# ACCESS TO SUCCESS AND SOCIAL MOBILITY THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION

***Great Debates in Higher Education*** is a series of short, accessible books addressing key challenges to and issues in higher education (HE), at a national and international level. These books are research informed but debate driven. They are intended to be relevant to a broad spectrum of researchers, students and administrators in HE, and are designed to help us unpick and assess the state of higher education systems, policies, and social and economic impacts.

Published titles:

Teaching Excellence in Higher Education: Challenges, Changes and the Teaching Excellence Framework
*Amanda French and Matt O'Leary*

British Universities in the Brexit Moment: Political, Economic and Cultural Implications
*Mike Finn*

Sexual Violence on Campus: Power-conscious Approaches to Awareness, Prevention, and Response
*Chris Linder*

Higher Education, Access, and Funding: The UK in International Perspective
*Sheila Riddell, Sarah Minty, Elisabet Weedon, and Susan Whittaker*

Evaluating Scholarship and Research Impact: History, Practices, and Policy Development
*Jeffrey W. Alstete, Nicholas J. Beutell, and John P. Meyer*

Forthcoming Titles:

The Marketisation of English Higher Education: A Policy Analysis of a Risk-based System
*Colin McCaig*

Cultural Journeys in Higher Education: Student Voices and Narratives
*Jan Bamford and Lucy Pollard*

Refugees in Higher Education: Debate, Discourse, and Practice
*Jacqueline Stevenson and Sally Baker*

Radicalisation and Counter-radicalisation in Higher Education
*Catherine McGlynn and Shaun McDaid*

# ACCESS TO SUCCESS AND SOCIAL MOBILITY THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION

## A CURATE'S EGG?

EDITED BY

STUART BILLINGHAM

*York St John University, UK*


United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India
Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2018



**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-78754-110-8 (paperback)
ISBN: 978-1-78743-836-1 (E-ISBN)
ISBN: 978-1-78743-992-4 (Epub)


ISOQAR certified Management System, awarded to Emerald for adherence to Environmental standard ISO 14001:2004.

Certificate Number 1985
ISO 14001

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

# CONTENTS

SECTION C
INNOVATIONS IN ACCESS TO SUCCESS

SECTION D
ACCESS TO SUCCESS AND
SOCIAL MOBILITY: THINKING BIG

# FOREWORD

The story of widening participation and promoting social mobility to and through higher education (HE), so powerfully illustrated in this volume, has a proud history, where leaders and players have come together at different times and in different places to forge new ways of engaging social change. In charting our successes, partial successes and unfinished business, it is salutary to look back on half a century of what we popularly term 'struggle' but is in practice a now normalised way of aligning people, places and political action through creative educational strategies that aspire to promote progress for the many not the few.

My personal story begins in 1973 as a 'mature'[1] student and parent at the University of Surrey – this, the re-housed and re-badged Battersea Polytechnic Institute, which began life in 1891, offering science and technology to the 'poorer inhabitants' of London. Six years later, I moved to my first, short-term contract-researcher post in the Polytechnics world – at the famous Polytechnic of North London (PNL). This drew on the combined and powerful legacies of the Northern Polytechnic Institute (1896), 'promoting the technical skill, general knowledge, health and wellbeing of young men and

1 The now-familiar descriptor 'mature' was neither articulated, nor conceptually understood in the early 1970s.

women'; and the North Western Polytechnic focussing on social sciences, humanities and arts.

In the 1990s, I progressed to Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) with its traditions firmly rooted in regional development. The Sheffield School of Design was founded in 1843 'to provide skilled designers to support Britain's industries'. Finally, in 1999, I joined the College of Ripon and York St John as Principal. The College would become York St John University, but would never neglect its nineteenth century mission, shaped by the Dioceses of York and of Ripon, to construct a cadre of teachers imbued with moral rectitude and high levels of learning, who would educate and create opportunity for the children of the poor.

Importantly, these staging posts in my career suggest that the twenty-first century universities are, literally, well placed to build on firm foundations, translating Victorian educational legacies into a contemporary vision for an inclusive society. The appetite for this challenge, however, clearly varies across institutions. Arguably, it is through leadership at all levels that we realise the vision of HE's founding fathers.

The 1980s will not be recalled as a period in which public services were best placed to secure the public benefit demanded by their communities. The phrase 'rolling back of the welfare state' became a *leit motif* for savage financial cuts to local services; marketisation; strangely, centralisation of control; and a lurch towards a form of harsh modernisation experienced by many as a negation of past contributions to community wellbeing. The PNL was not isolated from such a change.

Notwithstanding the dismantling of the Greater London Council (GLC), we did initially retain the unquestioning support of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA). A particular lead by ILEA, then the HE funder for inner London Polytechnics, was sponsoring access through a generous

budgetary allocation to the five HEIs for 'affirmative action funding'.[2] This annual budget line was not hypothecated for particular activities – but it was, of course, accountable. At the PNL, this enabled working with our neighbouring Boroughs, particularly Islington, Haringey and Hackney, to address the aspirations of newer and diverse communities – African Caribbean, South Asian and Irish.

Accordingly, partnership and cross-agency working became the new norm and early innovation produced the first important tranche of social workers and teachers who reflected the experiences and ambitions of their own communities – supported by introductory Access programmes. As the fate of ILEA echoed that of the GLC, Polytechnics typically resolved (both within management and through the trade unions) to protect the ever-widening concept and practices of access and Access.

At the PNL, I was supported within Natfhe (the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education, now UCU) to take on roles both within the Union and on the Board of Governors – which provided developmental opportunities both for me and for the PNL. As the Polytechnics Secretary for Natfhe's Inner London Regional Assembly, I was able to share and shape policy developments for part-time study in HE; for the establishment of research programmes in Polytechnics to underpin an excellent student experience (then a radical idea); and for the protection of budgets to acknowledge the needs and contribution of new kinds of learners (see also, e.g., Marr & Butcher in this volume, Chapter 4).

2 Following 1970s, equalities legislation, a tangible expression of political desire (by some) for a fairer society was the introduction of affirmative action strategies to support marginalised groups – as opposed to positive discrimination.

Looking at specific activity, it is not insignificant that the acclaimed access/Access work of the redoubtable Maggie Woodrow was located, at this time, at the PNL. Both a sponsor of well founded initiatives and a myth buster for inappropriate attempts to short-circuit necessary investments in social inclusivity, Maggie's early evaluation of two-year accelerated degrees aimed at mature and/or non-traditional students identified the significant barriers, both for students and HEIs, in achieving successful outcomes. As learning about widening participation started to accumulate, one important legacy from that optimistic moment when change seemed possible is the Irish Studies Centre at London Metropolitan University.[3]

In 2016, this small but influential exemplar of public benefit celebrated with the Irish Ambassador and the Leader of the Labour Party (among other eminent guests) a proud 30-year history, which has attracted global recognition. In 1986, as the PNL Director of Research, I secured support to establish the first University-level Centre to acknowledge and explore further, through teaching, research and community partnerships, the specific experiences (contributions and conflicts) of the Irish in Britain. This was not just through glorious literature, drama and history but as a force for productive economic and social change in the widest sense. This serves as a powerful signal of how scholarly excellence, university relevance and community benefit can come together when underpinned by the values and commitment of an institution to its continuing access mission (see also, e.g., Gaskell & Dunn, Chapter 12; Newton & Rowe, Chapter 10; Thomas in this volume, Chapter 14).

3 In 2002, the former PNL, subsequently University of North London, merged with London Guildhall University to become London Metropolitan University.

One of the lessons learned concerning effective leadership is to network, become visible and secure a positioning where you are noticed! This is not an endorsement of individual, aggressive self-promotion, but more a recognition that active pursuit of significant goals requires significant action.

Therefore, the access leadership journey does typically involve joining up different roles and relationships and placing access explicitly at the heart of them. When my junior research role at the PNL shifted to whole institution Director of Research in 1986, it enabled cross-faculty conversations and developments, always asserting excellence with relevance, and learning how that might be interpreted across disciplines and delivered with an access orientation. This, in turn, led to an invitation to join the Postgraduate Awards Panel of the Economic and Social Research Council. In addition, my concern with teaching excellence (and a new role as Faculty Dean) led to a position on the Council for National Academic Awards and a role as quality auditor with the Higher Education Quality Council – all places in which to confront access dilemmas. The mid-1990s, however, brought a new, political, clarion-call to pursue 'education, education, education….'[4]

Helpfully, this post-dated the Polytechnics' shift of title to be named universities and secure greater autonomy. This enabled a new and positive dialogue for policy makers and practitioners alongside their partners in the communities they served. Arriving at SHU as Assistant Principal in 1993, I encountered a city and sub-region in transition. The language of 'industrial upheaval' fails to capture the deep decimation of traditional skill-based employment and community lifestyle around coal and steel. The urgent need to re-skill redundant workers and their children, and to meet the expectations of

4 The pre-election promise of New Labour.

the women who had developed new confidence and ambition as they supported their families through painful challenge and change, was high on the 'to-do' list of my new colleagues and collaborators in diverse outreach activities.

Access can appear in many guises. The Sheffield Hallam that I joined was both an instigator and an early adopter of much innovation. A particular leadership style espoused by the Vice Chancellor, John Stoddart, was 'to enable great people to do great things'. In other words, he facilitated through his senior team, his Board and his external connectivity, a permissive environment where participation in HE by the wider community was of primacy. The curriculum was designed in ways that would facilitate entry to the emerging economy of new technologies and cultural industries, yet also respected traditional strengths and excellence as in materials science and urban studies; it also supported public services. Entry to and success within the University was encouraged and enabled through:

- outreach in schools and further education;
- curriculum structure offering flexible study (an early example of combined studies that really worked for learners);
- the visibility and popularity of town and gown lectures; and
- the creation of a student-friendly, one-stop-shop support infrastructure building confidence and achievement across the student 'life-cycle': from 'getting in'; to 'getting through'; towards 'getting out' and getting a good graduate job; and ultimately getting 'back in' for further study.

The 1990s were especially important for highlighting gender difference in HE and exploring diverse ways to challenge

barriers, and improve opportunities for women. SHU was one of the first Polytechnics/Universities to introduce and achieve scholarly recognition for Women's Studies – both within the curriculum and as an area of research. In the City of Sheffield, a motivational initiative called 'If I can, you can', brought together women leaders for mutual support and, importantly, to go into schools and support teachers and pupils.[5] Talks with classes of girls (and often boys) generated unexpected dialogue around what counts as being a leader and how do I get there! Moreover, of course, it was in the 1990s that – Through the Glass Ceiling – led by the exceptional Chris King addressed the question 'Why are there so few women leaders in our universities'. Hence, the 'clarion call' from political leaders found traction with SHU leaders and beyond. And whilst a 50% participation rate in HE continues to underpin the thought leadership of many government agencies today, the new millennium would bring new challenges requiring new vigilance and new resolution.

At this propitious moment, in mid-1999, I joined the College of Ripon and York St John as Principal. Tellingly, a fellow (*sic*) Principal observed, warmly, whilst congratulating me: 'Isn't it great to be running your own train set?' Therefore, this was the pivotal moment when I might draw upon the influences and experiences of peers and mentors, projects and partnerships across my former university lives – and yet remember that male imagery and metaphor had not yielded up their grip with respect to ideas of leading change.

The decade began for me as a tale of two proud Cathedral cities and two modest and unassuming Colleges of fading Victorian grandeur, Colleges that must merge into one in order to

5 Visits usually occurred as part of what was then tortuously badged, 'PSHE' – Personal, Social and Health Education, now more commonly timetabled 'citizenship education'.

protect the values and mission of access for the wider community. In particular, there was a longstanding commitment that was acknowledged tacitly, and would be nurtured further, to open our doors (literally and metaphorically) to those for whom HE had no self-evident attraction or relevance. Moreover, rationalisation to a single site in York would facilitate change and growth. York with its world-class heritage, great connectivity, glorious countryside and an exceptional tourist draw was chosen as the future base for investment. Yet, this beautiful city also concealed significant pockets of deprivation; and across the hinterland, an emerging imperative towards rural and coastal access was highlighted by voices from the soon-to-become York St John College, subsequently, University (see also, e.g. Gaskell & Dunn, Chapter 12; Noble & Grant in this volume, Chapter 5).

As a small college with a big agenda, partnership (both of necessity and by choice) was at the heart of the forward strategy – led by a senior team seriously skilled and experienced in the policy and practice of enabling social inclusion, including the Editor of this text! The City of York, in dialogue, supported plans for a fit-for-purpose campus regeneration to support new learning styles and engage new learners. National HE agencies such as the Leadership Foundation (LFHE) and the Higher Education Academy embraced and utilised our expertise, both on their Boards but also as their trainers and facilitators – and as early entrants into the esteemed hall of National Teaching Fellows. During the passage of the Higher Education Act 2004, it was helpful to have the College Principal positioned as Chair of what is now GuildHE[6] – working with Ministers to defend the best outcomes for the

6 The Standing Conference of Principals, founded in the 1970s, was one of two formal representative bodies for HE in the UK alongside what is now UUK. In 2006, it changed its name to GuildHE.

widest range of future students as the new and controversial tuition fees regime came into play. Importantly, this was mitigated, in part, by the introduction of a new regulatory force in the form of the Office for Fair Access.

Other partnerships at subject level, at professional level and around research interests ensured that the engagement of scholars from across the college contributed to the wider HE debates. For example, about what counts as widening opportunities for a particular subject, for the neighbourhood or city, and for the college/university. Importantly, this was not the task of a single heroic leader but one that was shared. One unifying theme which elicited different views and provoked different responses was our identity as a Church Foundation and its relevance for the social inclusivity agenda. A group of some 12 Church Colleges would meet under the banner of what came to be known as the Cathedrals Group in HE. For College leaders, this served as both a challenge and support group, exploring diverse policy and practice issues – including the boundaries of Church connectivity and the impact this might have on access missions, as subscribed to by all. In different geographies and different social contexts, it became clear that Christian values had underpinned significant thought leadership around access.

At York St John, the identification of faith advisers from seven world religions (seven women and seven men) contributed creatively to the understanding and celebration of diverse cultures for both a significantly white student community and a significantly white city. And it enabled successful outreach initiatives via workshops in West Yorkshire where Muslim mothers looked with confidence to York St John as a safe and respectful environment for their daughters. Yet, perhaps the most influential collaboration, shaped and sustained in large part by York St John, has been Higher York. This was the UK's second lifelong learning partnership and

is still active today. Yet, it began very nervously with a secret meeting in a basement bar in York between three CEOs: from University of York, York FE College and York St John.

There was anxiety about status and excellence, takeover/merger, standards dilution, mission distraction and loss of face – unspoken sentiments that might be attributed to academic communities rather than to the leaders themselves. In reality, the leaders had an emerging high ambition for a seamless education system available for York and North Yorkshire to offer students a comprehensive curriculum from (e.g.) Archaeology to Zoology – with scenic routes linking options and levels across institutions, as students journey towards their academic goals.

One measure of success is the swift move from project-plotting to consultation and effective bidding; then through to 'delivery' – with an enhanced membership to include the local agricultural college. A measure of impact is the naming and full incorporation of the work of Higher York into the City of York Local Strategic Plan where the virtues of widening access to HE for economic, social and cultural gain are explicitly articulated. And a measure of the positioning of York St John in this mix is the routine reference by civic leaders to 'our two universities' – where the particular access role of York St John is seen to complement the global reputation for research excellence of the University of York.

Meanwhile, in 2008, an exciting opportunity to forge new pathways and new thinking beyond York was secured through the Vice-Chancellor's membership of the HEFCE board and associated chairing of its Widening Access and Participation Committee. Notwithstanding the seemingly benign climate for HE engendered by the commitment to 'education, education, education', the economic clouds of financial failure were hovering over part-publically funded bodies as the decade was drawing to a close. Leading social inclusivity

through uncertainty and turbulence became the watchword for success. Performance indicators for the opening of doors were threatened and, as my retirement beckoned, supporting the ambitions of the next generation of leaders became my key goal. As my Leadership Consultancy business cards arrived and the home office took shape, my retiree diary for 2010 started to reflect my continuing passion for challenge and change towards widening participation and social mobility. A social justice imperative links with my Trustee roles at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, in Health and in the Arts. I have enjoyed developing for the LFHE their well-regarded Governor Development Programme. Moreover, I returned as an enthusiastic Trustee to the regenerating London Metropolitan University. Clearly, in diverse geographies and sectors, there exist multiple opportunities for shaping change.

This narrative demonstrates that leadership across different time frames can manifest itself in different places and in different ways – and that leadership qualities do not depend on status or title. In the case of widening participation, this is evidenced across this series of essays. We see that political and historical contexts help to shape the particular form that leading change will follow: whether operating under the radar of reactionary forces, or riding with the tide of good intentions! But an effective leader, in their turn, will seek to reinvent and shape that environment, for the better. Influence on social inclusivity is best exerted through positioning and partnerships where common interests unite governments, local or national, and where shared goals with arms-length-agencies, labour movement leaders, students, employers, fellow providers of FHE and many more can exert a multiplier effect on successful outcomes.

In conclusion, I observe that the 'Curate's Egg' of the title might be said to mask a sustained and often heroic series of endeavours that make a reality of access to success and social

mobility through engagement with a rich and diverse community of protagonists. Inevitably, impact remains patchy (as signalled by the 'Curate's Egg' metaphor) and in part unproven but, most encouragingly, the appetite to address unfinished business is illustrated powerfully throughout this volume.

Professor Dianne Willcocks, CBE, DL

# ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

**Dr Graeme Atherton** Founder and Director of 'AccessHE' and the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON), has worked in the access to post-secondary education field for 20 years both in the UK and internationally. He is Visiting Professor at London Metropolitan University, Amity Business School and Sunway University Malaysia.

**Professor Stuart Billingham** is Professor Emeritus of Lifelong Learning at York St John University being previously Pro Vice Chancellor at the University. He has worked to widen access to success in, and through, tertiary education for almost 40 years. He has published widely, both nationally and internationally, and regularly presents at major international conferences on these issues.

**Dr John Butcher** is Associate Director (Curriculum & Access), Learning and Teaching Innovation, at The Open University. John has led research projects for the Office for Fair Access on outreach for disadvantaged adult learners, and for the Higher Education Academy (HEA) on part-time learning in higher education (HE). He is currently Co-Editor of the international journal *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning* and is an executive member of the Forum for Access and Continuing Education (FACE).

**Siobhan Clay** is Educational Developer in the Teaching and Learning Exchange at University of the Arts London (UAL).

Her role is focused on student experience and attainment agendas, working with academics to support inclusive pedagogies and curriculum development. Siobhan has taught on the *Inclusivity* unit of the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning (PG Cert) for staff, and has supervised colleagues undertaking diversity and inclusion research projects.

**Louis Coiffait** is Associate Editor at Wonkhe, where he: writes, commissions and edits articles; produces email briefings and speaks at a range of events. He also leads on a number of new partnerships, consultancy and services. He has researched a wide range of education policy topics, including; access to HE, apprenticeships, employability, careers and selection. His career includes working with Reform, NFER, Pearson, TTA, HEA, for an MP and a Government Minister.

**Ian Dunn** is Deputy Vice Chancellor (Student Experience) at Coventry University. Ian's success in the 2016 *Guardian* Higher Education Awards 'Inspiring Leader' category sums up the way he works with colleagues, students and the local community alike, and he is a driving force behind a number of prestigious additions to the University's widening participation portfolio – most recently CU Scarborough and CU Coventry.

**Professor Craig Gaskell** is Professor of Higher Education Enterprise and Associate Pro Vice Chancellor at Coventry University. He was founding Provost of CU Scarborough, Coventry's new start-up campus on the Yorkshire coast, leading the project from initial concept to full implementation. He has extensive experience of senior management and leading change in the university sector. His research interests include organisational forms and student experience in Higher Education, enabling close alignment between his research and professional practice.

**Professor Dwight E. Giles, Jr** is Professor Emeritus of Higher Education at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, USA. Dwight was recently inducted into the Academy of Community Engagement Scholarship. He has been a practitioner-scholar of Experiential Education for 35 years, during which time he has taught courses and directed programmes in service-learning and international internships. He has co-authored numerous books and articles on service-learning research and community engagement including '*Where's the Learning in Service-Learning?*'.

**Jessica Grant** has been based at the University of Tasmania since March 2014 working across strategic planning and government engagement functions. Previously, she was Director of the Higher York Lifelong Learning Network in the UK, working on a range of widening participation projects, including Aimhigher. Prior to this, Jessica worked with post-16 providers to develop lifelong learning provision across York and North Yorkshire, for the Learning and Skills Council.

**Clara Gwatirera** is an education activist whose work in South Africa focusses on youth empowerment and development, and the promotion of educational opportunities for orphaned and vulnerable children. In 2005, she was a young person representative for Zimbabwe to the UN Secretary General's study on violence against children. In 2011, she was a delegate at the One Young World Summit in Switzerland. Clara aspires to study theology in the near future, and currently works as a Sales Consultant in Johannesburg.

**Dr Mark Jones** is Chief Operating Officer at Advance HE, formerly the Higher Education Academy (HEA). Prior to joining the HEA in 2014, Mark worked on the development of digital learning and digital curriculum materials, in the development of web-based delivery of public services

(including launching the NHS's first app), and in a range of business development roles across the private and charity sectors.

**Dr Liz Marr** is Director of Teaching at the Open University, UK, having originally joined the University as Director of the Centre for Widening Participation. She has a long history of engagement with the widening participation agenda in the UK, initially through the Aimhigher programme. She is Co-Editor of the international *Journal of Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning* and Chair of the Action on Access Forum.

**Dr Helen May** works at Advance HE (formerly the Higher Education Academy), currently leading Teaching Excellence Awards. Over the last 13 years, she has led a number of priority themes, including social capital, internationalisation, change, inclusion, retention and widening participation. An experienced teacher and educational researcher, Helen authored a National framework for enhancing student success (2016) and published in 2017 on communities of practice.

**Nik Miller** is Chief Executive of the Bridge Group and Director at More Partnership. Prior to this, he worked in the USA, at the University of Warwick and the University of York. Nik has advised the UK Government on social mobility, and collaborated with a range of organisations to support more equal access to HE and the professions, including Google, KPMG, the University of Oxford, the Wellcome Trust, the BBC and Trinity College Dublin.

**Dr Neil Murray** is Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Warwick, UK, and an adjunct member of the Research Centre for Languages and Cultures at the University of South Australia (UniSA). Previously, he co-convened the 1st International Australasian Conference on Enabling Access to Higher Education, which led to the publication of *Aspiration Access and Attainment: International*

*perspectives on widening participation: an agenda for change* (Routledge 2014, with Chris Klinger).

**Simon Newton** is a Charity Trustee and activist. He is currently Trustee of *Out of Character*, a theatre company whose members have used mental health services, and *Pilot Theatre*, an international touring company aimed at young adults. He was Deputy Director of Communications at the Open University, Director of Enterprise and Innovation at the University of York and Head of Partnerships at York St John University.

**Professor Margaret Noble** is Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic Quality and Schools Engagement) at the University of Tasmania. Previously, she was Chief Executive at Waiariki Institute of Technology in New Zealand and at the now University of St Mark and St John in the UK. She has directed a number of large regional widening participation projects in the North East of England and South East London, and led the establishment of the Kent and Medway Lifelong Learning Network. Margaret has published widely in urban and regional studies, higher education policy and widening participation.

**Dr Nick Rowe** is Associate Professor at York St John University and Director of 'Converge' – an initiative offering higher educational opportunities to people who use mental health services, which he founded in 2008 and now being adopted by the Universities in Leeds and Newcastle. Nick trained as a psychiatric nurse and dramatherapist. Since the launch of Converge he has written extensively about the model and the lessons to be learned from it.

**Dr Bruria Schaedel** is Senior Lecturer at the Western Galilee Project, Akko, Israel. She is Founder, Director and Senior Researcher of several projects at the University of Haifa and the Western Galilee College. 'The Western Gallts' project aimed to develop cooperation and partnerships among Jews

and Arabs in the northern region. The mutual partnerships were developed in various groups and included children, teachers, parents and students.

**Dr Gerard Sharpling** is Senior Teaching Fellow within the Centre for Applied Linguistics, University of Warwick. He has previously worked for the Open University, the University of Birmingham and the Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines, Université de Nantes (France). His main current areas of interest lie in English for Academic Purposes and Language Testing. He is particularly interested in empowering students from diverse linguistic and social backgrounds by helping them to develop their writing.

**Dr Tim Stanton** is Senior Associate/Engaged Scholar for Ravensong Associates (USA), through which he consults in global service-learning design, development and research in the United States, Africa and Asia. In 2016, Tim was Visiting Professor in International Studies at Northwestern University (USA). He is a Director Emeritus of Stanford University's Bing Overseas Studies Program in Cape Town, South Africa. He has published numerous articles and two books on service learning and engaged scholarship.

**Emilie Sundorph** was a Researcher at the think tank *Reform,* at the time of contributing to the writing of the first chapter in this volume. At *Reform,* she worked on a wide range of themes, including how top universities can be held accountable for supporting social mobility. Prior to working at *Reform,* Emilie worked with a number of educational charities, including Prisoners' Education Trust and The Challenge. She is now at Teach First.

**Professor Liz Thomas** is Professor of Higher Education at Edge Hill University and an independent consultant. She has approximately 20 years' experience of undertaking and

managing research about widening participation, student retention and success and institutional approaches to improving the student experience and outcomes. She is author and editor of over 10 books, many journal articles, reports, briefings and practice guides – all informing institutional, national and international policy and practice.

**Danail Vasilev** was a Researcher at Reform think tank at the time of contributing to the writing of the first chapter in this volume. His research focusses on applying quantitative methods to a range of policy issues – from the distribution effects of Social Care spending to the impact of contextualised admissions on widening participation in higher education.

**Professor Tony Wall** is Professor and Founder/Director of the International Thriving at Work Research Group at the University of Chester, where he leads numerous research and impact projects, Professional Doctorates and holds editorial positions with various international journals. He has three Santander International Research Excellence Awards, and he is a Visiting Scholar at Research Centres in the UK, Australia and the United States. His research and practice focus is on 'thriving' across multiple cultural and ecological contexts.

**Professor Dianne Willcocks** CBE, DL, is Emeritus Professor at York St John University, Honorary Doctor at Sheffield Hallam University and Honorary Fellow of Rose Bruford College. Formerly Vice Chancellor at York St John University, she is an advocate and practitioner for socially inclusive citizenship, promoting educational endeavour and opportunity that engages with the needs of modern communities. She is Vice Chair of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the York Teaching Hospital Foundation Trust.

*This page intentionally left blank*

# 1

# ACCESS TO SUCCESS AND SOCIAL MOBILITY THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION: A CURATE'S EGG?

*Stuart Billingham*

## GLOBAL CONTEXTS

Increasing and widening access to lifelong learning, post-secondary and tertiary education has been, in one guise or another, a political issue for a very long time. In the UK, it stretches back as far as the immediate post-First World War concern with social and economic reconstruction (Burke & Jackson, 2007). Since then, there have been a very large number of government and other reports and initiatives about widening participation (WP).

Globally, efforts by many authorities have produced significant change. For example, a recent report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

(UNESCO) (2017) notes that 'Worldwide there are DOUBLE the amount of students in higher education now than there were in 2000'.[1] Despite such apparent successes, these matters were included as one of the key Sustainable Development Goals agreed by all 193 members of the United Nations in September 2015.[2] As UNESCO (2017) puts it,

> *Target 4.3 states that, by 2030, countries should provide equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and higher education, including university. Achieving this target will facilitate the achievement not only of SDG4 but also of all other SDGs. (p. 1)*

Access to post-secondary and higher education also sits within the core of WISE – the World Innovation Summit for Education – an 'international, multisectoral platform for creative thinking, debate and purposeful action' regarding education.[3] However, a recent attempt to draw a global map of access to post-secondary and tertiary education (Atherton, Dunmangane, & Whitty, 2016) found that,

> *Across the 23 OECD countries, a child's chances of participating in tertiary education are twice as high if at least one of their parents has completed upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education. If one of their parents had a tertiary education, their chances of participating in it themselves are over four times as high. (pp. 22–23)*

1 See http://en.unesco.org/gem-report/gem-report-higher-education-policy-paper-social-media-resources

2 The SDGs came into force on 1 January 2016.

3 See http://www.wise-qatar.org

Whatever the limitations of the data on which these conclusions are based (and which are fully acknowledged in the study), such a picture supports the need for ongoing research, global debate and action. Graeme Atherton focusses on this, specifically, in the final chapter of the present volume. Clara Gwatirera examines government approaches to access in South Africa; Margaret Noble and Jessica Grant discuss access to tertiary education in rural and remote areas of New Zealand and Tasmania; and Bruria Schaedel considers aspects of diverse student experiences through a case study in Northern Israel. So, what is the essence of these debates?

Simply, it is about trying to understand, and then change, unfair and unequal patterns of who gets to study at a university (access); what happens to them once they are there (the student experience) and what happens to them once they leave (social mobility). Over the years, the terms of reference of this debate – what I will call its 'discourse' – have shifted significantly. This is arguably most easily illustrated in the UK, and on which I will now concentrate.

## THE 'ACCESS' DEBATE

Throughout the 1960s, 1970s and even into the early 1980s, the primary focus was 'access'. Initially, this was as much about increasing the number of students in tertiary education as it was about widening the profile of the student population. Inevitably, however, those concerned to increase the university student population realised that this could only be achieved through widening its social and economic base.

Early concerns often focussed on access by 'adult learners', or 'mature' students, as they would later be called. 'Access Courses' sprang up in further education colleges, adult

education centres and, later, in some university departments. They were designed to enable adult learners to return to study at a level, which would give them access to university, even though they did not have the standard 'A'-level entry qualification. And so, the 'Access movement' was born.

Such expansion of Higher Education (HE) was built upon a key principle (The Robbins Principle) enshrined in a seminal report, thus:

> *Throughout our Report we have assumed as an axiom that courses of higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so (Committee on Higher Education, 1963, p. 8).*

The idea of an 'Open University', developed by Labour Governments throughout the 1960s, was founded on this principle. The UK Open University opened its doors to its first students in 1971. From then until now, it has catered overwhelmingly for adult learners, studying part-time through distance learning.[4]

Later in this book, Liz Marr and John Butcher explore the challenges which policy-makers face with regard to part-time study for adult learners in the current political, economic and access policy climate in which the number of 'mature students' in higher education has fallen by over half since 2011 (Tuckett, 2018). From a different angle, Gerard Sharpling and Neil Murray consider the transformative effect on a university teacher's own pedagogy of studying part-time through distance-learning, whilst still teaching. The access discourse stresses the role of *outward-facing (outreach)* institutional strategies – explored here, for example, through the

4 It is interesting to note the long pedigree which distance learning has, because many people might easily believe it is a much more recent development given the media profile of Massive Open Online Courses.

case of Coventry University Scarborough Campus by Craig Gaskell and Ian Dunn.

## THE WP DISCOURSE

The 'Robbins Principle' continued to influence access policy and practice for a long time and, in some ways, very much still does. This is despite the emergence of a 'new' discourse in the 1980s, which has largely dominated 'access' research, policy and practice ever since.

The WP discourse naturally maintains a concern with access, but goes on to focus more upon the *experience* of those students encouraged into university by access initiatives. This discourse focusses our attention, therefore, on *inward-facing* institutional policies and practices – for example, induction, student support, teaching and learning and retention – triggered by sustained sector-wide evidence of systematically skewed patterns of success at university.

Chris Millward, the new director for access and participation in the Office for Students (OfS) (see more in the following paragraphs), summarises the latest picture:

> *…black, Asian or disabled students and students from disadvantaged neighbourhoods are significantly less likely to succeed at university. The differences are stark: the proportion of students who get a first or 2:1 degree is 10 percentage points lower for students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds than for their wealthier peers, three points lower for those with a disability than for those without, and 22 and 11 points lower respectively for black and Asian students than for white students. (Millward, 2018)*

A key part of the debate about how to design, implement and evaluate policies to change this picture often raised the question: do we simply need better student-facing policies for *all* students, or specific ones targeted at 'WP students'?[5]

Thomas and Jones (2007) expressed it well, a decade ago,

> *…achieving more diverse patterns of participation depends not on 'normalising' students – i.e. slotting non-traditional entrants into traditional structures and processes. Rather, it is a matter of recognising different backgrounds, experiences and interests in order to develop more progressive, responsive forms of HE. (p. 5)*

Liz Thomas picks up this theme in the present volume, drawing on contemporary case study material as well as recent action research with thirteen UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) implementing change in 43 academic areas.

In some respects, Thomas and Jones (2007) were reflecting The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education – the Dearing Report (1997) – which famously extended the 'Robbins Principle' when it concluded that,

> *The future will require higher education in the UK to: encourage and enable all students – whether they demonstrate the highest intellectual potential or whether they have struggled to reach the threshold of higher education – to achieve beyond their expectations (para. 5).*

Stimulated by this report, the WP discourse gradually and progressively 'morphed' into one not just focussed on the

5 Though widely used among practitioners, this shorthand is strongly rejected by the author.

student experience in general, but more specifically on academic outcomes and social mobility: the language of access to success.

## ACCESS TO SUCCESS: POLICY AND PRACTICE

A number of papers in the present volume examine the student experience, and student outcome, dimensions of the 'access to success' discourse. Helen May and Mark Jones, both of Advance HE,[6] examine evidence about what 'social capital' can contribute to student success; Siobhan Clay considers the experiences and future-oriented perspectives, of Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic and White students in a specialist Arts university; Nick Rowe and Simon Newton discuss an innovative approach to delivering higher educational learning opportunities to people who use mental health services; Tony Wall, Dwight Giles and Tim Stanton examine the history, and contemporary relevance to our field, of 'service learning' – a 30-year old education movement in the USA driven by goals of social justice and community engagement; and Nik Miller considers what should be done to narrow the gap in graduate outcomes when measured by socio-economic background.

The recent evolution of the WP discourse reflects, and in turn has itself helped to shape, a number of important policy initiatives. Here are just three, which I consider to be of particular policy and practitioner significance over the last decade and going forward:

6 From March 2018, Advance HE is the name given to the new organisation formed through the merger of the Higher Education Academy (HEA), the Equality Challenge Unit, and the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education. Its new structure takes effect in August 2018.

- The introduction in 2000 of the HEA National Teaching Fellowship (NTF) award: a competitive process involving teachers being nominated by their institution for demonstrating outstanding impact on student outcomes and the teaching profession. If successful, the individual receives the much sought-after NTF title with the requirement to support enhancement of teaching and learning in their university and beyond. According to the HEA, there are currently over 815 NTFs. In 2016, the HEA introduced a sister award 'Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence', aimed at recognising the impact of teamwork in delivering student success.
- In 2005, the National Student Survey (NSS), which asks final year undergraduate students about key aspects of their learning experience and publishes a league table of the results. The intention is for such results to help enhance the quality of student learning. In my experience of the first few years following its introduction, the NSS certainly focussed the collective mind of university senior management on the student experience and how to improve it where necessary. However, the NSS has not been without its critics with concerns about its publication in a league table, as well as significant and fundamental questions around its methodology and epistemology. Despite my experience of the way it galvanised senior managers and the positive change agenda which followed, I share those concerns – the nub of which is summarised succinctly by Scott et al. (2014),

> *student experiences need to be understood in context, and not through disconnected and de-contextualised technologies, such as the various types of student satisfaction surveys currently in use. (p. 1)*

- The creation of the new OfS established by the Higher Education and Research Act, 2017. Amongst many other powers, it arranges for assessing the quality of teaching in universities through the new Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). The first TEF results were published in June 2017.[7]

Interestingly – at least in terms of the argument being developed in this Introduction – the Department for Education changed the name of this exercise to the 'Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework' in October 2017. However, it has retained the 'TEF' acronym rather than the clumsier, though more accurate, 'TEaSOF' – and for possibly sensible media-related reasons.

The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) was merged into the new OfS, with a new director for access and participation, with effect from April 2018. New style, and re-named, Access and Participation Plans will be part of the registration requirements for 'Approved' (i.e. fee-capped) institutions.[8] Governing bodies are now also required to publish information on the 'fairness of their admissions'.

## ACCESS TO SUCCESS: FEES AND REGULATION

The language now used routinely by government to describe the function of the OfS is that of 'regulator' – a shift in the dominant political discourse regarding university education, which has been progressively taking place for nearly

7 For a comprehensive and critical discussion of the Teaching Excellence initiative, see French and O'Leary (2017).

8 For a useful guide to the powers and responsibilities of the OfS, see https://wonkhe.com/blogs/a-beginners-guide-to-the-office-for-students/.

two decades. This discourse creates significant tensions and clashes between the language and conceptualisation of WP circulating in the corridors of Westminster and Whitehall and those amongst practitioners in institutions. Within this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that the question of student tuition fees will almost certainly be seen as the defining WP issue of the present decade.

The Browne Report (2010) effectively set the stage for current[9] student tuition fee arrangements in UK higher education – though it had a difficult birth and an equally challenging early infancy. Whilst it made a large number of recommendations about the funding of higher education, it was the *principle* of having no 'cap' on tuition charges that universities levy on students, that is the most controversial. Browne (and subsequent amendments) linked the new tuition fee regime to a HE provider's plans to attract and support students from 'disadvantaged backgrounds' as described in their Access Agreement with OFFA.[10] Since then, the issue of tuition fees has never been far from the headlines.

In addition, as if to reinforce the point, the Prime Minister launched a new 'Review of Post-18 Education and Funding' in February 2018. The Review has a very broad remit[11] which, some might say, reads as if it is trying to be all things to all people. Either way, it includes some very familiar policy rhetoric. It will consider how to ensure that the post-18 education system

- is accessible to all,
- can be supported by a value for money funding regime, which works for students and taxpayers,

9 June 2018.

10 From April 2018, Access and Participation Plans are submitted to the OfS.

11 See https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/682348/Post_18_review_-_ToR.pdf.

- incentivises choice and competition across the sector and
- will develop the skills needed as a country.

However, when the Review Panel publishes its interim report (before the Review is concluded in early 2019), it is likely that the headlines will be grabbed by two constraints under which it has worked: there must be no cap on student numbers in post-18 education and students should contribute to the cost of their studies.

## ACCESS TO SUCCESS: SOCIAL MOBILITY

In 2011, the government firmly hitched all questions about WP to the social mobility bandwagon,

> *In a fair society what counts is not the school you went to or the jobs your parents did, but your ability and your ambition. In other words, fairness is about social mobility. (H.M. Government, 2011, p. 11)*

Yet, the shift to making social mobility central to WP policy really began at the start of the 1980s, with the emergence of a new consensus about what social mobility meant (Goldthorpe, 2012). From this time on, all major political parties seem agreed that increasing the rates of *relative*[12] social mobility must be a key priority of WP (and indeed other) policies.

Importantly, successive governments have believed that this goal will only be achieved if universities and other HE providers change, in deep and fundamental ways, as exempli-

12 *Relative social mobility* refers to the *chances* of individuals from different social class origins moving into different class destinations.

fied in this extract from a Letter of Guidance to the Director for Fair Access from the Secretary of State:

> *Real, lasting, progress can only be made by achieving cultural change throughout higher education institutions (BIS, 2016, para. 3.8, p. 4).*

This positioning had within it a much sharper focus on access to high tariff (or 'elite') institutions and, chiefly through them, to the professions. As Simon Hughes had said in 2011,

> *And I underline that there are particular courses which need particular attention if we are to widen access: medicine, dentistry, veterinary science, and architecture, for example. (p. 5)*

This major new focus of WP policy is explored in the present volume through significant original research by Emilie Sundorph, Danail Vasilev and Louis Coiffait in our next chapter, and is further examined later by Nik Miller.

## AN ALTERNATIVE DISCOURSE?

Whilst the *dominant* WP discourse has gradually and progressively developed into one centred on student outcomes measured by social mobility – within a framework of ever-increasing regulation – there has been a parallel or even subterranean discourse: that of 'equality, diversity and inclusion' which, in my experience, reflects the aims and aspirations of many WP 'academic-practitioners'.

However, it would be wholly inaccurate to say that this way of conceptualising the objectives of WP has only very recently been used with regard to student-facing HE policies. Shaw et al. (2008) put it like this,

> *Over the last fifteen years, a 'diversity discourse' has emerged in the USA … and the UK … which claims to recognise broader dimensions of inequality than those within the scope of standard equal opportunities policies. (p. 31)*

Importantly, they go on to note how this 'diversity discourse' challenges the way the WP discourse can promote a deficit view, or even 'victim-blaming' (Billingham, 2006), of the populations or groups they serve.

The origins of this 'diversity discourse' in UK education lay with concerns about the ethnic, gender, sexuality, age and disability profiles of *staff* in universities and colleges. The discourse now embraces institutional policy objectives relating to both staff and students. However, in the past, it rarely informed policies concerned specifically with WP. More recently, this discourse has begun to challenge the dominant WP policy framework by highlighting the needs of populations historically marginalised or completely ignored within the WP discourse, such as students leaving local authority care, estranged students[13] and those using mental health services.[14] In addition, the diversity discourse, challenging though it can be to implement,[15] not only figures within the policies of many HEIs but also, for example, at the Higher Education Funding Council for England HEFCE.[16]

Given all this, and that the UK signed-up to SDG4 'on inclusive and equitable quality education' (UNESCO, 2017), the discourse of equity, diversity and inclusion often struggles to find its way into *national* policy statements about WP.

13 See http://standalone.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2013/08/StandAloneUNITEfoundation.pdf.

14 See the Chapter in this volume by Nick Rowe and Simon Newton.

15 See https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2017/may/31/a-clash-of-personalities-why-universities-mustnt-ignore-race.

16 See, for example, http://www.hefce.ac.uk/workprovide/ed/.

Most recently, however, such policy objectives do feature in the Guidance to Institutions from the OfS about writing their Access and Participation Plans 2019–2020, published in February 2018.[17] However, the reference seems mostly concerned with protected characteristics rather than with the broader diversity discourse to which this chapter is referring.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

As I have tried to demonstrate in this ***very*** brief introductory overview of the discourses of 'access to success', the *dominant* WP discourse is not now just about who gets in to HE, nor only their experience once there. It is also centrally about chances for individual social mobility, especially as measured by access to the most selective universities and professions. At a systemic level, it is also about ever-tighter government regulation to achieve this goal – as shown powerfully through the remit of the OfS and the new Review of Post-18 Education and Funding. So, where do we stand now?

There has been good progress with WP in some countries; in parts of some countries; and for some groups in some countries. UK HE providers have explicit equity, diversity and inclusion policies and their Access and Participation Plans – and the supporting WP policies – whilst generally not built explicitly around these concepts are at least expected to refer to them.

However, student-facing WP statements often still reflect the dominant WP discourse of the pre-OfS era: especially of targeted outreach, academic achievement, progression, and outcomes. Whilst these foci are, in my experience, endorsed by WP practitioners and institutional leaders, many would much prefer

17 See https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-notice-1-guidance-on-access-and-participa tion-plans-for-2019-20/.

a discourse, which is *centred* around the concepts of equality/equity, diversity and inclusion, and is expressed through a corresponding discourse.

At the heart of the battle between the current dominant WP discourse and such alternative ones, lies the question of *who controls how universities and other HEIs approach this agenda*.

These critical questions of power and authority on what is good WP strategy and implementation policy and what is not are signalled by the subtitle to this book – A Curate's Egg.[18] The following chapters explore these questions through innovative research, practice and unique critical-analytical reflections.

## REFERENCES

Atherton, G., Dunmangane, C., & Whitty, G. (2016). *Charting equity in higher education: Drawing the global access map*. London: Pearson.

Billingham, S. (2006). Long live widening participation: An integrated strategy for sustainability. Paper presented at the 15th European Access Network Annual Conference, Thessaloniki, EAN.

18 'A Curate's Egg' means 'a thing that is partly good and partly bad'. It stems from a cartoon published in the satirical UK magazine *Punch* in 1895, which depicted a Curate who, given a stale egg at the Bishop's table, assures his host that 'parts of it are excellent'. The cartoon is a metaphor for describing things which are partly good and partly not, but especially how power relations affect the way we describe and deal with them.

BIS. (2016). Letter of Guidance from the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Minister of State for Universities and Science to the Director for Fair Access. Retrieved from https://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/11-02-2016-OFFA-Guidance.pdf

Burke, P. J., & Jackson, S. (2007). *Reconceptualising lifelong learning: Feminist interventions*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Committee on Higher Education. (1963). *Higher education: Report of the Committee Appointed the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins, 1961–1963, (The Robbins Report), Cmnd. 2154*. London: HMSO.

Dearing, R. (1997). *Higher education in the learning society. (The Dearing Report)*. London: National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education.

French, A., & O'Leary, M. (Eds.). (2017). *Teaching excellence in higher education: Challenges, changes and the teaching excellence framework*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing.

Goldthorpe, J. H. (2012). *Understanding – and misunderstanding – Social mobility in Britain: The entry of the Economists, the confusion of politicians and the limits of educational policy*. Barnett Papers in Social Research, Department of Social Policy and Intervention, University of Oxford.

Government, H. M. (2011). *Opening doors, breaking barriers: A strategy for social mobility*. London: HMSO.

Hughes, S. (2011). *Report to the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister from the Advocate for Access to Education, (The Hughes Report)*. London: Cabinet Office.

Millward, C. (2018, April 9) 'Wealthy, white students still do best at university. We must close the gap', Higher Education Network. *The Guardian*. London. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2018/

apr/09/wealthy-white-students-still-do-best-at-university-we-must-close-the-gap

Scott D., Hughes. G., Evans. C., Burke, P. J., Walter. C., & Watson, D. (2014). *Learning transitions in higher education*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Shaw, J., Brain, K., Bridger, K., Foreman, J., & Reid, I. (2008). Student diversity = Student success. In F. Ferrier & M. Heagney (Eds.), *Higher education in diverse communities: Global perspectives, local initiatives*. London: EAN.

Thomas, L., & Jones, R. (2007). Embedding employability in the context of widening participation. In Yorke, M., (Ed) *Learning and Employability*, Series Two. York: HEA

Tuckett, A. (2018, April 19). 'The world of work is changing. We need more adult education, not less', Higher Education Network. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2018/apr/19/the-world-of-work-is-changing-we-need-more-adult-education-not-less

UNESCO. (2017, April). *Six ways to ensure higher education leaves no one behind*. Global Monitoring Report (Policy Paper 30). Paris: UNESCO.