivalent qualifications as their highest qualification.

ii) Entry Statistics
In 2002/03, there were 25,117 applicants to the university and 5,057 acceptances. In comparison to the Leeds population, a large percentage of people from Asian/Asian British backgrounds applied to and were accepted by Leeds Met: 11.98% of all applicants and 11.50% of all accepted applicants to Degree and HND courses at Leeds Met were from Asian/Asian British backgrounds although these groups make up just 4.21% of the Leeds population.

Overall, Other Ethnic and Mixed Ethnic groups had the highest percentage of accepted applicants to degree courses, with 21.53% and 21.42% of...
applicants from these groups being accepted. Black/Black British groups (8.75%) had by far the smallest number of acceptances.

Students from Asian/Asian British (19.37%) and Chinese (18.18%) backgrounds were most likely to have been accepted via clearing in 2003. White and Ethnic Other groups had the lowest numbers of accepted applicants via clearing with 11.19% and 5.26% respectively.

iii) Qualified Output and Destinations Data

At Leeds Met, students from ME backgrounds are less likely to receive First Class and Upper Second Class honours in their first degrees than white students. People from Black/Black British and Asian/Asian British backgrounds receive a higher number of lower degree classifications with 55.55% and 54.20% respectively achieving Lower Second Class and Third Class honours compared to 40.77% of people from white backgrounds. Within Asian/Asian British groups, 2.10% of people from Pakistani backgrounds achieve First Class honours compared to 7.38% of Indian students.\textsuperscript{11}

At the time of the First Destination Survey, graduates from Black/Black British backgrounds had the highest employment rates with 62.67% in full-time and 10.67% in part-time work. Only 8% of Black/Black British graduates were unemployed and looking for employment. Graduates from Asian/Asian British backgrounds had lower employment rates with 11.18% still unemployed and looking.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{11} Data Source: HESA return for 200203 (using the HESA standard registration population)
\textsuperscript{12} Data Source: DLHE returns for 200203
2. Methodology

a) Methods
The research used both qualitative and quantitative methods, as laid out below.

i) Quantitative methods:

Statistical analysis on ethnicity
Data were provided by the Registrar and Secretary’s Office at Leeds Met, including statistics published by HESA, UCAS and the 2001 Census.

Institutional policy and practice analysis
Current institutional policies and strategies and the practices arising from these policies have been analysed in relation to Widening Participation, Employability, Retention and Equality and Diversity. These include:

- The Corporate Plan 2004-08
- The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2002-05
- The Widening Participation Strategy 2005-08

Student survey
A student survey was sent out to Level 3 students in the School of Education and Professional Training, the School of Childhood and Community, the School of Leisure and Sport Management, the School of Sport, Exercise and Physical Education (all in the Carnegie Faculty of Sport and Education), the School of Technology and the School of Computing (both in Innovation North, Faculty of Information and Technology). Both web-based and paper-based questionnaires were sent.

Students were asked a range of questions about HE and their experiences whilst at Leeds Met. The following areas were covered:

- Entering Higher Education
- Reasons for choosing Leeds Met
- Experiences at Leeds Met
- Equal Opportunities at Leeds Met

ii) Qualitative methods:

Senior management interviews
Interviews with 7 senior managers from across the university included Deans and Associate Deans of various Faculties as well as managers from the Met Office, which comprises the administrative centre of the university. Interviewees were asked questions covering their perception of HE, Leeds Met and their Faculty/Department, widening participation, ME students and employability.
Staff interviews
Interviews with 6 academic staff from Innovation North and the Carnegie Faculty and with 3 support staff were carried out. Interviewees were asked questions covering perceptions of Leeds Met, student experiences, widening participation and equal opportunities and employability.

Student interviews
Interviews with 10 students from Innovation North and the Carnegie Faculty were carried out. The interviewees came from both majority and ME backgrounds and all were Level 3, UK domiciled undergraduates. The questions asked covered their academic background and experiences, family background, arrival points into HE, perceptions, expectations and aspirations (personal, of HE and of employment and employability).

Where possible all interviews were digitally recorded. Consent forms were signed by interviewees to confirm their willingness to take part in the interview and their understanding of the project. When recording could not take place (either due to the interviewee’s objection or excessive noise in the interview environment) extensive notes were taken by the interviewer including quotes and were later ‘transcribed’. Questions were asked in a semi-structured format. All interviewees were assigned a code in order to preserve confidentiality.

Please note: as the research was not based upon randomly selected representative samples, the ability to generalise from the findings may be limited. The sample is not representative of all Level 3 students in the Innovation North and Carnegie Faculties, let alone all students at Leeds Met.

The primary research data presented in this report therefore presents a snapshot from particular groups of students and particular staff at a point in time. Given that the policy and practice of Leeds Met is evolving, and that the student experience develops and changes over time, the findings should be interpreted with caution. At best, the research may offer insights into questions such as how ethnicity impacts on the student experience. It has not been possible to explore such issues in great depth.

b) Target groups
The target groups were initially identified through ethnicity data from the different Faculties in 2002/03. However, a new Faculty structure was introduced at Leeds Met in 2004, so the original justification for the target groups is not fully consistent with the new data. The information given below draws upon data from both 2002/03 and 2003/04.13

In 2002/03, data indicated that Faculties had very distinct student ethnicity profiles. For example, 28% of students in the Faculty of Information & Engineering Systems (IES) were from ME backgrounds compared to 14% of the total university student population and 7% of students in the Faculty of Cultural and Education Studies (CES) and the Centre for International

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13 Data Sources: HESA returns for 200203 and 200304 (using the HESA standard registration population)
Further analysis of ME student populations in the Faculties found that despite having a high proportion of students from ME backgrounds, IES had a smaller number of Black/Black British students (3% - equal to the university’s overall percentage). Instead, a very high proportion of students in IES were from Asian/Asian British backgrounds (23% of students compared to 9% of the total university student population). In contrast, 2% of CES and CLS students came from Black/British backgrounds, from a total of 7% of all ME students in these Faculties.

A similar picture emerged in 2003/04 with 28% of the total student population of Innovation North – Faculty of Information and Technology (INN – IES’s closest equivalent Faculty) coming from ME backgrounds compared to 13% of the total university and 7% of the Carnegie Faculty of Sport and Education (CSE – CES’s closest equivalent Faculty) student population (see charts page 8). Only 3% of students in INN were Black/Black British (equal to the university’s overall percentage), whereas 22% were Asian/Asian British. In CSE and the Leslie Silver International Faculty (INT – CLS’s closest equivalent Faculty), Black/Black British students made up 2% and 1.5% of the student population respectively, despite ME students in these Faculties making up just 7% and 7.5% of students.

The Faculties also varied in the mode of study students undertook in 2002/03. Part-time students comprised 85% of CLS, 35% of CES and 15% of IES. This picture changed in 2003/04 with slightly fewer students studying part-time in CES and CLS’s equivalent Faculties CSE and INT (24% and 39.5% respectively). Instead, the Faculty of Health (FHE) had the highest number of part-time students (70%). IES’s equivalent Faculty INN, however, had a similarly low number of students studying part-time (16.5%).

Institutional data suggest that students from Asian/Asian British backgrounds at Leeds Met take a more traditional route into Higher Education than students from White British and Black/Black British backgrounds. Of Asian/Asian British students at the university, 76% study full-time, 63% are under 21, 55% are male and 47% have A’ Level or A’ Level equivalent as their highest entry qualification. This compares with White British students where 65% study full-time, 54% are under 21, 45% are male and 45% have A’ Level or A’ Level equivalent as their highest entry qualification and Black/Black British students where just 50% study full-time, 30% are under 21, 46% are male, and 27% have A’ Level or A’ Level equivalent as their highest entry qualification.

These data seemed to suggest that the perceptions, experiences and needs of students in general, and ME students in particular, in different Faculties would differ greatly. With the resources available, it was decided to concentrate on particularly on CSE and INN.

In addition to the different ethnicity and mode of study profiles of these two Faculties, they differ in the types of courses that they run. Courses run across the two Faculties include both vocationally-focused and more academically-

14 Data Source: HESA returns for 200203 (using the HESA standard registration population)
focused degrees, for example, the BA/BSc Primary Education leading to Qualified Teacher Status and the BSc Creative Music and Sound Technology in contrast to the BA Childhood Studies and BA Leisure & Sport Studies. It was therefore projected that students’ experiences of and thoughts on employability skills on these courses may differ greatly, thus providing an interesting overview of the differing needs and expectations of students.

The institutional data indicate ME students are often concentrated in more vocationally-focused degree subjects. This is especially the case with Asian/Asian British students with 31% studying mathematical and computer sciences and 23% studying Law in 2002/03 at Leeds Met. It was therefore felt that the students’ motivations and expectations when studying their chosen subject would be interesting areas to explore and compare and contrast within CSE and INN.

The target group was Level 3 undergraduate students, as they have spent more time at the university and therefore have more experience of university life, were nearer to graduation and the prospect of seeking work or further educational opportunities than other students.
Ethnicity breakdown at Faculty Level (High Level Ethnicity)

Faculty codes:
- **FHE** = Faculty of Health
- **LBS** = Leeds Business School
- **CSE** = Carnegie Faculty of Sport and Education
- **FAS** = Faculty of Arts and Society
- **INT** = Leslie Silver International Faculty
- **INN** = Innovation North – Faculty of Information and Technology

White
Asian/Asian Black
Black/Black British
Chinese/Other ethnic group
Mixed
Not known
c) Challenges
The main challenges faced in the research were:

i) Obtaining institutional data
There was difficulty in obtaining some institutional data at the beginning of the project. This was in part due to communication problems between colleagues within the university, but also due to the late appointment of the key researcher for the project.

ii) Institutional changes
Significant changes to the Faculty and School structure of Leeds Met and the development of new policies and strategies, such as the Widening Participation Strategy 2005-08, hindered progress in the identification of a suitable target group for the project and the analysis of key policy documents.

iii) Administering the student survey
Some Schools cooperated fully and swiftly with the distribution of questionnaires and access to student email addresses, but others less so, resulting in a far higher number of questionnaires going out to students in CSE than in INN.

iv) Interviewing senior managers and staff
Some senior managers and staff responded to interview requests very swiftly, but others not at all. When emails were sent to follow-up potential participants there was some renewed interest. There were difficulties in setting up suitable times to meet due to participants’ heavy workloads. Some interviews were cancelled on several occasions before the researcher and interviewee could finally meet, whereas some were abandoned due to the difficulty in finding an appropriate time to conduct the interview.

v) Interviewing students
Several methods were adopted to recruit students for interviews including use of staff contacts in the relevant Schools, emails to potential interviewees, posters advertising the project on Level 3 student notice boards and announcements on the student portal. Some of these methods proved more successful than others and the recruitment of student interviewees was a long and difficult process. There were also difficulties in setting up suitable times with interviewees especially as many had coursework deadlines and exams to work towards.

vi) Staffing issues
Issues affecting the time available to carry out and complete the research included the late appointment of the key researcher, time constraints (effectively only having 1½ days a week to devote to the project meant that the research could not be as in-depth as originally hoped), and unfortunate long-term sickness of the key researcher (for whom cover was not available).
3. Data Analysis

a) Desk Research

i) Statistical analysis on ethnicity\textsuperscript{15}

Ethnicity breakdown of numbers on entry
In comparison to the local, regional and national picture, Leeds Met has a high percentage ME students (see table 1, page 9). In 2002/03, 14.01% of the student population were from ME backgrounds, compared to 7.49% of the population of Leeds in 2001. Asian/Asian British groups made up the largest proportion of the university’s ME population (63.36%), whereas Chinese and Other Ethnic Groups made up the smallest proportion (4.35% and 2.14% respectively) (see chart 1, page 9).

Ethnicity breakdown of qualification levels at entry
Students from Mixed, Asian/Asian British and White backgrounds at Leeds Met in 2002/03 tended to follow more traditional routes into Higher Education, with the majority of students from these groups having GCE A-level/A-level equivalent qualifications as their highest qualification upon entry into the university (53.49%, 47.54% and 44.89% respectively) (see table 2 and chart 2, pages 10-11). Students from Black/Black British and Other Ethnic groups, however, tended to follow less traditional routes. Only 27.4% of Black/Black British students and 14.04% of Other Ethnic students entered the university with GCE A-level/A-level equivalent qualifications as their highest qualification. Instead, both of these groups had high numbers of students with ‘other qualifications’, for example, HNC/HND, professional qualifications, Dip HE etc (43.06% of Black/Black British students and 59.65% of Other Ethnic students).

Ethnicity breakdown of course studied
The subject areas which tended to be popular amongst students from ME backgrounds were Mathematical & Computer Sciences, Law and Eastern, African, American, Australasian Languages, Literature & related subjects. These subject areas were particularly popular amongst people from Asian/Asian British groups, who made up 31.34% of Mathematical & Computer Sciences students, 23.48% of Law students and 19.60% of Eastern, African, American, Australasian Languages, Literature & related subjects students.

A relatively high percentage of people from Black/Black British groups made up the total number of Mathematical & Computer Sciences, Education and Law students (4.04%, 4.06% and 4.22% respectively).

\textsuperscript{15} Data Sources:
2001 Census based on those aged between 16 and 74 years [National Report for England and Wales]; HESA returns for 200203 (using the HESA standard registration population); DLHE returns for 200203
Areas with much fewer numbers of students from ME backgrounds were predominantly subjects from the Arts and Humanities such as, Linguistics, Classics & related, Historical & Philosophical Studies, European Languages, Literature & related and Creative Arts & Design, all of which were made up of over 92% White students. Biological Sciences, Engineering and Technologies also had low numbers of students from ME backgrounds (see table 3, page12).

Ethnicity breakdown of first destinations

Most graduates from Leeds Metropolitan University in 2003 had found some form of employment by the time of the First Destination Survey (see tables 4&5, pages 13-14). 56.81% of 2003 graduates were in full-time employment and 9.13% were in part-time employment, with 7.48% unemployed and looking.

Overall, graduates from Black/Black British backgrounds had the highest employment rates with 62.67% in full-time and 10.67% in part-time work. Only 8% of Black/Black British graduates were unemployed and looking for employment. In contrast to this, graduates from Asian/Asian British backgrounds had much lower employment rates with 11.18% still unemployed and looking at the time of the First Destination Survey.

Within Asian/Asian British groups, Pakistani graduates were less likely to be in employment than Indian graduates with 14.19% unemployed and looking compared to just 9.65% of Indians. Only 33.78% of Pakistani graduates were in full-time employment compared to 56.93% of graduates overall.

Table 1: National, Regional, Local and Leeds Metropolitan University ethnicity breakdown (High Level Ethnicity)\(^\text{16}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total All Ethnic Minorities</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Asian/Asian British</th>
<th>Black/Black British</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Mixed</th>
<th>Other Ethnic Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>England</strong></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>35,532,091</td>
<td>3,049,699</td>
<td>32,482,392</td>
<td>1,569,628</td>
<td>818,541</td>
<td>176,862</td>
<td>313,299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>8.58</td>
<td>91.41</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yorkshire and the Humber</strong></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>3,574,330</td>
<td>208,649</td>
<td>3,365,681</td>
<td>143,934</td>
<td>26,539</td>
<td>9,863</td>
<td>20,724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>5.83</td>
<td>94.16</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>West Yorkshire</strong></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>1,489,739</td>
<td>150,951</td>
<td>1,338,788</td>
<td>115,494</td>
<td>16,140</td>
<td>4,612</td>
<td>11,012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>10.13</td>
<td>89.86</td>
<td>7.75</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leeds</strong></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>520,464</td>
<td>39,027</td>
<td>481,437</td>
<td>21,912</td>
<td>7,811</td>
<td>2,804</td>
<td>4,508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>7.49</td>
<td>92.50</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leeds Metropolitan University</strong></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>19,027</td>
<td>2,666</td>
<td>16,361</td>
<td>1,716</td>
<td>562</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>14.01</td>
<td>85.98</td>
<td>9.01</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{16}\) Data source for National, Regional and Local ethnicity breakdown: 2001 Census based on those aged between 16 and 74 years [National Report for England and Wales]. Data source for Leeds Metropolitan University ethnicity breakdown: HESA return for 2002-03 – standard registered student population, UK domiciled undergraduates who declared their ethnicity.
Chart 1: Ethnicity breakdown of numbers at entry at Leeds Met (High Level Ethnicity)
Table 2: Ethnicity Profile by Highest Qualification on Entry (Low Level Ethnicity)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>GCE A-level/A-level qualifications, SQA Higher equivalents</th>
<th>Access Courses</th>
<th>GCE qualifications only; SQA qualifications only;</th>
<th>Other qualifications</th>
<th>No formal qualification held</th>
<th>Not Known</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Asian British - Bangladeshi</td>
<td>No. 28</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 49.12</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>26.32</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19.30</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Asian British - Indian</td>
<td>No. 345</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 49.43</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>29.94</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>18.33</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Asian British – Pakistan</td>
<td>No. 406</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 46.72</td>
<td>1.04</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>28.19</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>21.86</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/ Black British - African</td>
<td>No. 53</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 25.60</td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>6.28</td>
<td>45.41</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>17.39</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/Black British - Caribbean</td>
<td>No. 69</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 31.08</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>39.20</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>22.52</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>No. 51</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 43.97</td>
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Chart 2: Ethnicity Profile by Highest Qualification on Entry (High Level Ethnicity)\textsuperscript{17}

Please note: this chart refers to GCE A-Level/A-Level equivalents and other qualifications e.g. HNC/HND, professional qualifications, Dip HE only.
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ii) Institutional Policy and Practice (Initiatives) on WP, Employability and Equality and Diversity

Widening Participation
Leeds Met’s Widening Participation Strategy (2005-08) has the following 8 aims:

- **Recruitment** – To widen access to and participation in undergraduate and postgraduate provision through diverse educational, business, sporting, community and cultural partnerships, collaborations and outreach programmes at home and overseas and in particular, the Regional University and the University of the Dales

- **Admissions** – To ensure fair and open admissions policy and practice that supports access, widening participation and lifelong learning

- **Transition & Retention** – To implement and monitor effective strategies and initiatives that will support the transition of students into HE learning and the HE environment and consequently their retention and success, focusing in particular on Harrogate College and partners in the Regional University

- **Curriculum** – To be a lead institution in the development of innovative accessible and flexible curriculum that will meet the needs of business and the community and provide learning opportunities for the widest number of people in diverse circumstances

- **Student fees & financial support** – To have a student fee and financial support strategy that recognises the diversity of the student population, supports widening participation and is coherent with and complements institutional aims and government strategy

- **Performance Indicators** – To establish a range of appropriate and informative performance indicators that enable effective monitoring of the impact of the widening participation strategy on recruitment, retention, success and employability

- **Sustainability** – To establish clear management, monitoring and evaluation processes and the dissemination of good practice to ensure the embedding of widening participation in the core business of the University

- **Research** – To embed research and evaluation in the widening participation strategy and activity and to establish the University as a national and international centre of excellence for widening participation research and practice

Examples of how these aims are practised in the university are as follows:
WP Practitioners Group
This group meets about 3 times a year for WP practitioners across the institution to update and discuss pertinent issues and innovations which affect WP practice. In addition, lunchtime seminars throughout the year allow practitioners to disseminate their work and showcase projects to staff across the institution.

Access Institute
The Access Institute provides a central focus for research and development activity around the University's widening participation strategy. The Get Ahead team deliver a broad range of activities with over 15,000 young people, from the age of 10 upwards, each year in FE colleges and schools in Yorkshire and Humber to raise their aspirations and awareness and support their progression into higher education. The Access Strategy team integrates widening participation activities across the University and leads a range of partnership projects with other universities, colleges, schools and community groups in the region. The Research and Evaluation team monitors and disseminates good practice in widening participation.

Employability
The university Employability Policy and Strategy is currently in draft form. The 7 keys aims of the policy are:

- Policy and Strategy
- Student Experience
- Learning
- Citizenship, Community and Partnership
- Regional
- Staff Development
- Marketing Employability

Employability is also a key objective of Leeds Met's Corporate Plan 2004-08:

The University’s reputation for a professional and vocational emphasis on employability will be enhanced by providing diverse ways into courses, diverse ways through them and diverse ways of enabling all students to develop and record achievement in key skills, including written and verbal communication, IT, entrepreneurship and career development skills (7)

Examples of how these aims are practised in the university are as follows:

Employability Office
The Employability Office provides staff with curriculum advice and teaching support on all matters regarding employability, career management or development and Progress Files.
Impact Project
The Impact Project, which provides additional career and employability support to ME students, has recently widened its remit to include widening participation and non-traditional students.

EROL(Employability Resource On Line)
EROL is a career management resource which is customised in part for the needs of individual courses.

Job Shop
The Job Shop, Leeds Met’s student and graduate employment service, helps students and graduates find work (including temporary positions within the University) and employers find staff.

Business Start-Up@Leeds Met
This is designed to support young student and graduate entrepreneurs. It is one of four partner universities tasked by Yorkshire Forward, the regional development agency, to encourage new business start-ups in the Yorkshire and Humber region. It offers a range of services catering to students at each stage of the start-up process from “Idea” to “Lift-Off”. Workshops discussing business ideas, motivation, development and planning guide students through the initial stages. An annual Entrepreneurs’ Summer School works as a crash course comprising everything it takes to start your own business.

Once young entrepreneurs are ready to start trading, they can access mentors, learning materials, and book hotdesks or office space at a Business Incubator. Support tools come in the form of a website and interactive study CD-ROM.

Equality and Diversity
The university’s commitment to equality and diversity is indicated in the Corporate Plan 2004-08:

Leeds Met people have always shared a strong commitment to making a difference to students and communities who would otherwise risk being disadvantaged. This spirit is reflected in the term ‘equalising’ and is manifested in the daily encouragement of widening and deepening participation in lifelong learning. This is part of a broader concern to promote an ethical culture throughout Leeds Met so that individuals and groups treat one another with respect and dignity, valuing and celebrating diversity.

The Corporate Plan also highlights the need for a diverse workforce to represent the wider community and for equality in staffing through pay and reward structures.

Equality and diversity are central to the Community Partnerships and Volunteering (CPVO) team at Leeds Met, whose aims are to:
• act as an information and co-ordination hub in order to build on the existing work going on across the university
• increase the numbers of staff and students engaged in voluntary activities by developing long-term partnerships with voluntary and other non-profit organisations
• integrate a community and volunteering focus into teaching, learning, research and consultancy carried out by academic staff,
• develop community-oriented volunteering internationally
• provide a mentoring programme to help refugees back into employment
• run and support other volunteer mentoring and buddying schemes
b) Fieldwork

i) Senior Management Perspectives

A total of 7 senior managers were interviewed as part of the project. All were interviewed individually in a semi-structured format and were asked a series of questions as indicated in Section 2.

Perceptions of HE and Leeds Metropolitan University

Interviewees gave a diverse range of answers when asked what they felt was the purpose of HE. These ranged from the short and to-the-point:

> to provide society with articulate, critical and self-critical people that can contribute (Senior Manager 1)

...to the longer and more descriptive:

> well at somewhere like Leeds Met it’s got a long history of sort of vocational education, so partly it’s about equipping, it’s about providing people with life chances and opportunities to progress as individuals and as employees and through that they sort of contribute to the wider community and to the economy on a sort of less vocational level. It’s sort of, you know, developing people in the round, providing them with experiences that they might not have had otherwise (Senior Manager 3)

On the whole, however, participants agreed that the purpose of Higher Education was to equip students with a range of vocational, academic and life skills to enable them to positively contribute to society and the local community.

One participant pointed out how the focus of Higher Education had changed over the years, moving away from a purely academic focus to a greater concentration on financial and economic outcomes and lifelong learning:

> It’s a different era […] it’s become a direct relationship in the long term between entering Higher Education and one’s financial well-being […] I think it’s a much more lifelong definition of Higher Education (Senior Manager 6)

When looking more directly at Leeds Met itself, participants perceived the institution as having a good community focus, both in terms of the local area and the region as a whole, good progression links with local schools and FE colleges, and a wide range of provision for students. It was also felt that the university had a primarily vocational and professional focus, and promoted a student-centred approach.

Student Profile

Participants’ perceptions of the student profile of Leeds Met differed greatly, highlighting the varied student make-up across Faculties and Schools. As one senior manager pointed out:
my [thought] around that is that it would vary depending on the School and depending on the activities. The areas that focus on portfolios, admissions criteria I think are likely to have a more varied student intake. Part-time provision is more likely to be varied, but on the whole I would see it as some areas will be attractive to, or traditionally attractive to, female students, some of the areas will be attractive to, or traditionally attractive to, male students. (Senior Manager 1)

Several pointed out the need to recruit more working-class students and one noted that the student population was much more complex and flexible than it used to be:

I’m not saying we are more part-time but I think we are much more complex in the way our students relate than we were. People have the capacity to come and go, drop in, come back, so it’s much more of a mixed picture than I think it used to be. (Senior Manager 6)

In terms of ME students, it was generally acknowledged that this varied according to Faculty and School, with some Faculties having a high and others having a low ME student intake. Most of the participants felt that the university’s overall ethnicity profile was good:

in terms of ethnic mix I think it’s probably consistent with the local population, but then I think you would find key variances depending on the Faculty or School you went into. So I think you would find more students from ethnic Minorities in Innovation North than perhaps you might find in most Faculties. I think we have a very diverse student population, but it’s, you know, different from Faculty to Faculty. (Senior Manager 5)

Widening Participation at Leeds Met & Minority Ethnic Students
Participants showed a good general awareness of the main targets of Leeds Met’s current WP strategy, with aspiration-raising and pre-entry activities, admission routes and pathways, retention, and community partnerships all being mentioned in relation to the university’s current WP activities. Participants also raised the importance of encouraging participation from and providing support for ‘non-traditional’ learners, particularly those from working-class and ME backgrounds.

It was generally agreed that Leeds Met’s work within the local community was excellent and that partnerships with local and regional organisations and other local education-providers were a very positive aspect of the institution’s WP strategy.

we are based in Leeds, but we have a regional remit. You know, we have the Harrogate campus and we’ve got these developing partnerships. I think they make us potentially different [to other institutions] […] there is a huge raft of things developed […] in local schools, local communities (Senior Manager 5)
In terms of the current WP activities and projects taking place within the university, participants gave various examples of aspiration-raising and pre-entry activities, often involving young people from local schools/colleges coming onto the university campus to take part in Open Days and Summer Schools:

*in terms of access, we’ve got a lot of links with schools and the FE sector, so, for instance, we run a number of focus days during the year where students from state schools can come onto campus and experience HE studies* (Senior Manager 3)

*there is a lot of focus on working with children in schools at the younger age groups so that you make them less nervous of Higher Education* (Senior Manager 1)

*the Camp Carnegie Project that we run introduces a whole range of young people into HE, into the campus. [They] tend to be 11-16 year olds, so they’re getting a feel for what a university’s like* (Senior Manager 2)

Only three out of the seven participants put any significant emphasis on activities involving students once they are at the university:

*In terms of retention we, you know, we’ve done various things, like we’re using exit questionnaires to sort of […] work out what are the reasons for student drop out. We have a great interest in developing student societies and student culture […] retention staff are in place* (Senior Manager 3)

*we have a huge raft of activities this year for Level 1 particularly aimed at ethnic minorities in terms of social activities which aren’t based around the student union and alcohol. We’ve tried to have smaller cohorts, less students in front of less staff so that they feel more at home and we’ve tried to understand the cultural backgrounds to fit in with their aspirations* (Senior Manager 4)

Despite Connor *et al*’s study (2004) which highlights the fact that ME students are more likely to leave degree courses early and less likely to gain a first or upper second class degree than white students (2004: 3-4), overall the senior managers interviewed did not put a lot of emphasis on WP work with ME students whilst they are at university. As one senior manager said:

*the problem isn’t the [minority ethnic] people who get here, it’s the people who don’t get here […] I think once they’re here they pretty much will relate to students really as any student would do. I don’t think that’s the problem, I think the problem is the kids who aren’t here* (Senior Manager 1)

The focus on the need for pre-HE entry activities and interventions rather than on retention and attainment related support and activities during HE study could to some extent be related to anxieties about labelling M.E. students as ‘different’. As the same participant commented later in the interview:
We shouldn’t treat black and minority ethnic students differently, that would be bad, that would be patronising […] I’m sure when they’re here they will need some initial support, probably initial, you know, study skills, but then let them go like with anybody else (Senior Manager 1)

It was also felt by some that the under-representation and under-achievement of working-class students in HE, in particular working-class, white, young men, was another significant issue:

I think another significant challenge […] is WP in relation to, well, it seems to me the last time I looked at it that another very severely under-represented group is white, working-class males (Senior Manager 2)

I think the biggest single threat to our way of life and public order [is] a population that’s comprised of young, white, working-class boys who are capable of being left behind by the changing economy […] So I think it’s particularly clear that tackling working class student recruitment, mainly male, is very significant. (Senior Manager 6)

One participant also felt that class was an issue that affected different ME groups in different ways and that this needed to be addressed:

I mean you’ve got […] clear success groups, students of certain ethnic backgrounds actually doing very well, those from professional Asian backgrounds [who] have got very supportive families, […] the Chinese community […] but I still think we struggle with young Muslim boys […] in parts of the city where you have a Black African-Caribbean population, the girls work harder than the boys (Senior Manager 6)

The same participant also felt that there was a need to develop a multi-cultural curriculum within Leeds Met to ensure that ME students would not face barriers to the curriculum upon entry:

We need to think through the content of the courses we offer and the extent to which the curriculum itself can be a boundary, a barrier to student access. (Senior Manager 6)

Staff Awareness of Widening Participation

Opinion differed amongst participants regarding staff awareness of Widening Participation, with some feeling that staff were generally well informed and motivated to promote WP issues and others believing that there were many sceptics of the benefits of WP activities:

I think that people are aware that Leeds Metropolitan University is interested in Widening Participation. I think there’s a commitment to it […] I don’t get a sense that people don’t want to do Widening Participation and they’re reasonably familiar with concepts around [it]. (Senior Manager 1)
I think [awareness of WP] is actually quite patchy. I think you've got a small core of staff who are committed to the issue, who are interested […] I think the wider staff body is, partly because they're too busy to get involved in it, but I don't think are totally convinced of the benefits of it (Senior Manager 3)

This seeming lack of interest in WP from some staff members was thought by two senior managers to be down to two factors: the lack of communication and promotion of WP across the university, between Faculties and Schools, and externally, and the difficulties in monitoring and assessing the impact of WP activities:

I think we could do more actually to try and co-ordinate what [the Access Institute] do with some of the one-off initiatives that go on in Schools and Faculties and then I think we ought to blow our trumpet a bit more […] We do good work, but we're not very good sometimes at saying we are good at this (Senior Manager 5)

I think part of the problem is there isn't a clear enough linkage being made between WP activities and outcomes, so I think a lot of staff would look at the whole [range of] activities that are put on and they would say, 'Is any of this working? If so, how do we know?' (Senior Manager 3)

Employability
Participants’ views on employability and HE’s role in it once again differed with some focusing purely on hard skills directly related to employment, such as vocationally-based provision at Leeds Met, and others highlighting the need for softer skills, such as communication skills, thus emphasising the ambiguities of the very term ‘employability’:

Obviously teacher training, that’s a direct employability thing. 90-odd% of students who undertake a degree that leads to Qualified Teacher Status do it because they want to become Qualified Teachers, therefore become employed without worrying about employability (Senior Manager 2)

I think it’s our responsibility to make sure that students develop the sorts of skills that are needed to live in a modern world […] those skills are often the traditional skills of Higher Education, so they're not about highly specific employment-related skills, but they're about criss-crossing things: communication skills and flexibility and mainly to develop those to a higher level (Senior Manager 1)

Other areas highlighted as important in the pursuit of graduate employability were increased confidence, increased aspirations and, on a more practical level, work placements and links between the university and employers:

[HE institutions] should offer a placement year out and they should manage that and they should try their very best to have employers out there who are willing to take them […] it’s our responsibility to bring the workplace in here […] we need to give them the skills to be in the workplace and we need to give them the skills and the confidence to go
to interviews, to get past the barriers into the workplace (Senior Manager 4)

Brennan and Shah’s findings (2003) show that work experience, extra-curricular activities, overseas experiences while in HE and job-search techniques had employment benefits for graduates, though the advantages of these factors were experienced to a lesser extent by graduates from working-class backgrounds, ethnic minorities or older graduates. This was due to the fact that such students had less opportunity to experience these factors (2003: iv, 18-19). Though the senior managers who were interviewed did stress the importance of links with employers, work placements and careers embedded within the curriculum (as above), little emphasis was given to the importance of extra curricular activities or to the ways in which the potential barriers for some students to experiencing these opportunities could be overcome.

**Interrelation of Employability and Widening Participation**

Brennan and Shah’s 2003 report *Access to What? Converting Educational Opportunity into Employment Opportunity* attempts to highlight the interconnectedness of employability and Widening Participation in HE by asking:

> Does extending opportunity to enter higher education necessarily extend opportunities in the labour market? Or do social factors such as class, ethnicity and gender work to limit the employment benefits to be obtained from higher education qualifications and experience? (2003: i, 1)

Despite the increasing links being made between WP and employability, the senior managers interviewed were often very unsure about the interconnection of the two terms and some felt that there was no direct link between them at all:

> In the sense that as we undertake our WP activities […] we increase the number of students, purported students, on our courses that come from ethnic minority groups, therefore, because our provision does have an employability focus on it then, you know, […] though I don’t see a direct link between WP and employability (Senior Manager 2)

> my understanding is the university’s Widening Participation strategy is very largely based upon working, there’s a heavy emphasis on pre-entry and working with students before they arrive at university. I’m less aware of what the WP strategy says about current students other than in terms of issues like retention (Senior Manager 3)

There was awareness, however, that by raising the number of traditionally under-represented groups in HE, their employment success and their employability could be heightened:

> Presumably we want to attract [under-represented groups] in so that they’ll get qualifications, they will develop skills which will make them more attractive in the market, you know. I would have thought that there
was no point of encouraging under-represented groups into Higher Education if they're not going to get anything out of it personally or career-wise (Senior Manager 5)

Conclusion
The senior managers interviewed showed a good understanding and knowledge about Widening Participation issues and Leeds Met’s WP Strategy and, despite differing in opinion about staff awareness of WP and the university’s student profile, on the whole interviewees showed an equal appreciation of the institution’s community partnerships and pre-entry and aspiration raising activities.

Overall, there was less awareness of WP and employability activities and initiatives for students whilst studying at Leeds Met and, with some participants, a misconception that once students are in university there is no need to continue WP work with them, thereby overlooking recent findings in studies on ME students in HE. Participants also showed uncertainty over the meaning of employability, with some focusing merely on career-specific skills and others taking account of more general, ‘softer’ skills.

The under-representation and underachievement of working-class students in HE was also raised as a significant issue, especially in relation to young working-class men, and it was noted that class could play a big part in the educational achievement of certain ethnic groups.

Interviewees in general did not see a direct link between WP and employability, highlighting the need for a clearer understanding of these links amongst staff, as well as a clearer understanding of employability. The need for better monitoring of WP activities was also highlighted and considered an important factor in raising staff awareness and commitment to WP.
**ii) Staff Perspectives**

Nine members of staff were interviewed as part of the project. Of these, 6 were academic staff (4 from Carnegie and 2 from Innovation North) and 3 were support staff (2 from Innovation North and 1 from central services). Despite attempts to interview staff from a range of ethnic backgrounds, 7 of the interviewees were White British and 2 were Black/Black British. All were interviewed individually in a semi-structured format and were asked a series of questions as indicated in Section 2.

**Perceptions of Leeds Met**

On the whole, interviewees felt that Leeds Met portrayed an image of cultural diversity with good international as well as regional links and it was generally agreed that the university offered a diverse range of learning opportunities helping to reduce barriers to learning:

> I think it is culturally diverse and does quite a lot to reduce barriers to learning, such as the promotion of Leeds Met Africa and a lot of work on internationalism (Staff member 3, White British male)

> it is successful in achieving [cultural diversity]. There are people from all over the world which is quite refreshing. It is quite genuine, not just a paper exercise (Staff member 9, Black/Black British male)

Some of the staff interviewed pointed out that the level of cultural diversity was dependent upon the Faculty in question, with some areas having a much more diverse student body compared to others:

> They do seem to promote diversity in some respects and whether that promotion actually reflects the student body that is another matter […] I think there are certain cases within Leeds Met where you get a larger number of black students and there are a variety of reasons for that (Staff member 5, White British female)

This was also highlighted when participants were asked about the student profile of Leeds Met and their individual Faculties. Whereas staff from Carnegie felt that ME students were under-represented in their Faculty, staff from Innovation North pointed out that there was very good ME representation, particularly of Asian British students, with some greatly over-estimating the actual figures (29% of students in INN are from ME backgrounds):

> I know we have a lot of students within our School, I mean I’d say, I don’t know the exact percentage, but I’d say it feels like about 80-85% Asian (Staff member 2, White British female)

Two members of staff from Innovation North highlighted the under-representation of Black students, in particular African-Caribbean males. Whereas one interviewee felt that this under-representation was not the fault of the institution and pointed towards the African-Caribbean community and
the need for more black staff, another interviewee believed that Leeds Met had acquired a bad reputation amongst the local ME population:

[the lack of black students and staff] is definitely a concern and needs to be addressed, but by the African-Caribbean community rather than the establishment here. It’s not isolated to this university – it’s indicative of most educational establishments in this country […] We need more [black] staff to improve the student intake. Education is a problem in African-Caribbean families, especially boys generally. It starts in the primary sector. It’s too late to address it at university – it’s already embedded. (Staff member 9, Black/Black British male)

I think after a year or so you see most of the, those who are ethnic minorities or classed as such, find other institutions […] most people in my area, I live in Leeds, refuse to come here because they have actually had the experience passed on. And effectively they have heard stuff over the years and they go to Halifax and places where ethnic minorities are more accepted (Staff member 6, Black/Black British male)

Whereas staff from Carnegie felt that there was a good gender mix in CSE, some staff members from Innovation North believed that, in line with institutional data, there was an over-representation of male students in INN:

We know that in the technology areas across the country and probably internationally there is a tendency for male students […] as opposed to female students (Staff member 8, White British male)

Several staff from Carnegie pointed to the high numbers of middle-class students in their Faculty whereas other interviewees believed that the university attracted students from non-traditional HE backgrounds with lower academic qualifications.

When asked about the staff profile of the university, the majority of interviewees felt that it did not reflect the student profile and that it was not diverse enough:

The majority of our staff are, well, male […] it seems to me that a lot of our staff are over 45, white, middle-class and yeah, there sometimes does seem to be a mismatch between students and staff (Staff member 2, White British female)

we’re still predominately white and the few black faces that are there are really noticeable because it’s really the exception to the rule (Staff member 4, White British male)

Other interviewees felt that the staff profile was representative of the student profile, but only because the numbers of ME students were also low:

On the full-time staff profile […] we have got one black member of staff and no South Asian members of staff, so it is not very reflective. Well it is reflective but that is because the student body is so small (Staff member 5, White British female)
**Student Experiences at Leeds Met**

Most of the interviewees believed that many students, especially those who are younger, do not have realistic expectations when coming to university, with many finding the amount and level of work and the focus on independent study a shock:

> We are getting a lot of students from non-traditional entry and coming through NVQ and BTECs so I think there’s a bit of a shock for many of these students at the academic level and they’re not used to the sort of essay writing and the that sort of study skills (Staff member 5, White British female)

> they get here and they find that it is much sort of self-orientated study so, you know, the lecturer contact time and teaching time might be quite low and then they perhaps make assumptions that the rest of the time is, you know, time off basically (Staff member 2, White British female)

One interviewee also felt that many students believe they do not need to work as hard at Leeds Met as opposed to the University of Leeds:

> There is a difference between Leeds Met and HE generally. Young students straight from college have different perceptions. They expect to be helped in some way […] Students would expect an easier ride at Leeds Met compared to Leeds University, for example. Rightly or wrongly the general ethos given out by the university [Leeds Met] is a lot more relaxed (Staff member 9, Black/Black British male)

As a result of what were considered by most of the interviewees to be students’ unrealistic expectations, many felt that they needed to be given a good understanding of course requirements before coming to Leeds Met as well as a clearer idea of what being in HE was like. A key area was the need for more contact between staff and students, as well as the need for pastoral support to help with what could be a student’s first experience of living and working independently:

> I think a lot of the time students now don’t actually feel that engaged with the university and they don’t really have a relationship with anyone – they might have a relationship with some of our students but they may not have any kind of real relationship with a member of staff (Staff member 2, White British female)

> I think their needs develop through the course really. At Level 1 it’s a lot of stuff about pastoral care, living alone, independently and not having your mum to do the washing and cooking! (Staff member 3, White British male)

Several interviewees stressed that students often faced financial barriers when coming to university as well as problems with confidence:
I was a Level 1 leader last year and the biggest problem students had coming to me was simply they didn’t have any money. I had one student who was told at Easter, he was a very good student, and he was told by his parents that ‘we can’t afford to keep you there, come home and get a job’ (Staff member 4, White British male)

we also get a substantial number of students who actually, because they are young women and haven’t had a lot of academic confidence, think [the course] is the only thing they can do. So there is a lot of confidence building to do with them really (Staff member 5, White British female)

When asked if they identified any specific groups as having multiple barriers when entering university, interviewees gave several examples, including students with disabilities and mature students. The students identified as having the greatest disadvantage, however, were non-traditional, working-class students and ME students.

Working class students primarily […] A lot drop out because they have taken a part time job, earn reasonable money, but this impinges on their study and they have to give up (Staff member 9, Black/Black British male)

if you were going to say who is the most, a stereotype if you like of the most, or the one with the most barriers it would be a low income, you know, ethnic minority student with no history of Higher Education in their family (Staff member 2, White British female)

There are barriers to African-Caribbean men coming into HE. Historically males don’t get access. The black male is seen as a threat by many (Staff member 6, Black/Black British male)

Despite this, there was some uncertainty over whether the university should take specific student needs, such as religious holidays, into consideration and if so, how and to what extent:

Ethnic background shouldn’t impinge on how the university runs – no! Obviously in regard to religious festivals, if there is a clash it should be discretionary, down to the school. I don’t think timetables, agenda etc should be different according to ethnic background (Staff member 9, Black/Black British male)

I think there are some [groups facing greater disadvantage], particularly the South Asian students, and part of that is the, because of the low number of them […] and no matter how hard we try to diversify the curricula and to tackle stereotyping and all the rest of it, there is no doubt they are a lot more visible (Staff member 5, White British female)

I think the younger students will pull you on a rope with religious holidays, to be quite honest. If they want to take the religious holidays off they can, you’re not going to suit everybody (Staff member 1, White British female)
It was widely agreed that the university did a lot to reduce barriers that students might face in coming to and during their study at Leeds Met including flexible learning routes, links with Further Education, student support services such as the Helpzones, student liaison officers and personal tutors, and the work of the Access Institute. Areas in need of improvement included better scheduling of classes for mature students, split sex sports classes, scholarships for poorer students and fewer demands on staff time. Two interviewees felt that the pressures and the lack of communication from senior managers impinged upon staff-student relationships:

*I think time is really an issue and the pressures on lecturers and admin staff is enormous and the paraphernalia of demands that come from higher management could actually save time for that sort of promotional work that is needed to bring in black students […] It would be easier if higher management stopped making unreasonable demands in terms of what nonsense they want* (Staff member 5, White British female)

*there is a diversity across the university and the university is trying to get more involved in a sense but I don’t think that the management understanding has yet really taken hold […] It is a system that has made itself totally unfeeling and unable to register what is happening on the ground* (Staff member 6, Black/Black British male)

**Widening Participation**

The majority of the staff interviewed felt that the principles of Widening Participation to make HE accessible to people who traditionally would not enter university were good; however, it was also thought that WP policy was not always well-translated into practice. Although most respondents accepted that more non-traditional students were able to come to university now than in the past, many also felt that the government’s target of getting 50% of young people into HE was misguided, resulting in the devaluing of courses, lower retention rates and students being forced on to academic courses that are not suitable for their needs:

*To me British widening participation is doomed to fail […] because you have to, you have to push everyone through an academic track whether or not they’re suited to it* (Staff member 1, White British female)

*I really do think that the whole thing about widening participation is not to try and get too many people through in one go because you just end up with courses that are really devalued* (Staff member 7, White British female)

*WP doesn’t make sense - you cannot open the doors to everyone* (Staff member 6, Black/Black British male)

Several interviewees also stressed that more WP work needed to be done prior to HE, believing that universities often inherited problems that occurred earlier on in the education system:
Yes, get 50%, more than 50%, into Level 4 education but [...] that should be sorted out not here but at A’ Level and then we wouldn’t get all this nonsense about they’re going through a university course and not being employable. Well, that’s because they’ve been on the wrong track since they were probably 14. (Staff member 1, White British female)

It was believed that these opinions were echoed throughout the university with some members of staff having a very positive and others a very negative response to WP. Several interviewees also felt that staff did not necessarily see WP as relevant to them because of it was often considered to be policy-making jargon:

*Widening participation again I think has become a bit of a sort of jargon, slogan term that people have picked up almost, so people don’t think that much about what might be part of widening participation* (Staff member 2, White British female)

*There is a mixture of positive and negative vibes about WP [...] There are a lot of negative vibes from people who have been around in HE for a long time, whereas other people think it’s fantastic* (Staff member 3, White British male)

**Employability**

On the whole, the interviewees agreed that it was important for students to have a clear understanding and knowledge of the skills they had acquired through their degree course to make them employable, including both harder, vocational skills and softer, transferable skills. Many employability initiatives running at Leeds Met were highlighted including work placements, Personal Development Plans (PDPs), the Careers Service and Employability Office, Graduate Employment Fairs, and the Impact project. They were divided, however, when asked to what extent employability and employability skills were the responsibility of the university:

*I think it’s the responsibility of the student to access what the university is offering with regard to employability skills, but I do have to say I find it quite worrying that at university we’re saying that we’ve got to teach students how to be employable, which means that they’ve come out of their schools completely unemployable!* (Staff member 1, White British female)

*I think unfortunately it’s not directly, it’s sort of built into our taught modules, but [...] we don’t have an employability module as they do in some other Schools and Faculties, which is a bit of a shame* (Staff member 2, White British female)

Several interviewees believed that these differing attitudes about employability were reflected more widely amongst staff as they felt it was often difficult to get staff involved or interested in employability initiatives:

*It’s something that has become a bit kind of, ‘oh, employability, it’s like another learner outcome’ and people don’t get that excited about it,*
which is a bit of a shame in terms of that’s the sort of staff perception
(Staff member 2, White British female)

It has taken a lot of drive from a few staff to make [our PDPs] work and has met with a lot of resistance from older staff who want to teach their thing and have no involvement in anything else (Staff member 3, White British male)

Whereas some staff members, particularly those from Innovation North, felt that there needed to be more links with industry to help students have a focus and direction following university, others stressed the importance for the university to focus on academic, rather than employment, outcomes:

A student has to be aware of the industry they are going out into. Vocational studies must reflect industry […] It would make sense to base part of academic work around industry (Staff member 9, Black/Black British male)

I think I’m actually opposed to [employability] being a driver because I think that the relationship between HE and employers has become too close and that there are questions about academic understanding and the thought that our students could actually be really, really brilliant and you’re driving them all the time for jobs (Staff member 5, White British female)

In terms of students’ responses to employability initiatives, several of the staff interviewed felt that many did not take them seriously, especially in the first and second years, and that initiatives which were most successful were those that were compulsory parts of the course, such as work placements:

Students don’t really think about career employability until after they’ve finished their course. You know, we try and encourage them to, you know, sort of get excited about it during their studies, but because at the moment everything we do with them with employability is […] bolt on, they don’t really engage with it that much (Staff member 2, White British female)

it is about embedding [employability] […] and the only way we capture it for the students is to assess the stuff, because they are so tactical about what they attend and things […] they know which modules they can fail, they know exactly what they need to do to come out with the qualification that they want at the end of it (Staff member 7, White British female)

Many interviewees also perceived a difference between traditional and non-traditional students in relation to their attitude to employability. Generally, middle-class, traditional students were considered by these interviewees to have a greater knowledge and understanding of how the different skills they had acquired through the course could be transferred into the workplace and had greater confidence in ‘selling themselves’ to employers. Having parents who had studied at HE level themselves was also seen as an influential factor,
encouraging students to take up more extra-curricular activities and helping them to focus on skills rather than purely on a degree classification:

I think traditional students understand that employers are looking for generic transferable skills, they want great communication, they want great team work, problem-solving, it is not just this, you know, ‘I’ve got this academic qualification at this level’ – that is not sufficient (Staff member 7, White British female)

if you’re from a middle class background you’ve immediately got a head start because if your family are in occupations, they can tell you, you can find out more, you can pull strings (Staff member 5, White British female)

It was also raised that finances could be an issue for non-traditional, working-class students who were more likely to have to work part-time during their degree and therefore spend less time studying and were also unlikely to be able to fund voluntary work and gap years abroad.

One interviewee stressed that certain Faculties, such as Innovation North, had worse First Destination results than others - not as a result of high numbers of ME students but as a result of high numbers of non-traditional students:

I really don’t think it’s an ethnic minority thing, I think it’s a non-traditional student thing and I think if you looked at destination data for particular ethnic groups, like if you looked at Indian boys for example, I think that you would find that their destinations were more in line with other traditional students, but if you picked a really non-traditional group then it wouldn’t be [...] You have got these ghettos of courses where everybody is non-traditional and they’re not getting any input (Staff member 7, White British female)

Conclusion
The staff interviewed showed much greater diversity in their opinions on Leeds Met, the student experience and WP and employability than senior managers; however, the extent to which this is because of the greater diversity in job roles of the interviewees is uncertain\(^{18}\). Generally, Leeds Met was considered to be quite good at breaking down barriers to learning and it was felt that the university had many WP and employability initiatives which were helpful to students. There was some disagreement, however, with regard to how much employability was the responsibility of the university and to how successful current widening participation activities were.

It was felt that there needed to be more diverse ethnicity and class student profiles, especially in certain Faculties, although the extent to which this was the responsibility of Leeds Met was again questioned. It was also felt by some that whether a student is from a traditional or non-traditional background was more influential than ethnicity in relation to HE and employment success.

\(^{18}\) Please note: no in-depth analysis of the potential differences between the views of staff members from different Faculties, genders or ethnic groups have been carried out here due to the lack of space available.
iii) Student Perspectives

Survey Results
In March-May 2005, 1438 web-based and paper-based questionnaires were sent out, with 186 questionnaires were returned (a response rate of 13%). Students on BSc Hons Sport and Exercise Science and BA Hons Sport and Leisure Management comprised 64.4% of respondents, with only 3.2% of respondents from Innovation North.

There was also a low response rate amongst ME students with 92.3% of respondents stating their ethnic origin as White British. 65% of respondents were aged between 18-21 years and 95.6% studying full-time. Sample size limitations dictate that no breakdown has been made of the survey results in terms of ethnicity, age and mode of study.

Entering Higher Education
When asked about deciding to enter HE, respondents tended to place emphasis on the importance of the course, continuing to study and the experience of university and its benefits as opposed to the more indirect factors such as they could not find a job or had no other plans. Factors such as careers advice whilst at school and taking part in a university activity such as an Open Day proved to be quite important, with 36% feeling the former and 25.7% feeling the latter were important or very important.

When asked in retrospect what information or guidance they wish they had had before applying to HE, 100 respondents gave suggestions. Of those, 23% felt there could have been more information about course content and a further 14% felt that there needed to be more information on potential careers:

Yes, more specific information about what my chosen course entailed, e.g. specific modules

How the course would enable me to get a job/career that didn’t involve going onto postgraduate study.

Reasons for Choosing Leeds Metropolitan University
The areas which respondents felt were the most important when choosing Leeds Met were the quality of the course and the university’s sports facilities (unsurprising considering the large number of respondents studying a sports-related subject). Other important factors were once again directly related to the HE learning experience with the range of courses offered and the level of entry grades required also being considered important. Interestingly, despite the media attention given to increasing student debt, factors such as the cost of living and the university being close or far away from home/family were considered of little importance to respondents.

Experiences at Leeds Metropolitan University
When asked what they expected the result of going to university would be and how important these results were to them, respondents overwhelmingly felt
that improved career prospects were ‘very important’ (71%) and 43.5% felt that this was the most important factor. Other important factors were developing new and existing skills and learning more about a subject of interest to them. Areas which respondents felt were less important were gaining respect in the wider community and making parents/family proud.

When asked to rate on a scale of 1-10 (where 1 = not at all and 10 = a lot) how much the skills they had learnt on their programme of study had enhanced their employability, 69.7% of all respondents rated their course as an 8 or above and just 15.8% gave a rating of 5 or less. When asked how this could be improved upon, 20.9% felt that the course content could be more useful. Significantly, comments made about course content showed that respondents’ views of what constitutes ‘employability skills’ were often quite narrow, with a focus on skills specific to certain occupations rather than on a wider, multi-dimensional range of skills:

many of the skills are academic based and of little use in employment

[the course could be improved] by gaining more work experience at a relevant organisation and using it as a platform for developing my skills.

Whilst at university, 76.5% had been on work placement and a further 59.6% had worked part-time. When asked how important they felt these activities were in enhancing their employability, 39.3% felt that work placement was ‘very important’, yet only 18.6% felt paid part-time work was. Other activities such as student societies, voluntary work and other extra-curricular activities were not seen as particularly important in the enhancing of employability.

By far the most useful services and provisions at Leeds Met according to respondents are the library service, Web CT and other on-line course provision and personal tutors.

Following graduation, 41.5% stated that they would find a job, 22.4% would like to go travelling, and 15.8% felt that they would like to continue studying.

Equal Opportunities at Leeds Metropolitan University
In general, respondents did not feel that Leeds Met could do more to remove barriers and promote equal opportunities. However, several felt that they had encountered barriers whilst at Leeds Met and 11.5% felt that more could be done in terms of support into employment. Other comments regarding barriers included the need to be aware of religious holidays when planning examinations and assessment, more ‘course specific’ careers advice, changing the weighting of assessments (i.e. not all exam/coursework, not all based on achievement at Level 3 etc) and more work placements. One student also felt that they had experienced some racial barriers whilst at Leeds Met, though no specific issues or incidents were given:

the general atmosphere at Headingley Campus – some issues on campus/S.U. and racial.
5.5% of respondents felt that they had experienced some form of discrimination during their time at Leeds Met which had affected their studies or employment prospects.

Conclusions
The survey suggested that on the whole students in the Innovation North and Carnegie Faculties have had positive experiences whilst studying at Leeds Met and the majority of students believe that their course has made them more employable. The quality of the course, course content and experience of going to university were all important factors in helping students firstly to decide to apply to university and secondly to choose which universities to apply to. Financial concerns were not of any significant importance.

Students felt that more careers advice prior to coming to university would have been helpful and could have influenced their final choice of course/institution. Despite many students taking part in extra-curricular activities, including involvement in student societies and voluntary work, few felt that this would impact upon their employability. Students’ perceptions of ‘employability’ appear on the whole quite narrow, with an emphasis on very specific career-focused skills, rather than a wider range of multi-dimensional, ‘soft’ skills.

Interviews
A total of 10 students were interviewed as part of the project. Of these, 4 were from Carnegie and 6 were from Innovation North. All students were studying full-time on undergraduate degree courses at Level 3 and were classed as Home students. 5 of the interviewees were White British (3 from CSE and 2 from INN), 4 were Asian/Asian British (all INN) and 1 was Mixed (CSE). 4 males (all INN) and 6 females (4 CSE and 2 INN) were interviewed.

All interviews took place individually in a semi-structured format and interviewees were asked a series of questions regarding their academic background and experience, family background, arrival points into HE, their perceptions, expectations and aspirations in HE and their views on employment and employability skills.

Academic and Family Background
The interviewees had varied academic backgrounds with some moving straight from school to sixth form to university, others taking gap years to travel and do paid or voluntary work and others working full-time for several years before returning to education. Despite this, 7 of the 10 students interviewed had taken A’ Levels before going to university, whereas the others had done a combination of A’ Levels, GNVQs and/or Access courses. 5 of the interviewees were mature students (4 of whom were from INN).

7 out of 10 of the interviewees’ parents had not been to university and 5 were the first ones in their immediate families to go into HE.
Arrival Points into HE

Whilst for some of the students interviewed coming to university had always been a foregone conclusion, others had not expected to come and, after working full-time for some years, felt that it was a good way to enhance their career and focus on specific areas of interest:

coming to university] was never anything I wanted to do, I never thought I was good enough to come to uni and then I worked full-time and then I was offered a job and I thought I don’t want to be stuck there for the rest of my life (White British female, 24 – Carnegie)

From my background the question wasn’t if you go to university, but what are you going to do at university? (Asian/Asian British male, 21 – Innovation North)

The advice that people had prior to coming to university also varied with mature students finding that they had little advice, often doing their own research into courses and universities, and younger students receiving lots of advice from Sixth Form tutors, careers advisors and siblings. Several students also noted that their parents were not particularly helpful in advising them as they had not been to university themselves:

In terms of advice my mum and dad, but neither of them went to university so they couldn’t talk about the learning experience at all, but they wanted me to go because it’s a positive thing rather than going on the dole (White British female, 21 – Carnegie)

The main challenge that the interviewees felt they faced when deciding to come to university was financial. This was particularly the case for mature students with 4 out of the 5 stating this was a barrier compared to 1 out of the 5 non-mature students:

financially we’re not a very affluent family and the choices that I had to think about was the course, how far away the university was and working part-time to support my studies (Asian/Asian British male, 23 – Innovation North)

financial [barriers], yeah, debts. It’s harder to go when you’ve got debts as you know you are not going to be able to work (White British male, 26 – Innovation North)

There was nothing to stop me from coming, no there was not anything that I had to deal with or anything like that. Obviously I applied for student loans knowing that I had to pay my rent, knowing that I would have to get a job – unfortunately with all of that still haven’t managed to get a job! (White British female, 21 – Carnegie)

The other area highlighted as a barrier by students was academic ability. This was particularly the case with students from Innovation North and mature students:
Academically, because I didn’t know how well I would do in my exams and [that affected] choosing somewhere to go (White British female, 21 – Innovation North)

knowledge-wise - I wasn’t that well knowledgeable in IT so I was a bit worried about coming back and studying. There was a lot of people who had just come from high school or college or whatever and they had actually been studying continuously. I stopped and actually self-taught myself a bit and wasn’t sure if I was good enough or had enough knowledge in that field to carry on really (Asian/Asian British male, 26 – Innovation North)

One student, an Asian female, felt that she had experienced barriers as her parents had not wanted her to move from the family home:

I had to stay in Leeds or go somewhere that was commutable. I had a place down South but my parents would not allow me to move. That is why I chose Leeds Met. (Asian/Asian British female, 23 – Innovation North)

Out of the 10 students interviewed, 7 had Leeds Met as their first choice of university. When asked why they chose Leeds Met, all of the Carnegie students stated that the sports facilities and the environment at Headingley Campus drew them to the institution, whereas students from Innovation North tended to be drawn by the courses Leeds Met offered:

As soon as I got here I thought ‘whoa!’ […] the emphasis on PE and sport made me feel comfortable doing sport here (White British female, 21 – Carnegie)

you find it is like this for a lot of sports courses, it has to be somewhere like this where they have got the playing fields and got the facilities so a lot of courses are like this but nowhere [is] as nice as Carnegie (White British female, 24 – Carnegie)

I was interested in Information and Communications Management, there weren’t many universities that did it as it was quite a new thing (White British female, 21 – Innovation North)

I looked at Leeds as well, but the course at Leeds Met was […] but the Leeds Met course was studying other languages, computer languages, that I thought would be better. It was suited more to the industry (White British male, 26 – Innovation North)

Other influential areas in choosing Leeds Met were closeness to home, the student accommodation and the social life in Leeds.

Perceptions, Expectations and Experiences of HE
Several of the students interviewed did not know what to expect of university when they first came to Leeds Met, whereas others expected it to be hard work, that there would be a shift to independent learning, that they would meet new people, expand their knowledge and improve their career prospects. On
the whole it was agreed that expectations had been met, with some interviewees feeling that HE had exceeded them:

I think they’ve exceeded them because I’ve not only learnt about sport but, because of the way the course is, […] I’ve learnt about politics, I’ve managed to gain general knowledge (White British female, 21 – Carnegie)

I have gained a lot of knowledge in the field I want to be in from my education and it has actually given me a broader view of what is IT (Asian/Asian British male, 28 – Innovation North)

For two of the students, the course had not lived up to all of their expectations:

I think it [the course] is what I wanted to do and the outcome, but I thought we would be taught how to teach each of the games and the rules and stuff but we’re not – you are expected to do that with your own money (White British female, 21 – Carnegie)

I wouldn’t choose the same course again, but I would choose Leeds Met. I’d do something that was more theory, PR, marketing. I’ve not enjoyed the course, but not hated it. I wouldn’t change the experience and the people. I didn’t think of what I would be interested in, I did what my family expectation was (Asian/Asian British male, 21 – Innovation North)

In terms of their experiences whilst at university, the students from Carnegie appeared to have made more friends and a developed a greater sense of community than the students from Innovation North. The reasons for this were varied, for example, the sports courses encouraged more teamwork-based activities, fewer of the INN interviewees lived in halls of residence with many living outside Leeds or with non-university friends or parents and a greater number of them were mature students:

I think what I felt from talking to other sports students is I think sports itself definitely makes quite a big community. I do wonder what people do if they don’t do sport. (Mixed female, 21 - Carnegie)

I think that [living in halls] contributed to my experience at university, amazing! […] When I consider my group of friends now there are at least 2 of us on the same course, so that was good because we knew people from the Brewery (halls) and on the course […] it was like a community all walking up together and it was really, really nice (White British female, 21 – Carnegie)

I don’t think I sort of tried to fit in with the students, with my peers, because they were all 18 just straight from school […] Most of them commuted anyway – they were all living at home, commuting from York or the outskirts of Leeds so there wasn’t really that kind of “let’s all go to the pub”[…] I chose that, I was only here to get the degree (White British male, 26 – Innovation North)
One interviewee felt that the work placement she was on for her course had helped her to build upon her confidence and make good working relationships, but that since returning to university this confidence had dwindled:

I wasn’t confident as a person before the work placement, but I gained a lot of self-confidence doing it. I feel I have less now I am back from it […] I don’t spend much time at uni this year, I don’t enjoy it. I would prefer to be at [my work placement] (Asian/Asian British female, 23 – Innovation North)

All of the students from Innovation North pointed out that there was a lot of emphasis on sport at Leeds Met and some felt that this was not reflective of the overall student population:

Headingley Campus I think is more tailored to sports students, that is my perception of it, it is a sports university […] which leads me to question where the information and business side has gone (Asian/Asian British male, 23 – Innovation North)

When asked if they felt they had faced any barriers whilst at university, many of the interviewees felt they had experienced none; however, several students in Carnegie felt that finances were a factor once again due to having to juggle part-time work, university study and work placements:

It’s money that prevents you from doing certain things you want to do, you have to go out and work to get your degree. Our course now is crazy – you just don’t have any time to work and if there was more money available to you then you would be able to spend more time on your course and do better (White British female, 24 – Carnegie)

I feel I’m not doing enough work, then I think I will work […] then still I think I have to do uni work as well. It’s harder to have a part-time job. (Mixed female, 21 – Carnegie)

One student pointed out that it was harder for her to get funding because she was a mature student and that this was problematic. Another mature student from Innovation North had initially been concerned that there would be no one his age and that he would not fit in at Leeds Met, however, these concerns were not realised and he felt that there were lots of students in the same situation as him.

One student from Innovation North felt that she had experienced some barriers being a woman on a course of mostly men, but felt that this could work to her advantage in some situations:

I have been the only girl in some groups, more are getting interested. Sometimes it can be an advantage being a girl as I found out at [my work placement]. At first it was proving you know something, but once you have got that I got what I wanted. One manager had confidence and would give me problems. It was because of being a girl, not because of
being young or new, it was just how he was. He saw me as a doll.
(Asian/Asian British female, 23 – Innovation North)

The same student felt that she also experienced barriers from her family as
she was not able to join societies or go on trips like many of her fellow
students. She stressed, however, that this was not due to her ethnicity, but
her family culture:

It’s not the fact I am Indian or Asian, it’s the culture my family follows.
Not being able to live the full student life, having to be home by a certain
time [...] It’s just the way my family is (Asian/Asian British female, 23 –
Innovation North)

This view was confirmed by several of the other students who felt that
ethnicity was not a barrier to HE:

People who are ethnic minorities I don’t think would have a problem
because [...] there’s a wide range of people [...] big groups of different
people (White British female, 21 – Carnegie)

I think Leeds is very multi-cultural [...] I don’t think [ethnicity] is important
as in it doesn’t really affect my studies (Asian/Asian British male, 23 –
Innovation North)

Two students, however, felt that ethnicity could be a barrier to some students:

Ethnic minorities who live with their families when they come to Leeds
Met [face barriers] [...] Some Asian boys are not interested in education,
they come for girls, drugs, to go out, which misses the point. There’s a
whole generation of Asians, especially Pakistanis, rebelling. I’ve not felt
it myself. (Asian/Asian British male, 21 – Innovation North)

I’ve noticed ethnic minorities in Leeds are not well informed of other
ethnic groups around [...] they say ethnic groups relates to a small
group like 2/3% of the student population in Leeds [...] but they don’t
make much sound, noise in the university area so people tend to
disregard that really (Asian/Asian British male, 28 – Innovation North)

Other areas of disadvantage pointed out by interviewees were students with
disabilities, part-time students and students facing social barriers:

The only barriers that I can see are [...] people not going to university –
social barriers in terms of people worrying about how they are going to
be perceived and stuff (White British female, 21 – Carnegie)

Whereas some students felt those from working class backgrounds faced
more barriers than those from middle class backgrounds because they often
did not have as much financial support from their parents, others felt that
finances should not be a problem as students were able to get student loans,
overdrafts and partial or even full funding for their fees.
In terms of their experiences with staff at Leeds Met, most of the students from Carnegie felt that their lecturers had been very supportive and felt that they were able to build good relationships with them; however, students from Innovation North had much more varied experiences:

*Generally I have found that it’s been really easy getting along with staff and […] you can have a less formal relationship than with sixth form tutors, that’s really helped. Like my supervisor for my dissertation was really, really nice and I think that helped* (White British female, 21 – Carnegie)

*Some are really friendly and you can go to them with problems […] but some don’t respond to emails […] I sent an email in a panic about changing a course. I didn’t get a reply so I had to do the course – I was stuck with it!* (Asian/Asian British female, 23 – Innovation North)

Although most of the students were aware of the various support services available to them within the university, few had felt the need to access them. It was acknowledged by one student that the Helpzones were good and that the staff were helpful over the phone.

Whilst there were some areas which the interviewees felt needed to be improved to give students more support during their time at university, for example, more staff, better organisation by lecturers, more opportunities to meet new people at Freshers’ Week and no group assessments, most of the interviewees felt they had gained at lot from their time at Leeds Met. The skills interviewees felt they had gained included presentation, teamwork, literacy, numeracy, IT, organisation, academic, social and life skills:

*My skills [are] communication, people, marketing, organisation. I enjoy project management and group work. I tend to be a group leader and am organised on all levels* (Asian/Asian British male, 21 – Innovation North)

*if I’d gone straight from college and worked in Asda or something, I wouldn’t have the social skills I have now […] Another thing is presentation skills, doing Powerpoint […] My writing skills have improved, I can now do loads of stuff on the computer I didn’t know before. Obviously listening skills, literacy, numeracy – working with them a lot in different modules, like essay writing, biomechanics, doing mathematical equations and stuff* (Mixed female, 21 – Carnegie)

**Future Aspirations, Employment and Employability Skills**

Most of the interviewees had a clear idea of what they wanted to do in the future. Unsurprisingly this was particularly the case with students from Carnegie, two of whom were studying courses which led directly to Qualified Teacher Status. Other jobs of interest were team management, setting up a business and working for the civil sector.
Whereas the students from Carnegie felt that it would not be too difficult to find a job in their chosen field, students from Innovation North were aware of the immense amount of competition in IT:

You have to be realistic that you are not going to jump into a job straight away. You may need to retrain, go to college, learn a language etc. (Asian/Asian British male, 21 – Innovation North)

I think as long as I’m prepared to go anywhere and I’m not stuck to around here, schools in Leeds, then I will get a job (White British female, 24 – Carnegie)

Several of the students interviewed were waiting until graduation to find a job, one had already got a job through a graduate recruitment programme and others remained unsure of what they were going to do immediately following university. Two of the interviewees were planning on taking a year out to travel, and one was returning to university to study for a PGCE:

The thoughts in my head at the minute are I’ve got loads of options: I can either go home and still carry on with my part-time job while deciding whether to go travelling, […] what I mean is go to a country like Australia because the sport it is very good there, and get a job in anything but try physical sports out there, or stay at home and try and get a proper job or stay here and get a part-time job and see what’s here (White British female, 21 – Carnegie)

I have applied for 4 different PGCEs – Leeds Met is my first choice (Mixed female, 21 – Carnegie)

I am going travelling for a year, taking a year out, because I am not really sure what I want to do. Hopefully that will give me a little bit more time to figure out what to do. I know I want to go into IT, but it’s so big I don’t know what area yet (White British female, 21 – Innovation North)

When asked what they felt would make them employable, nearly all of the students drew on their transferable skills as well as their subject-specific knowledge:

You have to be confident in what you’re doing, you have to understand why you are doing it and you have to want to do it […] I think you as a person will get the job, not specific qualifications or specific grades you get (Mixed female, 21 – Carnegie)

I think most employers look for hard working and experience in employees. Hopefully I am hard working, but I gained quite a lot of knowledge on this course as well which has helped me tremendously (Asian/Asian British male, 28 – Innovation North)

Although nearly all of the students had worked part-time during university, very few felt that it would help with their employability as the jobs they did were not directly related to the field they wanted to work in. One student,
however, had attempted to get relevant work throughout his degree to fund his way through university whilst gaining extra experience:

I made sure whoever I was working for I was practising skills or learning new skills to do with the course, which is easier to do with computing than it is if you are doing history or certain forms of accounting, but that allowed me to get through university financially and that has helped me (White British male, 26 – Innovation North)

Many of the interviewees had taken part in extra-curricular activities whilst at Leeds Met, such as mentoring schemes, student ambassador work, being course representative and joining sports teams. This was particularly the case with students from Carnegie. Several of the interviewees had also been on work placements, which they felt were invaluable in increasing their employability:

[the placement] was very hard work, but yeah, it is an experience. I think sometimes you don’t feel like doing it when you are doing it, but when you sit down at the end of a six week placement you think, ‘yeah, I have actually achieved something there’ (White British female, 24 – Carnegie)

Most of the interviewees felt that experience in a field, either through work placement or work in general, was very important and many wished that they had had more time to get this experience during their course:

You have to do a lot of voluntary work in schools […] which I’m not doing because I can’t afford to do as much voluntary as other people cos I have to do part-time work (Mixed female, 21 – Carnegie)

It’s a competitive industry, it requires a lot of experience and I don’t have that – only 14 months, which is not a lot (Asian/Asian British female, 23 – Innovation North)

Conclusion
On the whole the students interviewed had enjoyed their time at Leeds Met and felt that they had gained many skills through their studies. Although several students felt that they had experienced no barriers in coming to university or during their studies, financial barriers were identified as the biggest potential disadvantage for them, over and above ethnicity. None of the students felt that ethnicity had been a barrier for them personally; however, some felt that it could be for some ME students both prior to and during HE.

Many of the interviewees came from non-traditional HE backgrounds; however, it was felt that support and advice when choosing to come to university was good and the main challenges experienced were those by mature students who did not necessarily have ready access to careers advice.

Students from the Carnegie Faculty appeared to have a greater sense of community on their courses and their experiences with staff were also more positive. The extent that this was due to these students being more likely to
live in halls of residence, being traditional university age and being involved in team sporting activities is not clear.

Overall, the students had a clear idea of the types of employment they would eventually move into and had a good sense of the skills they had developed during their courses, including both transferable skills and more course-specific skills. Many believed that their work placements were excellent for improving their employability; however, several interviewees still felt that they did not have enough experience to move into the career they wanted at this stage.
4. 10 Key Institutional Findings

1. In general it was thought that Leeds Met did well in terms of Widening Participation, equal opportunities and employability and it was felt that the university attracted a diverse range of staff and students.

2. There was a lot of support for the idea and aims of Widening Participation; however, there were concerns that putting WP into practice had the potential to lower standards, student support and retention.

3. Ethnicity itself was not seen as a direct barrier in HE and graduate employability. Instead, students from working class, non-traditional backgrounds were thought to face the most disadvantages due to financial difficulties and having little or no familial experience of HE. Other factors that were considered to be potential barriers were age, mode of study and gender.

4. It was felt that addressing ethnicity and other potential barriers to HE was not always the job of the university. It was stressed that WP issues needed to be tackled earlier on in the education system and within the local community.

5. There are huge variations in the student profile across courses, Schools and Faculties; however, the extent to which this is an issue that the university should address was questioned. Why do certain degrees attract more ME students than others? Is there, and does there need to be, a solution to this? Is this a problem at the level of university admissions and recruitment or is it related to wider community issues and cultural expectations?

6. The meaning of the term ‘employability’ and the extent to which this was the responsibility of the university was questioned.

7. Work placements and work experience were felt to be extremely valuable in the raising of students’ employability once they graduate. There was a tension, however, between how much university provision should be academic and how much it should be vocational.

8. Soft, transferable skills were not always recognised as an important part of a student’s overall employability and hard, course-specific skills were often seen as more valuable.

9. Some students did not believe voluntary or part-time work would enhance their employability.

10. There was greater diversity in staff responses than in senior management responses; however, this could be due to the diversity of roles that staff had in comparison to senior managers.
5. Institutional Recommendations

1. Develop more and increase the focus on retention and support activities and initiatives within the university

2. Raise awareness of the importance of extra-curricular activities, part-time and voluntary work for student employability

3. Recognise the importance of the impression made when bringing people on-campus prior to admission to the university, for example, through Open Days. This can be a critical factor in students’ choice of university. Many students were impressed by the campus, especially Headingley, and felt that it portrayed a diverse student community

4. Continue to consider how the aims of WP can be achieved without the lowering of standards

5. Further explore how the perceived barriers to HE can be broken down both within the university itself and more broadly within the educational sector and the local community

6. Bibliography


7. Appendices

Appendix 1: Senior Management Interview Schedule

Opening Questions
What do you see as being your role within the Faculty and in the wider institution?
If you could sum it up in a couple of sentences, what in your view is the purpose of HE?
Briefly, how do you feel Leeds Met meets this purpose?
How would you describe Leeds Met in relation to other HE institutions?

About Leeds Met /Faculty – perceptions of the institution
What is your understanding of the student profile of Leeds Met in general and your Faculty in particular, for example, in terms of gender, ethnicity etc?
As an HE institution what do you feel Leeds Met and your Faculty offer students that other institutions/faculties may not?
What would you say are the primary strengths of Leeds Met as an HE institution? What about your Faculty specifically?
What would you identify as being the main areas needing improvement institutionally and at Faculty level?
How possible do you feel this is? How could/would it be done?

WP policy – Awareness of Policy and Practice
What would you say are the main targets of Leeds Met’s WP strategy currently?
How would you define a successful WP policy?
How does WP policy apply to your Faculty specifically?
What WP initiatives are currently in place and/or being developed? In the institution/Faculty?
What kind of funding is there for WP? Is it separate/included in other areas, formal/ad-hoc?
In your view, is this adequate? If not, how is this addressed?
What kind of awareness do you feel there is about WP throughout the institution? For example?
How is policy disseminated and implemented within the university (your Faculty)?
What kinds of forums exist to oversee their implementation?
What kind of monitoring takes place?
How is this recorded?
What would you identify as the main areas for improvement within Leeds Met, in order to successfully widen participation? Is this do-able? How?
To what extent does WP strategy feed into and inform practice?

ME students and WP
What would you say are the key concerns of most students? (in relation to ME students and WP)
How are the needs of ME students met within Leeds Met?
In your opinion, is this adequate?  
How are these needs identified?  
How are they monitored?  
Are you aware of any WP initiatives within Leeds Met /your Faculty regarding ME students specifically?  
How effective do you feel WP policy is when applied to ME students?

**Graduate Employability – Awareness of the issue**
If you could sum it up in a couple of sentences, what would you say the role of HE is in employability?  
What kinds of initiatives are taken (in Leeds Met / your faculty) to increase graduate employability?  
How do you feel WP strategy/policy relates to graduate employability?  
What are Leeds Met’s (or Faculty’s) employability indicators?  
How in your view, does WP strategy/policy translate in the labour market?

**Closing questions**
How would you further develop (Leeds Met /Faculty) WP and Graduate Employability initiatives in future?  
What would your goals/targets be?  
What do you think are the potential constraints in achieving your goal?  
How will you address these constraints?  
What do you think HE institutions should offer to students in relation to employability?  
Do you think WP and Graduate Employability initiatives are the most effective measures to achieve this? If not, why?  
What other measures do you feel might be effective in improving the levels and quality of HE attainment and employability, for ME students and students in general?  
Is there anything else you would like to cover that you feel is relevant?  
Given the nature of our research, once we have begun our analysis, we may feel it necessary for us to conduct follow-up interviews with you. Would this be ok with you?  
Are there any questions you would like to ask us about our research?
Appendix 2: Staff Interview Schedule

General details
- Faculty/School
- Role within School

Perceptions of Leeds Met
- Student and Staff Profiles
  What kind of student profile do you think Leeds Met has (e.g. in terms of gender, ethnicity, religion, physical ability etc)? Staff profile?
  Do you feel the staff profile of the university represents the student profile? Could this be improved? How?

- The Image of Leeds Met
  Do you feel that Leeds Met promotes a culturally diverse learning environment?
  Why? How could this be improved?
  What, in your view, are Leeds Met’s main principles and objectives? What kind of image do you feel the university tries to portray of itself? How and to whom does the university market itself in your opinion? Could this be improved?

Student Experiences at Leeds Met
- Student Expectations
  In your experience, what kinds of expectations do students have about HE and Leeds Met in particular?
  Do you feel these expectations are realistic? Why?

- Student needs
  In your experience, what are the main needs of students: prior to applying to HE whilst studying at an HEI upon graduating from HE?
  How do you feel these needs are met at Leeds Met?
  Are there any improvements that could be made?
  Do you feel there are needs specific to particular groups of students e.g. disabled students, part-time students, ME students etc? What are these?
  Does Leeds Met meet these needs?
  As far as you are aware, are specific student needs, e.g. religious holidays, taken into consideration in relation to the curriculum, modes of assessment, timetabling etc in your school? Do you feel that it is important for these considerations to be made? Why? Do you feel that they could impact on a student’s overall experience of the university and HE?

- Perception of student experience at Leeds Met
  How much do you feel that the general student experience whilst at Leeds Met is a good one? Why?
  Is there anything in particular you feel could be improved?

- Potential barriers and disadvantages to students
  What do you feel are the potential barriers that students may face when applying to HE whilst at uni? Any examples?
  Do you feel that there are any specific groups of students that may face multiple barriers? Who? Why?
  What do you feel could be done to break down these barriers?
  How do you feel Leeds Met challenges these barriers? In your opinion, is there anything more Leeds Met could do?
Which group(s), if any, do you see as being the most disadvantaged as students? Why? In your view, how might this be overcome?

In your work, have you experienced any barriers to students first-hand? What? Are there any particular dilemmas you face in terms of equal opportunities etc in your work?

Widening Participation and Equal Opportunities

- WP and EO Policies and Practices at Leeds Met
  How do Widening Participation and Equal Opportunities policies and practices at Leeds Met reflect in your job within the university? How visible are they?

- Definition of WP and EO
  In your opinion, what is Widening Participation? What is its purpose? How important do you feel WP and Equal Opportunity Policies are in HE? How much do you think these initiatives are sending out the right messages about the university, for example, that it is a diverse environment?

- Delivery of EO and WP at Leeds Met
  Do you feel Leeds Met positively promotes EO? How? Why? Do you feel that the university successfully delivers WP initiatives? How? Why? How could they be improved? Are there any areas that you feel need to be further developed?

- Awareness of WP and EO
  What kind of awareness about WP and EO is there amongst staff and students in your opinion?

- Relevance of initiatives
  How effective do you feel WP/EO initiatives are? How much do they work in practice - does policy always reflect the reality? Do you feel that the right student groups are being targeted by these initiatives?

- Involvement in WP/EO initiatives
  Have you had any direct involvement in or any experience of WP/EO initiatives whilst working at Leeds Met? What? Was it successful?

Employability

- Definition of employability
  What in your view does it mean for a student to be ‘employable’?

- How employability fits into the student experience
  What kind of awareness about employability is there amongst staff and students in your opinion? How important do you feel employability skills are regarded as within Leeds Met? What skills do you feel students need when entering the labour market? To what extent do you feel it is the responsibility of the university to provide students with these skills? In your opinion, are there any gaps in Leeds Met’s provision of employability skills to students? What are they? How could they be improved? Are there any specific employability initiatives that you are aware of that are running in your school or in the wider institution? Do you have any involvement in these? Are they successful? Why? What improvements could be made? Are employability skills incorporated into the courses that you teach? Do you feel that this is acceptable? Why?
Appendix 3: Student Survey

Ethnicity and Employment Project Student Questionnaire

Thank you very much for agreeing to complete this questionnaire. The aim of the survey is to explore how accessible Higher Education (HE) is for various sectors of the population and what the experience and perceptions of different groups are while in HE and subsequently when they are trying to gain employment.

We would therefore like to investigate students’ experience of HE at Leeds Met within the context of university policy and practice regarding inclusion in education. The responses you give will contribute to our understanding of the impact of Higher Education on students and their perceived ‘employability’. Your views are therefore extremely important to us.

Any information you give will be treated in the strictest confidence. As all data will be grouped together, it will not be possible to identify your individual responses from the findings. Your name will not be disclosed to anyone outside of the Access Institute Research Team. If you would like any further information, please contact Lucy Prodgers, Evaluation Officer on 0113 283 2600 ext 4133 or via L.prodgers@leedsmet.ac.uk.

The questionnaire should take around 15 minutes to complete.

SECTION 1: PERSONAL DETAILS

1. Your full name: ........................................................................................................................................

2. Gender Male □ Female □ *(Please tick as appropriate)*

3. Age .................

4. How would you describe your ethnic origin? *(Please tick one box)*

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5. What course are you currently studying at Leeds Met? (E.g. BA Hons Leisure and Sports Studies)

6. Is the course: Part-time □ Full-time □ Sandwich □

SECTION 2: ENTERING HIGHER EDUCATION

7. How important were the following when you decided to enter Higher Education?

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<td>Taking part in a University activity, e.g. open day, summer school etc (please specify)</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>m</td>
<td>Other (please state)</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. Which was the single most important factor which influenced you?

(Please enter a letter from the above list) □

9. Looking back, is there any information or guidance you wish you had had before applying?

........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................

289
## SECTION 3: REASONS FOR CHOOSING LEEDS METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

11. How important were the following in influencing your decision to study at Leeds Metropolitan University?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Unimportant</th>
<th>Not relevant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a Quality of the course</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b Range of courses offered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c Suitability of access routes for me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>d Level of entry grades required</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>e Cost of living</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>f It was close to my home / family</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>g It was a long way away from my home / family</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h Its learning support facilities</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i Its sports facilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j Open day/interview experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k Length of course</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l Social life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m Childcare facilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n Research reputation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Provision of accommodation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p Opportunity for professional work placement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q It was the only institution which offered me a place</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r My previous school / college / employer recommended it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s My family and friends recommended it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t Other (please state below)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. Which was the single most important factor which influenced you? (Please enter a letter from the above list)

□
SECTION 4: YOUR EXPERIENCES AT LEEDS METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

9. What do you expect will be the result of going to university? Please indicate how important each of the following is for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Unimportant</th>
<th>Not relevant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>Improved career prospects</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>Met new people</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>Had a good time socially</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>Developed new and existing skills</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>Gained respect in the wider community</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>Engaged with others in an intellectual environment</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td>Made your parents/family proud of you</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h</td>
<td>Proved something to yourself</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>Broadened your horizons</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j</td>
<td>Learned more about a subject that interested you</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k</td>
<td>Learned to live and work independently</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l</td>
<td>Gained a qualification for a specific job</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m</td>
<td>Other (please state below)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. Which is the single most important factor for you?

(Please enter a letter from the above list)

□
13. Do you feel that the skills that you have learned during your programme of study have enhanced your ‘employability’? (Please circle a number on the scale)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>Yes, a lot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Please give reasons

.................................................................................................................................................................

.................................................................................................................................................................

14. Have you been involved in any of the following activities whilst at university?

(Please tick as many as apply)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Details / examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student societies</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-curricular activities (e.g. member of sports team)</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary work</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work placement</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid part-time work</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16. How important, if at all, do you think these activities will be in enhancing your employability once you have left university? (Please tick one box for each activity you have been involved in)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Unimportant</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Not relevant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student societies</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-curricular activities</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voluntary work</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work placement</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid part-time work</td>
<td>□</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
17. **Please indicate how useful the following services provided at Leeds Met are.**

*(Please tick one box for each)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Very Useful</th>
<th>Quite Useful</th>
<th>Not at all Useful</th>
<th>Not Used</th>
<th>Not Aware of Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Career Service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. The Job Shop</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Helpzones</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>d. CALM Voluntary Service</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>e. Union of Leeds Met students (including all societies)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>f. Disability / Dyslexia Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>g. Library Services</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>h. Counselling Service</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>i. Personal Tutors</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>j. Financial Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>k. Leeds Met Education Guidance</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l. Mental Health Support Service</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

18. If you would like to make any further comments on any of the above services, please do so in the space below.

........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................

19. **Do you feel that Leeds Met could do more to promote equal opportunities in relation to the application process, content, delivery and timing of courses and exams and the provision of services?** *(Please tick one box below)*

a. Yes, a lot more  

b. Yes, a fair bit more  

c. Yes, a little  

d. No, not at all

Please give reasons
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................

20. **Have you experienced any form of discrimination, harassment or offensive behaviour during your time at Leeds Met which you feel has affected your studies or employment prospects?** *(Please tick one box below)*

........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
a. Yes  

If yes, please give further details below (any information given will be kept strictly confidential)
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................

b. No

21. What do you hope to do when you finish your course? (Please tick one box)

a. Find a job ☐
b. Continue studying ☐
c. Go travelling ☐
d. Do voluntary work ☐
e. Undecided ☐
f. Other (please give details below) ☐
........................................................................................................................................

Thank you for taking time to complete this questionnaire. Once completed, please return to:
L.Prodgers@leedsmet.ac.uk or Lucy Prodgers
Access Institute
Leeds Metropolitan University
Room DM208
Brunswick Building
Leeds
LS2 8BU

We would also like to carry out short interviews to elaborate on some of the issues identified within this questionnaire. If you would be happy to take part in one of these interviews, please tick the box below and provide us with an email address or telephone number so that we can contact you. (Please note: confidentiality will be maintained during interviews and individuals will not be identified from their responses). Thank you.

Yes, I would be willing to take part in an interview with a member of your research team ☐

Email address .............................................................................................................

Contact telephone number .......................................................................................
Appendix 4: Student Interview Schedule

Personal details

- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity (self-defined)

*How would you describe your ethnicity?*

- Where they live
- Dependents? Disability?

Academic Background and Experiences

- Educational route
  School/sixth form/FE college…?

- Subjects/level previously studied
  A’Level, GNVQ, Foundation etc

- Grades achieved
- Main sources of advice
  Careers advisors, parents, guardians, close family, extended family etc

- Main challenges in making these choices
  Financial, academic ability, knowing what to study/where etc

- Preparation for HE
  *Did you feel well prepared for HE?*

Family Background

- Family educational background and experiences
  *Does anyone in your immediate family have educational qualifications? Who? What? Gained in the UK? How about in your extended family?*

- Family employment background and experiences
  *What kind of jobs do people in your immediate family have? What are their experiences? What kind of jobs, if any, have you had? What have your experiences been?*

- Main sources of support and encouragement
- Role models
  *Is there anyone in particular who you feel has been a good role model to you? Explain.*

Arrival Points into HE

- Mode of entry i.e. grade offer/clearing/interview. Leeds Met first choice?
- Influential factors in choosing the course/institution
  *What influenced your decision to apply to the universities/courses that you did?*

- Mode of study i.e. full-time/part-time/sandwich
Structure of assessment
Exam and/or course work? Was this an influential factor in your decision about what to study and where?

Perceptions, Expectations and Aspirations – Personal

- Perceptions of ‘success’
  What does success mean to you? Is there someone who you perceive as being particularly successful? Why?

- Overall aims for the future
- Attributes, strengths, skills and experiences to achieve these aims
- Perceptions of disadvantage/challenges/barriers to achieving aims
  Do you feel that you may face or have experienced any challenges/disadvantages that may prevent you from achieving your aims? Such as…

- How these impact on perceptions, expectations, aspirations and choices
  Have these experiences prevented you from making any choices? How might they have influenced your expectations and aspirations?

- How these might impact on attainment
  Have these experiences had an impact on your educational achievement?

- How these barriers might be addressed/challenged
- Sense of community
  How important was it to be close to/far away from your permanent home when choosing Leeds Met?
  Do you feel part of the wider community in Leeds? Why?
  Is it important to you to live near/outside of the city centre? Why?
  Where do you see yourself living: after graduation; in 5 years; in 10 years?

- Challenges/disadvantages faced by students at university
  What kinds of challenges/disadvantages do you feel certain groups of students could face whilst at university? E.g. disabled students, minority ethnic students, part-time students, lone parents etc
  Do you feel that you have ever faced any challenges or disadvantages?

- Experiences with university staff
  What have your experiences been of staff and lecturers at the university? Do you feel that they are easy to approach? Have you had any negative experiences with staff?
  Have you ever felt that you have been treated differently to other students, for what ever reason, by staff or the university in general?

Perceptions, Expectations and Aspirations – HE

- Expectations of HE
  What were your expectations of HE? Has it lived up to your expectations so far? What have you/do you expect to gain from being in HE that you might not have otherwise?

- How ethnicity is constructed and experienced within the HE context
  What kind of image do you think the university tries to portray? Who is it aimed at?
  What are the uni’s main principles in your opinion?
  To what extent do you identify with this image? To what extent does this image reflect your experiences and background?
  Do you feel that the staff population reflects the student population e.g. in terms of gender, ethnicity etc? Does this make a difference to you?
How aware students are of WP, EOP and other initiatives within the institution
Apart from your course, do you participate in/are you involved in any other service or initiative within the university?
Are you aware of any initiatives or services within the university that might benefit you? Have you experienced any problems in accessing these? If so, what would make it easier for you to access them?

The extent to which students feel these initiatives are relevant
Do you feel it is important to have initiatives that are based on EO/WP policy? Why?

How supported they feel by the institution
How do you feel well supported by the institution (on an academic and pastoral level)? Are there any particular experiences this is based on?

How students feel they are 'constructed' within the institution
How similar or different do you feel to other students in the university? Do you feel part of the student community? What about academic and support staff? How do you feel this affects your experience as a student? Do you feel that it can influence your levels of attainment? In what ways?

How relevant students feel the equality categories used within the university are to them. How they may define themselves differently.

The extent to which the institutional structure of the course and of the university itself reflects students’ experiences and background
Do you feel that your experiences and background are reflected within the university? If yes, in what ways? If no, how could it be reflected more effectively?

How representative they feel the curriculum is and how relevant they feel this is
How students’ needs are identified and addressed
How students’ experiences are mediated via ethnicity
How important do you feel ethnicity is in terms of your experience as a student within the university? How important do you feel ethnicity is in terms of other people’s perceptions of you as a student?

Who students perceive the experience of other groups of students
Who students perceive as being the most disadvantaged groups of students and why

Perceptions, Expectations, Experiences and Aspirations – Employment/Employability Skills

Career aims
Perceptions of employment
Perceptions and expectations of the accessibility of employment
How easy do you feel it will be to get a job in you chosen field? What do you feel are the factors which may make it difficult to secure employment in your chosen field?

Perceptions of own skills and attributes
What do you feel employers are looking for in an employee? What skills, attributes and strengths do you feel you have that match or don’t match with employers’ expectations?

Expectations of future earnings
Expectations of future status
Expectations/perceptions of social/community responsibility
Apart from earnings and status, are there any reasons you have for wanting to be in employment?

Who students feel they are competing with in the employment market
Appendix F: UEL Case Study Report

Ethnicity, Education and Employment

University of East London

Final Report
(August 2006)

Maki Kimura and Tony Hudson
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1 Introduction

This is the UEL case study report for the Ethnicity, Education and Employment (EEE) project. In accordance with the overall aims of the project, this case study looks at the perceptions of students, graduates, university staff and employers about the effectiveness of policies and strategies at UEL aimed at supporting (Minority Ethnic) student participation in Higher Education (HE). The case study was conducted through both desk research and fieldwork including: the analysis of institutional policies; the analysis of institutional statistics; interviews with Senior Managers, non-senior managers, students and employers; focus groups with students; and participant observation.

The following report is an analysis of the findings; section 2 describes UEL’s institutional profile, and aims to portray the institutional characteristics of UEL in order to make comparison possible with other institutions participating in the project. Section 3 explains the methodology used in UEL case study including the target groups in the study. Section 4 is an analysis of the institutional student statistics relating to ethnicity; and section 5 is a study of the institutional policies and practices on Widening Participation (WP), Graduate Employability, and Equality and Diversity. Sections 6, 7, 8 and 9 cover the analysis of interviews with Senior Managers, non-senior managers, graduates, and students. Section 10 briefly illustrates the employers’ view on graduate employability. Sections 11 and 12 present the institutional findings and recommendations developed from the desk based research and fieldwork results. These recommendations are based largely on the findings from the qualitative interviews, especially those with students, given the focus of this project on qualitative student centred research.

2 Institutional Profile

2.1 Key Features of the Institution

2.1.1 Main characteristics

The University of East London is a new university (designated in 1992); although it has over a hundred years of educational and community tradition. It is a multi-site campus with sites at Barking, Stratford and Docklands in East London\(^1\). In 2004/5, the approximate total student population was 17,650; with 9,700 out of 11,900 undergraduates from the UK/EU\(^2\). Of the 8,800 home undergraduate students, 53% of them were from East London and the Thames Gateway, 36% were from the rest of London and the Home Counties.

2.1.2 Mission/Objectives/Policies

UEL’s vision is to be a leading UK regional university and it is fully committed to achieving the Government’s 50% Widening Participation (WP) target through liaising with local partners. It has a flexible student-centred framework, which is concerned to develop the employability of students, their ability to plan and monitor their own learning and to provide a learning environment which values and celebrates diversity\(^3\). The UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-5 states that developing student employability is one of the central concerns of the University, and keeping reasonable retention and completion rates is considered to play a crucial role in meeting these objectives. Various initiatives and policies which have been developed to address these priorities include: Skillzone, a study skills, information resource and guidance centre located in each of the libraries; National

---

\(^1\) Barking Campus will be closing down in Autumn 2006.

\(^2\) UEL Institutional Data

\(^3\) UEL Teaching and Learning Strategy 2002-2005 p. 4
Mentoring Consortium, Refugee Research Centre, LONDON EAST Research Institute, working on urban regeneration, the Rix Centre for Learning Disabilities, Race Equality Policy, the Religion, Cultural Diversity Policy & Procedures, and Employability Works! a series of careers and skills events for students.

2.1.3 Local/Regional Context
UEL is located in East London and the Thames Gateway, which is an area of rapid economic regeneration and social renewal; however, local people are often excluded from the new employment opportunities. The London Region as well as East London are characterised by marked contrasts in economic performance. Unemployment in London is still relatively high (4.7% compared to 3.7% nationally)\(^4\). Minority Ethnic (ME) groups who constitute 25% of the overall population in London (5% nationally) experience significantly higher unemployment rates\(^5\). At particular risk of non-participation in the labour market are those from Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean backgrounds, with unemployment levels of over 40 to 50%\(^6\). Although ME communities may be as well qualified as the White population, people from ME groups with higher level qualifications are more likely to be unemployed than White people qualified to the same level\(^7\). The Stratford and Docklands campuses are located in the London Borough of Newham, which is one of the most deprived areas in England. In addition, these boroughs have low participation in higher education, some local ethnic communities’ participation rates in higher education (HE) are less than 8%; examples include: people of White working-class origin in Barking and Dagenham; of African-Caribbean and Bangladeshi origin in Tower Hamlets and Hackney; of Pakistani origin in Newham and neighbouring boroughs; and of Indian origin in Newham\(^8\).

2.1.4 Student Intake
The diversity of the student profile at UEL largely reflects the multicultural and socio-demographic characteristics of the local community, as well as UEL’s continuing commitment to Widening Access. Groups which are traditionally under-represented in the HE sector constitute a significant proportion of the student population at UEL. For example, Black-Caribbean men constitute 1.3% of the sector-wide population (2003/4)\(^9\) yet make up to 8% of the home undergraduate students at UEL\(^10\). HESA data shows that UEL recruits significantly more mature students and students from ME backgrounds than comparable institutions\(^11\). The non-traditional qualifications are the common entry qualifications, with 4% of its first year undergraduate intake from Access courses and an additional 18% entering through other routes such as the Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning (AP(E)L) scheme or professional qualifications; or without formal education qualifications (2004/5).

\(^{4}\) The London Development Agency: Understanding London’s Sub-Regional Economies February 2003 p.4

\(^{5}\) The London Skills Commission: Framework For Regional Employment and Skills Action October 2002 p.24

\(^{6}\) Labour Force Survey 2000


\(^{8}\) UEL Widening Participation Strategy 2001-2004 p.3

\(^{9}\) HESA, Table 10b – First year UK domiciled HE students by qualifications aim (#12), mode of study, gender and ethnicity, 2003/4

\(^{10}\) UEL Institutional Data

\(^{11}\) UEL Widening Participation Strategy 2001 -2004, p.3
2.2 Student Statistics

2.2.1 Ethnicity Profile (2004/5)
In 2004/5, more than 60% of students entering undergraduate courses come from ME groups. As graph 1 shows the Black African and Caribbean groups were the two largest ME groups. Representation of ME groups such as Black Caribbean, Black African, Asian Pakistani, and Asian Bangladeshi, and Mixed Race are much higher at UEL than the sector level. Different schools within UEL have very different ethnicity profiles, for example, in the School of Architecture & Visual Arts only 38% of undergraduate students are from ME backgrounds, while 80% students in Business School and School of Law are ME students. More than half of Asian students are under 21, while over 70% of Black and White groups are mature students. Only 44% students enter through ‘A’ Levels; non-traditional entry routes, such as with other professional qualifications (19%) or access courses (5%) are other common entry routes. However, more Asian students (54%) come through ‘A’ Levels than Black (30%) or White students (35%). Black students are more likely to come through access courses (around 10%) than their Asian (3%) and White (4%) counterparts.

2.2.2 Entry Statistics (2004/5)
UEL accepted 3,450 applicants from total of 15,312 UCAS applications, 50% of whom entered through clearing. Of the 1,100 full-time young entrants for undergraduate courses, 97% come from state schools or colleges, 42% from Social Class IIIM to V, and 20% from low participation neighbourhoods. 12% of full-time mature undergraduate students; 11% of young part-time students; and 8% of mature part-time students come

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12 Unless stated otherwise, data obtained institutionally provided by UEL Strategic and Planning Unit (SPU).
13 Table 10b - First year UK domiciled HE students by qualification aim, mode of study, gender and ethnicity 2004/05 http://www.hesa.ac.uk/holisdocs/pubinfo/student/ethnic0405.csv accessed 22/05/06
14 HE institution: applications and accepted applicants 2005 http://www.ucas.ac.uk/figures/ucasdata/heinst/2005.html accessed 24/05/06
15 Table T1b - Participation of under-represented groups in higher education: Young full-time undergraduate entrants 2003/04 http://www.hesa.ac.uk/pi/0304/t1b_0304.xls accessed 24/05/06
with no previous HE experience and from low participation neighbourhoods\textsuperscript{16}. UEL meets all its benchmarks for WP.

### 2.2.3 Output Statistics

The majority of students from ME backgrounds obtain Lower Second class degree classifications, though more than half of students from White groups (except Other White background) obtain Upper Second class degree or higher, and only 37\% of White students obtain Lower Second. In 2001/2, the institutional employment rate for UK/EU full-time, first degree graduates was 57\%, the unemployment rate was 15\%, this is significantly higher than the sector rate of 6\%. This meant that UEL fell short of its benchmarks. However, in 2003/4, the employment performance indicator improved dramatically and was only 0.4\% below the benchmark of 88.8\%. The female graduate unemployment rate is lower than that of males. School of Health & Bioscience graduates have the highest percentage of those who are in employment, full-time or part-time (61\%), followed by graduates of Architecture & Visual Arts (60.3\%). The Schools of Law, Computing & Technology and Education and Business School have less graduates who are fully or partially employed (37\% for Law and 43\% for other Schools), but they all have significant numbers of graduates who take up further study (Law 32\%, Computing & Technology and Business School around 20\%, and Education 17\%). Where employment by ethnic group is concerned, high unemployment rates are observed in Asian Other (15 \%), Pakistani (14\%) and Bangladeshi (14\%), followed by Black Other (10\%)\textsuperscript{17}.

\textsuperscript{16} Table 10b - First year UK domiciled HE students by qualification aim, mode of study, gender and ethnicity 2004/05 http://www.hesa.ac.uk/pi/0304/t2b_0304.xls accessed 24/05/06

\textsuperscript{17} This figure includes postgraduate students. What Do UEL Graduate Do 2003/4 additional information provided by the Employability Unit.
3 Methodology

3.1 Methods applied in case study

In the context of the diverse UEL student profile, the focus of our research was on exploring how the institution responds to provide an environment to accommodate diverse student needs. The research looks at the impact of institutional practices and initiatives upon students’ experiences in HE and also on their subsequent life/career choices. The research has been carried out using a combination of various research methods, both quantitative and qualitative, but with particular emphasis on exploratory, student-centred interviews. Semi-structured interviews with key personnel in the university were also conducted; they included senior management, teaching staff, and support staff.

3.1.1 Desk research

There were several strands to the desk based research. Institutional policy documents were analysed, as were public documents and reports produced by UEL. Data about the staff and students at UEL was analysed; this came from a variety of sources including UEL Strategic Planning & Quality Enhancement Unit, the institutional data base “Proclarity”, and publicly available data from HESA and UCAS. Below are the lists of documents consulted:

A range of policy documents were analysed including:

- UEL Widening Participation Strategy 2001-2004
- Widening Participation Annual Monitoring Report 2002
- Annual Monitoring Statement 2003
- UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002 – 2005
- UEL Race Equality Policy and Procedure 2002
- Innovation and Renewal Strategic Plan 2002-2007
- Annual Monitoring Statement 2003
- Skills Curriculum and Implementation Plan (Skills Curriculum Level 1, Approved April 2004)
- UEL Skills Curriculum (Issued April 2005)

UEL publications and reports including:

- UEL WP Annual Monitoring Report 2001
- First destination Report 2002-3 and 2003-4
- UEL Race Equality Scheme Annual Report 2004
- UEL Student Satisfaction Survey 2004

3.1.2 Fieldwork

One method used was participant observation whilst attending various meetings and events including:

- UEL Open Day June 2004
- Employability Seminar, Feb – Mar 2005
- Employability Works Event, organising party meeting Feb – May 2006
- Equality and Diversity Training, Dec 2004
- Equality and Diversity Training trainer, Feb 2005
Meeting with Community and Education Partnership, in External and Strategic Development Services in UEL, Oct 2005

However, the major part of data collection was through interviews with Senior Managers, graduates, students, teaching and supporting members of staff, giving a range of views on the experiences of students at UEL.

3.2 Role of Advisory Board

An Advisory Board was set up in order to;

- Assist the research team in developing a coherent theoretical framework and rigorous methodology.
- Assist in the further development of key themes and issues shaping the research.
- Facilitate and support dissemination of research findings and recommendations across the HE sector.

Academics and practitioners with diverse (research) expertise and experience were invited to be Advisory Board Members. They were consulted about issues both specific to the UEL case study and in general related to the entire research project. The Advisory Board met twice a year at the University of East London and meetings lasted approximately two hours. The Membership of the Advisory Board is as follows;

- Prof. John Brennan (CHERI, Open University)
- Dr Yasmin Gunaratnam (Freelance Researcher)
- Dr Barnor Hesse (Dept. of African American Studies, Northwestern University)\(^\text{19}\)
- Dr Ian Law (School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds)
- Ms Sandie Miller (Final Year Student, BA in Psycho-Social, UEL)
- Ms Sinead Theresa Fiona McCarthy and Ms Deirdre M Okelly (Staff Members of Student Union, UEL)
- Prof. Gavin Poynter (School of Social Science and Cultural and Media Studies, UEL)
- Dr Bobby Sayyid (School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds)
- Prof. John Storan (Continuum, UEL) – Chair of Advisory Board

The first Advisory Board Meeting took place on 6\(^\text{th}\) December 2004. In this first meeting, it was suggested that students be invited to the Advisory Board, so that student perspectives could be reflected more in the research design and procedures. Given this, Staff Members of the Student Union who closely work with students and a final year student were invited to become Members of the Advisory Board and attended the second and the third Advisory Board meetings, which were held on 21\(^\text{st}\) June and 9\(^\text{th}\) December 2005.

3.3 Target Groups

To explore the issues pertinent to the project design, the UEL team consulted senior management, teaching staff, and staff from Careers and other Students Services.

It was decided to focus the student part of the research on students from three different programmes, Media and Advertising, Psychosocial Studies, and Information Technology. This was because these were all courses with more than 20 students on the programme;

\(^{18}\) Ethnicity and the Labour Market (Ethnicity, Education and Employment Project), Advisory Board – Terms of Reference

\(^{19}\) Corresponding member of Advisory Board
they represented a range of different disciplines; and both vocational and non-vocational courses. These programmes also had varying levels of ME student participation and the lecturers were willing to act as gatekeepers in the project. Students active in extracurricula activities, such as student societies, employability seminars, or mentoring schemes were also approached. Other groups involved in the project were local employers and graduate students from 2001/02 who attended employability seminars at UEL between January and March 2005.

3.3.1 Student Profiles in Media and Advertising
Over the past five years the programme has had an intake of 40-60 students per year. In 2001/02 and 2002/03, the programme had a large proportion of White students in their first year (54% - 2001/02, 55% - 2002/03). However, for the past couple of years, the student profile has more closely reflected the multicultural character of the university. In terms of gender balance, in 2001/02 female students were dominant in all ethnic groups (of the first year students), but in 2004/05 the number of male students exceeded that of female students, except in Black groups. One of the unique features of the student profile of Media and Advertising is that most of students, regardless of their ethnicity, start the course before the age of 21 and study full time. Also, the great majority of students enter from an ‘A’ level route.

3.3.2 Student Profiles in Psychosocial Studies
The programme admitted an average of about 60 first year students for the past five years. The ethnic profile of the programme shows the diverse student cohort, with a significant Black population. A significant majority of students from all ethnic groups are female. Apart from the Asian group, around 70-80% of students are over 21 on entry. In the past couple of years, there has been an increase in students, particularly Black and White groups, entering via non traditional routes, such as access courses. However this is not the case for all groups as Asian students are more likely to have ‘A’ Levels or higher education qualifications on entry.

3.3.3 Student Profiles in Information Technology
The programme has had a large proportion (80-90%) of ME groups for the past few years, made up of roughly equal numbers of Black and Asian students. Black Africans are the dominant African group. The majority of Asian students enter before the age of 21, whereas Black and White groups have significant numbers of students entering the programme aged over 21. There are more male students than female in all ethnic groups. More students come via the ‘A’ Level route, but for all groups except Asians, other entry routes are also common. A Full-time mode of study is popular during the first year, but there are more part-time students in the second year and above. After the 1st year, the programme is also offered via a part-time evening mode.

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20 First year student profile for 2003/4 was; Asian – 15.5%, Black – 28.8%, White – 42.2 % and Mixed Race - 13.3%. For 2004/5; Asian – 16%, Black – 30%, White – 32%, Mixed Race – 14% and Other 8%. From Institutional Data, accessed August 2005.
21 For Black groups, female students take up 73.3% of the group. From Institutional data, accessed August 2005.
22 For example, the percentages of Black students (the first year) are; 2001/02 – 45.2%, 2002/03 – 41.9%, and 2004/05 – 50%. And in general there are more students from Black African group than Black Caribbean group.
23 For example, in 2004/05 of the first year students, 100% - Asian, 89.6% - Black, 76.4% - White, 100% - Mixed race and 80% - Other.
3.4 Challenges

During the first phase of research, one of the difficulties the project team experienced was gaining access to institutional information and data. This is partly due to concerns with confidentiality, but mainly due to insufficient communication within the University. This was partly because the University was in the process of transition, with many new policies and initiatives introduced and Schools, as well as Services, being restructured; this caused much of the information and data to be dispersed.

The second challenge that the team faced was in recruiting students for interview. The graduate students, although difficult to arrange access to practically, were interested in the research project because they were job hunting themselves and the employability aspect of the research appealed to them. Recruiting current students however proved to be an extremely difficult task. On reflection, the timing of recruiting could be one of the reasons. At the same time, it needs to be stressed that those students in the target groups often had a double or triple burden of study, work and family commitments and did not have time to participate in the research. Many felt that their experience did not represent a typical student experience and therefore that the project team would do better to talk to a typical student. Given such circumstances, and to acknowledge the time that the respondents spent with the research team, the team decided to offer USB memory sticks as tokens of appreciation.

The style of the consent forms used with participants, particularly students who were unfamiliar with the norms of social research proved another challenging area. There were concerns that although participants had signed the consent forms they were not giving fully informed consent as they were not fully aware of the potential ramifications of their participation in the research. Furthermore, the research team found it really difficult to raise the issue of ethnicity with students when their concerns were more about something else, such as how to balance work and study, or family and study. Sometimes, respondents seemed uneasy discussing the topic. Even when these difficulties of recruiting and conducting interviews were resolved, the time consuming task of transcribing remained a challenge.

Lastly, given the diverse culture of the university, making a clear distinction between home and international students and placing research focus only on the former proved to be irrelevant in our institutional context. This is because, although there were many issues that separate home and international students, there were also other issues that affected both home and international students equally, such as racism or financial issues. In addition, when discussing the issue of ethnicity or the diversity of the student body, many respondents viewed the overseas students as belonging to same ME groups as British ME groups.
4 Statistical Analysis on Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Ethnicity Breakdown of numbers at entry (2004/5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>UEL</strong></td>
</tr>
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<td>Count</td>
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<td>Pakistani</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* In sector level data, Other Ethnic Group includes all Mixed groups and White is not broken down.

Sector Data from http://www.hesa.ac.uk/holisdocs/pubinfo/student/ethnic0405.htm

As table 1 demonstrates, UEL recruited significantly more ME students than the sector level average. Black African and Black Caribbean were the two groups which were most significantly different at UEL from the sector level average. Also all Asian Indian, Asian Pakistani, and Asian Bangladeshi groups had higher percentages of representation in UEL. The gender balance shows almost the same trends as
the national level data, except for Black Africans, where men were relatively over-represented at UEL. Asian and Black African women were under-represented compared to Asian and Black African men, White women were relatively over-represented compared to White men.

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<th>A Level, Higher</th>
<th>Access</th>
<th>Other</th>
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</table>
Different Schools had different ethnic profiles as Table 3 demonstrates. Computing & Technology, Business School and Law had higher percentages of both Asian and Black students relative to UEL as a whole, while Asian and Black students were less represented in Architecture & the Visual Arts and Psychology. Despite the lower representation of Asian groups in Architecture & the Visual Arts, the Chinese group was well represented. For Computing & Technology, Business School, and Law, it was only Black African students who had a higher level of representation than the UEL average.

<table>
<thead>
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<tr>
<td>White - Prior 2001/2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Race</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
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<td>99</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Ethnicity breakdown of course studied (%) (2004/5) (Undergraduate Home students)
Six months after graduation, White graduates were more likely to be employed than their ME counterparts. Asian and Mixed graduates were considerably more likely to be unemployed than other groups, and Black and Chinese graduates were more likely to be pursuing further study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Employed</th>
<th>Further Study</th>
<th>Still Seeking</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Asian or Asian British</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or Black British</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese or Other</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All ME Students</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole University</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5 Policy Documents Analysis

5.1 Mission

UEL’s vision is to achieve both national and international recognition as the leading university that successfully supports social inclusion and widening participation agendas. This distinctiveness is underlined by its aim to be an inclusive regional university valuing diversity; to emphasise student centred learning; to develop students’ employability; and to contribute to social, cultural and economic development through its research and scholarship.

The document ‘Strategic Plan: Innovation and Renewal 2002 – 2007’ identifies strategic challenges that UEL needs to meet as a London University. These are:

- providing an opportunity for Londoners to access higher education, whatever their formal educational starting point;
- ensuring student employability in the new economy via acquisition of appropriate knowledge and skill sets;
- supporting new economy business development and supporting the sustainability of the manufacturing sector, local government and key public services, particularly health and education;
- contributing through research to the evolution of London’s business and community life;
- developing the inclusivity of UEL and ensuring the quality of our work;
- working in close partnership with local colleges, universities and other key agencies.

These key strategic challenges are reflected in UEL’s various lower level strategies and plans, such as the Learning and Teaching Strategy, which addresses its key themes as:

- Ensuring fair access to higher education
- Maintaining and improving retention rates
- Enhancing the employability of graduates
- Developing a flexible learning offer
- Staff recognition and reward

Various initiatives have been introduced to realise the UEL vision and to respond to these themes and challenges. These include:

- Skillzone (a study skills, information resource and guidance centre in all libraries)
- New Beginnings 1 & 2 (short pre-entry subject specific and study skills accredited courses)
- Development of Foundation Degrees and Level 0 programmes
- Provision of structured AP(E)L
- Development of a Skills Curriculum
- New Dimensions (Recruitment Agency offering work placement and training)
- National Mentoring Consortium

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26 UEL Strategic Plan Innovation and Renewal, 2002-2007, p.8, UEL Strategic Plan Innovation and Renewal, 2002-2007, p.18
27 UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-5, p.5,
The following sections will review four main policies and strategies produced by the university that are particularly pertinent to the research. These are Widening Participation, Retention, Equality and Diversity and Employability. Each of these will be reviewed, looking at their aims and objectives in relation to the degree to which they have been implemented.

5.2 Widening Participation

In 2001, it was reported that 56% of UEL’s first year students were bilingual. Although such cultural and linguistic diversity is a rich contribution to the education discourses of the University, it also means that academic programmes and student services need to be designed with multi-lingual students in mind. The diversity of the UEL student population is also demonstrated by the facts that only 55% of students enter with ‘A’ level qualifications, and 65% of students enter as mature students. The student profile of the university has caused a re-examination of conventional approaches to programme planning, delivery, induction and retention, student support and employment outcomes in the university. Research carried out in UEL suggests that a significant proportion of student withdrawals happen in the first semester of the year, and that 95% of students who successfully pass Semester A complete the academic year, this therefore shows the importance of ensuring students from a wide range of backgrounds can access the necessary support during the first Semester.

5.2.1 Aims and Objectives of the UEL Widening Participation Strategy

The UEL Widening Participation (WP) Strategy, which was submitted to HEFCE in September 1999 aims to:

- Encourage widening participation by under-represented groups;
- Raise aspirations;
- Ensure that all students have the best possible chance of succeeding in their studies.

This is very much in line with the University’s overall mission, which includes a commitment to:

- Developing national and international reputation of innovation in widening access and participation,
- Regeneration of the region,
- Continuing to be committed to promoting cultural diversity,
- Enhancing students’ employability.

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28 UEL WP Strategy 2001-4, p.7  
29 UEL WP Strategy 2001-4, p.1  
30 UEL WP Strategy 2001-4, p.2
5.2.2 Action Plan 2001-4

Although the UEL WP Strategy has not changed significantly, the way in which it delivers its objectives has changed from 2001 to 2004. Within a unique institutional context, the aims of the WP Strategy include developing projects and programmes that can enhance student retention rates and graduate employability\(^3\). Given this, the WP Action Plan 2001 to 2004 aims “to ensure that all students have the best possible chance of succeeding, and the widening participation premium is being used to pilot and evaluate new innovative student support structures which cover the life cycle of the student experience”\(^3\). This can be broken up into five phases; pre-entry guidance; aspiration raising; preparing for higher education; on-course support; and employment.

5.2.3 Activities and Progress

The activities since 2001 to support widening participation include, the establishment of Skillzone, the 24-hour or extended opening of Learning Resource Centres, the provision of structured AP(E)L, and the development of Foundation Degrees and Level 0 courses\(^3\). Each of these activities will be discussed in more detail below.

5.2.3.1 Skillzone

Skillzone, established in 2001, forms a central part of UEL’s WP Strategy\(^4\). It uses the WP Premium Funds to provide a range of learning support services to students. Skillzone also aims to improve retention and completion rates\(^5\). It aims to address student needs at four different stages of their university lives: 1) pre-entry guidance and support; 2) Induction and Retention; 3) Developing Employability; and 4) Employability and Careers.

It organises training and support including group teaching sessions; one-to-one tutorials; workshops and short courses; as well as providing resources (books, software, CD-ROMs, videos and worksheets). Units are skills focused and are flexible allowing students to use the service intermitently. The largest group of students who use Skillzone are non-traditional students, but students who study at Skillzone also include those who entered through an Access Course, A-level students who do not have any essay-writing experience, or mature students who have been out of education for many years\(^6\). The original Skillzone was set up on the Barking campus, but smaller versions of Skillzone were set up in Docklands and Stratford respectively in 2002 and 2003. The initial focus of the project was on disadvantaged adults learners in the London Thames Gateway region, particularly Asian women, African-Caribbean men, and White working-class groups\(^7\).

Over the years, Skillzone activities have been extended, liaising with course teams, and become more visible though the university’s various strategies, such as the Teaching and Learning Strategy 2002–2005 and Innovation and Renewal Strategic Plan 2002-2007\(^8\). Tutors refer students to Skillzone, as well as students referring themselves, and as the profile of Skillzone has been raised, the work of Skillzone is regarded as substantial rather than merely remedial\(^9\). The Skillzone project plays a central role in the delivery of UEL’s

\(^{31}\) UEL WP Strategy, p.7
\(^{32}\) UEL WP Strategy, Appendix E, p.1
\(^{33}\) http://www.uel.ac.uk/Skillzone/diary/about.htm
\(^{34}\) Widening Participation Annual Monitoring Report 2002
\(^{38}\) UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-5 indicates the significant role that the Skillzone plays in enhancing students’ study and employability skills, ensuring fair access to HE, and maintaining and improving retention rates. UEL Leaning and Teaching Strategy 2002-5, p.6, p.11, p.19 and p.21. Similar references are made in Innovation and Renewal: Strategic Plan 2002-2007, p.19 and p.27
\(^{39}\) UEL WP Strategy 2001-4, Appendix?, p.3
WP strategy, which is managed by a senior member of staff, who is a member of the Corporate Management Team with the responsibility for regional partnerships, outreach and WP in the curriculum across the University.\(^\text{40}\)

The Annual Monitoring Statement 2003 indicates that Skillzone has specialist staff to support the following areas of work:\(^\text{41}\):

- Enterprise Zone – giving learners vital skills for self/employment
- Information Skills – advice and training in online information retrieval
- Careers Advice Service – information and advice on effective job searching
- English & Learning Skills – developing English academic and study skills
- Get Your Degree To Work – how to gain skills and knowledge from your part-time job/volunteer work
- New Beginnings – short courses for adults in the region who wish to move on to higher level training
- Make Your Experience Count – UEL credits.

One of the key activities of the Skillzone is managing the New Beginnings courses; these are a series of validated programmes for pre-entry support, which attract around 80 students a year.\(^\text{42}\) New Beginnings 1, a free short course programme of advice, guidance and confidence building for learners, started in 2000 and finished in December 2003 due to the end of the time limited by external funding. New Beginnings 2 are accredited subject-specific courses providing support to students, which cover study skills for degree level study and technical skills to support students in the transition from FE to HE. Students acquire 20 credits at level 1 to prove that they have an ability to study at undergraduate level.\(^\text{43}\) Full access to university facilities is provided and arrangements are made for students to have a computer, printer and modem at home to facilitate learning and preparation for HE.\(^\text{44}\)

5.2.3.2 Learning Resources at Barking and Docklands campuses

The Widening Participation Premium also funds the 24-hour opening (term-time) of the Learning Resources Centre at Barking and Docklands campuses, with extended evening and weekend opening hours at Stratford campus during term time.\(^\text{45}\) This enables many of UEL’s students, who are often balancing work, study and family commitments, to access the library at whatever time is most convenient for them.

5.2.3.3 Development of Foundation Degrees and Level 0 Programmes

Foundation degrees are vocational qualifications aimed at meeting the needs of both employees and employers in the modern and rapid moving workplace.\(^\text{46}\) ‘Innovation and Renewals: Strategic Plan 2002-2007’ highlights UEL’s commitment to support the development of Foundation Degrees with partner FE colleges.\(^\text{47}\) Through the development of these degrees, UEL ensures that these programmes present the best vocational pedagogy. It also ensures that there is a smooth transition for those who aspire to progress to a full Honours degree or other further professional qualifications upon their graduation.\(^\text{48}\) A full Honours Degree will be attained after 12 - 15 months further full-time

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\(^{40}\) UEL WP Annual Monitoring Report, 2001, p.19

\(^{41}\) UEL Annual Monitoring Statement 2003, p.4

\(^{42}\) Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-5, p.11

\(^{43}\) UEL WP Strategy, Appendix (number unknown) p.1

\(^{44}\) UEL WP Strategy, Appendix (number unknown), p.1

\(^{45}\) UEL WP Strategy, p. 8

\(^{46}\) [http://www.uel.ac.uk/courses/choosing/foundation/index.htm](http://www.uel.ac.uk/courses/choosing/foundation/index.htm) (accessed 24th June 2005)

\(^{47}\) Innovation and Renewals: Strategic Plan 2002-2007, p.18

\(^{48}\) Innovation and Renewals: Strategic Plan 2002-2007, pp.18-9, [http://www.uel.ac.uk/courses/choosing/foundation/index.htm](http://www.uel.ac.uk/courses/choosing/foundation/index.htm)
study, with the option of studying part-time over a longer period. UEL provides a number of Foundation degrees which include, Foundation Degrees for Teaching Assistants; Health and Social Care; Healthcare Science and Creative Technologies; with other programmes also in development. Partner FE colleges include: Barking College, Newham College of Further Education, Redbridge College, Bexley College and Lewisham College, the last two in collaboration with the University of Greenwich.

Level 0 programmes have been developed to provide a solid foundation to existing programmes in Schools where no equivalent pre-entry programmes are offered by the School or local post-16 providers. Some of the existing programmes include Media and Creative Industry Foundation Course and Information Communication Technologies Level 0.

5.2.3.4 Structured AP(E)L provision
UEL recognises that learning has many different forms which take place throughout life. In order to meet the diverse needs of students and local communities who wish to achieve formal assessment and accreditation of their employees’ skills and prior learning, the University is committed to developing “new tailor-made approaches to implementing A(E)L system”. This will assist those who seek an opportunity to study at UEL to be considered for admission through their prior experience and learning in addition to any qualifications they hold.

The University now applies A(E)L (Assessment of Prior and Experiential Learning), where APL (Assessment of Prior Leaning) and AEL (Assessment of Experiential Learning) are integrated. The A(E)L Coordinator discusses the source of credit with the potential applicants. This is done by assessing their skills and experience through either or both of the following assessments:

- The accreditation of previously acquired certificates/qualifications (APL), which includes, NVQs, HNCs, HNDs, UK and Overseas Degrees, Post-graduate Certificate/Diploma, and other HE short courses/certificates or incomplete first degrees/post-graduate degrees for exemptions, credit-transfer, and direct entry.
- The assessment of experiential learning, which is the process by which prior and/or learning experience, such as work experience, voluntary work or home work is given an academic value (APEL).

In addition, for a mature applicant, other learning experiences are also assessed (A(E)L). After assessing possible credit value, the A(E)L Coordinator also advises the applicant on possible entry routes, and on further practical issues such as how and where to submit their application (via UCAS or directly to the University).

The University webpage also contains the Guidance Toolkit, which was developed by the A(E)L Unit and the Learning Development Services. This aims to provide an idea for those with substantial experience how such experience can be assessed towards access to a degree programme at UEL.

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49 http://www.uel.ac.uk/courses/choosing/foundation/index.htm
50 http://www.uel.ac.uk/courses/choosing/foundation/index.htm
52 http://www.uel.ac.uk/apel/staff/policy_procedure.htm
53 Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-5, p.11, http://www.uel.ac.uk/apel/staff/policy_procedure.htm,
Innovation and Renewals: Strategic Plan 2002-2007, p.19
54 http://www.uel.ac.uk/apel/general_info.htm
55 http://www.uel.ac.uk/apel/general_info.htm
56 http://www.uel.ac.uk/apel/toolkit/index.htm
5.2.3.5 Other initiatives and services related to WP

These include:

- Maintaining a vibrant disability service
- The National Federation of ACCESS centre at Stratford campus, where student study support needs are assessed
- Maintaining a strong Student Finance Unit
- Developing distance leaning projects
- Responsive curriculum in the School of Education
- Education & Community Partnerships
- Continuum (Centre for Widening Participation Policy Studies)

All these areas of work that are laid out in the WP strategy and related documents show UEL attempt to create an environment that is accessible and welcoming to a diverse student body through both the schools and services.

5.3 Retention Policy

There is no cohesive retention policy, but retention and completion is one of the key foci of UEL WP Strategy and the Learning & Teaching Strategy. As described as above, Skillzone has been developed partially to meet this purpose. A study has been conducted to investigate the factors affecting student progression and achievement, the results of which indicate that the first semester of the first year is crucial in determining student continuation. UEL improved its continuation rate from 77% (1996/7 entrants) to 80% (1998/99), but the latest HESA data shows that UEL still suffers from a high drop-out rate of 27%.

5.3.1 Annual Plan on Student Progression and Achievement

This is formulated to identify and promote areas of good practice to support students in completing their studies. UEL has had the plan since 1997 and it states that any strategic focus on improving student retention has to be multi-dimensional, including pre-entry guidance. Following the findings of an institutional study, one key target of the retention strategy is a focus on embedding support mechanisms into the first semester of the first year. In January 2000, a one-day conference was held to disseminate the evidence of internal and external good practice and findings from the research conducted at UEL. Learning Support Services as well as other services pursued a range of strategies, and a Quality Improvement in Learning and Teaching Project made twelve recommendations to tackle the issues, some of which are incorporated in the Teaching and Learning Strategy 2002-5 for rapid implementation. Enhancing employability through programmes with a significant vocational focus is considered to have a favourable impact on retention. Therefore, many of the targets of the Employability Action Plan are also considered to be relevant to the improvement of the retention rate.

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57 UEL Annual Monitoring Statement, 2003, p.10
58 UEL Annual Monitoring Statement, 2003, p.15
59 UEL WP Strategy, Appendix?, p.2
60 UEL WP Strategy 2001- 4, p.7
62 UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2002-5, p.11
64 UEL Learning and Teaching 2002-5, p.11
65 UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2002-5, pp.12-3. Theses are; the introduction or extension of 1) level one skills units, 2) personal development planning, 3) work-related learning units.
5.3.2 Personal Development Planning (PDP)

Both ‘UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-2005’ and ‘Innovation and Renewal: Strategic Plan 2002-2007’ propose the introduction of Personal Development Planning for all undergraduates. Under this system, students are provided with support to plan and record their own development through a personal tutor. This is guided by a HEFCE initiative which expects all HEIs to provide PDP for undergraduates from September 2005. UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2002-5 states,

*All students at undergraduate level will create Personal Development Plans as a permanent record of their experience and a summative CV on completion of their course to enhance employability and career planning. Templates will be designed and staff development undertaken to achieve a phased implementation over three years.*

Personal Development Planning (PDP) Policy states the importance of PDP for retention, progression and employability as follows:

- a means of valuing and assessing prior experience and achievements and having them valued and discussed with tutors;
- it helps students to draw links between their previous experiences and HE, and to consider what skills and attributes they have which may be transferable;
- a means for focusing attention on the student’s own achievement and requirements.

5.3.3 Skills Curriculum

Skills Curriculum was introduced as part of PDP in 2004, and was developed through a wide ranging consultation, including student views as well as comments from academic and support staff, employers and external examiners. ‘UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2002-5’ discusses the importance of extending the provision of study and key skills provision in level 1 units as ‘skills units’. These aim ‘to develop study skills, employability skills, skills audits and CV development’ and are expected to ‘ensure structured links with the Skillzone and Learning Support Services’. The Strategy stresses the critical role of good co-ordination of student services and enhanced provision (by the academic School).

Under the Skills Curriculum, a series of Skills Modules are offered at various levels:

- Skills for Academic Learning – Level 1;
- Employability (Professional Practice) - Level 2 or 3; and
- Research Skills – Level 2 or 3.

In September 2004, all Schools had implemented Level 1, skills modules, further development was made on Level 0, 2 and 3 and the full programme was in operation by the academic year 2005/6.

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67 UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2002-5, pp.11-12
68 Personal Development Planning Policy, May 2004, [www.uel.ac.uk/qa/manual/pdp.htm](http://www.uel.ac.uk/qa/manual/pdp.htm) (accessed 27/06/05)
69 UEL Skills Curriculum, Issued April 2005
70 UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2002-5, p.11
71 UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2002-5, p.11
72 UEL Skills Curriculum, Issued April 2005, p.1
73 [www.uel.ac.uk/qa/manual/pdp.htm](http://www.uel.ac.uk/qa/manual/pdp.htm)
74 UEL Skills Curriculum, Issued April 2005, p.1
The Skills Curriculum is developed in order to lay a foundation where students will develop their skills throughout their study. Skills in all other modules will be built on this set of skills, which students ‘practice’, ‘develop’ and ‘refine’. The Skills Curriculum requires that this needs to be communicated to students explicitly through Indicative Learning Outcomes and should be articulated in the module specifications⁷⁵.

5.3.4 English Language Support

One of the services that Skillzone offers is English and Learning Skills development and support⁷⁶. They run a range of classes and seminars on all three campuses in the University. These include:

- Master classes in English and Communication Skills to groups and individuals as part of validated programmes;
- Lunch time academic and English support seminar programmes, on Academic Writing Skills and Skills for Academic Success;
- Academic study support by drop-in such as subject related modules and additional study support (10 week per semester) as well as bookable individual tutorials.

Providing materials that can help students develop English, academic writing and study skills, and generally improve the quality of work they produce, is an important part of assisting students who do not speak English as their first language to achieve as highly as they can and to remain in higher education⁷⁷.

Skillzone also helps in diagnosing student’s needs and monitor student progress as well as producing end of semester reports. They work to integrate learning development within courses and provide a referral system. The Skillzone tracks the progress of students with an end of year assessment called ‘decisions’. This is one measure of how many of the students they support successfully finish the year⁷⁸. Various academic Schools also provide their own in-house English support tutors, but this is an erratic and very limited service.

5.3.5 Development of Distance and E-Learning

As a part of multi-mode delivery, distance learning based on the web has been explored in the Learning Development Service. E-learning has been attracting attention as a means to improve retention. They are considered as effective because of:

- 24 hour access to materials;
- better communication between learners and with their tutors;
- motivation of learners though new approaches to teaching e.g. use of multimedia simulations
- tracking of student participation to allow early intervention⁷⁹.

The pilot of WebCT has been successful and its use is growing in the University. The UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-5 aims to maintain this growth⁸⁰. UEL E-learning Strategy 2004-2008 clearly indicates that the University’s use of the Virtual Learning Environment, such as WebCT, is an important way to help with the retention of students.

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⁷⁵ UEL Skills Curriculum, Issued April 2005, p.4
⁷⁶ International students will be provided English support from English Learning Centre, separately.
⁷⁷ UEL WP Strategy 2001-4, Appendix E, p.2; Annual Monitoring Statement 2003, p.7; http://www.uel.ac.uk/els/docs/wedo.htm
⁷⁸ UEL WP Strategy 2001-4, Appendix (number unknown) p.2
⁷⁹ http://www.uel.ac.uk/lds/e-learning/about_e-learning.htm
⁸⁰ UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2002-5, p.5
both on campus and on distance learning programmes\textsuperscript{81}. Learning Development Services work with Learning Support Services to develop a strong “linkage between electronic courseware and electronic print-based learning resources provided by Learning Support Services”\textsuperscript{82}.

5.3.6 Finance
Most of the students at UEL work during the course of their studies. Various funds are used to maintain a strong Student Finance Unit which gives advice and assistance to students with financial problems. In 2003-4, there was also a target of achieving a closer correlation between student retention and support from the hardship fund\textsuperscript{83}.

5.4 Equality and Diversity

5.4.1 Race Equality Policy
UEL’s has an extremely diverse profile of students and staff with 60% students and 20% staff coming from ethnic minority groups. The University Charter for inclusivity states that:

\begin{quote}
We are committed to working together to build a learning community founded on equality of opportunity – a learning community which celebrates the rich diversity of our student and staff populations. Discriminatory behaviour has no place in our community and will not be tolerated. Within a spirit of respecting difference, our equality and diversity policies promise equal treatment and opportunity for all regardless of gender, sexuality, race, colour, disability, religion, age, and ethnic or national origin. We call on all members of our community to make a personal commitment to these aims \textsuperscript{84}.
\end{quote}

The Race Equality Policy and its associated Action Plans are designed to promote equal treatment and opportunities for all members of the university community regardless of race, colour, religion, and ethnic or national origin\textsuperscript{85}. The policy is complemented and strengthened by policies such as the Equal Opportunities Policy Statement; the Religion and Cultural Diversity Policy & Procedure; the Anti-Harassment Policy & Procedure; and the Inclusive Language Policy & Procedure\textsuperscript{86}.

To achieve the aims of inclusivity at the University, the Equality and Diversity Unit was set up in February 2002, funded in accordance with UEL Human Resources Strategy. Its establishment is also in line with the recommendations and guidelines outlined in reports such as the MacPherson Report, Equality Challenge Unit Report and the Mann Weaver Report\textsuperscript{87}. Staff within the Unit made up what was the largest unit of its kind in the country\textsuperscript{88}, consisting of a Head of Unit, an Equality and Diversity Officer, a Unit Administrator, two equality & diversity advocates across the schools and services, and an event organiser\textsuperscript{89}. They work on various initiatives and events to promote equality and diversity including, staff development, local action plans, data monitoring, and policy review. The unit aims to maintain the diversity of the students as well as promote staff diversity to reflect student profile. They have established a close working relationship with the Student’s Union and

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{81} UEL E-learning Strategy 2004-2008, version 3.6 December 2004, p.4 and p.11
\textsuperscript{82} UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-5, p.14
\textsuperscript{83} Annual Monitoring Statement 2003, p. 10
\textsuperscript{84} http://www.uel.ac.uk/equality/index.htm
\textsuperscript{85} UEL Race Equality Policy and Procedure, 2002, p.1
\textsuperscript{86} UEL Race Equality Policy and Procedure, 2002, p.9
\textsuperscript{88} Inclusivity 2003, p.2
\textsuperscript{89} UEL Race Equality Policy and Procedure, 2002, p.2. But currently only one Equality and Diversity Officer and one Administrator & Event organiser is in post.
\end{flushright}
emphasise the importance of feedback of both students and staff across the University. The Unit also publishes a magazine “INCLUSIVITY”, which is widely available across the University. \(^{90}\)

The University employed a number of specialist staff to counsel and provide support to Black and minority ethnic students (suspended in 2004). Academic staff also have a range of research interests in the field of diversity.\(^{91}\)

**5.4.2 Implementation**

Regarding implementation, the Equality and Diversity Committee replaced the Equal Opportunities Advisory Group in 2002.\(^{92}\) The committee is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor with the Secretary and Registrar as the Vice-Chair; its other membership includes a further four members of the Corporate Management Team, individuals with expertise in various aspects of race equality, such as the Adviser to Asian Women and the Director of the National Mentoring Consortium.\(^{93}\) It holds several meetings in each academic year coordinating policy initiatives and reports to the Corporate Management Team.\(^{94}\) The Board of Governors also ensures that its own actions promote equality and diversity. Overall responsibility in support of maintaining and promoting equality and diversity lies with the Vice-Chancellor, with the Corporate Management Team, and also closely supported by the Secretary and Registrar.\(^{95}\) The Director of Personnel Services is responsible for equality of opportunity in employment, for developing policies which meet legislation and best practice, and for monitoring the impact of these policies on different minority groups. Heads of Schools and Directors of Services are also responsible for implementing this Policy and for designing and maintaining a local equality action plan. All staff and students need to be aware of the racial quality policy and ensure that their actions are in line with the policy.\(^{96}\)

Equality and Diversity Action Plans for each school and service were drafted in Spring 2003. These assess the impact of policies and procedures with regard to employment and service delivery, contractor/partnership functions and the promotion and development of good practice. These action plans operated initially for a two year period until October 2004 and are monitored and reviewed annually by the members of the Corporate Management Team, the Equality & Diversity Unit and the Equality & Diversity Committee. The action plans are specific, measurable, and achievable with realistically timed targets and outcomes.

An annual report is being devised by the Equality & Diversity Unit which will provide information on how the University has promoted equality; valued and celebrated diversity; whether the targets have been met, and whether any good practice has been developed. This report will also be submitted to the Board of Governors, the Vice-Chancellor, the Corporate Management Team and the Equality & Diversity Committee.\(^{97}\)

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\(^{90}\) [http://www.uel.ac.uk/equality/index.htm](http://www.uel.ac.uk/equality/index.htm)

\(^{91}\) [UEL Race Equality Policy and Procedure, 2002, p.3](http://www.uel.ac.uk/equality/progressreport/index.htm)


\(^{94}\) [http://www.uel.ac.uk/personnel/EqualityDiversity_Policy.htm](http://www.uel.ac.uk/personnel/EqualityDiversity_Policy.htm)

\(^{95}\) [http://www.uel.ac.uk/personnel/EqualityDiversity_Policy.htm](http://www.uel.ac.uk/personnel/EqualityDiversity_Policy.htm)

\(^{96}\) [http://www.uel.ac.uk/personnel/EqualityDiversity_Policy.htm](http://www.uel.ac.uk/personnel/EqualityDiversity_Policy.htm)

\(^{97}\) [UEL Race Equality Policy and Procedure, 2002, p.5](http://www.uel.ac.uk/personnel/EqualityDiversity_Policy.htm)
5.4.3 Monitoring

As part of the action plan, UEL carries out monitoring on student admissions and progression, and on staff recruitment, induction, training and career progression by racial group. The monitoring involves collecting, analysing and assessing data to measure performance and effectiveness over time. The results of this assessment are used to set targets for UEL corporate action plans98.

The impact of policies and procedures on both staff and students is monitored. In relation to staff members the following areas in employment as well as career development and promotion are monitored by ethnic group:

- the selection and training of interview panel members;
- job applications and success rates;
- type of contract (permanent, temporary or fixed-term);
- grade and type of post;
- length of service;
- induction, training and development;
- the results of training and career development programmes or strategies that target particular racial groups;
- promotion;
- discipline and grievance.

In relation to students, the following stages of the student admissions process as well as student achievement and progress are monitored by ethnic group:

- choice of subject;
- home or international status;
- entry routes;
- student numbers, applications and admissions, transfers and drop-out rates for each course;
- degree classifications;
- work placements, including success rates, satisfaction levels and job offers connected to placements;
- student success rates in finding employment after obtaining qualifications from the university;
- the results of programmes targeted at people from specific racial groups;
- racial harassment complaints;
- disciplinary actions and complaints.

The monitoring information is regularly reviewed in order to evaluate the progress made to meet UEL’s race equality targets. The monitoring and assessment of the impact of policies and procedures on the university community is partially made available on the web-site and also through a series of annual Equality & Diversity Reports. Furthermore, UEL tries to ensure that this policy and procedure will be available in Braille and on cassette99.

5.4.4 Staff Profile Statistics

Equal Opportunities Monitoring Statistics of the staff profile in Oct 2003 showed a stark contrast to the diversity of the student body. Only 26% of all staff are from non-White

backgrounds. The proportion is even smaller amongst Academic staff (18%), and at Management level (3%). With an increasingly diverse student body senior managers are aware of the importance of diversifying the staff profile.

5.5 Employability Policy and Practice

During the period 2000-1, there were numerous activities on employability; these included: Employability Conference (June 2000); Employability Project Group, HEROBC (the Higher Education Reach-Out into Business and the Community) Fund allocation (1999-2003), Online help for Employability (www.ueljobhelp.uel.ac.uk), Guidance toolkit, Skills Park, Working your way through College, the Graduate Project, or MA/MSc/PGDip by Work-based Learning. Most of these initiatives have been discontinued now (August 2006) because they were often funded from short term external funds; however other similar activities still take place.

UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-05 indicates that developing student employability is one of the key concerns of the University. Furthermore, enhancing “the employability of students by the embedding of key skills and by providing increased opportunities to engage in work-related and work-based learning” is set as one of the aims of this strategy. The University not only focuses on supporting students in acquiring employability skills but also offers students and graduates the opportunity to develop business ideas. The Corporate Management Team approved an Employability Action Plan, which is being implemented by the UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-05. There have been five main areas of activity developed:

- Level one skills units
- Personal Development Planning
- Work-related learning units
- Careers Conference days for level 2 and 3
- Careers liaison

Employability skills are embedded in the curriculum with the support of Skillzone, and work-based learning. A successful MA/MSc/PGDip by Work-based Learning has been running for 4 years and the University introduced a Graduate Certificate in CPD by work-based learning. This will be expanded to undergraduate level. In June 2004, the first careers conference ‘Employability Works!’ was organised by Skillzone and Student Services. The day was designed for UEL students, offering them help and advice in finding a job through workshops, presentations and one-to-one sessions on Interview Skills, CV Clinics, and Business Start-up. Businesses also attended in order to recruit UEL students and graduates.

In November 2004, a Head of Employability was appointed to enhance the graduate employability. Under the new Head, the Employability and Career Unit has been re-organised with many new initiatives taking place, including the provision of Employability Seminars (Pilot) (Jan – Feb 2005) and ‘Employability Works!’ events in Feb and June 2005. The Skills Module for Employability was also introduced at Levels 2 and 3 from 2005/6.

100 http://matrix.uel.ac.uk/employability/internal/news.htm
101 UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-05, p.4
102 http://www.uel.ac.uk/employability/index.htm
103 UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-05, p12
104 UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-05, pp.6-7
105 http://matrix.uel.ac.uk/employabilityworks/index.htm
The appointment of the new Head of Employability to work with the Learning and Teaching Sub Committee has assisted the University in developing more consistent and centralised practices on employability.

As UEL promotes self-employment and entrepreneurial skills, this has had an impact on both curriculum and teaching methods. Schools are currently considering introducing level 3 work-related units with the specific aim of enabling students to plan for self-employment. UEL’s strong interest in developing the entrepreneurial skills of students can also be demonstrated by the launch of HotHatch and Athena initiatives at Knowledge Dock, part of External and Strategic Planning Services. These are business generator units providing entrepreneurs at an early career stage with the environment to stimulate, support and develop their business.

In 1992, a pilot mentor scheme for ME undergraduates was established at UEL, which grew into the National Mentoring Consortium (NMC) in 1994. Now the NMC is a nationally recognised organisation providing the expertise, training and employer contacts for its mentoring schemes. It works with over 300 employers and 16 Universities in the UK. In the Ethnic Minority Undergraduate Scheme, students are linked with mentors who are professionals in their work to obtain support and experience; it is a one-to-one relationship, which allows students to improve their skills to prepare for employment. The scheme lasts for 6 months, from October/November, after training and induction events, to April. Mentor and student meetings are held once a month, often at the mentors’ workplace. All participants are awarded certificates upon successful completion of the scheme. The NMC also organises an annual Graduate Careers Day, which around 40 employers and 2,000 students attend. Following the success of the scheme, a mentoring scheme for students with disabilities is now being piloted at UEL.
6 Senior Management Interviews

16 interviews were carried out with Senior Managers in UEL, who represented the most important managerial positions in the university, on both the academic and service sides. Most of these interviews were digitally recorded and consent forms were signed by the interviewees. Interviews with the most senior managers were conducted by two researchers, whilst other interviews were conducted by one researcher. Interviewees were asked a set of structured questions, which covered the following topics: their perception of the institution (UEL and respective School/Department); Widening Participation Policy and Practice; Minority Students and Widening Participation; and Graduate Employability.110

6.1 The Perception of the Institution and Widening Participation

All Senior Managers shared the view that UEL has a diverse student community with students from many different cultural backgrounds. It was also widely accepted that most students were so-called non-traditional students, who were, for example, mature; from lower socio-economic backgrounds; come from the local area, or were studying part-time.

The profile [of the students] in general is that we do have a very significant proportion of students for whom English is not necessarily their first language –they are multilingual. Secondly the come from typically one of six inner or outer East London boroughs, so they are often typically local students. And thirdly they will be first generation entrants from diverse ethnic, social groupings and backgrounds within the community. And I would suggest that is approx 55-60% of our student population. Add to that the percentage of the student who are perhaps from White backgrounds from lower socio-economic groups and I think that the vast majority of our students come from ethnic and other socio-economic groups that are typically underrepresented in HE. (Senior Management Interview 9)

Many Senior Managers felt that UEL offers access to HE for these students who otherwise would not have an opportunity to progress to HE. This suggests that they tend to share the view that UEL is a successful example of a Widening Participation Institution.

The main targets… I mean that we have such a good record in widening participation in terms of students that I don’t think we have many targets apart form doing what we are currently doing and serving those students well. (Senior Management Interview 12)

It is absolutely the par-excellence of WP institution- we have the high numbers of working class students, we have very high numbers of Black and ME students – it very much reflects the locality we are in… (Senior Management Interview 4)

All Senior Managers felt that institutionally this awareness of (the importance of) Widening Participation was also very high. This claim was supported by various Widening Participation initiatives and practices taking place in different Schools. These included:

- A pre-degree programme for performing arts developed at Stratford Circus for mature students (Innovation and Cultural Studies, now Social Science and Culture and Media Studies);
- Extended degree (Year 0) programmes developed with schools and FE colleges (Innovation and Cultural Studies, now Social Science and Culture and Media Studies and Business School);

110 See Appendix A for interview questions.
• Developing a law degree for the Muslim women together with Azhar Academy (Muslim Girls Secondary School & College in East London);
• Skillzone (External and Strategic Development Services);
• Making sure that the diversity of the students (by gender, ethnicity, and disability for example) were represented in the School advertisement (School of Education);

In contrast to those Senior Managers who predominately identified WP as Widening Access to HE for students from non-traditional backgrounds, other Senior Managements interpreted Widening Participation more broadly111.

I think first a little bit of description [...] that we have tried to ensure that [...] there is seamless access that there aren’t obstacles into HE for applicants who may not know much about HE but are ready and have the capacity to join. [...] Point 2 is that [...] our extended degrees allow us to provide access to HE for people who are just entering in a way their post 16, post compulsory studies. [...] Third is being sensitive to how different communities enter into HE and how mature students and other groups of applicants may arrive into HE. So that means building up links with community organisations as much as with educational institutions. (Senior Management Interview 9).

Having students from non-traditional backgrounds, and thus a diverse student body was recognised as one of the positive characteristics of the University. However, many Senior Managers also considered that having a majority of students from non-traditional backgrounds, who were therefore not familiar with the HE environment, did pose a huge challenge to the University as the institution was required to meet these diverse student’s needs. Many Senior Managements felt that the main concerns of most students at UEL were getting good support to progress; moving onto successful employment; time management to balance study, work and family care; and financial issues. These issues, particularly, around student’s financial situations not only affected the student’s individual performance, but also the university retention rate, which is a measure of the university’s performance for HEFCE. This has recently become more serious concern given the introduction of fees from the academic year 2006/7.

We measure the average time a student here takes to complete their degree and of course it’s a three year degree and you expect to complete it in three years. Well in fact the average is something like 3.6 years. And what often happens is a student will drop out for a semester while they raise some cash and then they’ll come back in and we’re quite comfortable about that but actually our funding councils regards that as a failed student. (Senior Management Interview 2)

I think student debt is one of the biggest contributors to student dropout. (Senior Management Interview 4)

In order to meet diverse student’s needs, developing more creative assessments, which can satisfy the different learning styles of students, was considered important.

The easiest thing to do is to set a load of exams, but that is only appropriate for certain students if that is what their learning style is, if they have a very good memory capacity then they will be ok in exams, things like online multiple choice, using work based stuff to be assessed, coursework is ok, but it is a huge amount of marking and the harder it is to make the longer it takes for students to get their feedback, and the longer it takes

111 A few Senior Managers also considered that Widening Participation was strongly linked with Graduate Employability, which will be discussed later.
for them to get their feedback then the less use it is to them. (Senior Management Interview 11).

In addition to university’s responsibility to its students, as stated in the University mission, many Senior Managers believed that the University has a broader socio-economic role in the local community, helping the regeneration of the area and actively participating in the local economy. Given such a unique regional context, they believed that the role of the University is to provide the local community with basic as well as higher order skills. Many Senior Managers felt that the University is serving its purpose well.

Yes; it [UEL] is a degree awarding body; it educates 150,000-170,000 students a year. It’s providing a local sort of skills base and enabling people to acquire the qualifications needed to move forward in the employment market and that is increasingly important as being a graduate is becoming increasingly a requirement or a number of jobs now. (Senior Management Interview 4)

We see ourselves being here to serve a population in the six key London boroughs that surround us […] that’s a population of about 1.2 million people that we’re serving. […] Economic regeneration is what is particularly important theme for a university like this to be involved in because […] there are far too many people in those six boroughs who are not economically active and […] it means that there’s lots of poverty and things and therefore paying attention to getting more jobs in this part of London to getting more people enabled to have those better jobs are parts of what we do. (Senior Management Interview 2)

Although its locality and local commitment is one of the University’s strengths and unique features, many Senior Managers also pointed out its national and international characteristics. This was stressed as one of the positive factors that the University could further develop into a nationally and internationally recognised HEI.

Student profile of UEL is about representative of its community. I think my school which is more international and probably a smaller geographical base within the region. We have a very high proportion of students who come from Newham, Tower Hamlets and Inner East London and they are therefore disproportionately like to be of Black or Asian origin, I would guess. That’s the home based students and then we have a higher proportion of international students. (Senior Management Interview 3)

I think it [UEL] has a very important role as a regional; and international provider of education. So it meets in effect the needs of two different but interlinked constituencies. I think it is distinct because its student population is fairly distinct compared to the average university […] And so as a regional and international provider of education the challenges facing those students are greater than for the average university –they have tougher challenges to overcome. (Senior Management, Interview 8)

6.2 Minority Ethnic Students and WP

As discussed above, many Senior Managers acknowledged the diversity of the student population, particularly the high percentage of ME students at UEL. However, in terms of engagement with these ME students, some Senior Managers said that their Schools did not necessary provide services specifically to ME students.

Specifically? […] I don’t know how we do it superficially; we try to cater for all demands without distinguishing really. (Senior Management Interview 7)
In some Schools, that had many international (ME) students, the provision for ME students was a difficult issue. International students require a different kind of support to home ME students, as they have issues such as settling in London or feeling isolated without friends or families, which were often dealt with International Office in the University. However, they also faced some similar challenges with home ME students, such as lack of familiarity with British HE, the language barrier, or the possible racial and ethnic stereotyping. Despite the similarity of some of the issues that these students faced, they were often dealt with by different services due to the separate funding and support structures for ME home students and international students.

Although not specifically targeted for ME students, Senior Managers cited Year 0 programme, skills modules for Level 1, and personal tutor systems as examples of efficient provisions to serve ME student’s needs, particularly for those without traditional academic qualifications.

First of all we have a year 0, so the student can start from 0 and progress to 1 rather than 1 progressing to 2. Secondly we have had, even before it was university policy, very well imbedded skills modules for level1. [...] But I think a lot of attention to skills for the more than typically needy students, but actually that can also of course be somebody who is White and middle class and more privileged and if they lack the skills that would still benefit them. So in WP we have to be very careful about not privileging one group and depriving others, we need to privilege that group and it’s an opportunity for others if they also require that type of support (Senior Management Interview 3).

As demonstrated in the above quote, in addition to the difficulty in differentiating home and overseas ME students, one reason that there was not more support or provision specifically for ME students was the concern that such provision could cause disadvantage or discrimination for other groups. Furthermore, some Senior Managers believed that targeting particular groups often missed the point:

When people have this issue [of ethnicity], they always think what can we do for ME students, basically what they should be saying is whatever they do for those students is good for everybody. So basically what they should say is what is our service about? What are we trying to deliver to our students and if they do that, the fact that the students are from a particular ME group will be taken up in that because you will be looking at what will make our students successful.... When you try and create a particular strategy to encourage different groups you kind of miss it and in a good business you actually start with your customer and how you are going to attract them and look after them [...] (Senior Management Interview 14).

However, some provision did exist, such as the Race and Welfare Offices in the Student Union and The National Mentoring Consortium specifically for ME students. In addition, some Senior Managers referred to the institutional practices such as the celebration of ME community events; the recognition of key religious and cultural days; and catering for various (religious) dietary requirements on campus, and they saw these as an expression of University’s commitment to meet ME student’s needs.

For example, this coming academic year we have a programme already set up on all the various religious and cultural festivals that take place and we bring in entertainers from those various groups to meet our staff and organise entertainments and also there’s briefing materials there as well so people can fine out more about different religions, cultures and festivals. (Senior Management Interview 12)

However, not all of them were necessarily impressed by ME community events organised by the university.
There is all the celebration of ethnic minority events that we try to do etc. I'm never quite happy about that, I think it should happen but it seems a bit… (Senior Management Interview 7)

However, the careful planning of academic programmes to be aware of other religious and cultural calendars was often considered to be very important if the academic school was committed to equality and diversity, although it was difficult to organise school calendar taking all cultural events into account.

We try not to have, certainly on [programme name]; we try not to have assignments handed in when students might be fasting. If students need to take time off for specific days in their own cultural calendar then they can do. (Senior Management Interview 11)

Another area that Senior Managers raised was the development of a curriculum that critically explores the social and cultural aspect of all the diverse lives of their students and avoids being Eurocentric.

I think there is awareness in the institution about the danger of having euro-centric curriculum for instance, so there is that awareness. There are attempts to make sure that the curriculum and syllabus has that awareness of the whole of your student body. (Senior Management Interview 4).

There is sensitivity in terms of the development of our programme curriculum. In other words many of our staff are very committed to developing programmes that explore critically contemporary social and cultural life. Inevitably to do that effectively you have to explore questions of race, gender, the development of international and domestic social, political, cultural and economic circumstances. (Senior Management Interview 9)

In short, most Senior Managers acknowledged the importance of cultural sensitivity in all areas of teaching and student services, but a few Senior Managers were critical of the university not giving the right message to students through the cultural attitudes embedded in teaching and services.

Maybe it's just on this site and the people I've met here… I've felt that people's attitudes towards the students were maybe colonialist – you know – really do gooding. And because of that… and also the body, I don't know about the teaching body because I don't know the statistics, but if I look at the service I inherited – all female, all White until this year when they had xxx [name deleted] come who is Asian, but you have a body of people who are supposed to work with people who to me were not culturally sensitive, not necessarily maliciously, but they are not culturally sensitive. (Senior Management Interview 14)

In relation to this issue, some senior managers suggested that a fair representation of ME staff in their School could be a positive message for ME students.

It is also about having diversity in staff and we have a target to increase out ME staff by 5% - we actually do quite well I mean have a look at the photos of the staff outside the office (Senior Management Interview 11)

In order to identify student’s needs and to provide better support, Senior Managers utilised personal tutors, seminars, student support office. Various student committees also gave students an opportunity to raise their concerns.
We have a student experience committee, and I don’t think that that’s common across the university. It is there to debate student experience as opposed to curricular matters which go through other committees. The student experience committee is student reps. And its their chance to say what they think is wrong with the building, the food, its provision, all those sorts of support mechanisms, anything else that is actually outsider of our control. (Senior Management Interview 7)

Yes we have very active student programme committees and we meet regularly with the student representatives, and we make a big fuss. The difficult thing for us is part-time students because they can’t necessarily come in for meetings so we do that by e-mail usually. (Senior Management Interview 11)

6.3 Graduate Employability

When asked about graduate employability and the role of the university, many Senior Managers expressed the opinion that graduate employability was the key concern of the university.

It’s absolutely fundamental, there is I guess FE is important as well, but in the London labour market we are in desperate need of higher level skills. The industries such as banking, the finance services, companies I was talking about earlier [...] or the creative industries, leisure and tourism they are all needing people with higher level skills. And so it’s the job of HE very largely to work to support those things and to provide opportunities so that people when they enter the labour market have the basic knowledge and skills from which to operate. (Senior Management Interview 3)

Well it’s fairly obvious that people need to get a job and people need to start thinking about getting a job when they set foot in the institution and the old model I mentioned before will not work. So it’s got to build into the curriculum, they have to start thinking about it sooner and acquire skills early on in their programme that will be useful in the labour market and as long as that is done in the right way there is nothing in conflict with having a good academic experience and work. (Senior Management Interview 12)

However, compared to the success in WP, many Senior Managers accepted that the institution faced a challenge in achieving better graduate employment and employability. This demonstrates that many Senior Managers equated WP with Widening Access and did not necessarily link the issue with all phases of student experience at HEIs. However, some others considered that Widening Participation and Graduate Employability were closely linked agendas.

Well I think if you open the door at one end you’ve got a responsibility for what happens at the other end. (Senior Management Interview 12)

It’s that they are on a steep learning curve its all very well being able to get into an institution, but you need to be able to get a job a the end and our job is to train them for that. (Senior Management Interview 11)

A few Senior Managers argued that these two initiatives were more than linked, and that actually they were the same issue. For these Senior Managers, consistent strategies and practices across institutional services to cover and support different phases of student’s experiences were what the institution should provide if they were to claim success in WP.

I think it is about our students and I don’t think that they are two separate issues actually – I think that for our student body and our student profile that WP and employability are part of the same issue. (Senior Management Interview 4)
Successful WP policy means that a student from this university could go to any employer and they would be thought as well of as anybody from another institution. (Senior Management Interview 14)

Over the last year we put in place a retention and achievement policy that came into effect in September [2004] and that was intended to ensure that students and every opportunity we could give them and they had a personal tutor and we set out a personal development plan […] It means that the students who saw their personal tutors regularly put together a portfolio which hopefully will help them to reflect and to develop the sort of CV that will get them into jobs. It’s planned on that basis (Senior Management Interview 3).

Initiatives and practices identified by Senior Management that have enhanced work on graduate employability were as follows:

- Work placement opportunities;
- The appointment of the Head of Employability;
- Employability Works events (Skills and job fair);
- Personal tutor and Personal development plan which enables students to develop a portfolio and eventually CVs;
- National Mentoring Consortium;
- Working with local recruitment and training organisations such as New Dimension and London First;
- Appointment of an employability tutor in the School;
- Developing links with employers;
- Entrepreneurship Centre;

Senior Managers recognised the importance of graduate employability to the institution; however some of them felt that this view was not shared by members of teaching staff.

That’s a challenge because you know, in a real sense they [employment indicators] don’t but they do, and for many academics, they choose not to engage with such things [graduate employability]. (Senior Management Interview 2)

I think there are still quite a lot of staff who think that it [graduate employability] is not really their responsibility and it is because of the expectations of particularly the people we are now marketing our courses at, I think we are doing them a disservice if we don’t get more involved. (Senior Management Interview 7)

Even amongst Senior Managers who considered Graduate Employability as absolutely vital for the University, there were some who expressed ambivalence towards the way that personal and professional development profiling was being planned in the institution.

I think it will come under some unit in the 3rd year I think that’s the idea of personal and professional development profiling and plans and so forth. But its not something that employers would want to see credit rated, I mean […] people in the legal professional are not going to be thrilled to look at somebody’s CV and see that they got 20 credits in their final year for leaning how to attend an interview – your know this is not great but its something we want to do for them some other way. (Senior Management Interview 7)

In addition, there were a few others who argued that Employability should not be the only focus of the University in terms of measures of outcomes.

I don’t think it is just a straight forward answer saying HE is all about employability I think that diminishes the importance of HE, so I think it is an intellectual and human
development that one should expect HE to at least provide the opportunity for someone to achieve. If you do that well then actually you do create someone who has the confidence and the skills to get a decent job. (Senior Management Interview 9)

6.4 Gaps in Awareness and the Future of the University

Many senior managers agreed that the university needed to have a more focused or coherent strategy for the successful development of WP and Graduate Employability policy and practice.

We need to be a bit more focused and a bit clearer about what we are doing. I feel we are still trying to do everything and I think that is probably something that is common across the sector because we have had so many new initiatives that is probably no time to sit down and work out what we are really doing with WP and what we are really offering people. (Senior Management Interview 7)

It was also felt that success could only be achieved through partnership between colleges, schools, employers and UEL. Funding was the one of the areas that many saw as a possible constraint in achieving the goals.

Well I think funding is an issue because it is more expensive to provide the range of facilities and services that are needed for a student population where there is no history of university where there isn’t parents at home who can support you through university – a lot of our students themselves are parent and have caring responsibilities and so for all of those funding is a real issues. (Senior Management Interview 4)

A shortage of human resources was another serious concern for Senior Management in achieving their strategic aims and objectives.

Energy, staffing levels really, typically I’m always short staffed, there is not a shortage of initiatives there is a shortage of people to do them. (Senior Management Interview 3)

Some of these challenges had arisen because University had recently been in the process of major institutional change, which had aimed to reorganise services for students more coherently.

In general, the level of commitment to WP and Graduate Employability was high amongst Senior Management, although the interpretation of the link between these two policy initiatives varied. They were also extremely aware of the distinctiveness and the diversity of the UEL student population. However, compared to the marked awareness of the diversity of the student population, there was less awareness that the staff profile did not reflect the student population. Only three Senior Managers mentioned the issue of the numbers of ME staff and only two of them raised concerns about how this might have an impact on the University culture. Student diversity was often categorised singularly as diversity with few staff recognising that there were many differences within the diverse community of students, although there seemed to be a growing interest in the difference in performance between different groups. On the contrary, the different needs of full-time and part-time students seemed to be well acknowledged. Senior managers were very concerned about developing initiatives and policies around WP and graduate employability, however they were much less concerned about the dissemination, implementation and monitoring of these policies as the quotes below illustrate.

We just do it!!! There are no specific dissemination routes [for Diversity and Equality policy]. (Senior Management Interview 11)
I think it is mostly ad hoc below the strategic levels already mentioned – other than the annual monitoring statement which obviously pulls together all the activities that are going on and report them back to CMT, then to our board of governors and then to HEFCE. (Senior Management Interview 4)
7 Non-management staff interviews

12 interviews with non-management staff were conducted between September 2005 and January 2006. These included teaching staff in the School of Social Science, Media and Cultural Studies and other staff who work in student support roles including English language support, E-learning and careers. Semi-structured questions were asked about their views of the institution, the students, their awareness of WP, Employability and Equality and Diversity policies and practice; and effectiveness of university practice\textsuperscript{112}. Interviews were digitally recorded with permission from the interviewees.

7.1 The view on HE and UEL

In concurrence with senior managers, most non-senior management staff interviewed agreed that UEL has a diverse range of communities and that it is working towards becoming an inclusive institution. A lecturer who studied at UEL when it was a polytechnic considered that the institution gave him, someone from the working class background, an opportunity to change his life. Many others also thought that UEL still has the same mission, giving opportunities to the local community to encounter a range of different experiences.

I think its overall aim is still pretty much the same as it was back in the 70s [...] which is to give and local community, to change their life course. It is what we were talking about before you switched your machine on about emancipation. I also think perhaps something that is new in that project is the engagement of the university with the massive regeneration that is going and which increase in pace with the Olympics coming here. (Non-senior management interview 1, academic)

You know, whether we, we saw ourselves as a university focussing on this specific region or at least London/Thames Gateway or, or whether that was unnecessarily limiting. Um, but clearly we need, UEL needs to be responsive to the local community because, you know, most of our students come from, you know, broadly speaking the local area. I mean, London’s a big place, obviously, but most of our students have parents. I suspect, who live in London or, or the, the, the near, Essex communities and so there is a need to be response, um, responsive to, to their needs. (Non-senior management interview 4, academic)

Many staff pointed out that the university was often disorganised, with various different policies implemented rapidly and without thorough planning. It was felt that this was partly due to the legacy of the previous senior management systems and partly due to the recent restructuring of the schools. The lack of effective communication channels to inform staff about the changes, resources and the social infrastructure available to support students was often mentioned as an area of concern.

But I think the problems that UEL has at the moment is that it’s constantly in a state of evolution, it’s constantly going through major changes, particularly for me as a tutor in relation to the academic framework the new building programme, these are all changes which are being implemented very quickly, and I think at some point you know, we need just to stop and catch our breath because I think what it does do is tend to destabilise staff in that. [...] We seem to be implementing policy at a rapid rate, but we’re not very good at, ah, locating that policy at the individual level. Um, the communication channels by which people can learn about the change doesn’t seem to be very effective. (Non-senior management staff interview 7, academic)

\textsuperscript{112} See Appendices B and C for interview questions
However, some staff stressed that their colleagues were very committed, and that they still believed in the importance of getting an education per se, which was contrasted to other universities where it was felt that a business mindset was predominant. These were the reasons that these interviewees remained committed to teaching and learning in the university, despite all the challenges they face in the institution.

I think, I suppose, if I’m talking about the work, I very brutally use the word like chaotic, um, but that it’s hearts in the right place.[…]. I think a lot of universities, we live in quite a business mind and environment, but we don’t have to worry about budgets and things, but I think lot of universities dominated by that kind a business mind. (Non-senior management interview 3, academic

I think, um, quality [I can talk about] is often about the quality of the particular degree programme and…and I think that’s almost entirely determined by the, commitment of the staff group and its cohesiveness and how coherent the programme is, how experienced the staff are, how enthusiastic they are, whether they’re interested in undergraduate teaching, you know, and I think the xxx studies area has…has got most of those positive qualities. I think it’s got a committed staff group; it’s got a history of being interested in undergraduate teaching, um. (Non-senior management interview 6, academic)

Some academic staff felt that the University was not offering enough appropriate support and guidance to its students. An hourly-paid lecturer raised the issue that they were not paid for the extra support that they gave to students, and as another lecturer pointed out it is often the first year students who are taught by hourly paid staff. As the first year is when students need the most support, these lecturers considered that they should be taught by full-time, experienced academic staff.

[Students are working during the day and cannot see their tutors during their office hours] so people lie myself hourly paid lecture not really being paid for [other activities support them.] I was sitting here until 10 o’clock at night supporting student in the tutorials because […] you know they’re here they want some help, support, you help them. Or emailing […] (Non-senior management interview 2, academic).

I suspect there are and here we come down to the kind of budget decisions that Schools make, I suspect there are key, level one programmes that have been delivered by hourly paid temporary members of staff, should be being delivered by core contract members of staff. (Non-senior management interview 1, academic)

7.2 The view of students

Most interviewees were aware that students come from a variety of backgrounds with a large proportion of ME students, even compared with other new universities in London. They were aware that students often come from deprived backgrounds and that they often have pragmatic reasons for entering HE: they see education as a way to improve the quality of their lives. However, they also acknowledged that there are a few students who attend university principally because they are interested in pursuing academic study.

We have students with these massive social problems. […] and many of us who have, have come from different countries, African, Caribbean, whatever, and they don’t always have the same support, family support, it’s much more difficult for them, much more difficult for them. […] it strikes me as we… there are quite a range of needs, and some of our students, as I say, they’re very… They’re here for very pragmatic reasons […] We do still, we still, I mean, it maybe an increasing minority of students who are doing this degree for very academic reasons and why they, well, some of them say they
Have done it to get away from all that sort of, practical and employment things.
(Non-senior management interview 3, academic)

Many teaching staff identified that many of their students from non-traditional backgrounds lack the study skills they need to succeed in the institution. As they come from various learning and training backgrounds, they are rarely equipped with basic study skills that are required to pursue academic study. Although non-senior management staff agreed that HE is a place to study independently, they still think that UEL students, who usually arrived at the university without much preparation for HE programmes, needed to be motivated and require more one to one support than students at other institutions. Staff observed many cases where their students face all sorts of different life problems such as ill health, financial difficulties, and family responsibilities, which have affected their ability to study effectively. Some staff also perceived that some of these students have very low esteem and doubt their own ability to succeed in HE.

Yes so she [one of students in the interviewee’s class] was suffering from poor health. And from [other class] as well I have students who are coming in and saying ‘ah he couldn’t come in as he had some sugar level went up and he was in the hospital’, another one had some problems with the heart. Somebody else had some problems with legs. […] Different people, different scenarios, different cases but yes I would say [there are a lot of example of students suffering from ill health.] (Non-senior management interview 2, academic)

They have been scaffolded throughout their educational experience and suddenly here they’re expected to, to mange their own time, to mange their own personal resources and they do find it quite difficult. So there’s quite a transition for students from being a supported learner to an unsupported learner and, and that can be quite problematic. (Non-senior management interview 9, academic)

I’m always saying to […] to students that you’re doing the intelligent thing because sometimes people come in with the lack of.. a poor self esteem. (Non-senior management interview 10, support)

Many students at UEL have to work full-time even if they are full-time students too, and some academic staff felt that they are not same as full-time students decades ago. This affects the way in which teaching can be delivered and the amount of work that staff can realistically expect students to do.

A lot of our students aren’t rich to begin with and have a variety of other responsibilities including, you know, many of them have families to look after and so there’s a lot of pressure on students both in terms of money and in terms of time very often. You know, it’s all very well the likes of us academics saying, you know, these degree credits are calculated on the basis of you doing at least 200 hours of work… […] per, per module but, but if you have, um, a screaming child that needs attention, then, you know… [And some students, although they are studying fulltime, they also] work 20, 30, even more hours a week in, in paid employment. Sure. Yeah, the average fulltime student is no longer a fulltime student, as somebody said. (Non-senior management interview 4, academic)

In terms of student’s expectations of HE, a few teaching staff were aware that students have huge expectations of HE and believe that they can be transformed completely by their HE experience which can often lead to unachievable goals. Students also expect a lot of support from academic staff and a style of teaching and learning more similar to school or FE level.

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I think that there are a sizable percentage of students, although I don’t know how big, who have a very kind of naïve idea about what university will be. They think that is just some kind of other, magical kind of place, where other, kind of magical things happen; and that they will be transformed. And you know I think that most students are transformed, indeed if they are not transformed in some way we are not doing our job, but I think that they are not… at the end of the 3 years as it were, if you could take them back to themselves at 1st year induction, and if they could hear what they said about what they expected, where they ended up three years later is not where they thought they were going to go… (Non-senior management interview 1, academic)

I think they would be much happier if they had like much more flexibility to see the module leader or the person who is charge of somebody else who has given them extra help and support and extra explanations and course work support as well …(Non-senior management interview 2, academic)

7.3 Awareness of institutional policy and practice

7.3.1 Widening Participation

Many non-senior management staff agreed that WP is a key responsibility for UEL to the local community and felt that this view was widely shared by colleagues.

(Your view that the university is responsible for local community and WP, do you think that kind of view is shared by your colleagues as well?) I, I think so, certainly speaking for the, xxx studies. People here… You know, the, relationship between the local and the global is, is certainly something that comes out in, in conversation and, and in teaching. (Non-senior management Interview 4, academic)

Plenty of staff in the institution actually do believe, they believe that it’s the job of an institution like this to help people from poor, disadvantaged backgrounds to climb the ladder and to get to have a chance. A lot of people believe that so there is this quite a strong element of wanting to widen participation for the good of, you know, the people in the areas. (Non-senior management 5, academic)

Together with many other initiatives, the university’s focus on the development of e-learning was considered by some members of staff a key strategy to widen participation. However, others thought that such a move was more business driven and does not always work effectively; they often felt that more one to one support is necessary for students.

This [the link between learning technology and WP] is a very, very simple one. I would say … I would say tracking. […] Especially with large courses, we don’t necessarily notice our students fade away. This gives me something that’s very quick, very easy, that I can look at and say who’s there and who’s not there. And I’m often looking at who’s not there. […] Whereas, I think, otherwise, we may not notice necessarily, until they fail an assignment. […] Through technology, we can aid, we can really improve retention and progression. I think it genuinely does. (Non-senior management Interview 11, support)

I think it’s exactly that what’s happening. [E-learning is now more driven by business minds rather than moving towards inclusivity.] And even big companies, they like to send their employees on evening courses because they don’t have to release them from work, that’s one thing. Secondly, […]… you know for the business environment it’s cheaper to do the e-learning. […] But the quality of this learning or what they gain isn’t going to give them the experience that we were just talking about. Because I feel that what students require is much more one to one attention not less. E-learning goes into exactly the opposite direction. (Non-senior management interview 2, academic)
Whilst most staff admitted that the university was making an effort to widen access to HE some members of staff were more critical about the institutional practice, as they see the diverse student community as a mere reflection of the local area. Some others also felt that the university was not supporting students enough, institutionally, once they arrived to allow them to progress successfully through their programmes. Many explained that this was partly due to the lack of resources.

The sceptical, I mean a sceptical view of that [the university is making an effort to widen participation] would be to say, that is actually simply reflecting the fact that the reality is that only students from a poor background used to come, therefore may [...] get the best of a job and turn it into a virtue if you like, you know, there wasn’t any choice really, we weren’t turning away people from Eton and whatever in favour of people from, you know, Tower Hamlets, there’s no question of us deliberately choosing whatever, this was the only choice, so I mean, I think perhaps some of management has been simply been making a virtue of necessity. (Non-senior management interview 4)

We do not support our students properly here and that is one thing that I feel quite bad about and I try as best I can, there’s only one of me [...] So basically, one think that’s special for you is not just opening a door but continuous support for students. (Non-senior management interview 9)

I’m sure the university would say in general, yes it is keen on all this sort of thing but it’s all, but they will always say, but we are constrained by money problems, we always have to be more and more efficient and find, you know, teach with less money per student and all that sort of thing. So whatever it might desire or want or feel it should be doing, it also has to think of the money, it’s not a choice, it’s a very practical proposition. (Non-senior Management Interview 5, academic)

In informal meetings conducted with those who liaised with local communities to widen participation, it was pointed out that more structural and top-down support was needed from the University as most outreach work was a bottom-up operation. These practitioners often felt that their activities were marginalised; they said they needed more resources to support their activities as well as university-wide recognition of them.

7.3.2 Employability

In terms of employability, most non-management staff agreed that this is one of the key missions of the university. They recognised that in a society where the institution you study at matters more than what you study, UEL graduates still have some disadvantage, and the university has a responsibility to equip students with better employability skills to attempt to alleviate such a disadvantage. However, the disagreement amongst academic staff lay in how this should be achieved, and whether, or how, the employability agenda should be implemented. Along with some senior managers, a few academic staff emphasised the point that employability should not be the only purpose of HE.

I think it [HE] has multiple purposes. I think, I think there’s self-fulfilment in being a student. I think we overlook it in the focus on employability. We don’t look so closely at personal growth, but I think it is about personal growth too. Certainly, it is about employability. It is about providing students with happy learning experiences, happy and effective learning experiences. (Non-Senior Management Interview 11, support)

There was a major debate as to whether employability should be embedded into the curriculum. Some believed that employability should be part of the curriculum:
However, others thought that the implementation of employability modules in each programme has required them to remove some of the programme contents and that this is a very difficult balance to strike.

I would think we’re, we’re, that we would pretty much agree that the employability is an important issue. Exactly how it’s implemented might cause a few arguments. You know, for, for instance, just, just to take one example that, that we’ve had in the last year, that the university has decided that there will be essentially employability modules. [...] And in, in one case, we are not teaching a particular module in the second year this year because that space has now been taken up by, by employability and I’m going to try and work out with the module leader of that module how to, to in effect merge two previously separate modules to try and get the best of, of each so that the students don’t miss out on, what was going on in, in the module that’s been moved which, ironically, was one that’s about the workings of the IT industry… (Non-senior management interview 4, academic)

Yeah and I don’t know that, sort of, making core modules on employability is always the way to do it really. And I, well, maybe we’ll find out. We are planning to run some sessions this semester on career planning and, for all first years. But I mean, I, I can imagine we’ll just make it voluntary, I mean, and I think students will be quite interested in most of those things. (Non- senior management Interview 3, academic)

Even those academic staff who disliked the employability modules recognised that many students main priority in attending university is to get a better job; but they felt that it is a challenge to academic staff to teach employability modules when many have no experience of professions outside academia.

(Why you are not happy about employability modules to be made compulsory?) I suppose, but maybe that’s part of it, it just feels a bit beyond our expertise. I suppose. [...] So it’s [graduate employability] something we’ve taken quite seriously but I’m not sure being forced to do this particular thing is that helpful. (Non-senior management interview 3, academic)

This is why some academic staff resented being forced to deliver employability modules without any structural support from the university. In their view, it is more useful to provide careers days centrally organised by professionals rather than through academic schools by academics.

One of the problems that we are encountering at the moment is that across the university we have to do employability modules… which has brought in suddenly and, um, so in every school in different programmes, so you’ve got schools and within schools the programmes and within the programmes module leaders… who are creating their own materials to teach how to write a CV, how to apply, and they are all going to be doing it differently. [...] Now there’s nothing wrong with having different – I think there are a number of different ways of writing a CV […] but why can’t they do it centrally and say “Here. Six different kinds of good CVs” and across the University everybody’s going to be saying “this is a good CV” (non-senior management interview 8, academic)
Some academic staff members believed that one of the reasons their students find it difficult to find employment is due in part to discrimination.

I see students and the students still keep in contact with me after they've left the university and they are finding it difficult to get jobs and I, for me, that is because I think an element of it is racism in this country. We have a lot of students from ethnic backgrounds who are wonderful people, talented people, have done extremely well, and I would have no hesitation in employing them myself and I'm absolutely amazed that they find difficulty in getting jobs. And my only conclusion can be that they're not getting jobs because there is still an inherent racism within this country. (Non-senior Management Interview 9)

7.3.3 Equality and Diversity

Quite a few members of staff felt that diversity is one of the characteristics of the University that they appreciated.

This is my second time of working and teaching at UEL, I came back because I wanted to be here, the experiences I'd had the first time around were all very positive. I totally agree with what UEL is trying to achieve in terms of widening participation, and I particularly enjoy working with the wide cultural mix of students here. And that was one of the key reasons why I wanted to come back because, I feel we have a very sort of cosmopolitan which leads to a very interesting student mix, which makes the teaching very, very, pleasurable. (Non-senior management staff interview 7, academic)

However, many have also pointed out that diversity was often only applicable to the student body, and staff tended to be more White. A member of academic staff suggested that there was a shared awareness (in his School) around this issue, but it has been hard to recruit ME academics with equivalent experience and publishing records to non-ME applicants.

Well, mind you, that is a, you know, clearly we are largely a, Black and ethnic minority [unclear], a student group, and a largely White staff group [laughs], certainly in this school, so on that one it's obviously a problem, Again a fairly complicated one to solve, quickly anyway. But certainly something that we have our eye on. [...] I mean, again, well [sighs], certainly in this school you would, you would not get a lecturing job now unless you are very far advanced in PhD and publications. Because of the RAE anxiety about where [...] you already need someone who, you know, [are already established] and that's supposed to have got, you know, you either need to be extremely dedicated and ought to have had some advantages. And that probably does favour certain groups can think of people I'd want to employ now, who would enhance the profile, the staff profile but they haven't got that kind of, those kind of publications, they don't come from that kind of background where that was... and that's frustrating. (Non-senior management interview 3, academic)

Furthermore, some raised the question of whether diversity was being implemented at the management level, but they also thought that diversifying management poses some questions about institutional consistency.

It depends what you mean by diversity of course, it has a diverse student body; that is undoubtedly the case; it has a diverse range of kinds of programmes that are tough. Does it have a diverse management? No it has one VC, it has one governing body. The issue then becomes what is the relationship between the diverse voices, expressions of interests, aspirations that the students, and staff group have, but the staff is by no means as diverse as the student group. [...] the institution can't be diverse in what it does, as I say you can't have a range of VCs, a range of governing
Even though the university has a diverse student body, quite a few teaching members of staff were conscious that students tend to work together with those from the same or similar backgrounds, and they questioned how much real interaction between students from different backgrounds is taking place. These staff argued that many students do not actually go beyond such cultural boundaries.

You know, what I was saying about students interacting with each other, I think it's interesting when you go into, say, seminar groups and obviously students will go and sit with their friends, yeah, so they tend to cluster in, in the same groups week after week and it's always a, a question, do, do you want to break this up just for the sake of causing interaction or is that going to cause more problems than it, than it solves? Um, I, I'd be interested to know to, to what extent there is real interaction across the different social groups... (Non-senior management interview 4, academic)

### 7.4 Working as Practitioners

In general, non-senior management members of staff had similar views on the university and students to Senior Managers on many issues such as the institutional responsibility to local community and the diverse student body from non-traditional backgrounds. Although these members of staff appreciated such a dynamic institutional profile, as practitioners who have to deliver teaching under a specific policy framework, they were overall more critical (than Senior Managers) of the extent of policy implementation and practice taking place. While Senior Managers focused more on the success in Widening Access, teaching members of staff directly faced the challenges of delivering programmes to these Widening Access students with insufficient study skills. Not only is meeting their student’s needs of flexible timetable difficult, but also retaining students in their programme has become one of the greatest concerns for them. In addition, teaching members of staff in particular felt that the range of their job has been ever expanding and they did not feel able to guide students on issues such as employability, which they did not feel were expert at. This can also be due to the lack of clarity about the notion of employability, which does not seem to be communicated well to teaching members of staff. Effective communication, as well as support provision for them is considered as vital in order for them to offer efficient support to students. Considering the issue of diversity, those teaching members of staff who were keen on embedding diverse perspectives in their teaching were more concerned about the impact of staff ethnic profile on students. However, there have not been any measures suggested to tackle this situation.
8 Graduate Student Interviews

The Employability Unit at UEL provided training for three days a week over three weeks targeted at graduates (2003/4 cohort) who were still looking for a job. A researcher from the team joined the seminar in the last week of the programme and conducted participant observation. During the observation, the researcher had opportunities to speak informally to seventeen graduates in the programme. Eight of those in the group agreed to be interviewed individually. Although the graduates were informed of the research project during the programme, as they were not informed from the beginning, interviews were conducted informally, with the interviewer taking notes during the meetings. In the given circumstances, with some established personal relations between the researcher and the respondents, the researcher did not feel it is appropriate to use consent forms or recording devices. Typed notes were produced after every meeting. Most interviews took place at Tower Hamlets College where the last week’s training was taking place, as some of the participants in the programme continued to use the services at Tower Hamlets College.

8.1 Reasons for entering HE

Many came to HE because they wanted to study specific subjects, such as medicine, bioscience, or law which can only be studied at HEIs. Also, most of them believed that having a degree was important for their career development. However, some of them did not actually plan to start a degree programme in HE. These graduates found that a degree programme was accessible to them by following college tutors’ advice.

8.2 Reasons for choosing UEL

Convenience in terms of geographical location, or the timing of application, was often given as the reason for choosing to study at UEL. Some graduates said that UEL was not their first choice of institution, but as it had offered the programme that they wanted to study, such as physiotherapy they chose to come. However, for some graduates UEL was the third or lower of their choices. Those who came to UEL for an open day felt the atmosphere of the University was very friendly and organised compared to other universities they had visited, thus they chose to come to UEL. Unfortunately, some graduates found out later, once they had started studying at UEL that the University was not as friendly or organised as they had expected. One exceptional case was a graduate who chose UEL over Cambridge, as she thought the latter would be too traditional and not innovative, and she was very happy about her choice.

8.3 Routes into Higher Education

The pre-entry qualifications of the graduates were diverse including A-levels, Access Courses in FE, International Baccalaureate, Diploma, and other professional qualifications. Many graduates also had educational experience outside Britain at various levels. Those who came through Access Courses felt that the course had prepared them well for the degree programmes and they felt that those who did not go through Access Courses on their programmes experienced considerably more difficulties during the degree.

8.4 Reasons for choosing the course

Graduates chose the subject of study in which they were interested. One graduate said that he wanted to combine his professional interest (the medical related area) and personal interest (sports), which was why he chose physiotherapy. Another graduate who was a qualified teacher before she came to Britain more than 20 years ago chose a single honour in Psychosocial over combined honours Psychosocial and Education as suggested by her tutor, as she wanted to study something completely different. A few graduates made the decision based on the subject being something they did well in school.
8.5 Experiences of HE at UEL

8.5.1 Overall experience
Some graduates felt that UEL was not very well organised in terms of room bookings, organising timetables for modules, for example, module clashes often happened, and different assignments were due on the same day. They pointed out that there seemed to be a lack of internal communication between (teaching) staff. One graduate indicated that some of her fellow students dropped out from the programme due to the lack of support in study and computer skills, and many of them were not aware of the support available. Some graduates felt that UEL does not have the atmosphere of a university.

8.5.2 Administration, Finance and Facilities
Although they made some positive comments about administrative staff, many graduates believed that the administrative support was appalling. They gave examples of losing exam records, wrongly claiming that fees have not been paid, and accusing students of forging the signatures and comments of essay markers. A mature graduate pointed out that opportunities to get grants were inadequate. Many graduates complained that library facilities were insufficient, with either no copies of relevant books at all or only a single copy for all the students in the programme. Many also pointed out that computer facilities and IT support could be improved. Many felt it would be helpful if the access to computers and learning resources could be extended until November when they graduate. Those who degree involved lab work commented that safety issues were not raised sufficiently, and one graduate often felt her working conditions were not safe enough and nor was safety monitored enough.

8.5.3 Course Design and Support
Most of the graduates commented that the fact that many students were working during term time and also had family commitments was not always acknowledged by the University; or at least not reflected in course design, for example reading week does not correspond to school half terms. Graduates felt that special needs for particular groups of students, such as English support, as well as academic writing skills support should be provided more. Some stressed the importance of raising awareness of employability and careers or the need for more focus on vocational skills in the programme; however, there were others who opposed a move to a vocational focus. For those graduates who had enrolled on a top-up course, there was no support in preparing for the degree programme such as training and guidance about exams, and what to expect from the degree programme.

8.5.4 Contact with Teaching and Support Staff
Many graduates felt that teaching members of staff were not very approachable. Some pointed out that the staff profile does not reflect the student profile (in terms of ethnic and other diversities) they felt this could affect student’s performance and that the institution is not providing any role models for many of its students. Some indicated that it had become a student responsibility to make the effort to reach academic (or support) staff. However, if they did manage to contact them, the graduates felt that they were generally supportive. Some felt that teaching staff have huge workloads and did not have enough time to support or help students. They anticipate that this is a growing tendency as the number of students increases. Some of the graduates had not known who their personal tutors were, and some tutors were very inflexible about the timings of meetings.
8.5.5 Equality and Diversity

Some graduates said that they had been satisfied with the diversity of the university environment and that they had felt comfortable studying there. However, others pointed out that there was some institutional racism in the university and felt that having ME Staff was only tokenism. Some graduates felt that overseas students are exploited as they are not getting the service or support, such as English language support, that they have paid for.

8.5.6 Social Activities and Experiences

Many graduates said that they did not experience much outside their studies. Some graduates felt that there were not enough social activities on campus that they could enjoy, such as gigs in student bars. Some felt that they are not well informed of the activities taking place on campus, such as the Student Union, and the work of student representatives. Those who were involved in social activities, such as acting as a student representative, felt they had achieved something in addition to their academic study.

8.6 Preparedness to Employment

Many graduate thought that their course had not prepared them well for employment and they stressed that awareness should be raised amongst students during their programme that a degree is not enough to get a job. All agreed that the Employability programme, which stresses the importance of employability skills, should be provided while students are on the degree programme. However, in terms of the best timing, some said that they would prefer to have the programme organised alongside their academic programme, but others expressed their preference for the employability programme to be delivered after they finished their exams. Many pointed out that good support from the Careers Service (now Employability and Careers Unit) was vital in enhancing graduate employability. Most indicated that confidence building and practical advice such as the preparation of CVs and covering letters, and filling in application forms was most useful in preparing for the job market.

Graduates had chosen different career options depending on their subjects of study (but sometime not directly related to their study), such as studying for a PGCE, or working for the Metropolitan Police, with young offenders, or in the public sector. They said that attending the Employability Seminar helped them to focus on their career and being more confident. For those who pursued more vocational courses, attending the employability seminar helped them to be more aware of their wider career options than they were initially.
9 Interviews with Current Students

After consulting with programme leaders and lecturers, researchers visited lectures to recruit students for interviews. Twenty four interviews were conducted in total 15 with students from each of the target programmes, as follows: ICT – 5, Psychosocial – 8, Media and Advertising – 2. Two focus groups with students in Media and Advertising were also held. Nine further interviews were conducted with students from various programmes recruited at different events such as induction week events, work placement or employability seminars. These included students from Business Administration and IT, Economics, Life Science, Social Work, Business Information System, Accounting and Finance, ICT & Accounting, Development and Sociology, Education and Community Development. Consent forms were used and interviews were digitally recorded when the respondents gave permission\textsuperscript{113}.

9.1 Motivations for attending HE

The motivations for going to HE and the way UEL students arrived in the institution were diverse. However, most students stated that they came to HE in order to gain better career opportunities. Some of them said they aimed to get ‘a’ degree, but many said that they wanted a degree in a subject that they liked or they enjoyed.

\textit{I think I've had it [a career change] for a very long time even before I started the course. Yeh...hey....it's been on my mind for a very long time but in the future I want to set up my own IT company anyway, I'm trying to acquire as much knowledge as I can in IT....} (Student Interview 3, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Year IT, male)

\textit{I certainly thought myself that myself that the minimum education I should have is at least a degree. [...] Just no matter what I got a degree, I got one. [...] Then obviously you much more do better in something you wanted to do.} (Student Interview 12, Final Year, Psycho-social, female)

One student, whose interview was not recorded, said that entering HE for him was a means to obtain a better job, career, social position, and to pass something on to the next generation. He explained that to give something to someone, you have to obtain things for yourself first, as you cannot give anything that you do not have (Student Interview 9, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Year IT, male).

Also, for some, entering HE was a turning point that changed their life in a broader sense and not just enabling them to have a better professional career.

\textit{I always wanted to do HE, but I couldn't. Because after I finished my AAT [Association of Accounting Technician], I started ACCA [Association of Chartered Certified Accountant] but I dropped it because I couldn't cope with my children, so I was in a kind of blocked away, I went to do my English course, and that English teacher, she is the one who advised me to do a degree rather than waiting around and wasting my time. She said, even hey I told her that I couldn't work because of the children and she said why not go and do that with a degree while you're raising a children [sic]. That how I started it ....} (Student Interview 22, ICT & Accounting, 1\textsuperscript{st} Year, female)

For those who came from vocational backgrounds, their NVQs and some experience in the field meant that getting a degree was the logical next step.

\textsuperscript{113} See Appendices D and E for discussion guides for student interviews and focus groups.
Because I've done voluntary work for many years, in social care sector and as I said I've done NVQ [...] and because my parents were quite unwell and I need to look after them, I need a flexible job, so I took a flexible job in social care, and it just seems like a natural progression to go on and do a social work degree, because I used to work with people who access social workers, who are social worker input [?] and I thought I can do that um, so I applied to do a social work degree. (Student Interview 15, final year, social work, male)

Some students, particularly mature students, explained that they got to know about a first track access course (New Beginnings 1 and 2) or short summer courses at UEL, and whilst they were attending these programmes they found that they had an ability to study. These students often had negative experiences in their earlier educational careers when they were made to believe they were not bright enough or they were not encouraged to stay in education by their parents or teachers. For them, entering HE happened as the end result of doing short courses in a HEI.

Whole thing [applying to HE] was totally bizarre. It was as if somebody else is doing it, actually. Because by that I did fill in my application, and I went to the Open Day, and the end of that Saturday, I've been offered the place. [...] On Wednesday the idea, I think the idea was planted before, but only on that Wednesday that I've given any serious thought to it at all or begun to think about it, and by the Saturday I was about to become a degree student. [...] And so it wasn't a planned departure in my life, it was something that sort of happened. But that I took the advantage of the possibility. (Student Interview 16, 2nd Year Psychosocial, female)

I was drifting so I actually went on a, in fact, I went on, it was called, New Beginnings One course.[...] But then I enrolled in New Beginnings’ Two which you get your 20 credits and debate with your teacher how to go to university, don't they? And I really enjoyed that and, she gave me the, the lecturer or, they're not lecturers, the teacher, or whatever, she really was very encouraging and she made me feel that I had what it, you know, what was needed to go to university as a mature student. (Student Interview 7, Final Year, Psycho-social, female)

9.2 Reasons for choosing UEL

The geographical location (locality) was one of the reasons often given for choosing UEL, particularly by those who had care responsibilities.

[Have you ever though of going to anywhere else?] Not really no, because I live in Newham and have been in East End for towards 30 years [...] And I was working and obviously I had children although they were older children, but I didn't feel that I wanted to involved myself in travelling or whatever. I had enough on my plate without that, so I didn't really consider. (Interview 16, 2nd year, Psychosocial, female)

Well I thought about the UK universities so to speak I mean at that time I was think my I was mainly focusing on Cambridge University and Oxford and that sort of thing, otherwise they are the best. But when I thought about it deeply because I have a family and so on I realised I could not afford to go to one of these places, so that is how I chose UEL because it was close to me. (Student Interview 18, Final Year, Psychosocial, male)

Many students also explained that they chose UEL because it offered the course they want to study such as: Media and Advertisement, Psychosocial Studies, Accounting (with professional accrediting), IT, Development, Economics, and some combined honours courses such as Business Administration and IT.
I was looking for IT courses that would focus [application] and theory combined and wasn’t too software and programming [...]. I didn’t want it to include too much programming and technical stuff… [...] even though I just wanted to pick up some practical skills… [...] And the business school I liked because it wasn’t so much business management, it was more a sort of overall business course. [...] And I other places in London I, are all too all are managerial and the IT courses were too technical. So, it seemed like a good, a good pick. (Student Interview 8, Second Year, Business Administration and IT)

Well [...] one of the lecturers talked about the course before I decided to come here and I went to other universities as well [...] and I spoke with the contact person for the course which was really, really interesting because it sort of...it is advertising but it also had a social side to it like we study a bit of [topics like] ‘race’ and class. It is not just commercial advertising. [Focus Group 2, Second Year, Media and Advertising, female]

One student said that UEL offered a programme that partially qualified her as a chartered accountant, and she would therefore be exempt from sitting exams for the first two parts of accreditation.

The structure of the financial accounting as, what they call this? BA Accounting & Finance, it’s structured in such a way that when you are doing it you’re completing ACCA [Association of Chartered Accountants] at the same time and the Government is helping you with the funds. So as soon as I finish my degree I’ll have my honours, at the same time [...] I will be partly qualified, I will be left with five subjects now . (Student Interview 21, Second Year, Accounting and Finance, female)

UEL was recommended to some students by their friends who had previously studied there and who said that the university had very good programmes.

I thought I would do something pure psychology, I did but then my friend said that this is kind of psychology thing, it is mixed. And she [her friend who were then at UEL studying psycho-social degree] said, ‘do it, it is interesting’ so I thought ‘alright, I will do it’. But I wasn’t 100 per cent sure exactly what I want to be so I thought at least it opens up more doors to you. (Student Interview 12, Final Year, Psycho-social, female)

Some students chose UEL because it provided flexibility in entry requirements and start dates, such as a February start, providing funding for the course or operating various inclusive admission policies particularly for mature students.

I didn’t actually do my GCSEs in England here [...] I left my result back in Nigeria so when I came here and I wanted to do IT, I was expecting them to say to me right you need to bring in your GCSEs, your A ‘levels but I didn’t actually have them here, but they said to me you know I’m a mature student, so I was just being interviewed, [...] and they said to me alright, ok – I should do a test, a little test. I did a test and they said to me, after the test they said to me they said to me alright, ok you’ve been given a place – I said alright, you know and that was it really. (Student Interview 3, Second Year, ICT, male)

Another decisive factor was the organisation and structure of the programmes. For example, in some UEL courses, student are not required to sit exams, whereas equivalent courses in other universities do require exams, or UEL offers a course in three years whilst other institution offers it in four years.

The exam, but that the reasons why I liked UEL social work programme, because they won’t be exams. So they aren’t any. (Student Interview 15, Final Year, Social Work, male)
When I wanted to start to study, I knew I wanted to study Development. Third World Development. And the options were going to central London to SOAS or coming to here. SOAS worked out at a four years degree. [...] And here was a three year degree. And I really feel in a rush! Four years was like too long. I mean, too much time to invest to get a degree. (Interview 23, Second Year, Development and Sociology, female)

9.3 Routes into HE

Students came to UEL through a variety of educational routes. Some applied through UCAS but most came through clearing, access courses, the New Beginnings 1 and 2 courses, international qualifications, vocational qualifications, and through work experience, or any combination of these.

Because I applied very late, I just went through clearing. [...] Through UCAS I applied for all degrees to do with Business Studies. So I couldn’t get in, I couldn’t do what I wanted to do through UCAS anyway. (Student Interview 12, Final Year, Psychosocial, female)

What, because I’m a mature student, what, what happened was, I was doing a GCSE in sociology at the Adult College and they were running their course here, called New Beginnings. [...] That’s it, one of the tutors from UEL came to the college to do a talk and my tutor suggested I go and see what it’s all about. [...] I came here, well, at Barking, the campus, we had to come for six weeks you see and if you passed that you got 20 credits [...] which got, got you into the university. (Student Interview 14, Final Year, Psychosocial, female)

9.4 Experiences at UEL

The attitudes the students had to their experiences in UEL varied according to their pre-entry expectations. Many students felt their courses were very challenging.

The course is very challenging and can be very difficult at times because of the number of hours we need to put in with regards to studying. I’ve had a few problems in regards to studying because I am someone who has other things doing and it becomes so much of an issue when I have to put a lot of effort into the work I am doing. [...] I feel you know we’re actually rushed; there are certain modules that we do that we are actually rushed into. For example next week we are going to hand in an assessment, and then I think the week after next week we are having an exam. (Student Interview 3, 2nd Year IT, Male)

I think when I get my degree I’ll get it that it’ll be worth as much I’m worth, so I’ve got a degree and I’ve been to the programme and I know it’s challenging, and I’ve done the work I know a lot of it challenging that why we have complaints that we have, we feel it’s too challenging, especially this year, so I know that to achieve that degree in end of it, it’s going be, it’s going to be worth something. (Student Interview 15, Final Year, Social Work, Male)

Some said that they were satisfied with their experience at UEL because it had given them a completely different perspective on the world.

I think I made the right choice because I feel, you know, it’s made a big difference in many ways in my life and my outlook on things has changed and I think it’s that type of degree, it does change your outlook, you know. (Student Interview 7, Final Year, Psychosocial, Female)
Good support from tutors and student services were also vital factors for students to have had positive experiences at UEL. Some students had moved from other HEIs, expecting that the level of support in UEL to be much better than at their previous institution. There were students who specifically chose UEL because the university was well known for giving support to learners who return to education, and these students were satisfied that teaching members of staff were very helpful.

It [UEL] is a good place to learn, it is very diverse and they support you quite well […] and [I] got support from the teachers but I get good support from xxx my counsellor and you know I have found you know more support since my illness than xxx University, definitely. When I was at xxx I had to go to hospital, my sister was desperately trying to get to tell the university and she couldn’t get through, you know […] you know my personal tutor, not here but at xxx, she was desperately trying to get hold of them and they never phoned her back so… (Student Interview 13, Final Year, Psychosocial, Female)

The reason why I came here is, as a matter of fact I had, it was recommended by a friend of mine who was finishing Masters, how the teachers are very supportive with the students and I was scared that because I haven’t learnt for a long time I wouldn’t even be able to you know write an essay or whatever but my friend you know said that is what UEL is very good at, helping you prepare how to write an essay and you know so I should choose UEL and she had an experience, she did her [degree at UEL and] Masters at xxx and she saw the difference, how they are not supportive. (Student Interview 24, First Year, First Year, Education in the Community and Development)

No. Actually I have been having, very helpful teachers to be honest they are very good. Yeah, very good. They may not be to me, I don’t know. [My personal tutor is] xxx and xxx is my lecturer. They have been so helpful to me; I’ve got nothing to complain about. (Student Interview 19, Final Year, Psychosocial, female)

Several of the students felt that the range of different learning methods available helped them, and in particular they liked WebCT as a resource for personal study whenever they wanted to work.

I would check Web CT because, obviously, your, your modules come up on there anyway, so you, you can check for your lecture notes and, and hand outs, but […] you know, like, like the student office, bits on there and you can click into that and see if there’s any notices come up which can tell you about any forthcoming, talks or notices or stuff, like, you know, don’t forget that the last hand-in date is for so and so, or like, in extenuating circumstances, when all that changed, that they put that all on the notice board and that. […] You can get your lecture notes, you can print them up before the lecture. I, I like that, because I like do my reading and then get the lecture notes to see, see what the lecture is going to be about and then I like to make notes. (Student Interview 14, 3rd Year, Psychosocial Studies, female)

Web CT system. The web CT we use is very, very useful. It’s very, very useful. It’s very good. I mean the, you… xxx University they have got same system but it’s, it’s, it’s in a different way. It’s, it’s not, it’s not um very helpful. It’s not very… The web CT is very, very good. Yeah. It’s one of the very good options. […] I like web CT. I log in every day, even here. (Student Interview 5, Second Year, IT, male)

However, there were some students who were frustrated with UEL’s service provision. They raised issues related to course provision including: the amount of information on the course outline; the programme structure; problems with the personal tutor or tutorial support systems; the lack of support for February and second year intakes; and the way
that students get feedback on work submitted. Some students felt that information on the university website was a bit misleading with not much information on each module. Even though they had been offered interviews, they often had not had the opportunity to find out more about the courses.

I mean I, I had different image from this course before going to, to the course. Yeah. And I, I wasn't expect what ... It, it was in, into the course itself. I mean they said look this is the uni so this is the modules you're going to do. Yeah. But I wasn't... I mean there was, there wasn't enough information about the modules, about the, about the uni's. I think they can, they can put more, more than as they've already put the information about the course itself. So I... No, it wasn't what I, I expected [...] I went straight to year two and the, the person I had an interview with her she, she... It was, it was like a job interview. I mean she, she ask me what I've done before. She, she ask me about the programming I've done. Not about, about, about the course I've done before and she, she rather ask me questions about my past. Not what I'm doing in the future, what I'm looking for. [...]... I think she wasn't in a, in a position to give me those information. (Student Interview 5, 2nd Year, ICT, male)

Some students suggested that the programme structure could be organised more effectively to meet the needs of the students’ lifestyles. For example, those who were attending part-time courses were often working full-time and would prefer more weekend or intensive evening classes. Others felt that they had different learning styles that could have been accommodated more easily through a flexible programme. Students stated that most classes were auditory teaching with relatively low standards of presentation. A student with dyslexia felt that he had not received the extra support he needed when he took small tests. This student said that although he received extra support for exams taking them in a separate room, similar kind of arrangements were not made for the tests, despite the fact that he had raised the issue with his tutor.

And also physically I mean, five days a week, when do you get time to sit and read and you have to have, you know, we are all mature, we have a life outside university. So the last year’s too heavy. [...] I haven't got a family, but I like to socialise, but I can sacrifice social life, but a lot of students haven't even got the luxury of, you know haven't got the social life, they've just got family which is more important. [...] I do believe, that the placements should be 100 days each and it’s should be two placements... The first year and the second year. And the third year should be, and also I found that the fact for we’re off for five months in the summer, it’s too long, it should be stretched out a bit more, because we are wasting a lot of time... (Student Interview 15, Final Year, Social Work, Male)

It should encompass, even if it means doing different modules over longer periods of time, so that, one, we're getting more. Because we're cramming one module in every 12 weeks. That's a lot. [...] Some kind of provision needs to be made that we're not being stretched so thinly as we are at the moment. I think by splitting the sessions up slightly more, making them slightly longer than just 12 weeks, structuring the lectures so that we’re getting everything we need earlier to do the coursework, and then just the nitty-gritty bits coming later, would be much better. (Student Interview 6, 2nd Year, ICT, Male)

Those who had started in February or moved to UEL from other HEI with direct entry, felt that they could have been provided with more support to enable them to settle into the university environment smoothly. A student who started in February suggested that if they had been given more academic support and familiarisation with the UEL environment, then they could have performed better. The lack of support in terms of the personal tutor system was often raised. The problem seemed to be that even when students were
assigned a tutor; he/she was not necessarily a suitable person to give them advice. This issue was particularly serious for students on combined honours degrees.

I did [have a personal tutor] but I found it is very unhelpful and I felt him a bit patronising and then it put me off I just never had, but I never went to the personal tutor.[…] He never contacted me, no. [since last year] (Student Interview 12, 3rd Year, Psychosocial, Female)

It’s very hard to know what you get at UEL because you have a sort of barbarous and then you have personal tutors who have nothing to do with the course whatsoever. So, […] my personal tutor I’ve only ever met once. […] Yes, I’ve only ever met him once and he doesn’t even teach on my programme at all. (Student Interview 8, 3rd Year, Business Administration and IT, Female)

The timing and way of obtaining feedback on work was one of the key concerns of many students. Students wanted to receive feedback that was both constructive and was provided in time for them to learn from it, before handing in the next piece of work.

The coursework I have got back has been okay, but, out of the, one, two, three, four, five, pieces of coursework that I’ve done, and the exam, I’ve only actually had one piece back. […] And, in fact, one piece of coursework was due the week before, two weeks before the exam. So, I’m sitting in an exam. Am I writing things correctly, because I haven’t had coursework back giving me constructive feedback? And I find that absolutely atrocious, that we’re waiting… I’m still waiting for coursework that was submitted in April, the beginning of April, whenever it was. We’re now June, and I’m still waiting for it. It’s not just […] helpful at all. (Student Interview 6, 2nd Year, IT, Male)

They don’t really tell you, okay, you haven’t made this, you have not going to explaining this point, but in future it would be better if you do… They don’t, they don’t give you that. So we don’t know how okay, if we’re okay, there’s only maybe one or two… a course work for module, but if they give me a proper feedback like explaining how I can improve, the next module I can, like, go back to this feedback and based on the feedback I can do it better. But it didn’t really tell you that. They say, though, satisfactory, non-satisfactory, or need to be improved, but how? (Student Interview 22, 1st Year, ICT & Accounting, Female)

In addition to issues related to the academic programme, many students raised concerns around the insufficient provision of books and computers; the lack of information on student services; and transport issues. Many students said they needed more books in the library as they often only had a few copies of key textbooks. Some students had had very good experiences with support staff, receiving very helpful and friendly support, but others felt that they had no information on who to consult if it was not an academic matter, or they would have to wait a long time. There were other students who were frustrated by poor administrative support, giving examples such as coursework handed in often going missing. (Student Interview 10, 3rd Year, Economics, male)

That’s why. And no one, no one asked me look you straight in year two. You haven't been here so we need to um explain more about the, this university, procedures, departments, if you need this help, that help. But others they've, they've been that induction course. I haven’t had and I, I have to be honest. I haven’t had time to ask someone give me a student handbook. I’m sure they’ve got something like a student handbook. (Second Year, male, UEL, Student interview 5)

Yeah. I’ll tell you the people who I go to […] if I ever have a problem I go to the combined honours office. […] Um, yeah, she’s [a female staff member at the office]
really good. But sometimes I feel that they've got so much work to do that it takes them a long time to sort something out and get back to you. (Student Interview 8, 3rd Year, Business Administration and IT)

With multiple roles in their lives, which required them to be able to move around rapidly, transport issues were a shared concern amongst many students. With the campus move, for example, those students who had started at the Barking Campus had their courses moved to the Docklands Campus and then faced problems as most of them lived in Barking and the transport links between Barking and Docklands are very poor. Students who drove into the Barking Campus also foresaw problems as parking at the Stratford and Docklands Campuses is restricted for students.

You see, that was a problem for me because all my lectures are at ten, now, I drop my son off at, um, at school at ten to nine and I could not actually get to Docklands for ten o'clock by public transport. I was not guaranteed to get there for ten o'clock so I always had to ensure that I had a lift off somebody one way or another and sometimes it was a nightmare. And...but I always got there for ten o'clock, you know. [...] My husband used to take me sometimes if he could. If there was problems, I'd... a couple of students who used to come through, and I'd, you know, I used to ring them up, sometimes at the drop of a hat and say, oh, gosh, can you pick me up. (Student Interview 7, Final Year, Psychosocial, female)

At the moment the very good experience is a good car park, the car park because my mind is rested, I've got a car park, I park, I'm concentrating, it's a free park, I'm concentrating on my education.[...] My concern when we were moving to Stratford when there is no car park, we have children, you understand. So when I finish I want to be able to go and pick my ... and there is no car park you know. Stratford, if I can park somewhere for maybe two/three hours I have to go and put money in again, that's sort of, that doesn't give us the peace of mind as mature student you know, it doesn't help. (Student Interview 24, First Year, Education in the Community and Development)

For most students, their experience of the University was limited to attending lectures, seminars, and handing in course work. They did not expect to have other experiences outside their academic programmes (expect for those who are in student societies).

Sometimes I wish I was a 20 year old and I could sit in the bar afterwards. I used to think, oh, I quite...I want that for my children. I want them to experience university as a young person but, for me, it was a case of you go there, I never had any sort of fun time at university in the respect that I never socialised. I was either at lectures, at seminar or in the library and I never did anything else. I used to talk, you know, to...to some of my friends but it was never, oh, let's go and meet for a coffee. [...] There was no...there was no social life whatsoever. (Student Interview 7, Final Year, Psychosocial, female)

Yeah, I don't stay here long, it's, I just, um, come, especially for the lectures and tutorial, so I don't get to see the other side of this... of the university, um, I'm always coming in a rush, going in a rush, no I don't really know (Student Interview 22, First Year, Accounting and IT, female)

However, for those who had had an opportunity to be involved in extra-curricula activities, such as a student society, they considered their experience very enriching. A student who ran a student society said that he had some depressing experiences in first two years in UEL and that was why he sought spiritual guidance and founded the society. Although the experience was initially a bit embarrassing, as he was teased by fellow students whilst handing out leaflets, he felt that running a society was an inspiring experience and that he gained managerial skills, which he felt were equivalent to work experience. He was also
happy as he believed that the society enriched the university culture. (Student Interview 10, 2nd Year, Economics, Male, recording declined)

9.5 Preparedness for Employment

Students had mixed opinions regarding their preparedness for employment. A student in Social Work was very confident about his employability. There were also some students studying IT who expressed confidence their ability to get a job upon completion of their degrees. However, these students were often rather over optimistic. Many others expressed their concerns that their programmes were too theory based and not very practically oriented. Although they felt that getting a degree could be useful for their career development, these students were not very sure if what they had studied would help them to get a job.

[But do you feel that you actually studying in this programme and studying university environment would help you to get better opportunity to have a better job?] 50% positive because these days you can find very good managers they don’t have any academic background. But 50% yes. Not 100%. Yeah, most definitely I’ll get better job if I finish this course. [And you feel that the course itself provide enough information to get better job you feel or not?] No. I think, I think that the way it is, and this is not the East London University that is the problem. It’s the university’s problem. I think they are very, very far from reality, from the real world. (Student Interview 5, ICT, male)

Quite a few students were aware that work placements could improve their employability. Those who did not have work placement opportunities on their courses often looked for opportunities by themselves. Those who took part in work placements were satisfied with them and felt that it had helped them in developing their careers.

I am thinking about getting experience working wise. Because I have done work with elderly people, I have just done work, kind of young people as a home carer and I have just recently applied to Barnardos to work with children. […] And then another thing is two experiences I want to get is working in a prison environment and working in a residential home. (Student Interview 12, Final Year, Psychosocial, female)

[And what is your experience of this project based work placement?] Really good. I’m really, really glad I did it. I’d recommend it to other students. Otherwise, I’d be just doing, um, I’ve, I’ve, I’ve got an admin background. Secretarial. So, I probably would have just been doing sort of admin, temping, throughout the summer. So, to get this opportunity… You know, the money’s not very good. So, it was, better in the long run for me. (Student Interview 8, 3rd Year, Business Administration and IT, female)

Some students felt that a whole year work placement during their degree, thus extending it to 4 years, was too large an amount of time to commit because they needed to start earning as soon as possible (Student Interview 20, 3rd Year, Business Information System, male). Most students thought that the University and the individual programmes should have raised their awareness about the importance of employability, however, the extent to which they thought that employability skills training should be included in their programmes varied. There were some who believed that the employability programme should be part of their curriculum.

[Do you think that the employability training like the one you had should be part of your curriculum?] That’s what I’m not sure. I’m not sure. But because of the teaching department I think they should be able to give us something that will help us in line of teaching actually. Help to apply for jobs in teaching, how to apply for, or how to
Others preferred not to spend time on job applications and CV writing during their classes, although they also thought that obtaining information and practical knowledge on their relevant industry was an important part of their curriculum.

Well I really expected to find more support in terms of, as I said, linking my profession to the development world. But I didn’t find anything of that. I mean, for example, as charities or NGOs or initiatives. I thought lecturers and the university system were going to allow me to – to make that pace that step. But I didn’t find any real or realistic support in that sense. [...] It’s – it’s [the actually programme] just theory. I mean, it’s just lectures and lectures. But I don’t find the – I mean, I really think the lecturers should be the link from the lecture to the practical way. For example, with collaborating in an NGO here in London [...] That’s something I miss a lot. Yes. (Student Interview 23, Second Year, Development and Sociology, female)

Growing numbers of student have started to realise that it is transferable skills in addition to the degree which lead to a job.

I was actually surprised to know that it’s not your degree that gonna gets you into work. I used to think yeah that I’ve got a degree that I can get into any work that I want, but he’s like you can have a highest degree, but that’s not what they are looking for, they are actually looking for a certain skills that I didn’t know that I will need to have that in order to get into work. A lot of Black people or Asian, they don’t really know that. [...] So, I think that why they [the employers] tend to chose [non Black or Asian candidate], not like the being racism or anything like that, that was the fear, I used to fear that that the way of racism, but now I’ve been to this training [organised by a Mentoring Scheme], is like open another door for me. (Student Interview 17, Second Year, Media and Advertising)

**9.6 Discussions on Diversity and Ethnicity**

Most students agreed that UEL is a diverse institution. Many felt that this was a positive aspect of the university or that the diverse culture made them feel very comfortable.

I mean, you know, it’s so obviously different and I used to find you can’t mention the difference [...] You walk into UEL and there are a mixture of faces, a mixture of accents, um, and it’s made me realise, you know, be careful with assumptions and, um, you know, I used to think, and now if I see a White person at university I think they’re probably not from this country because I used to think if they’re White, they’re English. And that was it. And then I realised that’s very narrow, um, so, yeah, it’s done that. , (Student Interview 7, Final Year, Psychosocial, female)

Yeah, they did say that, but, um, some universities I have, um, I have been in, it’s quite different from UEL, that UEL is like more, more into multicultural [...] It’s probably [other universities], like, xxx University, it’s, it’s, yeah, that’s a modern university as well, Greenwich, but, um, I don’t know, somehow I feel more friendlier here. Like feeling, it’s like just a sense of feeling [...] (Student Interview 22, 1st year, Accounting and IT, female)
For some students, such diversity made them think about their identity. One student explained how she had chosen to come to UEL for the same reasons that she had chosen to live in East London for past 20 years, because of this diversity:

The conclusion that I came to, was that I was somebody. I was, I was a first generation of British, my parents were refugees, um and I grew up, sort of not ever really feeling that I quite belonged um, that certainly that I wasn’t an English, I wasn’t really anything because I have no roots in country at all, so I didn’t feel myself, there is nothing English about me, apart from the fact that I was geographically born here. And I think what happened was when I was having to move, was that I, I felt that Tower Hamlet was a place full of people who didn’t belong, and that’s why I felt comfortable, because I was one of those many people who didn’t really belong. (Student Interview 16, Psychosocial Studies, 2nd Year, Female)

However, others said that the diverse culture of the University did not necessarily give any added value to their experiences at UEL. One student felt that she was more comfortable staying within her own community whilst on campus, rather than mixing with people from other groups.

Obviously when you are with friends, you don’t always talk about work, that is the last thing you talk about and you know it is just they tell you ….obviously she was Asian and so I could get a lot from her because I am Asian, I have got to go into an Asian family [...I feel that I have got a lot in common with Asian]. That doesn’t mean I won’t talk to someone who is White or Black but it just makes it comfortable because you know, you know a lot of things about them, because they are like you, not personality wise but cultural similarities. It is like I speak the language with them whereas I couldn’t speak it when I was speaking with somebody else. (Student Interview 12, Final Year, Psychosocial)

There were quite a few students who felt that the campus was segregated by ethnicity.

Yeah, in particular in my degree it is all people from around the world. I mean, diversity is absolutely – yeah. [...] Yeah. [Experiencing diversity is a positive thing.] [...] It’s – it’s – but I mean – I think it’s – hmm – more a personal background, because until I came to London I had never had the opportunity to – to – to work together with so many different cultural backgrounds. So yeah, for me it is a bit of a challenge. But – and you see enough how people get in groups with the most similar to them. You know? […] Yeah. Quite a lot. But I mean, I guess it is part of human behaviour. (Student interview 23, Second Year, Development and Sociology, female)

Some people, I’m afraid, leave university without the slightest idea of how they can actually interact and mingle with different people with different cultures, they have just been brought up within one culture... so you have these people who are like mainstream and those who are trying to be a bit more liberal and other stuff – you have that split my argument is that. (Student Interview 18, Psychosocial, Final Year, male)

The challenges of ‘diversity’ were raised by two students (both of whose interviews were unrecorded) one student expressed the opinion that due to his background as an ME student his year tutor had lower expectations of him. His friend also felt that she had been treated in a similar way by her lecturer. Their attitudes were not hostile but these students had got the message that because they were ME students academics had the attitude that ‘if you can do this, that’s fantastic, but if you cannot do it, do this instead’. Also another student disclosed an incident where he was (racially) assaulted in the student bar on campus. Although he reported this to the police, the university and the student union, no action was taken and he felt unsupported. This student believes that his attacker was a
member of a well known right-wing extremist group, and he felt disappointed that the university allowed extremists of any kind to operate in the university.

9.7 Meeting Diverse Student Needs

Many of the students came to HE in an attempt to enhance their job prospects, although there were some students who saw HE as an opportunity for broader personal development. With increasing pressure on universities to meet the government employment indicators, valuing all students’ different experiences and expectations of HE remains a challenge for the University. With increasing numbers of students coming from non-traditional backgrounds with financial and family pressures, many students struggle to balance their time for study, work and family care. Students arrive at the University from various backgrounds with different needs and concerns. Most of them, as they come from family backgrounds where studying at HE is uncommon, are grateful for the opportunities afforded by being in HE. However, if they could get more support in study skills or other student services institutionally, they felt that they could perform better. This may be part of the reason that some academic staff, as discussed earlier, were critical of students requiring spoon feeding, which academics felt is not supposed to be the teaching and learning style in HE.

However, many interviews demonstrated that students struggled or failed due to insufficient support or lack of information about the support available. Therefore, more individualised and consistent support, both academic and non academic, could improve their experiences considerably. At the same time, as many students were not familiar with the HE context, they were not sure of the kinds of support that were available, and it seems that the lack of information about the services available also affected student retention. Students, particularly those from non-traditional backgrounds, tended to think that their problems were specific and that they would not be able to get any help because they were not typical students. Graduates who were unemployed more than a couple of months after their graduation were particularly critical about university’s provision in relation to career development. Many were resentful that they could only develop their self-confidence and come to realise that a degree was not sufficient to get a job by attending specially designed Employability Seminars. The student interviews which were conducted later show that there was a growing awareness amongst students that a degree was not sufficient to get a job. Despite these improvements, there were some students who were over-confident about their employability without good reason, and were not aware of the need to equip themselves with transferable skills.

The diverse culture of the University is well recognised, but many students did not question the possible difference between the idea of diversity and the practices within the institution. Although students felt that the diverse culture of the university was positive, many admitted that they tended not to interact with students from different backgrounds. As increasing numbers of students come onto the campuses just to attend their classes and lectures, there are fewer opportunities for them to interact at a social level and to increase their understandings about difference and diversity. If the university wants to take its social role more seriously, it needs to consider what it’s responsibility is in offering students a chance to broaden their horizons.
10 Employers’ Perspectives

The Employability and Career Unit at UEL organises the ‘Employability Works’ Job fair in June each year. Exhibitors were approached during the events in 2005 and 2006, and were asked simple questionnaire style questions to explore their views on graduates and graduate employability. Questions asked included: their purpose for attending career fairs; skills and qualities they required from potential graduate employees; and their impression of UEL students. 13 exhibitors in 2005 and 17 exhibitors in 2006 answered the questionnaire\(^{114}\). These exhibitors represented a wide range of industries, including the public sector, retail, banking, hospitality & catering, transport & communication and the police and armed services.

The skills and qualities that each employer required from potential (graduate) employees differ slightly depending on the nature of jobs. However, many employers agreed that certain skills and quality were transferable and vital to any job. These included: leadership and managerial skills; good educational history and grades; communication skills; presentation skills; team working skills; IT skills; a good personality with a positive attitude and behaviour; determination; reliability; responsible attitudes; flexibility; problem solving skills; good time keeping; career focused; willing to learn; motivation and focus. As for more industry specific skills and qualities that employers required, each different industry pointed out different skills and qualities such as: customer and community focus (retailer and public sector); analytical skills (science related sector); honesty (public sector); target driven (banking); entrepreneurship spirits (enterprise agencies); sales oriented (insurance); eagerness to work with people (public sector); and fitness (Defence).

Some employers came to the events with current vacancies intending to recruit graduates, but most employers attended the events in order to raise the awareness about the various job opportunities that they could offer. Employers usually had a wider range of job opportunities within their organisation than students and graduates expected. Employers felt that students were not necessary aware of all the opportunities provided by different employers. Some employers underlined that it is in the University’s interests rather than theirs to develop the contacts between each other. This was because they felt that they were helping the University by attending these events, raising the awareness of employability skills amongst students and graduates, and recruiting graduates, thus improving UEL’s employment figures. On the other hand, other employers stated that they were attracted to the diversity of students at UEL, as the University can offer them with potential employees from diverse communities. For these employers, maintaining a good relationship with UEL is regarded as being for their own benefit.

Quite a few employers shared the view that UEL students were in general very friendly and enthusiastic about employment. More positive comments were given on UEL students on their preparedness for the labour market in 2006 than 2005, such as students were well prepared with their CVs; communicated well with employers; were very motivated and interested; and looked confident. However, there were fairly critical comments towards students as well. Many employers noted that students often try to find out what the employers offer them, rather than to sell what they can offer to the employers. Also, employers pointed out that many students ask inappropriate questions or had not really prepared any questions to ask to the employers. Employers felt that students were more interested getting any job and earning money, often asking about the salary in the first question, rather than showing enthusiasm for the particular opportunity. In addition,

\(^{114}\) See Appendix F for interview questions
employers believed that some students were unrealistic expecting that they could get a job of their dreams with their degree. Another concern raised by employers, particularly those in the public sector, was that students often do not have a clear idea of their immigration status and work entitlements.

In order for students to increase their employability, in addition to improving the points mentioned above, employers felt that students needed to present themselves as motivated and interesting with some experiences and interests outside their studies, such as work placements or volunteer activities. Also, students needed to be more confident with a clearer knowledge of their skills and ideas. In addition, a good preparation to familiarise themselves with the industry context or the future employers as well as the knowledge of the job application procedure was considered very important. Employers suggested that by having work experience and improving the way they presented themselves, UEL students could do much to improve their employability.

Amongst those employers who had not recruited UEL students previously, there were those who said that they met extremely talented students during the events and would seriously consider their applications. There were others who said that they had previously received applications from UEL graduates, for example, for their graduate schemes in previous years, but that they were rarely successful. They explained that the reason for UEL graduates being unsuccessful was that they did not have the qualities to make them outstanding in a nationally competitive graduate scheme. In addition, one employer noted that this was not necessarily specific to UEL students, but when they tried to recruit from ME groups, many tended not to pass the multiple choice exams, although they are provided with textbooks and other study materials to prepare them for the exams. This employer expressed his impression that these groups did not seem to take the exams seriously and were not well prepared.

In terms of the University’s involvement for enhancing graduate employability, employers gave positive feedback on events such as these career fairs. However, some gave critical but constructive feedback on UEL students, suggesting that the University should prepare and equip them better. Others found UEL students exceed their expectations, and expressed their interest in the opportunity to recruit from diverse community groups. However, one exhibitor, which helped single and young parents to go back to work, pointed out that given that UEL has lone and young parents studying, that the university should provide a better service and events for these students with less business focus and a more family element.
11 Key Institutional Findings

- Students come to HE to improve their career prospects. However, many also hope to change their lives more generally by broadening their horizons.

- One of the main reasons for choosing UEL was its accessibility in terms of geographical location and the provision of a variety of flexible entry routes.

- Many students come from non-traditional backgrounds and in this sense UEL has been successful in widening access. However, many of these students do not have the study skills they require and they struggle to progress through lack of sufficient study support.

- With many students from non-traditional backgrounds, it is considered that auditory and non-interactive teaching styles are not very effective learning environments for them. Less frequent formal assessment and less text-based assessment are thought to be more appropriate methods of assessment.

- Many non-traditional students see themselves as atypical students, despite the fact that the majority of students at UEL now have multiple responsibilities of work, family care and study. These students feel that programmes are often not structured flexibly enough to accommodate their needs. Students also feel that their personal circumstances are not taken into consideration enough.

- E-learning facilities such as WebCT have been useful as a tool to facilitate widening participation and many students find it useful; however there is a danger of over-reliance on this technology when many students need more IT training and more general face to face learning support.

- Many students feel that a degree is the key to a good job, and they lack an awareness of the transferable skills they also need to demonstrate in order to obtain a job. Many students also lack self confidence and have low aspirations; however, awareness of the importance of employability skills is steadily growing as it becomes part of every programme curriculum.

- Staff understand the importance of employability, however, there is still confusion and concern about whether and how the employability agenda should be integrated into the curriculum. There are also mixed feelings amongst students who feel that an employability module in their programmes means that they are deprived of an opportunity to learn more subject specific knowledge.

- Both staff and students note the positive diverse culture of UEL. However, it is also pointed out that some segregation occurs both in the classroom and on campus, raising a concern about the extent of interaction between different groups. The difference between the student and staff (ethnic) profiles is also raised, suggesting that the university is not sending the right message with its staff recruitment.

- Quite a few students, as well as members of staff feel that there is some degree of disorganisation and poor communication at UEL, which is not helpful for student learning as students tend to get contradictory messages or not get information at all. These gaps are often covered by the good will of individual members of staff.

- Many initiatives on WP and Graduate Employability are taking place in UEL, but they are often decentralised and ad hoc. These initiatives are given as examples of the institutional commitment to WP, Graduate Employability, and Equality and
Diversity. However, the institution still needs to measure the effectiveness of these initiatives and to address the issue of consistency throughout the university.

12 Institutional Recommendations

- Better provision and embedding of study skills into the curriculum and assessment of its effectiveness.
- Increased provision of one-to-one support including the personal tutor system, the delivery and effectiveness of which should be closely monitored.
- A more comprehensive induction should be provided to all students at whatever stage they enter the institution, it should include an introduction to WebCT; UEL IT services generally; and information on the student services available. Programmes should provide more detailed information on courses at the beginning of the year.
- Ensure students have access to work placements both within and outside the curriculum, and raise awareness that transferable skills, in addition to a degree, are vital to increase student employability.
- Introduce more creative teaching and learning styles and assessment methods, including more interactive teaching and oral assessment.
- Facilitate better communication between and within different services and schools to enable more efficient student support on all issues. A more centralised system for the various initiatives would help to clarify their aims and objectives and the areas of responsibility for each service.
- The provision of excellent student services including learning resource centres and catering are vital for student success. Better stock control in the libraries, the later opening of catering facilities, and the provision of good access to campuses, including parking facilities will help students overcome some barriers to learning.
- Better integration of part-time and hourly paid teaching staff, with extra payment provided for student support activities outside teaching contract hours. Ideally, first year students should be taught by full-time staff who should have more time to support them.
- Increase the diversity of the staff profile to reflect the diversity of students.
Appendix A: Senior Management Interview Schedule

Project description
The focus of this enquiry is initially to obtain a better understanding of the ways in which minority ethnic students and other stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of institutional strategies and measures designed to promote student success, and, secondly, to comment on the relationship between perceived learner needs and institutional provision for minority ethnic students in higher education.

Opening Questions
1. Please tell us a bit about your department/school?
2. How does it relate to the institution as a whole?
3. What do you see as being your role within the School and in the wider institution?
4. In your view, what is the purpose of HE?
5. How do you feel UEL meets this purpose?
6. How would you describe UEL in relation to other HE institutions?

About UEL/School – perceptions of the institution
1. What is your understanding of the student profile of UEL in general and your School in particular?
2. What would you say are the key concerns of most students?
3. As an HE institution what do you feel UEL and your School offer students that other institutions/schools may not?
4. What would you say are the primary strengths of UEL as an HE institution? What about your School specifically?
5. What would you identify as being the main areas needing improvement institutionally and at School level?
6. How possible do you feel this is? How could/would it be done?

WP policy – Awareness of Policy and Practice
1. What would you say are the main targets of UEL’s WP strategy currently?
2. How would you define a successful WP policy?
3. How does WP policy apply to your School specifically?
4. What WP initiatives are currently in place and/or being developed? In the institution/School
5. What kind of funding is there for WP? Is it separate/included in other areas, formal/ad-hoc?
6. In your view, is this adequate? If not, how is this addressed?
7. What kind of awareness do you feel there is about WP throughout the institution? For Example?
8. How is policy disseminated within the university (your School)?
9. How is policy implemented?
10. What kinds of forums exist to oversee their implementation?
11. What kind of monitoring takes place?
12. How is this recorded?
13. What would you identify as the main areas for improvement within UEL, in order to successfully widen participation? Is this do-able? How?
14. To what extent does WP strategy feed into and inform practice?
15. How would you say WP policy integrates with funding issues for students?

**ME students and WP**
1. How are the needs of ME students met within UEL?
2. In your opinion, is this adequate?
3. How are these needs identified?
4. How are they monitored?
5. Are you aware of any WP initiatives within UEL/your School regarding ME students specifically?
6. How effective do you feel WP policy is when applied to ME students?

**Graduate Employability – Awareness of the issue**
1. What would you say is the role of HE in employability?
2. What kinds of initiatives are taken (in UEL/ your school) to increase graduate employability?
3. How do you feel WP strategy/policy relates to graduate employability?
4. What are UEL’s (or School’s) employability indicators?
5. How in your view, does WP strategy/policy translate in the labour market?

**Closing questions**
1. How would you further develop (UEL/School) WP and Graduate Employability initiatives in future?
2. What would your goals/targets be?
3. What do you think are the potential constraints in achieving your goal?
4. How will you address these constraints?
5. Are there any other ways they could also be achieved?
6. What do you think HE institutions should offer to students?
7. Do you think WP and Graduate Employability initiatives are the most effective measures to achieve this? If not, why?
8. What other measures do you feel might be effective in improving the levels and quality of HE attainment and employability, for ME students and students in general?
9. Is there anything else you feel is relevant?
10. Are there any issues you feel we haven’t covered?
11. Are there any questions you would like asked about WP and employability that you feel are not currently being addressed?
12. Given the nature of our research, once we have begun our analysis, we may feel it necessary for us to conduct follow-up interviews with you. Would this be ok with you?
13. Are there any questions you would like to ask us about our research?

**CLOSING**
We very much appreciate your participation in our enquiry and hope that your contribution will enable us to produce original research which will inform future policy and practice, both at UEL and more widely.
Appendix B: Academic Staff Interview Schedule

Opening Questions

Subject of teaching
Admin responsibility

The View on HEI

The image of UEL/the school
The purpose of HEIs
The mission of UEL

The view on Students

The student profile of UEL
The student profile of the School
What are the student needs?
What are the student expectations?

Awareness of WP, Employability and E & D policy and practice

Why these issues are important for HEI
What their views on these issues
Probe: Do they agree that these are the core mission of HEIs?
Policy and practice at University Level
Policy and practice at School Level
Probe: Are they adequate? Are staff aware of these?
Is UEL really an institution of diversity
Probe: If yes, give examples, if no why? Ask whether they are aware of discrepancy of staff profile and student profile.

Effectiveness of University Practices

Does UEL offer services to students that university should offer
Probe: if yes, some examples, if no why? How is the monitoring taking place?
Does UEL support students so that they can perform fully?
What UEL can offer to students that other institution cannot?
How UEL can improve its services to students (and staff and other community)?
Appendix C: Support Staff Interview Schedule

Opening Questions

The job role

The View on HEI

The image of UEL
The purpose of HEIs
The mission of UEL

The view on Students

The student profile of UEL
The student profile of the School
What are the student needs?
What are the student expectations?

Services provided by UEL

Does UEL offer services to students that university should offer
Probe: if yes, some examples, if no why? How is the monitoring taking place?
Does UEL support students so that they can perform fully?
What UEL can offer to students that other institution cannot?
How UEL can improve its services to students (and staff and other community)?

Awareness of WP, Employability and E & D policy and practice

Why these issues are important for HEI
What their views on these issues
Probe: Do they agree that these are the core mission of HEIs?
How do you think the inclusivity UEL? Is UEL really an institution of diversity?
Probe: If yes, give examples, if no why? Ask whether they are aware of discrepancy of staff profile and student profile.
Appendix D: Student Interview Schedule

Narrative Inducing Questions for students

I would like you to tell me about yourself and your experiences of education. Start wherever you like and please take your time. I'll listen first and won't interrupt. I'll just take some notes.

- What kind of experience did you hope to have in HE (UEL)?
- What do you want in the future?
- What are the factors that have influenced your experiences at UEL (HE)?
- In what ways does your course (or life at UEL) prepare you for employment?
Appendix E: Student Focus Group Questions

At start

Completion of socio-demographic information questions with asking their availability for interview.

Questions

- Things student like about UEL and dislike about UEL (as general discussion-starter question)
- What they expect from UEL or from their programme, whether these have changed before and after coming to UEL.
- Prompt: what kind of support, if any, could better support their learning process
- About diversity and difference at UEL.
- About ethnicity – how they define, and how they think that would have an impact on their experience of HE.
- Their future career aspirations.
Appendix F: Employer Interview Questions

Exhibitor Interview Questions at “Employability Works”

1. Name of the Organisation (and time spoken)

2. About their organisations (if necessary)

3. What are they looking for when they attend career fairs?

4. What skills and qualities do you require from potential graduate employees?

5. Impressions of UEL students (Have they spoken to students?)

6. What can students do to increase their employability?

7. Whether they have been recruiting UEL students.

   a. If yes – What are the strengths of UEL students?

   b. If no – What was the reason, and whether they consider recruiting them again?

8. Do they have a diverse range of employees? For example?