Recognising Students who Care for Children while Studying

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*Praise for Recognising Students who Care for
Children while Studying*

This is a fascinating book that sets out to explore the puzzle of why students caring for children continue to face difficulties within higher education, despite the increasing commitment of institutions to equality and diversity. Drawing on ethnographic data, it presents a nuanced and theoretically-informed account of the experiences of students with caring responsibilities, and an important critique of widening participation and equality policies. It will be of interest to all those working in the higher education sector who are committed to furthering social justice.

*Professor Rachel Brooks, Professor of Sociology,
University of Surrey*

Students who care for children exist in a dichotomy, being both ubiquitous within the HE landscape but equally, often side-lined in educational policy and discourse. Samuel Dent's timely publication refocuses attention on this growing population and invites the reader to explore the highly complex and emotional 'work' necessitated by being both student and carer. Drawing on rich narratives from both undergraduate and postgraduate learners, this book foregrounds the 'lived experience' of caring for children whilst studying and is essential reading for those passionate about the student experience including researchers, equity practitioners, student support staff and university teachers

*Professor Sarah O'Shea, Director, National Centre for Student Equity in
Higher Education, Curtin University, Australia*

Samuel Dent's monograph is a rare and precious contribution to the study of a much under-researched group: student parents. The book provides a much-needed analysis of how students with parenting responsibilities navigate the 'care-free' academic cultures which have excluded them for too long. The book is likely to appeal to researchers and practitioners concerned with widening participation and equity.

*Marie-Pierre Moreau, Professor of Education,
Anglia Ruskin University, UK*

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Recognising Students who Care for Children while Studying

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Preface: PROFESSOR PENNY JANE BURKE

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For Chantal, Gareth and Julia

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About the Author

Dr Samuel Dent PFHEA is currently interim Academic Development Manager at Nottingham Trent University in the Centre for Academic Development and Quality. Here he leads the Educational Research & Evaluation Team, which he established in 2018; The Trent Institute for Learning & Teaching; and the Educational Development Team. He holds a PhD from Sheffield Hallam University, upon which this book is based, and was named the 2016 emerging researcher by the Forum on Access and Continuing Education for his initial findings. Since then, he has received numerous awards and shaped practice in higher education (HE) in the United Kingdom and Ireland, including being cited in the Office for Students regulatory framework. In 2020, he was recognised as a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy for his contribution to the HE sector, and his reputation for weaving together research and practice on HE inequalities.

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Preface

Penny Jane Burke

As a scholar affected by accessing higher education while caring for children, this book speaks to me personally, professionally and theoretically. Indeed, my passionate commitment to women's access to higher education which set me on my journey as an academic was formed largely through my experiences of struggle as a 'mature, non-traditional' student, which is how I identified my social location at the time (in relation to wider policy discourses). These experiences are constructed through memory of the complex timescapes that I navigated as shaded by a sense of unworthiness; I did not see myself as a 'proper' university student. Recollections of the sense of shame in arriving to seminars late are powerful threads in my journey, having spent the morning rushing to drop children off to school and then having to leave lectures early in the haste to pick children up. My memories of being a university student are of fleetingness, never feeling quite grounded, always a sense of temporality shaping my subjective disconnection to space and feeling out of place. Dislocation and disorientation are major affective themes that colour the experiences of being a university student.

This did, however, connect me to those I identified with – other 'mature, non-traditional' students, most of whom came to university via an Access to Higher Education pathway and most of whom cared for children while studying. In this strong sense of identification, I formed the basis of my life project, dedicated to advocating for students experiencing a sense of dislocation and marginalisation, framed by the increasingly explicit deficit-oriented equity and widening participation policy agendas emerging in the United Kingdom and Australia where the body of my empirical work is located. Over time, and through the privilege of undertaking a doctoral degree, I began to critique my own assumptions about such strongly framed identifications and about the problematic narratives of 'empowerment' through access to higher education, drawing on post/ structural perspectives of difference and power. I began to question the homogenising assumptions at play that constructed personal identifications and institutionalised categorisations. I became increasingly interested in the ways the politics of difference shaped inequalities, particularly in the ways neoliberalised and marketised notions of 'diversity' subjected individuals to technologies of subjectification. Discourses of time management skills, for example, regulated processes of assimilation to the hegemonic time structures of the university despite the symbolic forms of violence this generated in which differences had

to be appropriately managed, concealed and controlled. For students who care for children while studying (CCS students) this might mean managing time in ways that fit in with dominant, embodied subjectivities and rhythms, including being on campus 'on time' and timing births 'appropriately'. Indeed, I managed to give birth to my son within the appropriate time frame – two days after final exams – perhaps one of the first indicators of my 'success' as a 'mature, non-traditional student'.

The politics of difference at play across the timescapes of higher education are thus central to the complex ways that inequalities are formed, sustained and reinforced through widening participation policy and practice, despite the discourse of fair access, equity and diversity. This is both subtle and explicit. In its subtle forms, difference is regulated via agendas of 'inclusion' that require the student to simply fit in to the dominant frameworks and cultures of the mainstream institution (Archer, 2003). Policies of equity and widening participation have given rise to hegemonic discourses of 'inclusion', yet without close analyses of the power dynamics that can make 'inclusive practices' exclusive. Discourses of 'inclusion' often work as a form of symbolic violence through the ultimate requirement that the person must fit in to the dominant framework, or be excluded, either through self-exclusion or through institutional exclusion and through practices of standardisation to ensure the regulation, management and control of difference. The discourse of 'inclusion' coerces those seen as 'excluded' to conform to the conventions, expectations and values of hegemonic discourses and practices and to participate in a process of individual 'transformation' into normalised personhoods. Inclusion plays out in ways that are experienced as personal failure, shame and simply not being the 'right' kind of person in higher education spaces. Thus, inclusion often perpetuates problematic values, assumptions and perspectives, placing responsibility on those individuals who are identified as at risk of exclusion through their individual lack (e.g. of time management skills), perpetuating the harmful effects of deficit imaginaries on the bodies of those constructed through difference.

Thus, one of the most pressing concerns of developing widening participation policy and practice that is appropriately sensitive to the politics of difference is to generate contextualised understanding of how difference plays out in the lived, embodied experiences of students. This book takes on this concern by contributing to nuanced, sensitive and socially justice framed research that focuses on the particular, but always heterogeneous, experiences of CCS students. In making an argument for recognising and making visible the struggles of CCS students, Samuel Dent builds on work in the field (Hook, 2018; Moreau, 2016; Moreau & Kerner, 2015) to disrupt the problematic universalistic, individualising and deficit discourses of meeting the needs of 'all' students.

Situating his research in the context of student-facing support services, Dent attends to the puzzle of the persistent homogenising of students associated with equity and widening participation. This homogenising of students did not speak to his experiences of being on the 'front lines of deeply distressed students' and in particular the cases involving CCS students which were the 'most harrowing' for him to respond to. The autobiography of the question (Miller, 1995) is identified

through exploration of his professional experiences in which the perception of higher education as an inclusive space was continually being challenged by the particular experiences of CCS students. In keeping with this approach, I briefly explore my positionality in relation to the themes of this book, drawing from Miller's (1997) autobiography of the question, a concept I have found to be significant and compelling in shaping my commitment to reflexivity and praxis (e.g. Burke, 2002, 2012) and as a pedagogical tool in re/shaping research and teaching (Burke & Gyamera, 2020).

I have argued extensively that widening participation is profoundly misframed in ways that perpetuate persistent *multidimensional inequalities* (e.g. Burke 2012, 2020). Understanding widening participation through a *monodimensional* lens is poorly placed to tackle the deep-seated, socially embedded and often insidious nature of inequalities that are woven through the fabric of contested histories of higher education. We only need to focus on the struggles for access of different social groups over time, including of women, Black and Ethnic Minority Groups, First Nation Peoples and working-class communities to begin to bring into focus that universities have been social sites in which the experiences, perspectives and values of an over-represented social group (e.g. White, able-bodied, middle-class and male) has influenced, shaped and largely determined the underpinning structures and cultures of higher education timescapes. However, this is not to say that higher education as a social institution is homogeneous or even that a single university has one shared culture or institutional habitus. Indeed, the politics of difference shape the contested discourses of higher education institutions and who is seen as having the right to participate and on what terms (Burke, 2012). In my reframing of equity and widening participation, I have brought together feminist post/structuralist perspectives (e.g. Fraser, 1997, 2003; Lather, 1991; Weedon, 1997) with a Freirean-inspired (Freire, 1972) praxis-based pedagogical methodology (Burke, Crozier, & Misiaszek, 2017; Burke & Lumb, 2018) to argue for the necessity of reconceptualising widening participation through ethically oriented, deeply reflexive timescapes (Adam, 1998) that open up possibilities for reimagining our subjectivities and practices (Burke, 2020).

As part of this, I have drawn on the work of Jane Miller (1995, in Burke, 2002, p. 5) to argue for the importance of critical reflexivity as part of our praxis. This requires the continual reflection on our own location in the complex web of power and the ways our personal sensibilities are always formed in relation to wider discourses and histories. The autobiography of the question requires the researcher/practitioner to historicise the questions she addresses and to thus situate her work in wider contexts. Thus, in my earlier work:

> I insert the slash in 'auto/biography' to represent the ways that the story of 'the self' is always a social story and always interacts and interconnects with the story of others. (Birch, 1998; Burke, 2002, p. 7; Stanley, 1992)

Interestingly, and this supports Dent's argument that the experience of caring for children while studying is often invisible, I have not explicitly identified as

a CCS student in previous constructions of myself as a 'mature, non-traditional' student. Dent's focus on CCS invited me to reconsider a key aspect of my own experiences of accessing education. Although, I have written about the impact of being a mother in relation to developing an understanding of gendered inequalities in higher education, this has not explicitly been identified through the category of CCS. Yet the experience of CCS was certainly significant throughout my auto/biography, from my Access to Higher Education course right through to my PhD. The struggles of student parents have been analysed by other researchers, including in the Australian context by Genine Hook (2018), who takes a feminist poststructuralist analysis of the experiences of postgraduate students who largely work to hide their status as sole parents for fear of the potential pathologising effects of being exposed as caring for children while studying.

Indeed, one of the conundrums of categorisations which are so vital to make visible structural and cultural inequalities is to homogenise and misrecognise students through the lens of those very categorisations. The construction of categorisation is inevitably entangled in the processes of subjectification, in which the student is subjected to the often derogatory discourses of the categorisation. Thus, while it is important to redistribute resources and opportunities to groups of students who share similar experiences and systemic disadvantages, it is simultaneously imperative to ensure that a process of misrecognition is not produced through such redistributive efforts that necessarily require some form of categorisation. This often presents a significant dilemma for policy and practice and is one that requires *praxis* – that is, keeping critical reflection/action and critical action/reflection in conversation, enabling the equity and widening participation practitioner (and other key educators, researchers and influencers significant to students' educational access and participation) to exercise deep reflexivity. This requires iterative processes of interrogation of complex relations of power including of our self-location(s) and positionings in the complex politics of difference and inequality.

By bringing Fraser's (1997, 2003) multidimensional framework to bear in his analysis, Dent is able to present an appropriately nuanced analysis of the rich accounts of the students participating in his research. This ensures the representation of their heterogeneous experiences and the recognition of their personhoods as legitimate participants in higher education. Dent simultaneously demonstrates the imperative of redistributing high-quality opportunities and resources to CCS students against monodimensional misframings that homogenise 'all' students. This book enables the reader to 'see' the particular struggles and multidimensional inequalities faced by CCS students that are otherwise systematically invisibilised by homogenising discourses of equity and widening participation. This is an important contribution that enables us to grapple with the ongoing tensions between redistributive and recognitive forms of justice that must simultaneously be held together through praxis-oriented approaches. The doing of 'equity' work requires the continual reflection on what the project of higher education is, and who it is seen to be for and as part of this, whose values and experiences are seen to matter and with what effects for widening participation.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The research for this book began when I worked in student-facing support services. My career had, by this point, involved working directly with students in a number of roles and organisations, starting in student unions and moving into university support services. In developing my career during this time, I had been trained in student support with formal away days, courses, mentoring from senior colleges – the cumulative message of which had been to adopt a 'student-centred approach' and, particularly, to think about the complex and diverse way in which the services produced needed to work for 'all' students.

For me – although this may not be a shared experience across the sector – the 'all' students we were trained to work with were not a homogeneous group. Increasingly, I'd been driven by my employers to think about the different students I would work with and who would need my support. Responsiveness and inclusivity were often highlighted as key, especially in acting as a 'one-stop' shop for support as I did, leading on the delivery of student support services like facilitating mitigating circumstances, pastoral support, disability support and general information advice and guidance. In part, some of this training and work had been supported by the introduction of the single Equality Act (2010), as the universities I worked for started to navigate with support – and pressure – from students how the institution's leadership would ensure they met their new, more clearly defined legal duties.

The challenge at the time felt new and refreshed, even if some of the issues, like disability discrimination, racism and sexism, were not. As time moved on, many improvements appeared to be made; I saw new policies and institutional reviews emerge, which sought to make more visible commitments to different groups and communities. Following this, each practice, process and pedagogical tool underwent review to ensure it met the needs of 'all', with strategic plans developed to show how any gaps would be rectified. This work was underpinned by seeking new equality awards, such as Stonewall accreditation, and moves for greater progress within the bronze, silver and gold of the Athena Swann Charter.

It felt, in many ways, like I was part of a sector which was growing and focussed on not leaving any students behind, making higher education (HE) work for all, and considering the complex task of evoking change and achieving some form

of social justice. This was a message which was very 'me', and I wanted to be part of this change. However, the longer I spent working on the front line of student support, the more I started to see some cracks appear in how institutions appeared to me and how it tried to appear to their students. The contrast of appearance and reality was very closely felt in student support, where I was on the front lines of deeply distressed students, often pleading with me not to be withdrawn – as though I were their executioner from whom they were seeking to negotiate a pardon.

An example of this came from the first case to spark my interest in the experience of students who care for children. A student, having given birth on the eve of their exams, called me the following morning from hospital, pleading to be allowed to sit the exam a few hours later and not to be withdrawn, as they had been led to believed they would be by other staff, if their birth conflicted with assessment.

Those cases involving students who cared for children while studying (CCS students) were often the most harrowing for me to respond to. Like the example above, they would usually start with a phone call to my office, often sparked by events which made these students feel like they had reached the end of the line, seeking my support. As the students calmed down and told me their stories, I would learn that, for me, a perfectly ordinary life event, such as pregnancy, childbirth, or childcare, had been the centre of the problems they faced. Often the student had sought the support in the first instance of someone else at the university, such as the academic who led their programme. Problems would then emerge, either when this informal support fell apart or the student infringed one of the conditions or interpretations of a policy or rule devised for them. Examples of this I came across included when:

- Academics would admit students to the course, provided they didn't miss lectures or need extensions because of their childcare.
- Students would be told they could stay on the course while pregnant or caring for children, as long as they gave birth during the Christmas holidays and made sure they never missed any exams.
- Programme handbooks – often over 100 pages long in size 9 font – started to feature among the many other 'programme-specific rules and guidance', sections on student parents, explaining what was and was not okay for these students to do.

Despite the presentation of these conditions or support, there was little laid down about what would happen if the students fail to meet them. Instead, an ominous unwritten 'or else' seemed to hover next to each condition – or a passing remark which referred non-compliant students to the student support office.

I spent a great deal of my time challenging these attitudes in my work, and I still do when I see them. I am never convinced I have been entirely successful, and these challenges have often been fraught with difficulty or conflict. Even as I moved my career into research the signs, quite literally, of the challenges students with children face appeared. The photo below, taken while visiting another

Fig. 1.1. Photo of a University Corridor, Author's Own.

university, is alarming in its exclusionary potential. For context in a relatively normal teaching building of seminar rooms and lecture theatres, every stairwell and corridor had the message in Fig. 1.1 on it in A3, white on a red background with the same intensity as a chemical spill or a fire hazard. Yet there were no labs in this building, no chemicals or clearly perceivable 'risks'; in the conventional sense that may warrant such a sign. Furthermore, there was no real indication that many, or any, children would commonly be in the building. But reflections on my motivation for the research in this book came sharply back to me. For any student who cared for children, even if the children were not with them, the message was clear: you are a 'risk', a 'danger' and an 'other', a big sign at the end of every corridor told you so.

My experience of working with students who cared for children always seemed incongruous to the messages I had been trained and flooded with in my early career and had associated with HE myself. Although I had never questioned that I would go to university, as a student from low-participation neighbourhood, an image had been engrained in my mind of HE as a welcoming place to be, supporting equality, diversity and inclusivity.

Thus, the genesis of this research was born; to explore my own puzzlement and confusion at my early experiences of working in HE and, in particular, focus on the experiences of students who care for children, remembering so vividly their confusing experiences in my practice.

The contrasts that appeared to me, when reflecting on my experiences of students who cared for children, seemed so clear. This was an environment where equality and diversity work, legislation and policy had been made so visible; yet, in seeing these students ostracising and isolating, there appeared to me to be potentially transecting issues of the protected status of paternity and maternity and gender discrimination. Further, services which were being developed with a view to supporting a diverse range of students and support their inclusion, participation and retention appeared to become positioned as regulators by informal channels of support who would exclude or punish students.

While working in student support, I had the space to improve the experience of those students within the schools or faculties I worked, but, through research, I could help share my findings with the sector and improve the experience of more students. Existing research, such as into the experience of student parents, showed me that my experiences of students who care for children often facing difficulty in participating in HE were not uncommon (Brooks, 2012a; Hinton-Smith, 2012a, 2012b; Marandet & Wainwright, 2010; Moreau, 2016; Moreau & Kerner, 2013; National Union of Students (NUS), 2009). Yet my puzzlement is not directly addressed in this literature: how can these students' experiences exist within the landscape of greater focus in universities on equality and diversity and the provision of services aiming to support 'all students'? This, then, is the puzzle this book seeks to explore and understand.

In Chapter 2, I expand on my introduction, exploring the UK HE policy landscape and discussing how different groups of students have, and continue to move into and out of specific policy focuses. I specifically consider the way in which 'widening participation' (WP) and 'equalities' policies tend to exist in 'silos' focussed on singular beneficiaries. This creates possible clefts where intersectional groups, or those not in the focus of either WP or equality silos, may be left unsupported. Critically engaging with existing literature which explores these shifts in focus, I go on to suggest that these siloed policy shifts may lead to an inequitable student experience, which this research will seek to explore further through the experiences of CCS students.

In Chapter 3, I explore and critically assess the current literature specifically connected to CCS students, establishing common patterns which emerge. I identify a dearth of research in the area of student parents, with many being captured in broader research into issues of mature students, or around gender. I highlight how these groups are not synonymous with carers of children, and in the small body of existing literature, highlight several key barriers and the specific ways in which they are experienced as a result of students' 'caring for children' status. In this review, I suggest that an up-close study is of how CCS students navigate and prioritise the barriers they face is needed, which looks to gain a richer understanding of how they are experienced and intersect, looking to create understanding of how the institution mediates these experiences.

In Chapter 4, I go on to discuss the methodological approach I adopted to gain this deeper, richer, understanding of CCS students by utilising an Institutional Ethnographic (IE) approach (Smith, 2006). This approach adopts a specific standpoint (i.e. CCS students) and explores how they go about their *work*, and how this is institutionally mediated through *Texts*, signifying extra-local decision-making which shapes their experiences. I also introduce my theoretical framework and describe how this was constructed through the data analysis. I conclude by elaborating on how these conceptual tools were utilised in practice through discussion of the methods of data collection and analysis.

In Chapter 5, I explore the nature of the practical topics CCS students navigate and experience as they go about the *work* of their everyday lives. Analysing the data to understand the recurrent themes across these accounts, I highlight the emergence of 'othering' (Ahmed, 2012; Archer & Leathwood, 2005; Burke, 2013;

Phiri, 2015; Reay, 2001), and 'individualisation' (Burke, 2013, p. 37; O'Shea, Lysaght, Roberts, & Harwood, 2016; Smit, 2012), which lead CCS students to engage in 'passing' (Leary, 1999; Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001; Stevenson, 2014) behaviours. In drawing this chapter to a close, I suggest that these themes hold an institutionally mediated quality which requires further interrogation, through Chapters 6 and 7.

In Chapter 6, I focus on critically exploring the specific points of interaction with institutional policy and practice, looking at texts (Smith, 2006; Smith & Turner, 2014) and their activation as points of engagement between the CCS student in my study and their institution. Using this approach, I probe deeper into understanding 'why' some of these students' accounts are permeated by the themes of 'othering', 'individualisation' and 'passing', suggesting that CCS students potentially experience an inequity of student experience due to the cumulative impact of the themes of 'othering' and 'individualisation', which encourages 'passing' behaviours in order for CCS students to navigate this particular institution. While in Chapter 7, I probe this cumulative set of themes further through considering the accounts of staff and their reflections on CCS students, and their status within this institution. Here, I establish further evidence of the recurrent themes of 'othering', 'individualising' and 'passing' as a more accepted form of student. I conclude this chapter by suggesting that the prevalence of these themes across both student and staff perspectives represents a wider institutional culture which marginalises CCS students and creates, for some, a potential inequity of student experience.

Finally, in Chapter 8, I summarise the findings from my research and utilise a Fraserian lens to theorise about the nature and the form of potential remedies to the inequity of some CCS students' experiences stemming from the recurrent themes in the data, thus drawing this book to a close by discussing potential institutional remedies and recommendations for the sector.

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Chapter 2

Exploring the Higher Education Policy Context

Introduction

In opening this book, I presented a problem which I attributed to the reactiveness to policy changes of the higher education (HE) institutions I worked for and the fractures I felt emerged between the policy vision and its implementation around the beneficiaries of HE. This chapter will, therefore, probe the English HE policy landscape and the equalities legislation affecting the university–student relationship by considering what is already known about the cleavages between the aims and beneficiaries of HE policy and implementation more broadly. As well as considering the influence and contrasts of equality and diversity (E&D) policies which affect institution students. This chapter will therefore seek to critically understand the policy landscape associated with the puzzle at the heart of this book before going further in the next chapter to consider the existing literature specifically connected to students who care for children while studying (CCS students).

First, I will briefly unpack the policy landscape following World War II up to the present day, discussing the shifts from 'elite' to 'mass' HE (Trow & Burrage, 2010, p. 94), and the extent to which this move symbolised the greater diversification of HE participation – or whether it just merely increased the numbers of students from backgrounds who already participated in HE. Moving on to consider the policy following the mid-1990s to the present day, where 'widening participation' (WP) was explicitly introduced as a concept (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE), 1997, p. 101) and the subsequent expansion and contraction of policy and practice connected to this.

Elite to Mass HE – 1945–1997

Prior to World War II, participation in HE had been relatively low, at approximately 50,002 students in 1938/1939 (Mountford, 1966, p. 57), compared with the highs of 2,503,010 seen in the decade 2004/2014 (Higher Education Statistics

Agency (HESA), 2016), leading to the expansion between this period to be characterised as a move from elite to mass participation (Trow & Burrage, 2010). Trow's work on elite and mass participation in HE (Trow & Burrage, 2010) explores this concept in some detail, defining elite participation as providing places for about 15% of the age cohort able to attend HE, in contrast to mass participation, which is defined as rising to about 50% (Trow & Burrage, 2010, p. 94). Trow proposes other more qualitative aspects to consider in a theory of mass participation, such as the way HE is perceived by students and staff, the nature of the curriculum and the character of academic standards (Trow & Burrage, 2010, p. 94); yet, by using specific numbers such as 15% and 50% to define his theory, Trow's work gains influence in policy because of its accessibility as a quantitative measure of the state of current HE participation.

Using Trow's quantitative indicators, there is a strong argument to suggest that the United Kingdom has moved into a period of mass participation in HE. Looking at the decade 2005/2006–2014/2015, using data from the HESA and considering that there were approximately six million young people in the United Kingdom aged between 18 and 24 (Arnett & Gutierrez, 2015) during this period. The data suggest that, on average, nearly 40% of young people were in HE, albeit having decreased slightly since 2010/2011, with student enrolments comfortably above two million consistently. Highs of 2,503,010 being reached in 2010/2011 (HESA, 2016).

The recent image of participation contrasts starkly with the pre-World War II figures cited above and the post-war figures of 126,445 in 1963/1964 (Mountford, 1966, p. 57), providing initial support for the notion that this period could be described as shifting from elite to mass, according to Trow's definition of the term (Trow & Burrage, 2010, p. 94). However, I locate the greatest momentum behind the development of a HE policy landscape as following the Robbins Report (Committee on Higher Education (CoHE), 1963), as this report principally called for the expansion of HE and is seen to influence HE even today (Scott, 2014).

The Robbins Report (CoHE, 1963) focussed on how to shape the HE sector in a way to meet the needs of society. This included reacting to the heightened demand for HE, due to the increase in school participation (CoHE, 1963, pp. 51–52) following the 1944 Education Act, and the need to direct these students towards university as a means of meeting the demand for graduate skill sets in the employment market (CoHE, 1963, pp. 71–72). Robbins established a clear agenda of increasing participation, and, for the first time, HE policy focussed on increasing participation for specific groups as a means of meeting these needs. Principally, the report looked at: first in family to go to university (CoHE, 1963, p. 51), mature or part-time students (CoHE, 1963, p. 167) and women (CoHE, 1963, p. 273). However, the call to action the Robbins Report made was more sophisticated than purely increasing participation alone, as indicated by the recommendation to reach applicants who were the first in their family to go to university (CoHE, 1963, p. 51). While the term 'widening participation' would not be coined in policy until the mid-1990s, Robbins foregrounded the principle by suggesting that certain groups who were not currently participating in HE