

**Access Policy and Practice in Further and  
Higher Education: Investigating “success”  
as access turns into widening participation**

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## ABSTRACT

The policy shift to widen participation in recent years has emerged using language associated with radical, practitioner-led discourses on post compulsory education and training (PCET) of the 1970s and 80s and even from earlier periods. The literature on groups who are underrepresented in PCET pathologies the student. This research focuses on the underrepresented student experience and perceptions of success within the PCET system. It uses a mainly qualitative approach to analyse the experience of staff and students in two further education (FE) colleges and two universities with traditions of widening access to underrepresented groups to explore good practice in widening access to further and higher education, the support services, student-centred administration as well as institutional policies and barriers to widening access. It also examines, from the perspectives of senior managers, teachers and students, institutional policies and practices to support the success of underrepresented groups. The research showed some evidence of changes within institutions but found that staff practices and administrative processes had not changed to meet the diversified participation. What was in evidence was a largely unchanged provision requiring the student to change. The successful student experience, for higher education (HE) certainly and mature students generally, identity was personal and strong, community links remain in the home. The HE institution is not somewhere you go to live, as campus based, 'traditional' students. The theories on success and retention of Tinto and others therefore need revisiting in light of the 'new' student population. The research evidence suggests a different context of successful access to PCET for 'non-traditional' students and the failure of the case study institutions to identify and accommodate it. The research found hard working but frustrated staff in FE and HE, and dissatisfied but determined students. The research concludes with recommendations for policy makers and PCET institutions.

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Before the Emancipation in British colonies in 1834, there was very limited education available for the slaves in the West Indies. The one public school in Carriacou, sister island of Grenada, catered for both the free and the enslaved. Residents of Carriacou had to travel to Grenada, some 60 miles away. There was only one school for the poor in Grenada, the main island, to receive an education. Free education was given to the slaves by missionary groups who taught them Christianity. This was a legal activity that was fiercely opposed by slave owners, because, according to the planter, Richard Ligonm 'once a Christian, we could not more account him a slave, and so lose the hold we had on him as a slave'. (Brizan 1984: 146). This attitude changed after Emancipation, when the ruling classes looked to a religious education to integrate former slaves into a 'normal life'.

In the 1860s, the ruling classes in Carriacou resisted a demand for popular, general education, as it was perceived as at best pointless and at worst dangerous. What was created instead of general education was an elitist, secondary education.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, primary education became compulsory (1888) but state investment was heavily towards the one Grammar School. By 1896 there were three secondary schools with a total enrolment of 140 pupils in Grenada. Education became a means of successful entry into the middle and upper classes of the society, which continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Brizan 1984).

This former slave culture is the source of my origin. I was born when the island was still a British Colony and attended primary school until the age of eight when I migrated to England to join my parents. Neither of my parents attended post compulsory education though some of their siblings obtained professional and academic qualifications in Grenada, the US and the UK. I completed primary education and attended secondary school in the UK in the 1960s and received local authority grants for higher education tuition fees at first degree and masters level studies. My experience of attending school in the Caribbean suggested that academic success was possible for anyone with the ability to attain the limited scholarships into secondary education. That system saw the descendants of slaves gaining access to prestigious universities and contributing to their society at its highest levels as teachers, QCs, senior civil servants, ministers and even prime ministers. These early beginnings have shaped my perceptions and the possibilities and meanings of success.

There are strong similarities between the struggles of colonial peoples/ former slaves and of working class people in the UK to access education. The idea of research into access and widening participation had been realised through leading and collaborating small-scale, time limited research and development projects throughout nearly 30 years of teaching and managing in inner city London boroughs: first in secondary schools then in further education, interspersed with part-time teaching for the Inner London Education Authority's Inspectorate and within higher education institutions. Throughout my work in education in the UK, the issue of success/failure of 'non-traditional' student groups in compulsory and

post-compulsory education has been a preoccupation. As a senior manager in an inner city further education college, I have observed the absence of FE practitioners' perspectives on policy development and research on PCET. This has been apparent in the interpretation of statistics on institutions' performances and the underlying assumptions of research and government policies on success/ failure in PCET of underrepresented groups. The impression is given of a victimised, powerless group of working class and minority groups, failing in the education system. This over-researched group of 'failures' often appear mute, their experiences and perceptions conveyed by or through the writers, most of whom had long since ceased to be practitioners, occupying 'loftier' positions as civil servants, senior academics or researchers. As an FE practitioner and as a descendant of slaves, this research provides me with a unique opportunity to conduct an in-depth examination into the success and access to PCET of non-traditional groups, giving prominence to their voices and to those of their teachers and managers.

### **Why the study?**

In recent years an education policy shift towards widening participation in further and higher education has emerged which uses a vocabulary from an older, radical, practitioner-led discourse from the 1970s and 80s and even earlier. However, there has been much research reporting on inequalities and on problems encountered by underrepresented students and why they fail in all stages of education, (Holt, 1964, Coard 1977, Swann 1985, DES 1987, Parry 1989, McGivney 1990 and 1996, Harrison 1993, Leicester 1993, McNay 1994, Martinez 1995, Mirza 1996, Allen 1997, Kennedy 1997, Dee 1999, Ainley 1999, Social Exclusion Unit 1999, Parry



2002, Bowl 2003, Archer et al 2003, Quinn et al 2004 among others). This has been the case with publications since the 1944 Education Act, after the arrival of the Empire Windrush in 1948 and since the Robbins Report of 1963.

There is a dearth of literature on the student experience (Haselgrove 1994 and Silver and Silver 1997) and in particular that of the underrepresented student in PCET (Leicester 1993). The funding councils (Learning and Skills Council and Higher Education Funding Council) responsible for funding PCET have implemented policies and practices to widen participation. However, there is still a lack of information on what works (Newby 2004). Of the research which exists on PCET, most deal with higher education. The realities of teachers, managers and students in further education are under-researched (Avis et al 2002) and Silver and Silver (1997) contend that research into the student experience has been 'data free'.

Given the dearth of literature on the student experience within PCET, this study therefore set out to:

- i) conduct qualitative research into the experience of staff and students in two further education colleges and two universities with traditions of widening access to underrepresented groups
- ii) highlight good practice in widening access to further and higher education
- iii) explore the support services and student-centred administration which address the needs of non-standard entrants in FHE
- iv) examine institutional policies and barriers to widening access and how teachers and learners have successfully navigated them.

The immediate motivation to conduct research came during the data collection process for the Kennedy Report, published in 1997. Data was collected from practitioners and managers in further education colleges. The Kennedy research focused on FE practitioners' perceptions of their practices which successfully widened participation. It was one of the first reports which used the experience and testimonies of FE practitioners to tell FE's 'success' stories of widening participation to non-traditional student groups. The Kennedy Report was an important and influential report which led to national PCET policies to encourage the recruitment of underrepresented groups in FHE. In reporting on the perceptions of students and staff at all levels of FE and voluntary sector organisations, it highlighted how the FE funding system deterred institutions from widening participation but presented the 'good practice' examples of widening participation as neutral and unproblematic.

By contrast, this research is located within anti-racist and feminist paradigms. It argues against neutral positions and acknowledges the necessity of occupying a position that is political both in the public and personal spheres of a person's life (Grosz 1987, Ozga 2000). It therefore identifies participants' social identities and draws on testimonies. It also provides the opportunity for views to be expressed that traditional discourse would usually suppress or ignore (Usher 1996). PCET policies are therefore examined as contentious processes rather than as neutral products (Ozga 2000). This research, in contrast to the Kennedy report, as well as seeking to identify good practice, sets out to examine the barriers for staff and students in widening access. It pays attention to 'race', class and gender because human

experience is differentiated through such categories (Collins 1990). The research takes account of issues of diversity and power relations between different groups.

This research includes HE institutions because part of success for many FE students is progression to HE and many HE institutions, particularly former Colleges of Advanced Technology and polytechnics, offer FE level programmes. Many HE and FE institutions have strong partnerships for progression to higher level programmes or have franchised arrangements. The Funding Councils for FE and HE have also identified the same underrepresented groups to whom PCET should be widened. Using both FE and HE case study institutions therefore appeared beneficial to the research in exploring differences and similarities in the approaches to access and widening participation within and between the two PCET sectors.

### **Background to the Case Study Institutions**

The case study institutions chosen were two further education (FE) colleges and two universities with mission statements and public reputations for successfully widening access to underrepresented groups. As indicated above, the research focus was on success factors, therefore institutions with a track record of working successfully with underrepresented groups in PCET were selected. The literature produced by all the case study institutions contained information on financial, academic and pastoral support available to students. The information also suggested that efforts were made to provide teaching and learning strategies to enable student success and a learning environment which welcomed student diversity in terms of ethnicity, disability and nationality.

The data collected (Appendix VIII) on the performance of the FE and HE case study institutions, is not consistent. Due to the difficulties encountered in obtaining information, the data on the FE case studies is based on the 2000-2001 academic year and for the HE case studies, the 2001-2002 academic year. There is further inconsistency with the data. Only the FE institutions provided consistent data on the retention and achievement of students and a consistent breakdown of ethnicities. It was not possible to collect the same information from the two HE institutions. Data collected from the HE institutions on achievement and retention only showed undergraduate progression (from New University) and undergraduate degree classifications (from Old University). Although staff from both institutions were cooperative in providing the data, they were extremely busy at the time of the fieldwork and their Management Information Systems (MIS) do not, apparently, easily provide such analyses.

The retention and achievement data of FE students are used as 'success' measurements by the FE Funding body. The data is also used to report on the institutions' 'success' when they are externally inspected by the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) and the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED), now merged under the latter. This data is collected by both FE and HE Funding Councils (Individual Student Record or Individual Learner Record – ISR/ ILR) through a database provided by the Funding Councils to calculate income based on the number of students who complete programmes of study and achieve their qualifications (retention and achievement). The calculation is based on the number of learners enrolled and those who are registered on the ISR. Other sources of data used by OfSTED and ALI to measure FE institutional success are teaching and learning

inspection grades. In this brief introduction to the case study institutions only the retention and achievement data will be highlighted below.

Pseudonyms are used for individuals and the case study institutions as guarantees of anonymity were given to staff and students who participated in the research.

## **The Further Education Case Studies**

### Beacon College

Beacon College (BC) is a large, general FE college in London with a reputation for successfully widening access to underrepresented groups and as an exemplar of good practice as a 'Beacon' college. This is a competitive award open to all FE colleges. The different categories of the Awards recognise innovative and imaginative practices in colleges. The Award winners receive a small grant to develop the project and to disseminate good practice to other colleges. The Award ensures literature promoting the college's 'exemplary practice' is distributed annually throughout the FE sector (AoC 2004).

In its literature, BC is described as having a Black and minority ethnic student population of more than 50%; an average age of 28 (at the time of the fieldwork) and nearly two thirds of students are male. BC's ISR database for the academic year 2000-2001, shows levels of 'success' for most groups of learners that are above the national rate for FE colleges. The achievement rate, that is those who pass their programmes of study, ranges from 56% (for Pakistani students) to 75% (Indian and White students). Pakistani students have the lowest recorded achievement rates in BC, below the national average for FE Colleges. The achievement rates recorded for

all other students at BC are at least equal to the national average for FE colleges. This is the case for Black Caribbean students (64%); other groups exceeded the national average FE college rates: Indian (75%), White (75%) and Black African (66%). Overall, though, the retention rates, that is those who complete their programmes of study at BC, are high. The groups most successful in completing their programmes of study are Black African (81%), Black Other (80%) and Bangladeshi (80%), whose retention rates are all above the national average for FE colleges.

### Non Beacon College

Non Beacon College (NBC) is a large, general FE college similar in size to BC. NBC shares other similarities with BC, e.g. students from Black and minority ethnic groups form the majority of the student population. At the time of the fieldwork, NBC had not achieved Beacon status. However, widening participation was acknowledged as one of NBC's strengths in its last OfSTED inspection report.

NBC rates of achievement for the academic year 2000 -2001 range from 61% (students in the 'Black other' category) to 83% (students in the 'Other Asian' category). White students' retention and achievement (80% and 70% respectively) at NBC were below the national average (85.5% and 74%). All the minority ethnic groups' achievement, with the exception of Black Caribbean students' were above the national average. Black Caribbean students had the lowest retention and achievement (77% and 56% respectively) at NBC.

## **The Higher Education Case Studies**

### Old University

‘Old’ university (UO) was established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and from its onset catered for groups that were underrepresented in PCET. It is a small university approximately half the size of the ‘New University’ described below. At the time of the fieldwork UO’s Corporate Plan indicated that over 80% of their staff were engaged in research that was of international research quality. Over 45% of UO’s first degree students are first generation to go to university. The number of students who live in postcode areas identified as neighbourhoods of low participation are significantly lower than the benchmark and so UO does not receive ‘postcode premium’ funding. UO students’ ages range from 18 to over 70 years with the majority falling within the 30-39 year age group. The gender balance (female: male) of first degree and postgraduate students overall is 53% female and 47% male but there are large differences along gender lines between subject areas as would be expected. Black and minority ethnic students represent 25% of the student population. Student retention rates at UO are 66% for undergraduates from year 1 to 2 and 87% for subsequent years. Of the students achieving the highest undergraduate degree classification, First Class, 87% were identified as ‘White’. The next degree category where White students attained the majority of the awards was the 2:2 classification: 73% achieved this award. This achievement was proportionate to the representation of White students in UO’s population (75%).

The students identified as 'Non-White' only represented four per cent of the highest grades but were over-represented in all the other degree classifications particularly for 2:1, a very 'respectable' achievement - 57% achieved the award.

### New University

New University (NU) was established as a PCET institution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and became a university in 1992. It is a large university, over twice the size of UO; its records for the 2000-01 academic year show 51% of students were male and 49% female. White students were recorded as 59% of the population and over one third (36%) were from Black and minority ethnic groups, 5% were not known. NU's Corporate Plan expressed a vision to improve the recruitment and retention of staff and students from Black and minority ethnic groups with claims of teaching and learning strategies which counter discriminatory practice. It also cited disappointment in the 2001 RAE funding decisions which limited its research aspirations. NU's prospectus described institutional initiatives to support the progression of minority ethnic groups into employment with 'Blue Chip' companies. At the end of the academic year 2002-03, a similar proportion of White students (52%) to Non-White students (51%) progressed from first to second year. However, the proportion of students that were unsuccessful/ failed to meet the required academic standards was greater for Non-White students (24%) than White students (13%).

The differences between the information collected from the FE and the HE case study institutions made it difficult to make comparisons between the different PCET sectors, or between the two HE institutions. The data provided a background on each



institution for contextualising the main research data: this consisted of interviews, supplemented with documentary evidence and fieldwork observations.

It is evident that significant proportions of students from underrepresented groups attend the case study FE and HE institutions, ranging from 25% at UO to 56% at BC. Using 'official,' Funding Council and inspection measures, BC has been successful in supporting the retention and achievement of its students and NBC for most of its students, with the exception of students in the White and Black Caribbean categories. Of the UO students who complete undergraduate degree programmes, a relatively small proportion achieve the highest degree classifications (17% White students and 3% Non-White students), the majority attain second and third class degrees, with a higher proportion of minority ethnic students attaining third Class degrees.

The quality of the student experience is not indicated by the data or by the number of students who complete programmes but do not 'succeed'. For some groups of students in the case study institutions, as many as 30% failed to complete their programmes of study/ achieve their qualifications. There have been many studies, as indicated earlier in this chapter, on such underrepresented groups 'failing' in PCET.

By contrast, this study focuses on student success, the underrepresented student experience and perceptions of success within the PCET system. It also examines from the perspectives of senior managers, teachers and students, institutional policies and practices to support the success of underrepresented groups. The

research explores good practice in widening access to further and higher education, the support services and student-centred administration as well as institutional policies and barriers to widening access. Chapter 1 introduces the research, Chapter 2 examines the literature on access, success and widening participation to PCET from an historical perspective. Chapter 3 describes the methodology, Chapters 4 and 5 presents the data from the HE and FE case study institutions respectively. Chapter 6 discusses the research findings and Chapter 7 summarises and concludes the research.

## Chapter 2

### HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL CONTEXT OF ACCESS TO POST COMPULSORY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

*If at first you don't succeed.... you don't succeed* (Kennedy 1997:21)

*...elite recruitment is not that the aspirant recruit possesses a degree in Physics or in engineering, but that [the] degree is conferred at Oxford or at Harvard...ownership of wealth and property continues to play a fundamental part in facilitating access to the sort of educational process which influences entry to elite positions.* (Giddens 1973:263-4)

The term 'access' came into use in the 1960s and 1970s (Heron 1986, Sand 1998, Ainley and Andrews 2003) and its development was preceded by a succession of education and social reforms. Scott (1990) cites this succession of development as the 1870 Forster Act, the 1944 Education Act and the Robbins Report of 1963 which, through prompting systematic state funding of elementary, secondary and higher education respectively, raised educational aspirations and provided the value base for access in the 1960s and 70s.

The first part of the chapter introduces concepts of access, success and meeting student needs. The second part provides an historical background to access within post-school institutions - further (FE), adult (AE) and higher education (HE) in England which are individually discussed. The third and final part examines access

in the last three decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. It suggests that access originated from a principle of education for social justice and asserts that the current official education access policies have appropriated the vocabulary of the access 'movement' for a different purpose. It contends that access, in becoming 'widening participation', is largely vocationally related FE and HE and focuses on younger learners (Callender 2002, Ainley and Andrews 2003) or on adult basic skills. It argues that academic FE in colleges is being replaced with new sixth form colleges and centres in order to court the middle and 'intermediate' classes. The chapter proposes that academic HE remains the preserve of the elite (Palfreyman 2002, Scott 2001) and concludes that the current 'New' Labour government's education initiatives are designed to address economic needs, which can only continue to reproduce the structural inequalities of society.

### **Concepts of A/access**

Concepts of A/access (with upper or lower case, see below) to post-compulsory education are often complex and contradictory. The idea of A/access in its early stages embraced liberal (capital – 'A' access) and radical (lower case 'a' access) notions of education to enable adults to engage in learning. As access has become widening participation, New Labour's widening participation policy is one of 'academic' and 'utilitarian' approaches to access (Jones and Thomas 2005).

Academic access attracts 'gifted and talented' young students to unchanged, pre 1992 universities, rather than lower status, ex-polytechnics (Capital – 'A' access) and utilitarian access attracts groups who are underrepresented to HEIs, mainly post 1992 universities, where attempts are made to reduce barriers, including

organisational and curriculum changes to engage new student groups, prior to entry and exit changes (lower case 'a' access). However, the utilitarian approach is designed to address labour market needs. New Labour's widening participation policy echoes the binary HE system which existed prior to the 1992 FHE Act and the tripartite secondary school system established by the 1944 Act. This is evidenced by the segregation of mass tertiary education which will be discussed later in this chapter.

'Lifelong learning' by contrast is an emerging concept which embraces different aspects of A/access and equality of opportunity. Before lifelong learning became widely used, there was a tendency to use the terms adult education, recurrent education, continuing education and paid educational leave as processes to bring about lifelong learning (Houghton and Richardson 1974, Flude and Parrott 1979, Titmus 1981). There is little evidence of a lifelong learning policy in England despite expectations following the Green Paper *The Learning Age* (DfEE 1998) and David Blunkett's (2000) speech at Greenwich (as Secretary of State for Education and Employment); however, lifelong learning embraces values such as social justice, equality of opportunity, social inclusion and social progress. These values are also the language of New Labour's welfare reform and policy, that is, the development of labour market skills and flexibility to reduce dependency on the state and social exclusion. Griffin (2000) argues that a concept of lifelong learning is about bridging the gap between education and the outside world, linking education with everyday life. He suggests that there is a European drive for vocationally orientated lifelong learning and that ideas of lifelong learning fluctuate between an emphasis on vocationalism and a concern for social democracy. However, despite the arguments,

the dominant language is employability. In considering the meaning of lifelong learning, Griffin (2000:5) contends that 'meanings' are appropriate due to paradoxical and ambiguous notions of lifelong learning. These are discussed below.

The 30 year period after the end of Second World War (WWII) was a time of increasing wealth, improving equality of opportunity and the gradual opening up of general education, including general education at degree level. 1960-1970 saw the greatest percentage rise in student numbers in UK HE (Court 2006). The historical and theoretical context provided in this chapter begins from this period to establish a baseline for comparative and contextual analysis of the case studies which follow. They will examine notions of A/access and success within higher and further education.

Much of history is oral; 'A/access' is no exception. There is no comprehensive written account of its history. There are historically based accounts of only some elements such as Silver and Brennan (1988) on the CNA and its influence.

Therefore, in attempting to write a history of A/access here, it has been necessary to include oral accounts from practitioners in the field. Characteristically, many educationists working 'in access' were practitioners who did not record much of their work. At the onset of this study several former practitioners of the 'access movement' were contacted and four agreed to be interviewed: Harinder Lawley, Bev Sand, Gareth Parry and Maggie Woodrow. Unfortunately, Maggie Woodrow died before the interview was conducted.

Activities associated with A/access are often based in further education colleges (FE) consisting of programmes to engage underrepresented groups such as women, Black and minority ethnic groups, unemployed people and those seeking a 'second chance' (Sand 1998: 5). A/access also describes opportunities for people who have been disadvantaged by the education system, and the opening of alternative progression routes into and through further and higher education. Access also embraces teaching and learning strategies and services to meet the needs of mature students (Andrews 1991).

Tight (1988) describes two approaches to access. One is concerned with opening up study opportunities to more and different people, linked with a desire to re-structure further and higher education into more relevant and flexible institutions (lower case 'a' access). The other approach equates access with 'Access courses', designed to help adults prepare for entry to unchanged further and higher education, albeit, incidental changes in the institutions are expected to emerge as a result of the presence of an increased number of underrepresented groups in HE. But this is not the main concern of this approach, which is to change individuals rather than institutions. The latter approach to access is usually referred to as 'capital - A Access'. Practitioners who developed Access courses as well as those practitioners who worked towards changing the HE curriculum and institutions to be more appealing to non-traditional students, were described as being part of an 'access movement' (Duke 1989:164; Sand 1998: 5). Tight (1988) argues for a definition of access to mean access to all forms of post-compulsory education, for all who wish it. He did not support the changing of students via Access courses to 'fit' into post -

compulsory education institutions. Evans (1984) defined access from the student perspective, as enabling people to study at whatever level is appropriate for them. Evans' and Tight's approach to access requires a flexible institution catering for the needs of the learner; this approach is usually referred to as access with a small 'a'. Parry (1986) highlighted the contradiction inherent in the development of Access courses. What was offered, he argued, '...is a non-traditional pathway to a traditional provision; and a student-centred preparation for a subject-centred experience' (Parry 1986: 53).

The ideology which influenced the 'access movement' was critical pedagogy which drew on the work of Paulo Freire (Burke 2002). Freire (1974) believed that education had the power to transform lives and ultimately the world with regards to power and domination. He wrote

...concepts such as unity, organization, and struggle are . . . dangerous. . .  
And the more alienated people are, the easier it is to divide them and keep them divided. (Freire 1972: 141-2)

Freire described the traditional teacher /student relationship as 'banking education' and argued that teacher authority and student passivity perpetuated the values of the oppressor. He suggested that by changing the power relationship between teachers and students to a more equitable one, teachers and students would transform their knowledge of the world and work together to change it. Approaches to teaching and learning that are described as student-centred and experiential learning embrace this perspective (lower case 'a' access). To ensure consistency and clarity, 'access' will be written in this thesis using the lower case, unless referring to 'Access courses', when the upper case will be used.



'Lifelong learning' embraces both concepts of access. Lifelong learning first appeared in English language writings over seventy years ago. The 1918 Education Act proposed the expansion of tertiary education and this post war period seemed to trigger the debate. Yeaxlee (1929) and Lindeman (1926) first wrote about lifelong learning, drawing upon French and North American traditions of adult education. Yeaxlee's book argued that lifelong education was as essential for life as food and exercise.

No man is free so long as he remains, even though of his own deliberate choice, in bondage to intellectual authority, however venerable, or to his own crassness and ignorance, however absorbed he may be in the practical service of his kind. Life and learning go together in the attainment of liberty....  
(Yeaxlee 1929:51)

Woodrow Wilson committed the US Democratic Party to liberalism and a legislative programme of reform, declaring "we must abolish everything that bears even the semblance of privilege" (Wilson 1913: 1). He endorsed General Education in 1921 for those in the armed forces who were lacking an 'elementary education' (Anderson 2003: 2). Much of the modern day writing on Lifelong learning originated immediately after the Second World War, particularly in the USA and to a lesser extent in the UK (Monroe-Hughes 1970). In 1944 President Roosevelt signed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act which became known as the GI Bill of Rights. This enabled servicemen and women to receive financial benefits including loans and grants for tuition assistance for up to ten years after discharge from military service. Millions of veterans obtained education and training as a result (Monroe-Hughes 1970).

In Europe, the principles of Lifelong learning were introduced by the OECD and UNESCO in the 1970s (Belanger and Tuijnman 1997, Schuller 2003). Lifelong learning was presented as a set of principles to enable adults to participate in learning throughout their lives. Belanger and Tuijnman (1997) describe it as learning in formal institutions of education and training or informally in the home, at work and within the community. The opportunity to learn formally, informally and throughout all stages of life is often the everyday experience for privileged groups and needs to be a reality for those who have been excluded. The latter view is shared by Sand (1998) who believes that lifelong learning has a broader notion of widening educational opportunities for learners at further and higher education levels and at different stages of their lives. The idea would mean an end to the concentration of education mainly on schooling or even 18-30 year olds ('front-loading') and the spread of education across all age groups in the population. The 1972 UNESCO Report on lifelong learning (reported in Coffield and Williamson 1997) perceived lifelong learning similarly to Freire and advocated learning for democracy and empowerment. The OECD (1973) argued against the preoccupation with extending young people's period of schooling and for an emphasis on enabling adults to return to education at different stages of their lives. The OECD's rationale for lifelong learning was in response to the role of knowledge in a modern society

In the last two decades of the twentieth century and at the start of the new century, many discussions in Europe and the UK have focused on the implementation of lifelong learning in order to address the 'social exclusion' and 'skills' agendas (Morley 2003a). Preston (1999) describes lifelong learning as '... provision

accessible in any ... place [and] should include opportunities for learning at all life stages'. She goes on to state that lifelong learning also '...seeks to enable those on the margins to increase their footholds within the included sectors of their societies' (Preston 1999: 569).

Lifelong learning first emerged in the UK government's vocabulary through the Kennedy Report, *Learning Works* (Kennedy 1997), *Learning for the Twenty-First Century* (Fryer 1997) and *The Learning Age* (DfEE1998) policy documents and David Blunkett's (2000) speech at Greenwich. Taylor et al (2002) refer to the Green Paper, *The Learning Age* as the policy paper on lifelong learning for the UK government. The Green Paper conflates notions of learning to prevent social exclusion, learning for individual and national economic prosperity and learning for its own sake. This policy paper was a departure from New Labour's notion of lifelong learning as skills development and vocational skills in particular to prevent social exclusion. Taylor et al (2002) discuss five contested concepts of lifelong learning: vocationalism and performativity, social control and incorporation, pluralistic complexity within a post-modern framework, personal development and growth and radical social purpose and community development. All five concepts have been the subject of much debate within post secondary education (Belanger and Tuijnman 1997, Coffield and Williamson 1997, Taylor et al 2002, Andrews 2003a, Morley 2003a) and it is arguable that they should be viewed separately, as collectively they represent different positions along a continuum of lifelong learning. At one end is vocationalism and performativity where education is primarily for skills development and employability. In practice this can be

programmes for unemployed adults in community centres which lead to National Vocational Qualifications or basic skills qualifications leading to low paid employment (See Parham 2001). At the other end, lifelong learning as radical social purpose and community development, akin to the principles of A/access, which draw on Freire's (1972) critical pedagogy. Burke (2002:15) describes this as provision which is not restricted to nationally recognised courses but which responds to the needs of local communities: '...engaging groups who have been socially excluded from participating in and contributing to the reconstruction of knowledge and meaning'.

Griffin (2000) suggests that lifelong learning can be seen as an economic or employment policy. He draws parallels with the origins of the welfare state which was located within the policies of the nationalisation of industry, full employment and health and national insurance. He argues that the policy rhetoric of lifelong learning implies expansion of learning opportunities but not usually accompanied by an increase in public provision. The increased marketisation of education, according to Griffin, renders lifelong learning a form of private education, which makes it vulnerable to market forces; not primarily concerned with access and equality of opportunity. Griffin asserts that only governments can redistribute access and equality of opportunity: markets reproduce inequalities.

It can be seen from the above discussions that A/access has been subsumed within lifelong learning which New Labour has used as the vehicle for its widening participation agenda. Concepts of access will be returned to later in chapter 6 when the institutions in the case study are examined and where a third interpretation of

access seems to be emerging.

Ideologies on access provide explanations on engaging underrepresented student groups in learning. The next section examines theories of student success within institutions of PCET.

### **Concepts of Success**

Student success has been recognised as the ability to persist to the completion of a degree at one or more colleges (Berger and Lyon 2005: 25)

As access lost its radical principles and became a means of engaging socially excluded groups in developing skills for employment, notions of learning for personal development, social democracy or community development as measures of success were displaced by the completion of programmes of study and attainment of qualifications. The institution was therefore expected to change rather than the student. Changes to programmes such as modules, credit frameworks, certificate, diploma and foundation/ associate degree qualifications created new definitions of 'success'. In a review of literature on student success, Yorke and Longden (2004) claim that the early theories of Spady (1970) and Tinto (1975) from the US provided the conceptual framework for most of the early research into student retention and success in the UK. Yorke and Longden (2004: 8) describe students' success within higher education as obtaining qualifications, securing graduate-level employment, being effective in working with others and 'solving the "messy" problems that life throws up, and so on'.

Tinto (2005: 323) defines student success as 'persistence and graduation' but highlights the complexities of developing a theory of student behaviour. He

discusses the complexities of students' leaving HE with the intention of returning (to gain promotion within a job, moving to another institution, or to take on domestic responsibilities) – 'stopout', arguing that institutions may observe such acts as negative because of the loss of funds but students who have left may perceive their actions as positive in achieving successful outcomes. A recent study by Quinn et al (2005) argues along similar lines. On student success Tinto states:

...without learning there is no success and that at a minimum success implies successful learning in the classroom.... student learning... [is] part and parcel of the process of student success, however it is defined and measured, must have at its core success in individual classes (Tinto 2005: 324-325).

Much of the early theoretical literature on student success in HE was influenced by psychology, characterising students' success due to their personality, maturity, disposition and motivation (Berger and Lyon 2005). It was not until Spady's work in 1970 that a sociological model emerged of why students left HE before completing their studies (Spady 1970). A psychological perspective characteristically focuses on individuals (capital A-Access) whereas a sociological approach focuses on institutions and social structures (lower case a – access). This section discusses the theoretical literature on student academic success which has influenced policy and practice within further and higher education in the UK and the US.

Bandura (1997), a psychologist based in the US, asserts that success is limited by expectations and self-esteem. He suggests that successful achievement has a direct relationship with self-efficacy. He contends that a person's ability to successfully master experiences is the major influence on their self-efficacy. Bandura also claims that self-efficacy and self-esteem are both determined by a person's conscious reflections. The self-concept is developed through involvement in and reflection on

activities. Individuals reflect on what they have done, how this compares to what others have done as well as their own expectations and the expectations of others. The self-concept is not inherent but is socially constructed through individuals' contact with the environment (including teachers and institutions) and reflection on that contact. This characteristic of the self-concept means that it can be developed or altered. For young people, Bandura suggests that teachers and parents should provide experiences that create opportunities for students to master skills or knowledge as opposed to using other means to raise self-esteem. Bandura concludes that successful experiences of learning have a significant influence on self-efficacy and are a good measure of future success within those areas of learning. As an example of the application of this approach to students of all ages in PCET, many institutions have changed ('a' access) and now treat the first year of undergraduate study on full time programmes as a year to qualify for the honours programme. By removing the requirement to pass first semester exams and arranging exams later in the year, this allows time for first year undergraduate students to develop skills and knowledge to confidently succeed on their programmes by the end of their first year of study. Formative assessment is also crucial (Yorke and Longden 2004). Many further and higher education institutions have removed the examination components entirely from courses of study and introduced continuous assessment. This allows students the opportunity to develop their confidence as well as skills for successful study (Yorke 2002) and is a better 'fit' with the employment agenda.

Gage and Berliner (1998) argue that research into the relationship between self-esteem and school achievement shows that it is only at the level of individual

subjects such as English, geography etc that there is a relationship between academic success and self concept:

the evidence is accumulating, however, to indicate that level of school success, particularly over many years, predicts level of regard of self and one's own ability... whereas level of self-esteem does not predict level of school achievement. The implication is that teachers need to concentrate on the academic successes and failures of their students. It is the student's history of success and failure that gives them the information with which to assess themselves (Gage and Berliner: 159).

Access students entering FHE are more likely to have experienced failure within compulsory education; correspondingly they may have low self-esteem and require approaches to learning and teaching and learning experiences to raise their self-esteem. The notion of developing self-esteem is a key factor in the structuring of mainstream as well as Access programmes within PCET institutions to enable students to have successful experiences in the early periods of attending the institution. This will be explored in the case study analysis.

Bourdieu (1986) attributes success in school to 'cultural capital', both in the quantity and type inherited from a person's family background. His theory proposes to account for the uneven success at school of children from different social groups. Bourdieu sees cultural capital as a resource which, unevenly distributed between children of different social classes, enables some children to 'profit' in the school market and others to fail. Cultural capital exists for Bourdieu in three forms: first in an embodied state as the store of cultural capital that an individual develops from childhood, requiring action by parents/ hired experts to enable the child to be receptive to specific cultural characteristics; second in an institutionalised form as objects such as qualifications; third in an objectified form as personal possessions



such as books, art objects etc. Bourdieu also differentiates between three forms of capital: economic, cultural and social. Those who can acquire more of the different forms of capital relative to others occupy the higher levels of society and are able to maintain their positions. Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) idea of cultural reproduction is related to the existence of disadvantage and inequalities within capitalist societies. The social divisions within capitalist societies are seen as ensuring an education for working class students which produces manual workers. This is reproduced from one generation to the next through the education system and other social institutions. According to Bourdieu, removing the inequalities would disrupt the system. Therefore, schools in capitalist societies will always be stratified.

Berger (2000) applies Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital to student withdrawal and offers four propositions to test social reproduction by examining the 'fit' between a student's cultural capital and that of the education institution. He proposes that the higher the social capital of an institution, the higher the retention rate; students with the highest social capital are more likely to succeed in all types of institutions than students with the lowest social capital; students with the highest levels of social capital will succeed in institutions with high levels of cultural capital and students with low levels of cultural capital are more likely to succeed in institutions with correspondingly low levels of cultural capital. He concludes that future research should focus on theories which explain the relationship between specific types of students and specific types of institutions rather than a broad approach to research which seeks to explore all types of students in all types of institutions. Thrupp (1999) likewise claims that students of all social groups are more successful in institutions with high social capital but asserts that students with

the lowest social capital fail even in institutions with low levels of social capital due to a combination of their backgrounds and the absence of those resources and processes that are provided in institutions with high levels of social capital.

Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction also extends to the concept of 'habitus'.

The habitus is not innate but acquired through socialisation as a set of norms and practices characteristic of an individual's social class (Bourdieu 1998). An individual's behaviour is influenced by their habitus which, together with the external restrictions of the 'field' (social settings) is responsible for their actions and understandings. Individuals are not conscious of their habitus but, like cultural capital, it is embodied in the norms and practices of their class groups which are largely acquired through their families. Some class groups, Bourdieu argues, are dominant. Habitus also applies to institutions (Thomas 2001, Yorke and Longden 2004, Reay et al 2005) whereby the cultural codes and norms of educational institutions are often more familiar to students from high socio-economic groups who thus find it easier to achieve educational success than students from poorer backgrounds. Habitus is the outcome of socialisation within the family and changes as individuals come into contact with external environments. Through engaging with a field, habitus can reproduce an individual's disposition. Conversely habitus can change through experiences which lower or raise an individual's expectations. Education institutions can therefore play a significant role in changing an individual's habitus (Thomas 2001).

Durkheim's (1951) study of suicide was the source of Tinto's (1975, 1987) and Spady's (1970) theories of student non-completion (Brunsdan et al 2000, Walker et

al 2004). Durkheim claimed that individuals were less likely to commit suicide if they were socially integrated, sharing common values with others. He used the example of married Italian Catholics who were less prone to committing suicide than single Protestant Englishmen. Spady (1970) likened suicide to student non-completion. He claimed that students were more likely to drop out if they did not share the same values as other students, were not socially integrated with other students and did not feel comfortable within the college environment. In Spady's (1970) first attempt to devise a model of student drop out, four distinct features emerged: marks achieved, cognitive development, 'normative congruence' and support from students; a fifth feature, 'social integration', he claimed was influenced by the four distinct features. These five characteristics were then linked indirectly to the dependent variable (dropout decision) through two intervening variables (satisfaction and institutional commitment). After researching this model among first year undergraduates in 1965, Spady (1971) revised it. His revised model kept features of the original but included two changes. The first was the addition of another part including structural relations and friendship support and the second improvement was a revision of the relationships between its components. Similar to Bourdieu's habitus, Spady's assertion was that a dynamic relationship existed between the institution and the student which created the necessary environment for successful student academic development. Student actions and characteristics were important factors and success, according to Spady, was dependent on student involvement and effort.

Astin (1970) developed a model of student academic success based on involvement in the learning process, particularly in their first year of undergraduate study (1984).

Astin associated student learning and development with the ability of an education programme to encourage students to devote time and energy to it. Through his research into the quality and quantity of their involvement with 348 college students, he concluded that students who are engaged are more likely to remain on their programme and successfully complete their studies. He perceived engagement as student involvement with activities where they live (on or off campus), within their college department and with the main senior academic of their programme of study. Astin identified successfully engaged students as those who were highly articulate and assertive, who make time to study, have a positive attitude, conduct research and are involved with student government and athletics. Astin's model is often applied within colleges of further and higher education in the provision of resources for extra curricular activities, project/research based assignments, student associations and student representation on governing body/ departmental committees.

The present research examined the case study institutions' documents to explore the provision of programmes and resources to develop students' cultural capital and used interview questions to investigate teaching and learning approaches to foster peer support among students.

Though Tinto is a sociologist, Yorke and Longden identify both sociological and psychological components within his theory of student success: 'intentions, goals and commitments and...the decision whether to depart from, or stay in higher education' (Yorke and Longden 2004:76). Tinto, like Spady, developed a model of student integration based on Durkheim's study of suicide. Durkheim's (1951) sociological analysis of suicide was used by Tinto to explain how a lack of adequate

social and academic integration (transition and incorporation) resulted in student attrition or 'suicide'. Tinto built on the earlier work of Astin (1970) expressing the importance of a combination of students' background characteristics with institutional characteristics and integration processes to bring together the student and the institution. This is again similar to Bourdieu's institutional and individual habitus.

In his first model, Tinto (1975) linked students' success to the meanings they gave to the formal and informal interactions they had with their institutions which he described as social and academic interaction. Social integration is related to the level of similarity between the social systems of the institution and the individual student. This occurs, according to Tinto, both at the institutional level as well as at the subculture level of an institution. Academic integration has two dimensions: one dimension is the accomplishment of specific standards within the institution and the other is the individual's attachment to the traditions and conventions of the institution. The model also characterised student success as commitment to their career, to their academic achievement as well as to the institution. Pascarella et al (1986: 156) coined the phrase 'person-environment fit' to describe what was central to Tinto's model. Tinto later revised his theory, linking the student journey to Van Gennep's rites of passage: 'separation, transition and incorporation' (1960:11) to explain the process of integration. This brought into the model longitudinal and process elements which are found in Astin's model (1970) but were absent in Tinto's earlier model. Tinto's model describes the process of students going through higher education as experiencing separation from their family and home, making the

transition to HE and incorporation into the environment of HE. However, for part time students and some home-based, full time students, this passage is not clear cut as for campus-based, full time students, leaving home. Tinto perceives students dropping out of institutions as a longitudinal process, influenced by students' individual characteristics such as personality, secondary education experiences, family background etc. as well as their commitment to the institution:

The more time faculty give to their students, and students to each other the more likely are students to complete their education. Both academically and socially, such informal contacts appear essential components in the process of social and intellectual development...institutions should encourage those contacts whenever and wherever possible (Tinto 1982: 697).

Tinto's theory can be seen as a deficit theory, denigrating the values, the family or the individual non-traditional student without considering problems that may exist with the curriculum, or the institution (Jones and Thomas 2005). It has been supported and built upon by a number of researchers in North America and the UK, and has influenced practice in UK PCET institutions. In a review of literature on student persistence in community colleges in the US, Seidman (1995) reported on the value of early and continued support to enable students to select institutions based on informed choice and when they have selected an institution, the importance of guiding students through the often unfamiliar and unclear systems within institutions. Seidman also emphasised that good quality information and advice can lead to greater student satisfaction with an institution and therefore the attainment of academic and personal aspirations, as was found in the case study institutions of this research. Seidman used evidence from the Carnegie funded research by Boyer (1987) to show the high drop out and student transfer rates from colleges where information was inadequate to select institutions. Seidman's own study (1995) of an

integrated admissions and counselling service at a suburban college found that, through this initiative, students became more positive over time about the institution and the retention rate increased. Seidman's findings fit with Tinto's model of social and academic integration within the institution. Seidman's study has influenced structures within further and higher education institutions as well as their admissions practices. Most PCET institutions on both sides of the Atlantic now provide integrated information, advice and guidance services, counselling services, open days and produce a range of literature to guide applicants through the decision making process. But the current research showed how ineffective this was for some students.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1977) tested Tinto's model to explore the effect of different types of interaction between students and their staff within their programmes of study in predicting student drop-out. They found that the most influential interactions were those which focused on academic and intellectual issues, followed by those which related to careers and academic advice. In 1980, Pascarella and Terenzini extended their research to examine undergraduate student progression from one year to the next and found that there were differences in academic and social integration based on gender and other characteristics. Pascarella (1985) developed a model to analyse the effect of post compulsory education on learning and cognitive development. His model showed that students' background, their earlier experience of education and the characteristics of the PCET institution contributed to the culture of the institution and directly influenced learning and cognitive development. Pascarella's study concluded that the nature of the campus

accommodation, and the most influential peer group, affected successful academic outcomes. In this current study, the physical and cultural environment of the PCET institutions were identified by students as factors which influenced their success.

Pascarella contradicted Tinto's notion of the importance to successful outcomes of students' informal interaction with staff or their peers outside the classroom. In 1991, Pascarella with Terenzini reviewed theories and models of student development and the impact of the HE environment. Their study reported that, irrespective of their size, institutions were more concerned about their reputations, graduate scores and income. They found that there were few differences in cognitive, psychosocial or economic outcomes for students, even when variables such as social identity and background were taken into consideration. They concluded that there should be a:

shift in the decision-making orientation of administrators toward "learning-centred management" that consistently and systematically focuses on the consequences of decisions on students' development (Pascarella and Terenzini 1991:656).

This shift in causal theories of student academic success, away from the students' personalities and towards socialisation and environmental factors within PCET institutions was posited by a number of North American researchers and is still influential on both sides of the Atlantic. Bean and Astin are among these academics. Bean's (1980) study into student drop out concluded that student commitment to the institution was based on their satisfaction with the institution which affected whether they left or remained and completed their course. He claimed that this applied more to women than to men and called for more research into this area. In a later study, Bean (1985) reported that peers were more important in students' commitment to



institutions than the informal contact with academic departments which had been central to theories by authors such as Tinto. Astin's (1984) longitudinal study into the retention of first year undergraduates at the University of California Los Angeles also found that peer group relationships were the single most important factor which contributed to students remaining on course. His later work included a model of 'Inputs-Environment-Outputs (I-E-O) model' (Yorke 1999:8). Astin's theory of student withdrawal is based on student commitment and the ability of the institutional environment to translate student commitment into successful outcomes. This model relates to theories of student retention and withdrawal which have been the focus of many studies. Braxton et al (1997) tested Tinto's theoretical model of student integration and found that students who were involved socially with activities and friendships on campus were more committed to the institution and more likely to successfully complete their courses than those who were not involved. The present research did examine the case study institutions' documents to explore the provision of programmes and resources to develop students' cultural capital and used interview questions to investigate teaching and learning approaches to foster peer support among students.

Tinto's and Astin's theories of social and academic integration and institutional environment to secure student commitment were also considered in conducting this research. However, it was not intended to test these theories, but rather set out with an 'open mind' (Denscombe 1998) to extend the theoretical framework on student success.

Yorke's (1997) study has been one of the most influential research projects on student drop-out in the UK. The outcomes of his study attributed much student failure to complete courses in UK HEIs to their own inadequacies. Yorke identified five factors in students' failure to complete courses: a lack of 'fit' between the student and the institution, insufficient preparation for HE, limited progress made on course, absence of commitment to the course and financial hardship. In a review of literature on student withdrawal in the UK, Yorke (1999) concluded that students leave courses for three main reasons: their expectations have not been met; they have chosen the wrong programme; they lack commitment or interest in the subject. Yorke also noted that these three factors influencing withdrawal were more applicable to younger students. These three main factors affecting student withdrawal were taken into consideration in this research in exploring students' perceptions of the factors which contributed to their success. Particularly the first emerges as important.

There are two main criticisms of Tinto's model of departure. His use of 'rites of passage' as the construct for social and academic integration has been expressed as faulty (Tierney 1992). Tierney argued that it could not be applied in a modern society as there is no failure to navigate a rite of passage in a traditional society. The model also failed to take fully into account students' social identities such as race, ethnicity, gender etc., nor did it adequately predict students' decision to remain or leave institutions (Bean 1980). Another weakness of Tinto's model was its disregard of the possible effect of economic and other non-institutional factors on students' decisions. In search of reliable knowledge on student withdrawal, Braxton

and Lee (2005) tested 13 propositions from Tinto's theory on student academic and social integration. They concluded that three propositions constituted reliable knowledge:

...the greater the degree of social integration, the greater the commitment to the institution; the initial level of commitment to the institution also affects the student's subsequent commitment [to the institution]...Subsequent commitment to the institution, in turn, positively affects the likelihood of student persistence [in the institution] (Braxton and Lee 2005:122).

However, none of the thirteen propositions tested by Braxton and Lee were labelled as reliable knowledge in colleges and universities which lacked residential accommodation and which provided associate degrees (community colleges). They suggest further research into Tinto's propositions and made two recommendations: firstly, a year-long orientation programme for first year undergraduate students with opportunities for social interaction among students; secondly, a requirement for first year students to live on campus with social activities to enable students to make friends. This very influential theory applies more to the full time, campus based 18-22 year old student in residential accommodation and does not apply to the older, 'non-traditional' student with family responsibilities who commute to college or university. In the UK, the recent expansion in HE has resulted in young people entering university from diverse backgrounds as well as from FE colleges. The number of mature students and students from minority ethnic backgrounds has increased in recent years in FHE in the UK (HEFCE 2004, DfES 2006a). These 'new students' are choosing not to live on campus, to maintain their social links rather than to break from them and to 'fit' university around existing lifestyles and family/ community responsibilities (Christie et al 2005) and are typical of the sample in the case institutions of this research.

It can be seen that despite its weaknesses, Tinto's model has remained an overarching theoretical framework which has dominated much of the research into student success. This influence can be observed from the widespread implementation of student orientation programmes in all PCET institutions on both sides of the Atlantic to make it easier for students from underrepresented groups to 'integrate' into the PCET institution. In addition to student orientation programmes, Tinto's influence can be observed by the more integrated, holistic approaches of organisational structures, systems, pedagogies and PCET funding methodologies which support success for learners throughout the student life cycle, from enquiry and joining the institution to successful completion of the programme (see HEFCE 2001). Recently Tinto (2005: 320) has been critical of a theory of student success which places all the responsibility for success on the student (changing the student to 'fit in': capital 'A' Access). A more appropriate approach, he proposes, is to move away from a focus on student attributes, which he describes as a tendency to 'blame the victim', and towards an examination of the conditions of the institutions within which students are placed (changing the institution: lower case 'a' access). In other words, a sociological rather than a psychological approach. (The dominant approach continues to be psychological). Tinto contends that research indicates that there are approximately five conditions which support student success: commitment, expectations, support, feedback and involvement or engagement. He concludes that:

...students are more likely to succeed when they find themselves in settings that are committed to their success, hold high expectations for their success, provide needed academic, social, and financial support, provide frequent feedback, and actively involve them, especially with other students and faculty in learning. The key concept is that of educational community and the capacity

of institutions to establish educational communities that involve all students as equal members (Tinto 2005:324).

He argues (2005: 320) for a model of 'student persistence' which in turn provides a model for institutional action: guidelines, programmes and effective policies developed to meet the needs of students who traditionally do not progress to HE. He suggests that it is out of these activities that a theory for institutional action for student success will emerge.

The next section explores different concepts of meeting student needs and institutional response to widen access.

## **Meeting Needs: Student Centred Approaches to Teaching and Learning**

...the implications of widening access for higher education...will have to take into account not only the varied educational and experiential backgrounds but the actual demands of the workplace. In particular, teaching and learning methods will have to undergo a radical change, with more emphasis on student-centred and independent learning... (Parry and Wake 1990:14).

This section explores concepts of meeting learner needs and their origin in supporting underrepresented student groups within further and higher education. The section illustrates the adoption of the language of student-centred approaches to teaching and learning to describe/ justify competence based employment training and modular, credit based programmes. James and Gleeson (2004) argue that there is a tension between humanistic, student-centred supportive pedagogy and the rhetoric in education (FE). In place of student-centred approaches, they observe management practice which show a systematic, technical, record-keeping and target setting approach. The concepts of student centred approaches to teaching and learning discussed in this section provide the theoretical framework for the analysis of practice within the case study institutions of this research. Student-centred approaches to teaching and learning have their origins in learning theory (Armstrong 1982, Keddie 1980, Field 1991, Ecclestone 2002). Behaviourist theories of psychologists such as Thorndike and Skinner e.g. 'personalised instruction', who observed learning as being motivated by rewards, were perceived as providing the rationale for modularising programmes, breaking them into small parcels of learning, bringing immediacy to successful outcomes as opposed to a year-long programme (Armstrong 1982, Keddie 1980 and Field 1991).

The humanistic approach to learning theory exemplified by psychologists such as Knowles, Maslow, and Rogers focused on learning for personal growth and development and influenced the language and style of adult education to meeting the individual needs of students (Tennant 1988). Freire's (1972) critical pedagogy, mentioned earlier, like the humanistic psychologists, characterises the teacher as a liberator who facilitates learning through group work methods. Cognitive theories place learning (the problem) at the centre of the teaching activity and the teacher in the role of setting problems and helping to solve them. Youngman (1986) attributes the 'learning to learn' approaches of adult education and the popularity of education projects for adults to the influences of cognitive psychologists. The term 'student-centred' is more familiar in the language of adult education than in any other form of education. Adults are said to respond to active, participative approaches to teaching and learning with appropriate support from the teacher as facilitator (Brockett and Hiemstra 1991). The extent to which these approaches were utilised in the case study institutions was examined in this research.

Literature on student-centred approaches to teaching and learning has concentrated largely on techniques to develop this approach. The work of Rogers (1993), Maslow (1971), Boud and Felletti (1991), Entwistle (1981) and Gibbs (1992), amongst others, provides guidelines for good practice in the implementation of student-centred approaches. 'Personalisation' is the newest term coined to describe student-centred approaches to meeting learner needs (Leadbeater 2004). Personalisation is based on a perception that people expect mass public services to be flexible and tailored to their individual needs. However, there is a lack of critical

literature in this field (Armstrong 1982, Field 1991, Edwards 1991, Ecclestone 2004). Edwards (1991) locates student-centred approaches within a socio-economic need for greater adult learning and the ideology of meeting students' needs has evolved within the tradition of liberal adult education. Ecclestone (2004) argues for an exploration of how issues in education such as meeting learner needs, both transmit and legitimise wider political and cultural concerns at different periods in history. Student-centred approaches question the political neutrality of students' needs, maintaining that the process of meeting learner needs involves identifying the learner's individual needs thereby problematising the learner as having some sort of deficiency. Edwards (1991) claims that a student-centred approach requires teachers to construct learners' identities, to explore what students know in relation to the subject so that their needs can be met. The teaching and learning processes are interactive so that students are encouraged to ask questions and to ask for support when necessary. There is, however, a contradiction, he argues, when the learning outcome has been previously set, which is the case with award-bearing courses because of the bureaucratisation of validation and quality assurance processes. The case study institutions in this research promoted in their literature, student-centred approaches to recruitment and teaching and learning.

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) were designed as student-centred approaches to meet the needs of adults who, due to their social status or other social inequalities, lacked qualifications. They were intended to be a unitary qualification system providing progression and access for all (Ainley 1999). NVQs were therefore



flexible in delivery and assessment and recognised the experience and prior learning of students. NVQs were expected to 'parallel and complement' the credit accumulation and transfer scheme (CATS) of HE. The idea was to enable progression to HE whereby HE institutions would accredit prior learning to NVQs and to assess and give academic credit to work-based learning (Edwards and Miller 1998), providing support and guidance to employees as they would to any potential student. However, the two credit-based systems (NVQs and CATS) developed separately, reinforcing the vocational/ academic divide (Parry and Wake 1990). Foundation degrees are the latest, similar, initiative.

Field (1991) criticises NVQs and the mechanisation of learning outcomes into competences in employment training. He questions the absence of NVQs for professional and graduate qualifications (level 5) and their applicability to the lower levels (level 1: reflecting elementary skills). McNay (1994) made similar criticisms of the competence model, suggesting that it is a shift away from conceptual understanding. Hyland (1994) argues that they are conceptually confused, empirically flawed, and inadequate for the needs of a learning society. When competence is conceptualised in behavioural terms, Hyland argues that the behaviourist framework breaks down competence into the performance of discrete tasks, identified by an analysis of work roles. This forms the basis for competency statements or standards upon which competence is assessed. He criticises NVQs for ignoring the connections between tasks; the attributes that underlie performance; the meaning, intention, or disposition to act; the context of performance; and the effect of interpersonal and ethical aspects. He asserts that the NVQ curriculum is steered by competency standards, the effect of which narrows the content of the curriculum.

Even the broader competencies, he suggests, still stress performance and outcomes above those of knowledge and understanding. Hyland concludes that NVQs are 'largely unsuitable for the teaching and learning which goes on in higher education institutions, whether this occurs in general/academic or professional/vocational contexts' (Hyland 1994: 336).

Student-centred approaches to teaching and learning emphasise the learning process rather than the content. The underlying assumption of humanistic psychologists is that individuals are autonomous; their notion of freedom is the provision of a learning environment and appropriate teaching style to develop an individual's potential and to become 'whole' (Edwards, 1991), i.e. fully human (this is likely to be a class/ cultural judgement – if not also a racist, sexist, ablest one). However, education programmes that are associated with student-centred approaches have been criticised as being fragmented with overly simplistic values (Brah and Hoy 1989, Field 1991). Modularisation of learning into units from which individuals choose what they 'need' is thought to fragment learning. Active, collaborative learning in the form of group work in the classroom is designed to 'empower' learners, actively engaging them in the process. Brah and Hoy (1989) argue that student centred approaches are not value-free and propose that, in their implementation, power relationships in the classroom should be acknowledged and challenged. Edwards (1991), Armstrong (1982) and Keddie (1980) further challenged the notion of the autonomous individual (learner) in the teaching and learning process; they make links between the 'meeting of needs' ideology and social control, suggesting that the learner is problematised, alienated and isolated,

concluding that the self-evaluative, self-monitoring practices of adult educators 'facilitate' the socialising of compliant learners. Ecclestone (2004) argued that the strong counselling background of post-16 education makes it difficult to challenge humanistic approaches with the critic running the risk of being perceived as uncaring towards non-traditional student groups.

Methods such as using students' experiences, open and distance learning and group projects are common to student-centred education programmes. However, there is an absence of a social context within these methods. Learning in groups may place individuals in a conflictual situation where power relations of class, race, gender and other differences are apparent; however, there is an absence of strategies to deal with these conflicts (Brah and Hoy 1989). The conflicts that occur in group activities are explained as inter-personal problems and dealt with by 'encounter groups' (Youngman 1986). Whilst student-centred approaches to teaching and learning are perceived as developing autonomous learners and providing equality of opportunity, the processes through which they are implemented can reinforce inequalities and isolate the learner. The individualised approach to learning that is characterised by Credit Accumulation and Transfer Schemes and Accreditation of Prior Learning and Experience tends to isolate the learner and therefore destroys the 'collective' (McNay 1994), especially in the current socio-economic environment.

### **The Policy Context of Student-Centred Approaches and Widening Access**

Further and higher education have expanded in recent years and in absolute terms the number of students, particularly those from groups previously under-represented,

has increased (Mayhew et al 2004). A former Conservative government, through policies developed in White Papers like 'Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge' (DES 1987), supported the expansion of higher education. It also supported wider access to higher education by urging higher education to accept vocational awards as entry qualifications (Parry and Wake, 1990). Many organisations and institutions, such as the Royal Society of Arts, the Council for Industry and Higher Education, the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) and the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) have also urged higher education to widen access (Parry and Wake 1990).

Through the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 and the setting up of the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), funding was used as a lever to expand participation. This followed the precedent of polytechnics and the PCFC. Research has indicated that significant numbers of young people from the Black and minority ethnic communities obtain qualifications from further education colleges (Lyon 1993, Hillage and Aston 2001). However, studies have shown that the expansion in student numbers within further education, as within HE, has been mainly for those who have already gained most from schools (McGivney 1994, 1996; Uden 1996 and Kennedy 1997). The Kennedy Report (1997) stated that many colleges selected students who were most likely to achieve qualifications due to the FEFC's linking of funding to successful outcome. Greenbank's (2006a) research also found funding to be the main motive for HEIs to widen participation. The expansion of student numbers has led to a change in the student group within HE, from a majority of white middle class, male, 18 year olds with A Levels, to include mature, Black and

working class student groups with non-standard or no university entrance qualifications and with a majority of female students. This change in the composition of the student body is widely believed to require a change in teaching and learning methods to a student-centred approach (Osborne and Woodrow 1989, Parry and Wake 1990, Melling and Stanton 1990, Quinn 2003) and this research explored the implementation of such a change by the PCET case study institutions as well as student perceptions of teaching and learning to meet their needs.

The Enterprise in Higher Education Initiative (EHE), funded by the then Conservative government's Training Education and Employment Department, was announced in 1987. It was introduced into HE for the development of 'enterprising' students with transferable skills. Skills such as teamwork, communication and problem-solving were identified as 'transferable' (but this term 'transferred from NCVQ). New assessment methods were introduced such as group projects and profiling which relied on outcomes as opposed to examination (Scott 1995). These skills and the approaches used by teachers involved in the EHE initiative are also closely associated with student-centred approaches to teaching and learning (ibid). Hyland and Merrill (2003) question the 'transferability' of skills on empirical and logical grounds. They criticise the use of the 'skills' label to reduce the status of knowledge and understanding in education in the development of skills which can be applied to a variety of situations. They further argue that 'skills' threaten the great traditions of teaching and education and reduce it to measurable training activities, i.e.: competences (Ainley 1999). Kemp and Seagraves (1995) are sceptical of universities' abilities to identify and assess transferable skills that are acceptable to

industry and which offer a passport to so called 'employability skills'. Knight and Yorke (2003) suggest that 'skills' are more complex than often appreciated. They highlight the Dearing Report (NCIHE 1997) and Kenneth Baker's speech in 1989 (the then Conservative Minister of Education) as the policy commitment to the development of 'transferable', 'key' and 'generic' 'skills'. Knight and Yorke distinguish between skills required to underpin the range of actions in employment and skills that are transferable from one area of experience to another in a relatively straightforward manner. They assert that the former are unproblematic. However, the latter require an understanding of the impact of the 'transfer' from one context to another. They conclude, using the work of Bridges (1993), that 'transferring skills' requires the use of higher level skills and intelligence that are more in line with the behaviour of someone who is a professional, as opposed to lists of competences.

Reports on the changes in teaching and learning methods as a result of EHE initiatives have been few, although an evaluation of the scheme had been promised by the former government department (Training, Education and Employment Department). However, former Polytechnics with EHE projects have been positive about the level of staff participation in the initiative. Universities such as Bradford, Leeds and Birkbeck reported on the development of student-centred approaches within their institutions. Their Access and Staff Development projects recorded a level of staff resistance as well as successful pilots (Kelly 1991, Andrews 1991). Sufficient research has not been conducted to illuminate the level of change in approaches to teaching and learning that has taken place within HEIs, in particular

within the older universities. The extent to which new pedagogies were adopted by the FE and HE case study institutions was examined in the present research.

The introduction of new sources of funding for further education such as the Single Regeneration Budget, European Social Fund, New Deal, Regional Development Funds and LSC Development Funds placed greater demands on further education to respond to new student groups in off - campus locations . Working in partnership with local providers of services and responding flexibly in terms of place and mode of delivery, the education calendar and the curriculum offer, continue to be new challenges for many colleges. Equally, universities are being encouraged to respond to the needs of local communities which are underrepresented in HE, with financial incentives from HEFCE's Widening Participation funding work in partnership with employers and local communities. This study investigated whether the case study institutions utilised additional funds to widen participation.

It is evident that PCET policies to widen access to FHE have not resulted in noticeable change, either in a more diverse student population or changes in institutional practice informed by student need. Jones and Thomas (2005) propose three strands to government policy on widening access: the 'academic', 'utilitarian' and 'transformative'. The academic strand is described as the enrolment of 'gifted' and 'talented' young people from lower socio-economic groups into elite institutions onto academic courses; the utilitarian strand has a focus on vocational skills to meet the needs of the economy, changing the curriculum and 'bolting on' student support to reduce student withdrawal and ensure student success (associated with post 1992

universities); the transformative strand requires structural changes, with a focus on lifelong learning, knowledge that is valued by underrepresented groups and ‘does not require [students] to change before they can benefit’ (Jones and Thomas 2005: 619) from PCET. These three strands are an extension of the concepts of access discussed earlier in the chapter. Both approaches to access requires the institution to change: capital – A Access will bring about change in the institution due to the growing number of ‘new’ student groups and small – a access is the more radical approach to institutional change. Government policy has not led to a transformative approach to access. Instead, what has emerged are divisions such as ‘academic’ versus vocational (utilitarian), elite versus mass, and ‘project’ funding for institutions to engage with innovative approaches to access which are short term and therefore limited in their impact and implementation.

At a conference held by the CVCP in February 1998, the then Minister of State for Further and Higher Education, Baroness Blackstone, declared that universities should be ‘assessing potential as opposed to A levels’. In addition, universities and further education colleges should be more flexible, more conveniently available to the public and more available to those who missed out on education the first time around. The four case study institutions in this research share these characteristics. The DfES reported that in 2004 the student population in further and higher education included more of those who had missed out on education the first time around than in the previous year (DFES 2005). However, students who were traditionally underrepresented in FHE were in the minority and were more likely to be in further education. The academic year and the location of programmes in



further and higher education have remained largely unchanged; the majority of programmes begin in September and end in the summer, as well as being classroom and campus-based.

Student-centred approaches within the widening access discourse emerged as radical adult education practice and have been adopted into the language of policy makers and practitioners in PCET:

The notion of individualised [‘personalised’ in the 2006 FE White Paper] learning is now a mantra that in policy circles...is thought to contribute to the long term social and economic benefits of a more inclusive and skill-based society (Wahlberg and Gleeson 2003: 426).

This appropriation of the language of radical access practitioners within PCET, by policy makers, can be observed below, in the pattern of PCET development in three sectors throughout the twentieth century, and at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Student-centred approaches will be returned to later in the case study institutions in Chapter 6 when strategies to support student success are discussed.

## **Access Within Post School Institutions**

### Adult Education

The expansion of adult education (AE) which began after the 1918 Education Act continued after WWII (Taylor and Ward 1986, Williamson 1998). The length of courses was reduced, the number of manual workers attending declined and middle-class students interested in a wide range of courses began attending Workers Education Association (WEA) classes. Local education authorities (LEAs) have provided the majority of AE since 1944 (Devereux 1982). The 1944 Education Act required LEAs to provide for those who were over the compulsory school age, but the quality and quantity of LEAs' AE provision varied. Ward and Taylor (1986) note five major types of AE: local adult education centres, colleges or institutes; community colleges, community schools or village colleges; departments of adult studies in FE colleges; higher education 'extension' and residential AE institutions.

Jennings (1992), writing about the history of the WEA, described the period after 1945 as one of contradiction. Its mission was the provision of a rigorous course with a social purpose for working-class students but in reality it had an increasing membership of middle-class students pursuing unchallenging courses for enjoyment. Mansbridge, the founder of the WEA had said that unless seventy-five per cent of its students were 'labouring men and women' it could be considered an unnecessary body. By 1950 only 19% of all WEA students (although 45% of male students) were manual workers and the percentage of students attending classes of at least one year's duration had fallen to 39% compared with 50% in 1939. This shift from its initial principles was noted by a government report in 1954 which, while praising

the academic standards of the WEA and recommending improved grant arrangements, warned that the WEA could not grow unless it regained its sense of social purpose.

The Russell Report (DES 1973) recommended that the WEA should focus on four main areas: education for the socially and culturally deprived living in urban areas; educational work in an industrial context; political and social education; courses of liberal and academic study below the level of university work. This was the charter the WEA in England needed to allow it to return to its roots and regain its sense of political identity (Jennings 1979). Progress in the new specialist areas of work displaced traditional branch programmes. For most of the 1980s and 1990s the organisation had described the liberal adult education programme of the branches as its 'mainstream' work, and its targeted provision in areas of social disadvantage as 'project' work. As the WEA attracted more mainstream funding, its focus changed: the new money coming into the Association was for its project work. By way of contrast, there was little interest from funders in the traditional programme, and its volunteers, loyal to its mission, were left feeling they had to defend a form of provision that had become unfashionable. The new lifelong learning agenda set out in the New Labour government's *Learning Age* (DfEE1998) was not supported by funding; instead what followed was an emphasis on vocationalism and social inclusion. In May 1998 the Management Committee of the Association created a three year development plan. The document, 'Learning Together', created a balance between the three different parts of the WEA's curriculum, giving parity of esteem to three areas of work: Access and Opportunity which creates opportunities for

individual learners; Building Communities which works with collective groups in the community and Local Learning which encourages and supports voluntary participation in the provision of education.

It can be seen from this brief history of AE that it is difficult to apply a single definition both in terms of its character and its providers. The 'Great Tradition' of adult education has however come to an end. Its concern with the liberal principle of learning for knowledge's sake and 'for the emancipation of the working class and the overall democratising of society' (Taylor and Ward 1986: 14) has been all but abandoned. Williamson (1998) states that the political frame of adult education has widened, embracing the needs and interests of a larger constituency of students, namely women, minority ethnic groups and those who are socially excluded.

Edwards (1997) argues that adult education has become more flexible as other aspects of the economy and society are also being developed to function flexibly. He (1997) concludes that the practice of adult education discourses has shifted from a focus on inputs to one on outputs, learning and the learner. This amounts to practices which engage adult students in learning flexibly, within and outside education institutions, to obtain qualifications and/ to develop skills for the labour market.

It is evident that, as AE encompassed a more diverse student group and received state funding, the liberal curriculum was abandoned and in its place a curriculum was introduced to 'meet the needs' of this diverse group. Who defines these needs? Although an in-depth response to this question is outside the scope of this chapter, it is an important issue in the context of changes affecting access to AE and can be

observed in the discussions below which examine historically the development of access to further and higher education.

### Higher Education

The 1939 - 1945 War was the starting point for increasing access to higher education (HE) which developed in the 1960s (Becher and Kogan 1992; McNay 1992; Egerton and Halsey 1993). The history of access to HE after WWII, reported below, shows year on year increases in the number of students participating, greater gender equality but continued race and class inequalities. The last University Grant Committee's (UGC) report before the War recommended a slow increase in student numbers and a greater concern for quality. In 1937-38 the number of students in university education was 50,000. England in particular lagged behind similar European countries in the number of inhabitants per university student:

Number of Inhabitants per University Student:

Italy	808		
England	1,013		
Germany	604	Scotland	473
Holland	579	Wales	741
Sweden	543	Great Britain	885
France	480	USA	125
Switzerland	387		

(Simon 1999:30)

Throughout the developed world, the decades after WWII were decades of expanding opportunities in which increasing numbers of people from 'ordinary'

backgrounds got the chance of secondary and higher education and the opportunity, denied to their parents' generation, of social mobility and full employment (Williamson 1998, McNay 1992). The Barlow Committee (Barlow 1946) was set up to advise on policies for the development of scientific manpower (sic) resources during the next ten years and to make recommendations on the establishment of a permanent system for carrying out surveys on the best use of scientific resources in the national interest. The Committee's report *Scientific Man-power* proposed an increase of the university system from 50,000 to 90,000 places as soon as possible. Two years later, in 1948 - 49 there were already 83,000 students in higher education. The increases were mainly in the provincial universities although Oxford had increased its overall numbers by fifty percent (Simon 1999), recruiting ex-servicemen.

The University Grants Committee expressed concern with the quality of HE in a proposed expanded HE system prior to and after the Second World War. It shared the views of the Barlow Committee that:

In few other fields are numbers of so little value compared to quality properly developed...Moreover before a student enters the university, intelligence must be trained and the associated personal qualities matured to a standard that we would not wish to see lowered (Barlow 1946:24).

This period immediately after the Second World War also saw the UGC making clear statements suggesting reservations with the move from catering to an elite, privileged group to promoting opportunities for the able, from whatever social class. The UGC's and the universities' concern for increasing participation in higher education was driven by several factors; firstly, the economic need for educated workers due to the demands of the military and industry and the waste of talent – limited numbers of women and working-class students entering HE; secondly, the

low number of graduates from Britain compared to other European and North American countries; thirdly, social pressure to achieve greater social and educational equality than existed before the war.

In 1960 the Anderson Committee was established to explore a system of grants for students. The Committee (Ministry of Education/ Scottish Education Department 1960) reported favourably on the setting up of a system for granting awards to students. The report stated its commitment to increasing participation in HE and recommended that students who were qualified to enter HE should not be prevented from doing so due to the costs. The Education Act 1962 placed a duty on local authorities to make awards which met the costs of living and tuition fees to residents attending full-time degree, Diploma in Higher Education, National Diploma and teacher training programmes (Mackinnon and Statham 1999). Students who had been in employment received a higher rate of grant (Chitty 2004).

Only four or five per cent of the relevant age group went to university at the time of the Robbins Report (Budd 2003). This Report set the framework for the expansion of autonomous university education and the principle 'that courses of higher education should be made available to all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them, and who wish to do so' (Committee on Higher Education 1963: 49). Four purposes of education were identified by the Report: instruction in skills, promoting the general powers of the mind, advancing learning and transmitting a common culture (ibid). Many writers (Drew, 1998 and Bennett et al 2000) have highlighted the influence of the Robbins Report on a shift in attitudes

towards the purposes of higher education. Robbins argued that there was a need for the system to encompass employment-related skills whilst continuing to represent the values of traditional liberal education.

An increasing focus on a more direct connection between academia and the world of employment was implied in Anthony Crosland's Woolwich speech in 1965 (Burgess and Pratt, 1974) as in the Swann Report (1985). Crosland made reference to the history of higher education as being a binary one with two tracks. One track was the 'autonomous' universities and colleges of advanced technology and the other was the 'public sector': technical colleges and colleges of education. He observed that that the binary HE system had existed from the end of the nineteenth century. Pratt (1997: 9) described these two traditions among institutions of higher education as 'autonomous' and 'service'. He identified the autonomous university tradition as being characterised by academics who pursue knowledge 'for its own sake', justify their practice through a discipline or body of knowledge and claim to devote half of their time to research. The autonomous institutions were exclusive, with overrepresentation of the middle classes and under representation of the working classes. By contrast, Pratt perceived the public sector service tradition of HE as 'responsive, vocational, innovative and open'. Such HE institutions did not claim to pursue knowledge for its own sake and were mainly involved in professional and vocational education. The traditions associated with the 'old', research-led universities and 'modern', teaching universities which were former polytechnics, can be aligned with these characteristics of 'autonomous' and 'service'.



Prior to the Robbins Report there were 24 universities in the UK (Scott 1995). By the middle of the 1960s, after the elevation of CATS to universities and the creation of new universities, there were 45 universities, most of which were small (Scott 2001). Scott also stated that significant expansion of university higher education both in terms of scale and ethos came with Robbins and the development of polytechnics. This expansion after 1963 was not consistent and Scott (1995) described this expansion as 'stop-go'. Scott used Martin Trow's description of participation to define mass participation in HE: enrolment of between 15-40% of the age group as a mass system and enrolment of more than 40% of the age group as a universal system. UK higher education participation of the age group rose from 14.5% in 1987-88 to 33.4% in 2002-03 (House of Commons 2004). HE in the UK could therefore be described as a mass system. Taylor et al (2002) noted that expansion was largely in the polytechnic sector, since universities were slow to expand - 'their instinct [was] to defend the unit of resource and resist any rapid expansion' (Taylor et al 2002: 77).

Using Trow's definition, from the end of the 1960s HE moved from elite (up to 15%) to mass (15-40%) participation by the beginning of the 1990s. However, the disparity between working-class and middle-class staying on rates continued (Scott 1995, McNay 2005a), not only in schools and HE but also in AE up to the end of the twentieth century. The next section examines the emergence of FE and government policies to widen access to FE.

## Further Education

The system of further education (FE) as we know it today comes from the demand for vocational education. After WWII, further education, full-time in particular, expanded more than any other area of post-compulsory education. In 1938 full-time enrolments were 20,000, by 1955 they were 64,000 and ten years later 187,000 (Fowler and Little 1973). Section 41 of the 1944 Education Act required LEAs to provide 'adequate' facilities for further education (Chitty 2004). This was defined as full and part-time education for those over the compulsory school age and leisure-time occupations such as cultural and recreational activities for those able / willing to benefit from them (ibid). The 1944 Education Act therefore established FE colleges as providers of diverse education activities. FE could offer activities for young people, adult education, play and recreational centres (Fowler and Little 1973, Devereux 1982). The Percy Report in 1945 called for the expansion of advanced technical education (Bobcock and Taylor 2003). The report established a relationship between industrial progress and the high status of technological education in leading countries and compared this to its low status alongside slow industrial progress in the UK (Davis 1990).

One of the recommendations for the future of technical education made by the Percy Report had been the separation of higher level technical colleges into colleges of advanced technology (CATs). The 1956 White Paper 'Technical Education' set out a policy for the delivery of advanced technical education in a selected number of technical colleges. The White Paper established a new group of CATs above local,

area and regional colleges (created by an earlier policy), increasing the provision of HE outside universities. It promoted day release to replace evening classes for industry-related training. Between 1955 and 1961, the number of day release places increased from 335,000 to 681,000. (Davis 1990). Eight CATs were founded in England and Wales and quickly abandoned their responsiveness to local needs, as had the 'civic' universities, closed their low level provision and by the 1960s established themselves as ready for university status as recommended by the Robbins Committee (Pratt 1997).

The Crowther Report (HMSO 1959) '15 to 18' recommended the raising of the school leaving age to 16, the expansion of FE as an alternative route into higher education and compulsory day-release to FE colleges for young workers. It also highlighted the lack of professional teacher training of FE teachers, their technical qualifications, part-time employment and the preponderance of male teachers. A requirement for teacher training for FE was only made in 2004 when the Government set out reforms for 'QTLS' (Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills) due to be implemented in 2007 (DfES 2004c). Following the White Paper 'Better Opportunities in Technical Education' in 1961, courses for the training of junior technicians, craftsmen and operatives were set up in FE colleges and more colleges were built as more resources became available.

In 1964 the Industrial Training Act established industrial training boards (ITBs). These would contain representatives from employers and trade unions. Each ITB was responsible for overseeing training in its industry, setting standards and

providing advice to firms. Each paid allowances to trainees that were financed via a compulsory levy on firms in its industry. This levy / grant system was designed to remedy the failure of the labour market to deliver sufficient skilled workers and to end 'poaching' (Elliott and Mendham 1981). The Act made new demands on FE to provide education and training (Pemberton 2001). The Act failed to revolutionise vocational training or to change the attitudes of employers and unions towards training or to reform the apprenticeship system. The apprenticeship system was not delivering the number of skilled workers to meet the needs of industry. There were no incentives to attract young people to enrol or complete apprenticeships which offered lengthy training without a living wage. The Minister for Labour in 1964 did not use his statutory power to influence the apprenticeship system. Instead, employers and unions, through the ITBs, were given the power to regulate the system. They resisted a shorter apprenticeship period which would increase the cost to employers in wages for young workers; the 'craft unions' did not want change in defence of the 'skilled wage' premium they commanded. Consequently, they paid the levy and did nothing (Pemberton 2001).

As already indicated, CATs were removed from local authority control from 1963 onwards and were granted university status in 1966 as Robbins had recommended (Committee on Higher Education 1963). Technical colleges, (now FE colleges) were designated to respond to local needs and provided courses from basic to advanced levels catering for part and full-time students. In 1966, thirty polytechnics were created from the existing technical colleges due to the consistent demand for

advanced work in these colleges and the lack of take up of science and technology university places (Summerfield and Evans 1990).

The steady expansion of FE from WWII to the 1960s is evident. However it was not 'access'. FE developed in response to the industrial and economic needs of the economy and parts of the system were separated and became HE. FE development was affected by frequent government intervention and failed to deliver prosperity to the UK through technical education due to the end of heavy industry and the collapse of the apprenticeship system in the 1970s. FE, at the end of the 1970s was a wide range of vocational and non-vocational provision, catering for post compulsory age groups. FE provided mass post compulsory education and training. It did not have a clear focus and delivered mainly lower level skills to young people who were not in employment or continuing their schooling. But sixth form centres within FE had more A Level students than schools, so also offered a second chance to those failed by academic schooling.

#### Towards The End of the Twentieth Century: Access and Education Policy

In an interview in 2000 Parry stated that informal arrangements existed before WWII for learners without entry qualifications to access further and higher education. It has been discussed earlier that the decades which followed WWII witnessed expanding opportunities for ordinary people to experience secondary, non-advanced FE and HE. Parry explained the origins of access activities, suggesting that the full range of post compulsory education providers (PCET) was involved in the early stages of access, notably, Community Education (Extra-Mural), adult education (Fresh Start/

Return to Learning) and Collaboration between FE and HE (Capital 'A'- Access). He described the Open University as the first 'open' PCET institution, that is open to anyone regardless of ability (who can afford to pay the fees, which were low and with a good financial assistance fund). Bird (1996) provided a preliminary history of partnerships between further and higher education, beginning in the 1960s with small, local, informal arrangements mainly for mature students. The aim of such collaboration, Bird suggested, was to widen access in response to local needs for higher education. As the number of these partnerships expanded between 1985 - 1992, policy makers took an interest in their quality. This interest was seen by Bird as a threat to local autonomy and as a result led to what may be seen as a struggle for power between the policy makers and post-sixteen institutions involved in partnerships. Parry's view (interview 2000) is supported by Sand (1998) who describes access activities as collaborative arrangements and courses within and between further, adult and higher education institutions during the late 1960s and early 1970s providing 'second chance' educational opportunities.

In an attempt to provide a 'second chance' to adults who were traditionally underrepresented in education, the Government, then the Department of Education and Science (DES) sent a letter to seven local education authorities in England and Wales in August 1978 inviting them to set up pilot Access courses in order to establish the viability of the idea (Brennan 1989, Sand 1998). The Government did not provide any resources for these pilots. The courses were designed to provide for the transition of minority ethnic students from the learning environment of adult education to the learning environment of public sector higher education and the

professions. Six Access courses were set up in 1979 (Hodgson 2000). Heron (1986) and Sand noted at an interview in 1999 that progression to higher education was not the primary purpose of Access courses. Sand stated that Access courses were often programmes of activities which often had an explicitly 'alternative' curriculum. Although this was the purpose for the first seven Access courses that were approved.

Government approval and support of Access courses came in 1978 (Heron 1986). This development occurred after a number of riots beginning with the Notting Hill Carnival in 1976 which saw hundreds of young people, mainly Black African/Caribbean venting their frustrations on the police. These disturbances were perceived as a response to racial discrimination and lack of opportunity in education and employment. This was to continue into the 1980s in other areas. In an interview, Harinder Lawley recalled setting up Access programmes at an FE college in West London in the mid 80s as a result of her experience on return to study programmes and teaching ESL (English as a Second Language) at evening classes. She saw the frustration of many adults, particularly from Black and minority ethnic groups being stereotyped into 'suitable' jobs; at one extreme there were doctors and at the other end, low level blue collar careers without prospects. The Access programmes Lawley designed were, she said, to 'push' at the doors of the establishment and '(re)claim some space for alternative approaches that recognised diversity as a positive feature and enabled access to education and self realisation from an equality perspective'. She characterised the early Access courses as focused, designed to meet local student needs and based on close working relationships with the 'key players'. In contrast, Lawley described the regulatory national framework for Access

programmes as prescriptive with little room for creativity. She concluded that the 'massification' of Access created bureaucracy and damaged much of the innovation which characterised the early programmes. Nevertheless Access courses became popular with a wider range of adult students throughout the UK. By 1985 there were 130 courses delivered across the country and this increased to 600 by 1990 (Fieldhouse 1999).

Youth Training initiatives (Youth Opportunities Programmes – YOPS, Youth Training Schemes - YTS) were implemented as apprenticeships and day-release collapsed (Finn 1987, McNay 1992, Ainley 1992, Ainley and Andrews 2003).

Policies to deal with adult unemployment and literacy were also introduced, such as the Training Opportunities Programme (TOPS) and the Adult Literacy Campaign began in 1973. Finn (1987) argued that during the labour market crisis of the 1980s, the Conservative government transformed this into an educational crisis. He asserted that structural changes made to the organisation of work led to the major reduction in youth employment and the false accusation that the reduction was due to failings in the educational system. Finn suggested that the Youth Training initiatives, which he described as 'training without jobs', failed to develop real skills but provided 'counter-cyclical training' for when the industrial economy picked up (but it did not).

The 1988 Education Reform Act gave corporate independence to polytechnics and higher education colleges (DES 1988). The Act gave greater power to governing bodies in colleges through local management of colleges (and schools) by removing



the statutory duty of local education authorities to be represented on college governing bodies and gave prominence to business representatives. It increased the power of central government in its relationship to education and paved the way for major changes to administration and finance in further and higher education. The introduction of parental choice prepared the path for the concept of market competition which came with the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act (Ranson 1994) which resulted in league tables which countered efforts to widen access and reinforced stratification. By the end of the decade policies focused on widening participation through Access courses and a range of employment training initiatives such as Youth Training Schemes (YTS) and Employment Training (ET).

Ainley and Green (1996) maintain that the UK has adopted a north American approach where 80 per cent of pupils are encouraged to remain in further and higher education and where those who would have been 'trainees' during the YT period are now replaced with 'students'. Ainley (1999) describes this as 'education without jobs'. He suggests that if the idea of a 'learning society' continues to be encouraged by governments, the results will be a long, drawn out transition to work, with post-compulsory education replacing the control previously exercised by the workplace over young people and the society becomes a more 'certified one' (ibid). The current trends began with a Conservative government and have continued with New Labour; they are an attempt to make a more lasting response to the permanent structural unemployment of young people. The number of students in further and higher education between 1972 and 1982 grew from 602,000 (HE), 914,000 (FE) to 832,000 (HE) and 1,505,000 (Scott 1995) with a rise in the size of the age cohort.

## The Further and Higher Education Act and Its Effect on Access to Post 16 Education

The 1990s saw the incorporation of FE colleges, the introduction of published inspection reports which 'named and shamed' colleges and 'rationalised' polytechnics and HEIs. Prior to the 1992 FHE Act, The Conservative Government produced a policy document which outlined the vision for competitive, independent PCET. The White Paper, 'Education and Training for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' (DfEE 1991) proposed a competitive system for 'improving' efficiency and greater choice for learners at the post -16 phase: schools, colleges, sixth form colleges, HE and private training providers would compete for the 16-19 'market' offering academic, vocational or work-related training. In 1992 the HE student population was 1,444,000 and the FE student population was 2,574,000 (Scott 1995).

The 1992 Further and Higher Education Act (FHE) removed the binary lines across the UK HEIs and created a unified funding system for HE (Higher Education Funding Council for England - HEFCE) with separate bodies for Scotland (SHEFC) and Wales (HEFCW). Local authorities lost control of FE (HE in 1988) and a national Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) was established (DfEE 1992). The unified funding system for HE reduced the unit of funding per student for both the former polytechnics and the pre-1992 universities (McNay 2005a). Prior to 1992, the UGC carried out a planning role which was consistent with the main values of the pre -1992 universities and mediated between them and the government. The new funding body, HEFCE, implemented the government's HE policies, funded HEIs against their strategic plans (Scott 1995) and did not protect universities in the new

drive for greater financial efficiency in HE. Institutions felt compelled to increase student numbers to sustain the level of their institutional budgets (McNay 2005a, Greenbank 2006a). This growth in student numbers occurred during the same period as a number of HEFCE initiatives such as access, widening participation, institutional collaboration, the development of new pedagogies, the forging of business and community partnerships, among others (McCaffery 2004). For further education, the FHE Act separated vocational education and training from 'leisure' (DfEE 1992). The funding system established by the FHE Act supported the delivery of vocational programmes and those which led to qualifications courses by FE colleges. Local education authorities were made responsible under the Act for adult education which was associated with leisure programmes. Students would have to pay fees to attend 'leisure' courses if they were provided by FE colleges. The unit of funding per student in the HE sector was reduced.

In spite of the earlier policies to engage learners in education, training and employment, several reports, as mentioned earlier, suggested that learners from the least privileged backgrounds were still not participating and gaining qualifications at a level that was deemed desirable (Social Exclusion Unit 1998; Kennedy 1997; National Commission of Inquiry into Higher Education 1997; Learning Age 1998). Government data showed increasing numbers participating in further and higher education but concealed patterns of new participation based on 'race' and social class. It is worth noting that the data on the number of learners participating in PCET, particularly HE, are inconsistent. Some data sets express the Age Participation Index (API): the number of home domiciled initial entrants to full-time

and sandwich undergraduate HE, aged under 21, expressed as a percentage of the average number of 18 and 19 year olds in the student population. Some data include HE delivered in FE colleges as well as part-time students; others do not, while some data express the total of all students participating including post-graduates. Some use Initial Entry Rate (IER), covering all modes of attendance and students up to age 30. This research uses the range of official data available and identifies the types of data where known.

In 1994/95 three million learners were recorded by the FEFC as participating in FE; this increased to a peak of 3.9 million in 1997/98 (Hillage and Aston, 2001). The new learning and skills sector, all providers of further education and training, including private training organisations, had a combined total of 6 million learners in 2004/05 academic year (DFES 2006a). However, these increases concealed the length of courses and also camouflaged actual numbers by recording 'enrolments'. Participants were often those who had already gained much from the compulsory education system (Kennedy 1997; Tuckett 1997). After the 1992 Act the number of universities in the UK increased from 46 to 112 (Morley 2000) and undergraduate student numbers rose from 900,000 to 1,800,000 (DfES 2003c). Participation rates for students under 21 dramatically increased from 15% in 1988 to 30% in 1993. The Dearing Report (NICHE1997) revealed in a survey of 15 HEIs that a higher proportion of White students were in 'old', pre-1992 universities, than in 'new', post- 1992 universities: 56% of White students were in 'old' universities and 44 % were in 'new' universities. It also reported that Black students and those progressing to HE from FE colleges were more likely to be in post-1992 universities.

Callender's (2003) study showed that this stratification of HE was greater among students studying in London than in other parts of the country. She also stated that London students' experience of HE was becoming polarised by class, ethnicity and income. Callender's research revealed that one third of all students in London were from a minority ethnic group compared to 4% in the rest of the country but 40% of minority ethnic groups lived at home compared with 16% of White students. These trends have continued from the previous decade and can be observed from reports published during the 1990s.

The 1993 annual reports of PCAS (Polytechnics Central Admissions Advice Service) and UCCA (Universities Central Council on Admissions) showed that in the academic year 1991-1992 55% of children from middle class backgrounds (professional) went to university. In 1998, the annual report showed that for the academic year 1995-1996, this figure was 79%. Correspondingly, for children from working class backgrounds (unskilled), the relevant figures were 6 percent and 12 percent. Whilst these trends show increasing and widening participation, as with the data revealed in the report by Connor et al (2003) on minority ethnic students in HE, together with working class students, they were concentrated in the less prestigious, 'new' HE institutions. The same is true of mature students and part-time undergraduate students. Middle/ upper class students were more likely to be in the more prestigious, 'old' HE institutions (NCIHE 1997). The numbers of entrants to HE from White working-class entrants (unskilled and semi-skilled) have doubled since the 1992 FHE Act but their proportion in the HE undergraduate population has

remained unchanged (NCIHE 1997, NAO 2002) and White, working-class men and Caribbean men remain underrepresented in FE (FEFC 1997).

Until 1990, tuition fees for undergraduates were met by the state. The Conservative government passed the '1990 Education Act (Student Loans)' which introduced the Student Loan Company. Maintenance grants were frozen and students could obtain a low interest loan to top-up the deficit (Department of Education 1990). In New Labour's first term of office in 1998, the Teaching and Higher Education Act was passed which removed student maintenance grants. Students were required to contribute to tuition fees and grants were fully replaced with student loans (DfES 2004b). A number of studies on the take up of student loans and students' attitudes to debt have shown that student loans may deter applicants particularly those from low income backgrounds (Callender and Kempson 1996; NUS 1999; Hesketh 1999). The study by Hesketh found that students' attitude to debt and the taking out of loans were more positive among middle class students than among working class students. The study also reported that the most anxious students were those who took out loans because it was a financial necessity. At the start of the academic year 2005, university applicants were down by 5% compared to 2004 in England. The trend in Scotland and Wales was different where fees were not raised. This was considered to be ample evidence that top-up fees were deterring potential students from applying to university (THES 2005).

The New Labour government encouraged HEI's to widen access in 1999 by an increase in Access Funds (HEFCE 1999). This was to enable HEIs to provide

financial support for students whose ability to participate in HE was prohibited by finance. This was and continues to be a relatively small fund compared to increases in research funds (McNay 2005). Students' post codes were used to increase participation of non-traditional groups by the payment to HEIs of a 5% additional premium weighting for the recruitment of young full-time students from neighbourhoods identified as disadvantaged (HEFCE 1999). In addition the government made it a requirement for all HEIs in 1999 to develop widening participation strategies. These strategies would form part of the indicators used to monitor and allocate funding (HEFCE 1999). A HEFCE funded study in 2001 (Gibbs 2001:3) found that 27% of pre-1992 universities prioritised widening access within their strategies, 'addressing students' diverse needs' were the least often targeted for development by HEIs. The study also found that institutions had strategies to 'admit' underrepresented student groups but rarely indicated how teaching and learning processes would change once the students were admitted.

#### Access and PCET Policy in the Twenty First Century

At the beginning of the twenty-first century there were two million students with 35 per cent of 18-21 year olds participating in HE in the UK (DFES 2003a, HEFCE 2005). Using Martin Trow's definition, this makes the UK system a 'mass' HE provision. If participation in HE continues to increase, closer scrutiny of the participation data reveals that participation continues to be uneven and may be falling back slightly. An examination of this mass system shows a higher participation rate of women (57%). There is a polarisation of the courses women and men study along 'traditional' gender lines (though this is changing for medicine and law where women are now in the majority) and among the academic staff men out-

number women two to one (84,000 men: 43,000 women). As already indicated, there are similarities between minority ethnic and working-class student participation, not in levels but in choice of institutions. Students from middle-class families have continued to dominate HE enrolments in the twenty first century. Only 26% of young entrants to full-time undergraduate degree programmes were from working class family backgrounds in the academic year 2001 – 02 (DfES 2003c).

The New Labour government continues to emphasise its commitment to widening access to PCET in the twenty first century. This is demonstrated by the swathe of legislation and policy documents to increase and widen participation in further, adult and higher education, all of which focused on widening access to PCET to meet the needs of the economy and global competition. The FEFC was abolished in 2000 under the Learning and Skills Act, which set up a national Learning and Skills Council (LSC) with 47 local LSCs with a broader, skills remit for all post-school education and training including providers from the private and voluntary sectors. In examining the skills, workforce and employment agenda, the government set up the National Skills Task Force (Payne 2000). The establishment of the Sector Skills Council was one of the outcomes of the task force. The task force also recommended increasing the skills levels of those who are already in employment with higher level educational qualifications. Contrary to the government's agenda for widening participation to HE for young people to enter employment as graduates, the skills agenda focuses on those who are already in employment. In addressing the skills agenda, foundation degrees were launched (Blunkett 2000) and supported by the government as a flexible response to higher level skills in the workplace alongside



the promotion of part-time HE provision to meet the needs of those in employment. The White Paper, 'Skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' (DfES 2003d) followed the launch of foundation degrees and together with the White Paper, 'The Future of Higher Education,' formed the basis for increasing HE provision through foundation degrees (DfES 2003b).

The 14-19 Green Paper 'Opportunity and Excellence' (DfES 2003a) set out an agenda to increase and widen participation to education and training for young people by focusing on young people from age fourteen, the age which the Government believes to be critical to engage young people in education and training beyond compulsory schooling. The Green Paper stressed the importance to the success of this policy of collaboration between schools, FE colleges and employers. It also proposed a review of 14-19 education and training in order to establish a more flexible system which would give equal value to academic and vocational qualifications. This is intended to enable the mass of young people in the UK to progress to HE (50 per cent by 2010) or to gain vocational skills through programmes such as Modern Apprenticeships to progress to employment or to progress to HE. All of which are expected to contribute to the economic wealth of the UK and ensure its place among leading world economies. Another initiative, 'Aimhigher' which began in 2004 (HEFCE 2004) is a series of geographical partnerships of HE, FE and 14-19 providers designed to increase achievement in the 14-19 age group and raise the number of young people able to participate in HE. The initiative is an amalgamation of three funding groups which previously targeted young people in inner cities as well as local and regional partnerships of HE, FE and

schools (Excellence Challenge, DfEE 2000; Excellence in Cities, DfEE 1999 and Partnerships for Progression, HEFCE 2002). Aimhigher partnerships are designed to raise young people's awareness of HE, increase the number of young people qualified to enter HE and develop new progression routes into HE.

The Higher Education White Paper, 'The Future of Higher Education' (DfES 2003b), presented New Labour's vision for increasing participation to higher education for those who have traditionally not participated in HE. This set a target of 50 per cent of those aged between 19 and 30 to participate in HE by 2010 and instructed universities to secure a relationship between knowledge and wealth creation. Universities were also directed to improve standards, widen access, increase collaboration with business and compete internationally. The White Paper highlighted the importance of student support and effective teaching and learning to improve retention and support underrepresented student groups. There have been many critics of the government's education focus on younger people and the deficit model used to blame working class people for the disadvantages they faced in the compulsory education sector (Greenbank 2006b, Thomas and Jones 2003).

Statements made in the White Paper such as raising young people's aspirations to attend university and improving attainment at age 19 by encouraging more young people to remain in education after age 16 suggest that some young people (meaning working class young people) need to be taught about what is best for them rather than the onus being placed on institutions on how best they can change to benefit students (Greenbank 2006c).

Following successful pilots in urban areas across the country, the Government introduced Education Maintenance Awards (EMAs) to increase participation in post-16 education and training in 2004. Young people aged 16-19 whose parents earn less than £30,000 per annum can 'earn' up to £30 per week if they attend school or college regularly and punctually. A termly bonus is paid to those young people who meet EMA requirements. Evaluation of the pilots showed increase participation in education and training of young people, especially young men in areas of low socio-economic status, low levels of participation in post-16 education and training and low attainment at age 16: participation increased by 3.8% and retention by 4.1% and the number of young people Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) was reduced by 1/3% (LSC 2004c). Overall, participation rates fell, or were at best static outside London and the South East (DfES 2006a).

Comments on the purpose of universities by the then Secretary of State for Education, Charles Clarke in the 'Guardian' characterised the 'instrumental' and 'vocational' perspectives of modern PCET policies. He stated that the 'wider non-economic benefits of higher education are "overrated" and 'universities exist to enable the British economy and society to deal with the challenges posed by the increasingly rapid process of global change' (Mayhew et al 2004: 69). In contrast, the Robbins Report of 1963 recommended unlimited, high quality, expensive, elite education for all who were qualified by ability and attainment (Tapper and Salter 1992). It also argued, as stated earlier in this chapter, that there was a need for HE to encompass employment-related skills whilst continuing to represent the values of traditional liberal education.

The 2003 Higher Education White Paper included the government's intention to create an Access Regulator. The 2004 Higher Education Act (DfES 2004a) established a Director and Office for Fair Access (OFFA). This has been set up to implement fair access to universities for working class young people in exchange for universities being permitted to raise tuition fees from £3,000 per year. However, 90% of young people who are qualified to enter university with A-levels already do (ibid). OFFA will therefore be focusing on the missing 10% (Newby 2004). Layer (2005) suggested that the key to widening access to HE for young people from low socio-economic groups required improvement in attainment at age 16 which OFFA was not expected to affect nor to enhance participation. He argued that OFFA's role would be a 'bumper regulator' with 20-30 % of the increase in student fees going towards bursaries for students. In effect therefore OFFA will not change the type of students entering HE. Layer believed that the UK government had not considered the wider context of successful student participation in HE. He identified three approaches to widening access to HE which were based on international models: partnerships with universities, schools and colleges that are geographically based, the requirement for universities to develop equity/ widening participation strategies, and redefining widening participation as successful participation focusing on strategies that covered the entire student experience.

On the 27<sup>th</sup> March 2006, the FE White Paper 'Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances' (DfES 2006b) was published. Comparisons with EU, Asian and north American education, social and economic systems were made with the UK to inform the White Paper. It was a response to the earlier Foster Review of

FE- 'Realising the Potential: A review of the future role of further education colleges' (2005) and it incorporated recommendations from the Leitch Review of Skills – 'Skills in the UK: The Long-term Challenge, Interim Report (2005) and the LSC's 'Agenda for Change' (LSC 2005). The White Paper, in responding to Foster's review of FE, proposed a new mission for FE '...equipping young people and adults with the skills for productive, sustainable employment in a modern economy' (DfES 2006b:1) and placed FE as central to the economic future of England. FE will deliver skills prioritised by the government and its agencies to ensure economic growth, productivity and social justice. Concepts such as choice and personalisation which were previously introduced in other public sector reforms were featured in the White Paper: students aged 14-18 will be able to choose to study in more than one institution based on their choice of programme, students aged up to 25 will have free tuition for their first level 3 qualification. Institutions will be expected to design and deliver programmes to meet individual students' and employers' needs and involve students in decision-making. The White Paper also proposed reform of the FE workforce including mandatory qualifications for leaders and teachers, quality measures to eliminate failing colleges and a less complex funding system. It is evident that the White Paper has set out to raise the profile of FE and clarify its role with a more distinct purpose. It has again used funding to implement change in FE but this time it has placed student success (qualifications) as the main measure of institutional success. Its narrow focus on the delivery of skills in FE, and vocational skills in particular, relegates students from working class and Black and minority backgrounds, the bulk of students attending FE, to a narrow experience of learning and career aspirations. The focus of the White Paper on

student choice will ensure the maintenance of a stratified PCET system and will reinforce institutional choice based on 'race' and class. Therefore minority ethnic and working class students will be relegated to the less prestigious institutions.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a broad historical context to the development of access to PCET from WWII to the beginning of the twenty-first century and discussed theories of academic success within PCET institutions. Causal theories of student academic success were explored and showed that there was a shift away from theories attributing academic success to students' personality (psychological) and towards socialisation and environmental factors (sociological). In examining Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of academic success, cultural capital and habitus were discussed. The quantity and type of cultural capital and habitus inherited from a person's family background emerged to account for academic success. However education institutions were identified as having the capacity to reproduce or change individual's cultural capital and disposition (Thomas 2001, Berger 2000).

The powerful influence of theorists and research from North America on the practice and policy in UK post-16 provision was highlighted. Tinto's model of student success was examined and its dominance in PCET institutions. The chapter illustrated that much of the theory which exists on student success had an ideal notion of the student and pathologised the student as problematic who was part-time, mature, working class or minority ethnic. At the beginning of the twenty-first century Tinto (2005) was critical of a theory of student success which placed all the responsibility for success on the student (changing the student to 'fit' in - capital 'A')

Access) and recommended an examination of the conditions of the institutions within which students are placed (changing the institution - lower case 'a' access).

The chapter examined the different concepts of access from its radical beginnings as education for freedom, self-development and empowerment to its emergence as widening participation within a social inclusion government agenda but with economic objectives. It has shown the social divisions which characterised the development of PCET since WWII. The chapter revealed the haphazard and unplanned way in which PCET developed to enable non-traditional groups to participate. The emergence of access as widening participation in the latter part of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has continued along the lines of division within education which existed prior to WWII. HE is largely segregated into 'old' universities (pre 1992) for the mainly young, white middle classes and 'new' universities (post 1992) for the growing numbers of minority ethnic, mature and working class and part-time participants with a vocational/ professional focus. FE colleges, originally established to cater for the working classes (Bythman and Orr 2002), the only 'comprehensive' education institutions, are now funded for 'instrumental' learning, basic skills programmes for adults, training to meet the needs of employers, social inclusion and vocational programmes for 14 to 18 year olds. Secondary schools with Sixth Forms are being funded at a rate above that of FE colleges and Sixth Form colleges to provide a mainly academic curriculum to attract the young of the middle classes. Thus the development of PCET to widen participation in education and training still perpetuates existing inequalities in education. Palfreyman(2002:8) suggests:

...higher education as an exemplar of Galbraithian private affluence (Oxbridge) and public squalor (some 'new', over expanded HEI's) ...say 'Club Class': World Traveller' [i.e. steerage] on airlines; or mass banks like Nat West offering attentive but expensive elite banking in their Coutts 'posh' subsidiary, while the rest of us are urged to bank on-line to save staffing costs in bank branches.

The disproportionate funding of Sixth Forms in schools against FE Colleges not only concentrates access on younger learners but also sets up sixth forms in schools as a selective 'quasi' academic institutions and relegates FE to the 'vocational' institution. As Alison Wolf writes, vocational education is 'a great idea for other people's children'...(Wolf 2003:56). There is a parallel in HE with funding for research with 'elite', 'old' universities being eligible and many of the 'new' universities relegated to teaching only institutions (McNay 2005a).

The chapter has illustrated the movement of post-school education from a basis of voluntary funding, limited state support and individual effort to significant state funding and involvement. It identified the continuing preference for 'traditional' students (and definitions of 'success') and the academic drift of institutions towards that model, encouraged by the reality of policy and funding in operation, despite the widening access/ widening participation/ social inclusion rhetoric. This research focused on 'non-traditional' students to challenge that. In charting its expansion the chapter highlighted how the characteristics of further and higher education continue to reproduce the structural inequalities in society. Concepts of access and success will be returned to later when the perspectives of students and staff from the institutions in the case studies will be reported. The next Chapter presents the methodology used for this research.



## Chapter 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

This chapter reports on the research approach used. It examines why a mainly qualitative, case study approach was adopted. It explains the research process, highlights the difficulties encountered and recognises the limitations in the research.

The methodology adopted enabled narrative data to be collected and analysed on the social worlds of 'non traditional' student groups within FHE institutions and some of their teachers and managers. A multiple case study approach was used and documentary evidence was collected and analysed. The social identity of the researcher as a Black woman was acknowledged at the outset, as well as the researcher's anti-racist and feminist stance. The research approach, though mainly qualitative, combined with a quantitative approach, to provide an accurate representation of the research participants' realities. It was a fit with the researcher's stance in that power relationships and inequality were examined. This included approaches which were anti-racist and feminist, though not exclusively, such as: validating the perspectives of research participants; maintaining the originality and authenticity of participants' meanings of their experiences; where time permitted, involving participants in the different stages of the research; identifying social change as a main research outcome, in this case greater equality for underrepresented groups in PCET institutions.

## **Qualitative and Quantitative Research Traditions**

Two research paradigms emerging from the quantitative-qualitative debate are referred to as positivist and interpretative. Positivist research is that which is generalisable, not limited to a particular setting and therefore applicable elsewhere. The research approach which has emerged from the positivist paradigm is quantitative research. Qualitative research emerged from the interpretive paradigm. This generalisability of quantitative research distinguishes it as the 'best' model for all research (Henwood and Pidgeon 1993, Usher 1996). Positivist research is described as objective and 'scientific' as it stems from the natural sciences, especially physics which aims to develop general 'laws'. Traditionally it was the standard used to judge how research should be carried out and to determine what was and was not valid, reliable knowledge. This still has influence in education and social research (Usher 1996, Denscombe 1998). Qualitative research is 'local' and specific to an area and set of circumstances. Guba and Lincoln (1985) describe this approach to research as 'naturalistic' which perceives social realities as a whole and must be understood within all its contexts: the researcher, the subject of research and the environment. The researcher's social identity, values and beliefs are seen as important influences on the collection and interpretation of the data within the interpretive tradition. The outcomes of qualitative research are not validated through 'objective' or generalisable measures but the researcher is recognised as the 'measurement device' (Denscombe 1998). This research used a qualitative approach and followed this tradition by identifying the social background and standpoint of the researcher in chapter 1.

## Quantitative Research

From the end of the nineteenth century the most appropriate approach for conducting social research was understood to be the scientific model, drawing on practices within the natural and physical sciences. This was described as empiricism: knowledge was only valuable if it was derived through experience. Researchers who arrived at this empirical knowledge were expected to have done so through observation or some sort of controlled experiment where authority is exercised over what is experienced (Hitchcock and Hughes 1995). Quantitative social research therefore aims for objective social enquiry using methods from the natural and physical sciences. This assumes that there is no qualitative difference between the natural and social worlds. Human behaviour, therefore, can be accurately observed, measured and predicted. Quantitative researchers are more likely to collect large amounts of data, as their concern is in establishing whether a study is reliable and replicable (ibid). A large proportion of education and social research has used this model for the design of research (Finch 1986, Hitchcock and Hughes 1995, Usher 1996), Denscombe 1998).

Denscombe (1998) refers to the impression of 'scientific respectability' which quantitative research carries. This he attributes to the solidity and objectivity which is conveyed by the reporting of quantitative findings using graphs, tables and numbers. He argues however, that the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research denoting contrasting positions within social research is far from 'watertight'. He claims that the distinctions are somewhat simplistic and caricaturist, unlike the reality of social research where researchers are not entirely in separate camps.

## **Strengths and Weakness of Quantitative Research**

Below is a summary from Harrison's (2001) list of quantitative research methods and statistical analysis:

### Strengths of quantitative research

- I. The potential of quantitative research designs for generalising the findings from the sample population to the larger population which it represents.
- II. When the assumptions of objectivity and generality are met, the researcher is able to consider the wider implications of the research findings.
- III. Quantitative research findings, which result from well designed research, are highly influential in the field of education.

### Weaknesses of Quantitative Research

- I. Reductionism and reliability in the design of quantitative research is a limitation of the research - it reduces or operationalises complex ideas into measurable activities or events. The findings are perceived within the limitations of operationalised definitions.
- II. The reliability of the measures determines the strength and applicability of the findings. The quantitative researcher cannot generalise beyond what has been measured and how well it has been measured.
- III. The significance and generalisability of quantitative research rely on statistical analysis. Whilst this can be perceived as a strength, it can also be a weakness as errors are possible.

## Qualitative Research

Weber (1922) and Dilthey (1911/ 1977 in Miles and Huberman 1994), claim that human communication and action could not be fully analysed using 'scientific' methods. The interpretative research paradigm challenges the appropriateness of scientific method in social and education research where the focus of research is on social practices. Usher (1996) argues that the quantitative approach to research fails to provide understanding of 'meaning' within 'social interactions' and states that:

...we need to understand the meanings that construct and are constructed by interactive human behaviour. Human action is given meaning by qualitative schemes or frameworks (Usher 1996:18-19).

Gadamer (1975) argues that there is more to truth than the scientific method and that the natural sciences do not provide the only method of rationality. He states that the qualitative researcher is not separated from the historical and cultural context that interprets and frames the research. He maintains that knowledge within the social sciences cannot be objective and asserts that understanding is approached from an individual's situation, their standpoint in history, society and culture. Gadamer (1975) questions the ability of the researcher to be objective about the meanings that are produced from those who are researched (objects). He argues that researchers should use their prejudices and biases as the starting point for acquiring knowledge. In the process of interpretation and understanding, prejudices and biases are placed at risk, tested and modified.

A qualitative approach is a description used for a number of social research styles.

Qualitative research draws on a range of disciplines which include sociology, social anthropology and social psychology (Denscombe 1998). The data produced from

qualitative research are largely words or images. They are the outcomes of a process of interpretation by the researcher. They are not 'out there' waiting to be revealed, as would be assumed by a quantitative research approach (Miles and Huberman 1994).

Phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research which leads to 'deep understanding' and requires the researcher to have an empathy with the subjects. Phenomenologists often use interviews as the main method for collecting data and work with transcripts. The time limited aspect to the interviewer's position helps to structure the interview and impose an agenda. Phenomenologists give priority to the voice of the subjects. The data is not coded; instead, the researcher repeatedly and carefully reads the transcripts. By being cautious in making inferences from the transcripts, the researcher

...reaches the "Lebenswelt" of the informant, capturing the "essence" of an account – what is constant in a person's life across its manifold variations. This approach does not lead to covering laws, but rather to a "practical understanding" of meanings and actions. (Miles and Huberman 1994: 8)

Phenomenological research does not aim to generalise findings or to connect to sets of constructs or covering laws. The aim is to interpret data rather than to gain firm facts (ibid). This requires multiple reading, 'mining' and reduction of the data to become familiar with it in order to search for 'regularities and essences' (ibid: 14). The researcher may need to contact interviewees on more than one occasion to gain this familiarity and empathy referred to earlier.

Characteristics associated with phenomenology were used within this research:

Interviews were the main research method used for collecting data; not all of the data were pre-coded; interview schedules were used with a combination of open and

closed questions to structure the interview and limit the time spent interviewing subjects. The analysis consisted not only of analysing 'empirical facts' but of interpretation of the texts. A semi-structured interview was designed. Some pre-coding of responses was done due to the pressure of time and resources, though the approach adopted aimed to give emphasis to the voice of the interviewees. This approach is consistent with anti-racist and feminist perspectives, personal values were identified at the outset by the researcher.

Miles and Huberman (1994) offer seven strengths for the use of a qualitative approach:

- I. Focus on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings so that we have a handle on what 'real life' is like.
- II. The confidence with which a local phenomenon can be explored within its own context.
- III. The 'thick descriptions' produced by qualitative data provide a window into a real context which makes a powerful impact on the reader.
- IV. The collection of data over a sustained period of time facilitates understanding of how and why certain events occurred, as opposed to 'snapshots' of 'what?' or 'how many?'
- V. The focus on people's 'lived experience' makes the approach effective in obtaining people's perceptions and interpretations of what is going on around them.
- VI. When discovering or exploring a new area, a qualitative approach is the best strategy.

VII. In supporting the use of quantitative data from the same site, to explain or re-examine quantitative data.

### Weaknesses of Qualitative Research

- I. Where a single researcher is gathering data it is difficult to cross check information so the danger of distorted information is apparent (Blaxter et al (1996).
- II. Representativeness and generalisations are not always possible.
- III. The close involvement of the researcher with the subjects involves risks and ethical issues.
- IV. The methods used are often time consuming and expensive.

In this research, to overcome the weakness of distorted information associated with the gathering of data by a single researcher, the process was monitored at monthly supervisions, other researchers were used to cross check transcribed interviews and to cross check the coding of transcripts. This research did not set out to use representative samples, nor achieve findings that were generalisable.

Guba and Lincoln (1985) suggest that 'fittingness' is more appropriate to qualitative research than the research being generalisable. The purpose of qualitative research is to produce an idiographic body of knowledge which describes the individual case. They contend that generalisations are not possible from qualitative research as it is neither time nor context free. Therefore the emphasis on qualitative research should be on the extent to which studies match with other situations and whether the conclusions drawn from one study help in understanding another. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) similarly argue against generalisability and contend that



qualitative research has the potential to be applied to other situations by having 'comparability' and 'translatability'. Comparability relates to the individual parts of a study. How well these are described (i.e. analysis, concepts, populations etc.) determines the basis upon which the results can be used for comparisons.

Stake (1995) agrees that qualitative research cannot be generalised from one single case to a target population of which the case is a member. He argues that through a process called 'naturalistic generalisations', the findings from one study can apply to another 'similar' situation. Through experience, he maintains, individuals will be able to use both explicit comparisons between situations and explicit knowledge of those same situations to make useful naturalistic generalisations. Cronbach (1982), like most qualitative researchers, argues that generalisability in terms of laws which can be universally applied, is not the purpose of or a useful standard for qualitative research. This is not to say that the outcomes of one qualitative study cannot be used to inform another. Miles and Huberman (1994) and Denscombe (1998) suggest that the 'thick descriptions' of qualitative research are useful to convey the complexity of the situation, to provide the readers with enough detail to assess for themselves whether the interpretation of the phenomenon is warranted. Miles and Huberman (1994) also suggest that 'thick descriptions' are useful for testing hypotheses or as Cronbach (1982) suggests, using the findings from one study as 'working hypotheses' to make judgements on what might occur in another study.

To overcome ethical issues and other risks associated with qualitative research, the research methodology and approach were scrutinised by the University of

Greenwich's Ethics Committee prior to the collection of data (Details of this process are outlined separately on page 118). In addition monthly supervision monitored the research process. To counter the criticism of high costs i.e. time and resources that are directed to the use of qualitative methods, the research used case studies and adopted the approach recommended by Yin (2003) for case study research (see page 104 in this chapter). The research design therefore ensured a systematic process with milestones identified for the delivery and monitoring of efficient, inexpensive research.

Research in education is located within the 'traditions' of the social sciences and therefore the approaches used in educational research borrow from them, being qualitative and perceived in methodological debates as complex and contentious (Hitchcock and Hughes 1995, Blaxter et al 1996). Strauss (1987), Henwood and Pidgeon (1993) and Denscombe (1998) suggest that there is much confusion about quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Though differences exist between the two approaches to research, Hammersley (1992), Blaxter et al (1996) and Scott (1996) argue that the differences may not be as precise as may appear initially. They are usually both adopted safely within the same study and Blaxter et al (1996) suggest that it is usual for research reports to include both numbers and words: as adopted in this research.

### **Why a mainly Qualitative Approach?**

The study initially set out to use a quantitative approach as the one major source of data and began with the FE ISR (Individualised Student Record now called ILR [L=

learner. ISR will be used for the purpose of the research)]. The ISR is the quantitative database held by institutions on the enrolment, retention and achievement of students based on their social identity, e.g. age, ethnicity etc. The statistical records of students' performance were intended to be the main focus for defining 'success' and exploring the factors which contributed to 'non-traditional' students' success. After collecting and analysing data from the two FE institutions' ISR databases, the quality of the data, though used by the Learning and Skills Council to plan PCET provision and allocate funding, was found to be unreliable for the purposes of this study due to the inconsistency of data collection, the ambiguous definitions of 'success' and the crude profiling of students' ethnic profile (Andrews 2003a). The complexities of data collection for funding purposes raised a number of questions about its validity as the main source of evidence for the study. The ISR database only held records of students who were still attending courses after the November census point, student 'enrolments' were recorded as opposed to 'individuals', making it difficult to identify whether a series of enrolment data referred to one or several 'individuals'. The crude descriptors used to identify the ethnic profile of students also proved to be unreliable as they were based on the limited categories provided by the LSC. ISR data for the HE case studies were not available at the beginning of this research. Data held by universities which is reported to HESA has also been found to be unreliable. In a study, funded by the Rowntree Foundation, Quinn et al (2005) reported:

...the inaccuracy of the data provided by the universities...of the ex-students listed as under 25 were not, as the research team discovered...some had never been undergraduates or had not dropped out, raising serious concerns about university data collection and use (Quinn et al 2005:11).

A quantitative approach also had limited utility to the study, as it cannot relate to personal stories to glean patterns. So the approach to the study changed.

A mainly qualitative approach was also taken in order to ensure that the 'perspectives', 'point of view' and 'lived experience' of the people being studied would be reported (Silverman 2004: 344) and because:

... qualitative researchers describe and explain the social conditions under which organisational work is, and is not, done effectively. Both the descriptions and explanations answer questions about the how and why of organisational outcomes. They also make fundamental components of organisational processes visible to outside stakeholders like regulators or other public policy agents. (Miller et al 2004: 327)

Though both qualitative and quantitative researchers are concerned with the individual's perspective, the former argue that qualitative researchers can get closer to their subjects' point of view through in-depth interviewing and observation. Quantitative researchers' reliance on inferences from remote methods to get close to their subjects reduces their ability to encapsulate their subjects' perceptions (Denzin and Lincoln 2000 in Silverman 2004).

As indicated earlier, quantitative data was collected, using the ISR databases from the two case study FE colleges and the two HE institutions. ISR data is required by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). The LSC provides the organisations that it funds with a specific methodology and database for calculating and claiming funding at three stages of the academic year. Data is collected on the enrolment, completion and achievement of students in November and May. 'Starters' are all students

enrolled, 'retention' is the number of students who are continuing or completing their qualification divided by the number who started the qualification. However, 'achievement' is the number of qualifications students have 'fully' achieved divided by the number of completed qualifications with a known outcome. Students who start a qualification and withdraw before 1<sup>st</sup> November of their first year are not recorded on the ISR data (Andrews 2003a).

In the case of HE, the HEFCE employs the Higher Education Statistic Agency (HESA) to act as its agent in supplying data on HE institutions. Under the terms of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, HESA has a legal duty to provide a system of data collection, analysis and dissemination, as the basis of a comprehensive management information system for publicly funded higher education in the UK (HESA 1992a). Like the LSC, HESA provides HE institutions with a database for the collection of information not only on students but also staff employed by HE. HEIs are bound by law to provide good quality data. Records are submitted of all students who are registered and remain on course two weeks after the start of the course and from 1<sup>st</sup> December. For the period covering the 1<sup>st</sup> August – 31<sup>st</sup> July, data has to be sent to HESA by 15<sup>th</sup> September annually (HESA 1992b).

The LSC and HESA categories for identifying students are limited and fail to capture the range of ethnic groups within the London area, e.g. the category for 'Black Caribbean' does not distinguish between students who are recent arrivals from Jamaica and third generation Britons of Jamaican heritage. Nor can the category 'White English' distinguish between a mature, White middle-class student

who has chosen to move into a 'trendy' inner city area and a mature White working-class student whose family has lived in an inner city area for successive generations. HESA collects data from the Universities Central Admissions Service (UCAS) on students' social class, using parental occupation as the measure; meaning that HE only has data on the social status of younger full-time, undergraduate learners, even if one accepts that as valid criterion for social status. Data to determine the social status of mature students is not collected as they are not required to state their parents' occupation on application. HEFCE recognises this bias in their data collection and reported that new data collection strategies are being devised with the use of the 2001 Census to be more reliable than in previous years (HEFCE 2004). It should be noted, however, that the 2001 Census has been reported by local councils to be incomplete and failed to capture as many residents as other data sets such as those held by social services and the electoral register.

The unreliability of the ISR data base is further confirmed by a former college principal, Adrian Perry, who argues that the combination of data requirement and targets set by the LSC:

...has had 'ludicrous' effects including high expenditure on creative accounting ...and 'cover up' when targets are not met (Perry 1999 in Ecclestone 2002: 99).

Evidence of the recruitment and retention of 'non-traditional' learners within the case study institutions from the ISR and HESA databases, policy documents, prospectuses, Ofsted and institutional reports were used to contextualise the study. Interviews were conducted with staff and students to analyse the meaning behind the ISR and HESA data (Silverman 1985 in Andrews 2003a). Interviews were

conducted to collect data on the perceptions of students and staff of how and why 'non-traditional' learners succeeded. The interviews included three levels of the institutions' contexts: students, teachers and managers.

A mainly qualitative research approach was also used in order to discover whether there is a relationship between non-traditional students' perceptions of the factors which support their success in FHE and the institutional stated policies and staff perceptions of the factors which support students' success. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that:

...good qualitative data are more likely to lead to serendipitous findings...the findings from qualitative studies have a quality of 'undeniability'. Words, especially organised into incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavour that often proves far more convincing to a reader – another researcher, a policymaker, a practitioner – than pages of summarised numbers. (ibid: 1)

In highlighting good practice in the field of access and widening participation to FHE, the research aims to influence policy within this field. The research into policy uses the approach developed by Pratt and his colleagues (1997) which analyses the intentions, outcomes and implications of policy by testing it against those whom the policy in education is supposed to serve, that is students and staff. Atkinson and Delamont (1985) suggest that the use of the case study to conduct research is appropriate when making comparisons of good practice and to identify common themes.

### **Why a case study approach?**

This research is based on four 'cases' (further and higher education institutions) in their natural settings. Yin (1994) describes the case study as naturally occurring; i.e.

not something that is artificially created for the purpose of the research but something already in existence prior to the research and continuing to exist after the research is completed. He adds that the case study is:

... a comprehensive research strategy which is distinctive in that it incorporates many more variables than there are data points, relies on a variety of data which accumulates in the triangulation style and requires the use and development of theory to inform how the data is collected and analysed (Yin 1994:13).

Casley and Lury's (1987) explanation of a case study refers also to the range of research methods used:

The case study uses a mixture of methods: personal observation, which for some periods or events may develop into participation; the use of informants for current and historical data; straightforward interviewing; and the tracing and study of relevant documents and records from local and central government, travellers etc. (Casley and Lury 1987: 65)

The case study approach was selected above other methods because it is appropriate for small-scale research (Blaxter et al 1996) as it allows a researcher with limited resources to narrow their focus to a few examples. Case study research was appropriate for pursuing contemporary questions on access policy and success within the working environments of FHEIs. This research covers both a phenomenon (the success of underrepresented groups in PCET) and the context (PCET practice and policies). Case study research is most appropriate to facilitate the collection of multiple sources of evidence when researching numerous contextual variables (Yin 1993). Stake (1995:8) suggests that the real business of case study is its 'particularisation'. Stake (ibid) explains that in each case study, there are sets of interrelationships which both hold together and shape the data but also relate to factors that are outside of the cases. Case studies can therefore enable the familiar to be seen afresh. For Atkinson and Delamont (1985), the benefit of a



case study approach is its capacity to build on existing theory by the comparative analysis of more than one case.

The outcomes of case study research are also looked upon as being reliable (Herriott and Firestone 1983 in Yin 2003; Yin 2003). This is mere appearance, as the data collection methods selected and the 'audit trail' of the research process will determine reliability of the research outcomes (Guba and Lincoln 1985).

Denscombe (1998) argues that the defining characteristic of the case study is its focus on individual instances rather than on a wide spectrum. The aim, he suggests, is to illuminate the general by looking at the particular. The case study also provides the opportunity to carry out an in-depth study which brings unique and valuable insights into areas that other methods such as surveys could not make apparent (ibid). Four PCET institutions were selected for this research. Multiple case studies were used because the evidence gathered is considered more convincing due to the use of 'real' cases as well as the 'words' and 'stories' of subjects. Multiple cases enable 'pattern matching' of results to occur against the data collected within the case studies, giving greater confidence and robustness in any theory that is generated (Yin 2003; Miles and Huberman 1994).

Similar cases were selected; i.e. PCET institutions with a history of widening access to 'non-traditional' students. The rationale for using multiple case studies is the same replication logic as multiple experiments. Yin (2003) states that there are two types of replication, replication which predicts similar results, called 'literal

replication' and replication which predicts contrasting results, called 'theoretical replication'. He argues that multiple case studies should be considered similar to multiple experiments and a replication logic should be followed. This entails conducting multiple case studies in a similar manner to multiple experiments. If all the cases predicted turn out as expected, then there would be convincing support for the initial prediction. If the results are not as anticipated from the multiple cases, the initial predictions are revised and re-tested with another group of cases, as would be carried out by scientists with experimental results. The theoretical framework, under which the particular phenomenon is found, becomes the means for generalising new cases. Theory plays a similar role in cross-experiment designs.

Replication logic was not the method used in selecting the case studies for this research. As already indicated, the research did not seek to generalise findings. The four institutions were selected for their traditions of widening access to underrepresented groups. However, there were characteristics such as their public profiles and awards conferred upon them within their sectors, where differences existed.

The research set out to explore new theory, using an approach that is described within one of Glaser and Strauss' principles of 'grounded theory' as an 'open mind' (Denscombe 1998). This is not a 'blank mind' but it is an approach that requires the researcher to be informed about the area of study:

...but [is] open to discovering new factors of relevance to an explanation of that area, rather than restructuring the scope and vision of the research to whether a hypothesis based on existing theories had got it right (or not).  
(Denscombe 1998: 215)

Yin (2003) suggests that overlaps exist with histories and case studies. However, only the latter deals with a variety of evidence, i.e. documents, artefacts, interviews etc. This research is set within the current stage of an historical process but an historical approach was not used as the main methodology because histories are only used when there is no access to primary evidence and where there is no control (Miles and Huberman 1994). Historical data was used for this research, such as oral histories and documentary evidence. An historical approach is usually chosen where there are usually no persons living to provide the evidence, the evidence available being archival, documentary etc. (ibid). As already indicated, the research was based on a contemporary issue therefore the evidence was accessible.

The case studies chosen had similar characteristics so that the findings can contribute to the widening access debate in FHE and to the development of policy and pedagogy to improve the student experience. The two FE colleges and two universities were all located in London and had long traditions of widening access to underrepresented groups in PCET. One of the FE colleges, BC, is a Beacon College, an award given to FE institutions assessed as 'excellent'. The other FE college, NBC, though not a Beacon at the time of the research, was commended in its Ofsted Inspection Report for its success in widening participation to its local communities and now holds a Beacon award. The HE institutions shared two characteristics: they were both over one hundred years old and they had traditions of widening access to HE. There were differences between the two HE institutions, NU, became a university after 1992 and the other, UO, became a university early in

the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. UO also had a higher proportion of White students than NU and more of its academic staff were assessed by the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) as conducting research at 'International' levels.

### Strengths and Weaknesses of the Case Study Approach

Denscombe (1998) identifies the following strengths and weaknesses of the case study approach:

#### Strengths

- I. The limited focus enables the researcher to deal with the complexities of social situations, relationships and processes in an holistic rather than isolated manner.
- II. The case study encourages the use of more than one research method to encapsulate the complex reality being investigated.
- III. Multiple sources of data are used which facilitates the validation of data through triangulation.
- IV. When the researcher has little control over events, the case study approach is appropriate, as it is based only on naturally occurring phenomena.
- V. The case study is highly suited to the small-scale researcher as it concentrates on one or a few sites.
- VI. Research which seeks to build or test theory is aptly suited to the case study approach.

#### Weaknesses

- I. Generalising from the findings of case study research is often open to criticism.

- II. Case studies are frequently perceived, though not always justified, as generating 'soft' data due to the use of interpretative methods and the production of qualitative rather than quantitative data and statistical procedures.
- III. The difficulty of defining the boundaries of the case study, creates problems in deciding on the data to be included or discarded.
- IV. The difficulties of gaining access to case study settings or documents or even required sample characteristics and people can create ethical problems in relation to issues such as confidentiality. Permission can also be withheld or withdrawn which can be challenging for the researcher.
- V. The impact of the presence of a researcher in a 'natural setting', over a period of time can affect the behaviour of subjects. They behave 'unnaturally'.

### **Overcoming Weaknesses in Case Study Research**

Issues of validity are often described as a major weakness of case study research. Scott (1996) refers to internal validity, the researcher's truth value and the accuracy of how reality is described. He suggests that validity is maintained if the participants recognise their contribution and agree on the validity of any claims made. In this research internal validity was maintained by checking the accuracy of interviews with interviewees using full transcripts for this purpose. Also other researchers appraised the process of transcribing the interview and using the transcript for coding purposes. Guba and Lincoln (1985) confirm this as good practice.

Lack of external validity is also a criticism of case study research; this relates to whether it is generalisable, more typically associated with quantitative, 'scientific' research. Yin (2003) argues that this criticism can also be directed to experiments where a single experiment is replicated under different conditions. He suggests that, like the experiment, case studies are generalisable to theoretical propositions rather than to populations. As already indicated, the purpose of the research is not to replicate it but to draw conclusions which will help in understanding other situations. Guba and Lincoln (1985) advise that a piece of research is valid in terms of its method of enquiry; they recommend triangulation as a procedure to establish and maintain credibility. Triangulation was used in this study in that more than one method of enquiry was utilised. Questionnaires to collect interviewees' personal details, observation in the field (field notes) and documentary evidence were used to validate the interview data. Interviews with one person/ group helped validate what emerged from interviews with others.

Case study research is often associated with lengthy investigations which generate large volumes of data. Yin (2003) suggests that this was typical of case study research that had been carried out in the past. He also argues that particular types of research methods, such as ethnography and participant observation are often mistakenly, associated with case study research. He explains that case study research can include or be limited to quantitative data. In order to counter the issue of a lengthy case study and the production of an excessive amount of data in this instance, the research was planned (the research design) utilising the 'components of research designs' recommended by Yin (2003: 27). These included research

questions, proposals, analysis, linking the data to the proposals and criteria for analysing the data. The plan also set dates to guide the research from the preliminary stages to completion.

## **Research Design**

### Defining the Research Question

The absence of research on practitioners' and managers' perceptions of why 'non-traditional' learners succeed created the need to pursue the question of how and why 'non-traditional' students succeed and progress in FHE. As indicated in Chapter 1, for the writer, an African Caribbean woman, and senior manager in an FE college, there is a personal interest in why 'non-traditional' students study in FHE, why they continue on programmes, despite the statistics reported of their 'failure' and discriminatory practices within FHE. The research therefore had four aims:

1. To conduct qualitative research into the experience of staff and students in two further education colleges and two universities with traditions of widening access to underrepresented groups.
2. To highlight good practice in widening access to further and higher education.
3. To explore the support services and student-centred administration which address the needs of non-standard entrants in FHE.
4. To examine institutional policies and barriers to widening access and how teachers and learners have successfully navigated them.

The methods used to pursue the aims of the research are listed in the table below:

<b>Research Aims</b>	<b>Method of Data Collection to Achieve Outcome</b>
i) To conduct qualitative research into the experience of staff and students in two further education colleges and two universities with traditions of widening access to underrepresented groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews with senior and middle managers</li> <li>• Interviews with teachers</li> <li>• Interviews with students</li> <li>• Questionnaires to students and staff</li> </ul>
ii) To highlight good practice in widening access to further and higher education (FHE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews with staff and students</li> <li>• Analysis of documents</li> <li>• Literature review</li> <li>• Interviews with notable Access practitioners</li> </ul>
iii) To explore the support services and student-centred administration which address the needs of non-standard entrants in FHE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of documents</li> <li>• Interviews with staff and students</li> <li>• Literature review</li> </ul>
iv) To examine institutional policies and barriers to widening access and how teachers and learners have successfully navigated them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews with staff and students</li> <li>• Analysis of documents</li> <li>• Observation of institutional environment and practices</li> </ul>

Literature on access (Tinto 1987, Pascarella and Terenzini 1986 and 1991, McNay 1992, Tight 1988, Sand 1998, Andrews 1991) describes successful strategies to support student access to PCET occurring in a planned and systematic manner at different points prior to and during the period of a programme of study. This is often referred to as a student centred approach to teaching and learning (Parry and Wake 1990:14, Kennedy 1997) and includes, for example, methods of supporting students prior to entry to the programme, at entry, whilst on the course and at exit. The research question was designed to test the extent to which this approach was



reflected in institutional policies and practices and whether these were recognised and valued by the staff and students. Aspects of this approach were also examined through documentary evidence, e.g. management information systems, institutional evaluations/ annual reports. Yin (1991) states that

A theory can be seen as a predicted pattern of events, which we place alongside what happened to see whether the pattern matches (Yin 1991:in Miles and Huberman 1994:145)

The research set out to probe and analyse the range of factors that enable learners from non-traditional backgrounds to succeed within further and higher education, the purpose being to compare and contrast their experiences within the case study institutions and to draw conclusions that can help in understanding and developing good practice in working with underrepresented groups in the wider FHE population.

### Literature Review and the Research Design

A literature review was initially conducted in 1999 – 2000 to explore the history of access and to inform the research question. It was discovered that there were gaps, incomplete and inconsistent explanations of access developments. It was decided to improve the quality of data by contacting practitioners who had worked in the field of access during its development in the 1970s and 1980s. Interviews were conducted in 2000 to with notable practitioners such as Bev Sands, Harinder Lawley and Gareth Parry to explore the unwritten history of access and to develop sharper, more insightful questions. The outcomes of the literature review and interviews to chart a history of access framed the questions within the interview schedule (see appendices II and III). The questions for staff and students were designed using the good

practice strategy reported in the literature on widening access. Thus questions focused on policies, practices and experiences at 'pre-entry', 'entry', 'on-course', at 'exit'/ progress point. The literature review continued to be developed throughout the period of the research. This helped in reviewing the context of access and widening participation in FHE.

The outcomes of the literature review and interviews with access pioneers produced a wealth of data that lacked consistency and any sense of a trajectory of progressive access development. It also illustrated the ad hoc nature of access policy development at national level, e.g. at times of crisis such as 'race riots', 'uprisings' or when economic policies changed, such as at times of high youth or adult unemployment. The access practices which were described by these pioneers, whether in developing Access courses or in making institutions more accessible followed no clear, logical, pattern but appeared to be driven by individual initiative and an access 'movement' (Sand 1998: 6, Duke 2003: 38). What emerged was a lack of any 'system' of access policy development, described as 'continuities and discontinuities' by Parry (2002:15).

The lack of a systematic approach to the development of access enabled the use of a multiple case study approach, using cases with similar characteristics to explore similarities and differences in the development of access in four FHE institutions. A small sample of people was selected as is customary with qualitative research undertaken by a single researcher with limited resources. Multiple case studies, whilst they introduce further complexity to the study, offer:

...an even deeper understanding of processes and outcomes of cases the chance to test (not just develop) hypotheses, and a good picture of locally grounded causality. (Miles and Huberman 1994: 26)

## **Sampling**

Four institutions were selected. All four institutions promoted in their literature a commitment to widening access to underrepresented groups and had reputations for implementing good practice in widening access to underrepresented groups. A larger sample size of institutions was not undertaken due the length of time and costs this would entail for a lone researcher. On this basis the decision was made to interview 80 students. This would consist of 9 'non traditional', 'successful' students from three programme areas at each of the institutions. A target of 20 students from each institution was set to account for the possibility of difficulties with their attendance, since at interviews students were expected to drop out. Students were identified as 'underrepresented' using the LSC widening participation criteria in the case of FE students. HE students selected were mature students (aged 21 and over) and the first generation in their families to attend higher education. It was also decided to interview three teachers from each institution who had a reputation for good practice in successfully widening access to 'non traditional' students within their respective institutions. Interviews were also planned for a cross-section of managers, three from senior and middle management levels at each institution.

The reality was that a much larger number of managers than planned were interviewed and more students in FE than in HE were interviewed. The number of managers interviewed increased due to difficulties in gaining access to teachers as many had full teaching timetables or had difficulties committing to pre-arranged

interview dates. The Principal at BC arranged interviews with all her senior and middle managers. Though the HE teachers were generous in asking students' permission to be interviewed for the research, many students were unobtainable by telephone and of those who were contacted, many were unavailable for interview. A larger number of FE students were interviewed to counter the lower numbers from the HE institutions.

The decision to use convenience sampling was the most appropriate in the circumstances; as a lone researcher exploring an area of education policy and practice, access and widening participation which, potentially, can be 'sensitive' for individuals as well as institutions. Convenience sampling is often criticised for its potential for bias (Kane 1991). Convenience sampling plays a part in most research: Stake (1995) argues that due to the limitations placed on most researchers, selecting subjects who are easy to access is the usual practice. The criticism of bias is often attributable to interview data as well as to convenience sampling by researchers who work within the quantitative paradigm (Kane 1991, Silverman 1993). Examples of bias include poor interviewees and interviewers or of interviewees providing distorted versions of the truth. Silverman (1993), however, suggests that there is much to be learned from interviews; he argues that interviews are accounts of moral realities and 'provide access to how people account for both their troubles and good fortune' (Silverman 1993:114).

The students and staff samples for the two FE colleges were identified through data from the Management Information Systems (MIS) to determine 'successful' learners

among those defined as 'access' or 'widening participation' groups. Samples from the two HE institutions were identified by senior managers who were interviewed and on the basis of a research and development report in 1991 which highlighted good practice in widening access (Andrews 1991).

The particular institutions were also selected for ease of gaining access to subjects for interviewing. The students selected for interview were 'widening participation' students, as defined by the Learning and Skills and Higher Education funding councils' categories. In total, 73 students were interviewed, 52 and 21 respectively from two case study FE colleges and the two case study HE institutions. All FE students interviewed were contacted for follow-up interviews but only 10 were available. Of the FE students who participated in the follow-up interviews, one had progressed to employment, three to higher level FE programmes and six had progressed to HE. A total of 25 staff were interviewed, 15 from the FE and 10 from the HE case study institutions. The teachers and managers were selected for their experience in working with 'widening participation' and 'underrepresented' groups within the case study institutions.

### **Ethical Issues**

The research was carried out in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association and, owing to the topic's sensitivity, the process and methodology required approval by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Greenwich. This entailed the completion of a detailed form explaining

how the research would manage ethical issues. These were similar to Homan's (1991) 'common core' of ethical issues found in all professional codes:

...professional codes ...which includes access to subjects, the acquisition and informing of consent, rights of subjects such as privacy and confidentiality, precautions to be taken in the interests of the reputation of the profession, obligations to colleagues and sponsors and care to be taken in reporting, speaking and publishing.( Homan: 1991:19)

The collation of data on the recruitment, retention and achievement of students as well as the profiles of learners necessitated the anonymity of the case study institutions as well as staff from the institutions. The Data Protection Act was also observed in the collation of data from the institutions' MIS. The names and addresses of students other than those who were interviewed were not collected, only the aggregate details of student data.

At the start of each interview the purpose of the interview and how it would be conducted were explained to interviewees. A similar format was used: each interview schedule had this information on the front at the top. Tuckman (1972) and Keats (2000) recommend this approach. Interviewees' consent was requested to use audio tape to record the interviews. Interviewees were brought back politely to questions from the interview schedule whenever they strayed into irrelevant topics. At all times, the researcher focused on data collection and did not allow personal biases or opinions to affect the conduct of the interview. Curiosity was controlled and confined within the limits of the research objectives.

There were ethical issues of students feeling vulnerable expressing negative perceptions of their lecturer and the institution, knowing that their academic success

was determined by these lecturers. In addition, although the staff willingly agreed to participate in the research, some felt uncomfortable not knowing what their students or subordinates may have said about their area of work and meeting a colleague 'researcher' there was also apprehension about possible judgements being made following the interview. Despite this, staff interviews revealed insightful access practices within the case study institutions. Strategies to counter staff sensitivities may have assisted in reassuring interviewees: assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, prior to and after the interviews, as well as the promise of sending copies of transcriptions for editing.

Homan (1991) argues that the practice of informed consent is problematic given the powerlessness of interviewees in their role relative to the interviewer. He states that it is unlikely that many interviewees would refuse access to researchers given the lack of practice most people have of negotiating such issues. Homan also challenges the notion of privacy in relation to public as opposed to private subjects in research. He suggests that public subjects should not be offered anonymity or be allowed the privilege of withholding consent. In conducting this research, written and oral information was presented to prospective interviewees informing them of the purpose and nature of the research with an assurance of anonymity (see appendix III). Following the interviews, transcriptions were sent to interviewees offering the opportunity to edit any details that may have been incorrectly recorded. This opportunity was not offered to students due to lack of time and resources to follow up. However, students were asked for their contact numbers, addresses and their permission to be contacted for follow-up interviews and to verify information that

may appear inaccurate or incomplete. This was done on a number of occasions with staff and students.

As a part-time researcher, manager in further education and teacher in FHE, the researcher was able to gain access to staff, students and documentary evidence from the FHE case study institutions. Interesting data has been included which sheds light on the difficulties of implementing widening access. To avoid undermining the work of peers or revealing sensitive information provided by students, great attempts were made to maintain the confidentiality of interviewees by changing the names of courses and places in any published works.

### **Fieldwork**

Blaxter et al (1996) describe fieldwork as the process of going out to collect research data. They define data as empirical or original and suggest that this data can only be accessed by the researcher being involved in some sort of 'expedition' such as going to an institution to conduct an interview. The distinction between fieldwork and deskwork can become blurred, if for example, telephone interviews may be carried out from a desk but will take the researcher into the field 'electronically' (ibid). For the purposes of this research fieldwork included telephone interviews.

The fieldwork for this research was carried out between January 2002 and December 2004. Prior to this, senior managers from the four case study institutions were initially contacted by telephone, followed with a letter to request permission to conduct the research. Written information on the nature of the research was also



provided which included assurances of confidentiality and anonymity (see appendix III). The senior managers were generous in granting permission and in making themselves, staff and students available to be interviewed.

Access to the case study premises was unproblematic. The assistance of managers and administrators was used to identify appropriate participants. Security guards, secretaries and administrators were welcoming and helpful. Difficulties were encountered with managers, teachers and students failing to attend pre-arranged interviews. In most cases these were not easily rearranged.

All initial interviews were tape-recorded and field notes were recorded immediately after interviews. This was a safeguard against faulty tape recording equipment. Field notes recorded information such as the atmosphere of the institution, the manner in which the researcher was treated at reception, descriptions of the non-verbal behaviour of interviewees, all of which may be of relevance to the interview (Denscombe 1998).

Interviewees selected the location and time of their interviews. The interviewing style, the venue and the selection of questions were appropriate for the participants as all senior managers, teachers and students were engaged in the process. There was however, one group of construction students at BC, mainly male, under the age of 20, who were not as articulate in responding to the interview questions as other participants. One year later, when follow-up interviews were conducted by telephone, this was not the case. Members of this group who were successfully

contacted for follow-up interviews were more receptive to answering the questions and behaved in a friendly and familiar manner with the researcher.

## **Interviews**

Interviews are often described as a kind of conversation. The comparison is misleading as interviews often have a set of perceptions and beliefs that are not expected in casual conversations. They require great skill and planning on the part of the interviewer (Robson 1996, Silverman 1993, Denscombe 1998). The identity of the interviewer, in particular, the gender, age and ethnicity can affect the responses of the interviewees. As interviewers are unable to alter their social identity, Denscombe (1998) advises that in preparation for the interview, the researcher should ensure that politeness, punctuality, receptiveness and neutrality are conveyed to provide the appropriate environment for truthful responses. This advice was taken into consideration in preparation of the fieldwork for this research.

Robson (1996) describes five advantages of interviews:

### Advantages of interviews

- I. A flexible, adaptable and efficient way of finding answers to research questions by asking people directly.
- II. The face to face interview provides opportunities to explore other areas of the research based on the nature of responses in ways that questionnaires could not. Non-verbal clues offer the opportunity to gain insight into the meaning behind the responses.

- III. Interviews provide opportunities to correct any misunderstandings in the questions asked which cannot be rectified when using questionnaires.
- IV. The response rate of interviews is high, unlike questionnaires.
- V. The data provided is 'rich' and informative in comparison to questionnaires.

#### Disadvantages of interviews

- I. Interviews take a great deal of time. The time taken to interview research participants is unlikely to be less than half an hour and participants may appreciate the opportunity to express themselves to a willing listener.
- II. The rich data generated from interviews is time consuming to transcribe.
- III. The lack of standardization that interviews imply leads to criticisms of unreliability.
- IV. Biases are difficult to avoid.

Face to face, telephone and focus group interviews were conducted with staff and students from the case study institutions. Individual interviews were conducted with all staff as none were available for group interviews. A focus group interview was conducted with one group (four) of students from NU; all other interviews with HE students were conducted one-to-one. A combination of group and individual interviews were carried out with FE students. All follow-up interviews with FE and HE students were carried out one to one and by telephone (the types of interviews used for staff and students at the four case study institutions are detailed in Appendix IV, Tables 1 and 3 and Appendix IV, Table 25 and 26).

This research used a number of means to reduce bias and to facilitate more 'truthful' responses. The choice of venue and time of the interview were selected by the interviewees. The interviewer dressed 'neutrally' in 'smart but casual' clothes when conducting face to face interviews and all groups of interviewees were asked the same questions in the same order. Interviewees, who used the interview as an opportunity to talk about issues that were not based on the questions asked, were politely re-focussed on the question and the research timetable was extended to accommodate the additional time required for transcriptions.

### Telephone Interviews

Robson (1996) argues that telephone interviews share the same advantages of face to face interviews such as response rate, opportunities to probe and corrections of any misunderstandings. This he claims is due to the increasing use of telephones among many populations of interest. The main advantage is the cost in terms of money and time when considering, for example, a sample located across a large geographical area. In terms of safety, the interviewer would not need to take the same level of precaution as for face to face contact. The disadvantage is that rapport may be more difficult to attain over the telephone. Robson suggests that lesser interviewer effect compensates for reduced rapport. There is also a lack of visual cues as would be found in face to face interviews; that can be problematic for interpreting the data.

### Focus Group Interviews

Wilkinson (2004) claims that focus groups, though they began in the 1920s, were only used for market research purposes until the 1970s. She cites the flexibility of the focus group interview as a major advantage for its use, as a stand-alone

qualitative method or as part of multi-method research involving quantitative methods. She emphasised its suitability for pre-existing small groups as few as two or as large as 12, such as a student group, or brought together for the research, such as members of a specific population. Content analysis is usually the form of analysis used for focus group data and the results can be presented in a number of ways from numerical tables, through prose accounts to lengthy quotations. Focus groups should be selected as a research method when the purpose of the research is to study 'talk' either as a means of exploration into participants' lives or their beliefs and opinions or direct observation of a social context.

Wilkinson (2004) advises that the researcher who uses focus groups acts as the 'moderator': asking the questions, keeping the discussion flowing and ensuring that all individuals are participating and no individuals dominate. She differentiates the focus group interview from the 'group interview' by the role of the moderator. This, she states, ensures that the group members interact with each other in the focus group rather than each group member responding to the questions as in the group interview.

#### Advantages of Focus Group Interviews

Focus group interviews have a number of advantages over one-to-one interviews:

- I. They enable the collection of interview data very quickly from a large group of people.
- II. They are also considered to be closer to everyday conversation and therefore more 'naturalistic' with joking, teasing, persuading (Wilkinson 2004).

- III. The group context of focus groups can facilitate people disclosing sensitive information about themselves (Farquhar and Das 1999, Frith 2000).
- IV. Focus group discussions are perceived as building 'solidarity' among the group as participants react and respond to the content of the conversation leading to more elaborate accounts than in one to one interviews (Stewart and Shamdasani 1990). The reduction in the interviewer's control of the process due to the number of participants in a focus group enables participants to follow their own agenda. This gives some power to the interviewee and addresses the concerns of the power relationships between interviewer and interviewee which feminist researchers such as Oakley (1981) and Finch (1986) raise as unequal in the one to one interview.

#### Disadvantages of Focus Group Interviews

- I. There is a perception that people are unlikely to disclose sensitive details in the context of a group discussion.
- II. The number of people expressing their points of view at the same time makes it difficult to control the interview.
- III. The large amount of data produced may be difficult and time consuming to analyse.
- IV. They require additional skills to those needed for one-to-one interviewing.
- V. Due to the number of participants speaking, it is difficult to record the interview without a tape recorder.

Eight focus group interviews were conducted for this research, one group at New University (NU), three groups at Beacon College (BC) and four groups at Non-

Beacon College (NBC). To overcome the disadvantages of too large a focus group, the largest one consisted of seven participants, each at BC and NBC and the smallest, three, at NBC. Students in all but one of the groups revealed sensitive information. Prior to the focus group interview, the interviewer explained the interview process, requested permission to use a tape recorder and reminded the group that their contributions would be reported anonymously. During the interview, all participants were encouraged to express their points of view. As a trained group facilitator, the interviewer used verbal as well as non-verbal cues to quieten one person and allow another to speak when more than one person spoke at once. The method of analysis used for the large amount of data produced by the focus groups is explained later.

Interviews ‘...generate data which give an authentic insight into people’s experiences’ (Silverman 2001:87 in Miller and Glassner 2004: 126). Silverman (2004) and Charmaz (1995) challenge the use of interviews as a method for exploring the point of view of the research subjects; they describe what qualitative researchers do as ‘romanticised’. They criticise qualitative researchers in their attempt to be objective and fair in representing the views of research subjects, stating that the researcher’s language to elicit the research subject’s experience hinders the collection of data on the subject’s experience and instead only collects answers to questions. Miller and Glassner (2004) argue that much of this is inevitable as the researcher uses language which elicits responses to specific experiences as time is often limited for both interviewer and interviewee. They suggest that the research has a particular focus and to keep the interaction interesting

to the interviewee, the researcher will need to ask questions using 'research language'. They describe the interview process and the language used as 'fracturing' the stories being told resulting in only parts of stories being told. They also cite coding and categorising as further 'fracturing' of interviewees' stories preventing the whole story from being told (ibid: 127).

Miller and Glassner (2004) recognise the limitations placed on researchers in recording interviewees' authentic experiences, indicating that the many levels of representing interviewees' experiences from the primary level of the interview itself through to the analysis, provide additional opportunities to represent interviewees' experiences. They also discuss the issue of how interviewees respond to researchers based on who the researcher represents in their lives and their (the researcher's) social identity. Whilst they comment on the importance of the researcher taking into account any social difference between them and their interviewees, they oppose the suggestion that the interviewer should share the same social grouping as the research subjects to legitimise any knowledge claims. They (ibid) present examples of a White researcher successfully obtaining in-depth and quality narratives with which to theorise using interviews with girls in gangs from Black and minority groups in the USA. Also Phoenix (1995), a Black British researcher interviewing White teenage mothers, also supports this idea of the collection of quality narratives regardless of social differences between researcher and interviewee.

### Interview Aims

These were the aims of the interviews with institutional managers:



- To learn how the institution is led to increase student numbers
- To find out whether a specific group(s) is being encouraged to participate
- To explore how the institutional policies and practices support access and equality of opportunity
- To discuss whether the Senior leaders consider the institution as successful in increasing student numbers through access and equality of opportunity policies and practices
- To explore any conflicts/ contradictions/ barriers to widening access and participation and if any exist, how they are managed
- To find out whether the Senior leaders of the institution perceive the institution in class /gendered/ ethnic terms
- To identify the character of the institutions as defined / described by the Senior leaders

#### Aims of interviews with students

- To define success in students' terms
- To identify the factors which have assisted student success
- To examine whether the institutional practices and support services are recognised and valued by students
- To identify 'informal' / indirect institutional factors which support student success
- To find common characteristics among successful A/access students
- To identify appropriate students for the follow-up phase of the study

### Aims of the interviews with staff

- To identify staff perceptions of institutional and teaching strategies which support student success
- To examine whether the institutional practices and support services are recognised and valued by staff
- To identify staff perceptions of ‘informal’ / indirect institutional factors which support student success
- To find common characteristics among staff who work successfully with A/access students
- To explore barriers and strategies used by staff to overcome them in their work with A/access students

### The Pilot Study

The pilot study was carried out in 2001-2002 prior to the main fieldwork, which began in 2002. An interview schedule combining closed and open questions was designed for students, managers and teachers. The interviews were carried out in a manner similar to the ‘focused interview’ described by Merton et al (in Yin 1994: 84) using a conversational style. Yin (1984) suggests that this approach enables the researcher to find out from respondents in case studies, ‘the facts of [the] matter as well as [their] ...opinions...[and]...insights’ (Yin: 84).

The schedule was piloted to ensure that it could be used consistently with the same meaning with all the respondents in the samples, yet at the same time allow for

individual differences in response styles. This entailed designing a set of core questions which all groups of interviewees were asked and including probing questions to explore reasons and account for individual differences in language, conceptualisation and readiness to respond. Piloting the interview schedule enabled the testing of the questions to ensure they meant the same to different respondents, to estimate the time it would take to conduct each interview and how best to introduce the topic to an interviewee. Keats (2000) highlighted these concerns as important considerations before beginning to collect data.

The pilot was conducted with five HE students, two of whom were PhD students and the other three were undergraduates. The two PhD students were used to pilot the staff interview schedule. The process was found to be time consuming and difficulties were encountered obtaining personal details of the 'staff'. Following the piloting of the interview schedule, one of the interviewees suggested the use of a questionnaire to collect personal data to reduce the length of the interview. This was adopted (see Appendix III) together with the use of a small tape recorder to collect the data.

### The Interviews

Interviews were carried out with 73 students from the 2 FE and 2 HE case study institutions, 52 were from the FE institutions and 21 from the HE institutions.

Students interviewed were in their first year of study and their courses represented a range of programmes including BTEC, NVQ, LOCN Access, BSc, BA, Certificates and Diplomas in HE. A total of 28 staff were interviewed: one Management

Information Manager, six Lecturers, five Principal lecturers/ programme Leaders, seven Heads of School and nine senior managers (two Directors, two Vice Principals, two Principals and three Professors).

All students interviewed were also asked to participate in interviews after progressing to their next year of study. All students agreed and provided their telephone and address details on a questionnaire. Due to the difficulties and delays encountered when interviewing first year HE students, it was not possible to conduct follow-up interviews with this sample. All FE students were contacted for follow up interviews in their next year of study and a further group of ex-students from NBC, who were in employment, were also interviewed. The purpose of the follow up interviews was to examine whether perceptions had changed with regards to factors which supported their success as they progressed. Though the names of students and their courses of study were meticulously recorded, on two occasions it was necessary to contact teachers to verify the students' group/ class as the records that were kept were not always clear about this detail. In both instances teachers were able to verify the group which the student belonged to at the time of the first interview. This enabled inferences to be drawn based on patterns of students' responses.

Interview schedules were designed using a combination of open-ended and closed questions and were piloted in February and March 2002. Interviews were arranged with institutional Heads, Senior and Middle managers for April and May 2002 and for students in May and June 2002. Due to competing institutional demands, only

two heads of institutions and ten managers were interviewed within these timescales. The remainder were completed in November 2003. Follow-up interviews were conducted with 10 students from September to December 2004. A further 10 former students from NBC were interviewed to provide a 'longitudinal' element to the research due to the lack of success conducting follow-up interviews with NBC students. See interview schedule in appendices.

Four HE teachers and one FE teacher interviewed commented on the questions asked during the interviews for this research. Three of the teachers said that they found the questions helpful in thinking about their practice with access students and one teacher expressed offence in response to questions which focused on how the HE institution supported 'non-traditional' students.

### **Preparing the interview schedule**

The lack of time and resources as a single researcher utilising qualitative methods suggested the selection of a semi-structured interview as the most efficient method. The problem of validity is one of the most reported problems with interviews, that is people telling the truth (Cohen and Manion 1989). The most practical way of minimising invalidity is to reduce the amount of bias as much as possible. Bias was countered through careful preparation of the interview questions to ensure they were clear, piloting and thorough planning of the interview process to ensure that interviewees selected the time and location of the interview. Interviewees were met or telephoned at the agreed time, treated in a friendly and polite manner, non-judgementally and with respect.

Kitwood (1977) suggests that the interview as a research tool generates conflict between the traditional notions of validity and reliability. Where greater control of its elements enables increased reliability, this is achieved, he argues, at the cost of reduced validity:

. . . . For the main purpose of using an interview in research is that it is believed that in an interpersonal encounter people are more likely to disclose aspects of themselves, their thoughts, their feelings and values, than they would in a less human situation. At least for some purposes, it is necessary to generate a kind of conversation in which the 'respondent' feels at ease. In other words, the distinctively human element in the interview is necessary to its 'validity'. The more the interviewer becomes rational, calculating, and detached, the less likely the interview is to be perceived as a friendly transaction, and the more calculated the response also is likely to be (Kitwood 1977 in Cohen and Manion 1989: 319).

Interview schedules were designed for students, teachers and managers. They were piloted as recommended by Keats (2000) and Derver (1995). The Interview schedules (see Appendix II and III) contained a combination of open-ended and closed questions. The focus was based on the theories of good practice in widening access to 'non-traditional' student groups which has been referred to earlier in this chapter. A schedule was devised for each category of interviewee. Whilst the questions were similar, different ones were included for students, managers and teachers. All schedules contained the same information on the purpose of the interview. The closed questions captured quantitative data to compare staff and students' perceptions of institutions' practices at the application stage and whilst on course as well as to compare the role of family and friends in the lives of non-traditional students.

As already indicated, senior managers were the first group interviewed within the case study institutions. In the FE colleges, this provided access to students, staff and

the quantitative data from the ISR data bases, policy documents on access and institutional practices. This was also the purpose of beginning the interviews with senior HE managers. However, access to their ISR data bases proved difficult and managers were not forthcoming with this information. HE senior managers were not as open in disclosing information about the statistical data held on students' performance as FE counterparts. It was possible that they did not hold this data or did not have access to it and their embarrassment may have appeared as reluctance to provide the data. The most senior HE managers interviewed were at departmental and professorial level compared to the 'top' level FE managers. The HE managers did not have 'control' of the data.

All the staff interviews in FHE were carried out individually as their availability was too varied to organise group interviews. For similar reasons only one group of HE students was interviewed as a group of four. It was found that the nature of HE students' attendance modes and modular programmes made group interviews difficult to arrange. The remaining HE students were interviewed separately. All the FE student and teacher interviews were conducted face to face. Four HE student interviews were conducted face to face (including the focus group interview); the remaining HE student interviews (mature/ part-time) and FE ex-students from NBC, were conducted by telephone based on students' choice or availability (details of the type of all interviews conducted are available in Tables 1, 3, 25 and 26 in the appendices). As already indicated all students and staff were met prior to interviews.

### International Context: Operationalising 'Access' and 'Success'

An international context to the research was developed. Successful practices in widening access to HE for underrepresented groups in the United States were explored during the London Metropolitan University's study tour to the US from 19<sup>th</sup> September 2003 – 1<sup>st</sup> October 2003. This assisted with definitions of 'Access' and 'success' and with the analysis of findings. In the US there is a single definition of 'underrepresented' in tertiary education, which is:

...first generation to go to higher education and low income and the concept of the 'American Dream' permeates education which enables underrepresented groups to aspire to HE, succeed in HE and to acknowledge their 'humble' origins after graduating successfully and as they progress within the society (Andrews 2003b: 3).

### Documentary Evidence

May (1993) argues that documents should be viewed as instruments through which social power is mediated. He suggests that the cultural contexts in which documents are written should be the starting point for their examination. May's argument is particularly relevant for the examination of PCET institutional documents in the present climate of competition between institutions of FHE, the need for them to comply with audit and quality assessment procedures and the financial efficiency expectations for public services which the government has placed on them.

Blaxter et al (1996) claim that strategies for analysing documentary evidence can be predominantly qualitative or quantitative. Either or both of the two techniques can be used to deal with qualitative or quantitative data. Documents enable researchers to develop ideas, issues and policies with which documents deal through a comparative analysis (ibid). The process of analysis of documents occurs by



‘abstracting’ from each document, elements considered to be substantial or pertinent, categorising these findings together, then placing them alongside those which are believed to be related (ibid). Blaxter et al (1996: 187) recommend the consideration of the following questions when analysing documents:

- Who is the author?
- What is their position?
- What are their biases?
- When and where was the document produced?
- In what context was the document produced?
- How was it produced and for whom?
- What are its underlying assumptions?
- What does the document say and not say?
- How is the argument presented?
- How well supported and convincing is its argument?
- How does this document relate to previous ones?
- How does this document relate to later ones?
- What do other sources have to say about it?

#### Documents Analysed from the Case Study Institutions

The prospectuses, widening access policies and strategies and strategic plans were collected from all the case study institutions. Documents were also collected from individual departments which described how students were supported and reported statistically on their recruitment, retention and achievement. Atkinson and Coffey (2004:73) argue that one cannot assume that documentary evidence is an ‘accurate’

portrayal of the social world and advise that documents should be treated as ‘texts’ and questions should be asked about their form and function. They recommend the examination of text for its ‘rhetorical’ features and cross-referencing of textual formats to discover a more ‘accurate’ version of social reality. The data collected from the FE and HE case study institutions for this research was examined for three purposes: to confirm the commitment of the institutions to widening access to underrepresented groups; to determine practice which was promoted to recruit, support and ensure the success of underrepresented groups; and to inform the design of interview questions

### **Triangulation of Data**

The methods used to collect data in this research were documents, interviews, quantitative data from the institutions’ databases, questionnaires to collect data on the social identity of interviewees and field notes from observations. The main method employed was interviews; the additional methods used were supplementary.

Denscombe (1998) describes triangulation as:

Seeing things from a different perspective and opportunity to corroborate findings can enhance the validity of the data. They do not prove that the researcher has ‘got it right’, but they do give some confidence that the meaning of the data has some consistency across methods and that the findings are not too closely tied up with a particular method used to collect the data (Denscombe 1998: 85).

Debates on the merits of one method above another have failed to establish one method of data collection as being the best for all possible situations. Denscombe (1998) suggests that for the small-scale researcher, none of the research methods can be considered to be excellent and none should be considered useless. Each

method should be considered to have its own uniqueness, its strengths and weaknesses in relation to the aims of the research and the constraints confronted by the researcher. Brannen (1992) claims that providing data through multiple methods (triangulation) confirms its validity by obtaining data from a second or third methodological source. Thus evidence gained from an interview, where researcher bias may be possible, can be backed up by data collected by observation in the field / from documentary evidence.

Triangulation may not be easily achievable for lone, small-scale researchers.

Blaxter et al (1996) recommend that researchers should seriously consider verifying the validity of research through triangulation; given the difficulties this may place on some researchers they advise that it should be done only when resources permit. Denscombe (1998) argues that triangulation creates different kinds of data on the same topic resulting in more data. This improves the quality of the research but at a cost. He states that the researcher, in using a multi-method approach, is forced to sacrifice some areas of the investigation which would have been included using one method, to make resources available to use multiple methods. The benefits to the researcher are the opportunity to examine different kinds of data on the same topic, to understand the topic from more than one perspective and in a more holistic way than if a single method was employed. The main benefit of triangulation is in checking the findings from one method against the findings from another. He concludes that providing different perspectives and corroborating data enhances the validity of data. Triangulation, he contends, does not mean that the researcher is exactly right but lends confidence that the meaning attributed to the data has

consistency across methods and prevents the findings being associated with a particular data collection method.

## **Data Analysis**

### Coding Responses

Full interview transcripts were used to analyse the data. This provided an opportunity to become familiar with the data. It was however time consuming. This helps to overcome some of the problems associated with focus group interviews. Blaxter et al (1996) advise that only comments which relate specifically to questions or their sequences should be included for analysis. This is due to the large amount of data emerging from focus groups due to their interactive content that may lead researchers to premature or misleading conclusions.

After transcribing all interviews in full, leaving margins on both sides of the typed A4 sheets, students' backgrounds, which were initially recorded on questionnaires, were typed onto the relevant transcripts. Each interview ran into several pages and was printed out. Each response to each question was analysed, which involved spreading the transcripts on the floor, making notes in the margin and highlighting similarities and differences using different coloured pens. Transcripts were read several times and where necessary, details were checked with respondents and further communications made. This was done systematically with transcripts from each case study institution. Common themes were explored through each script. Comparisons were then made between similar and dissimilar responses, in relation to the institution, e.g. whether between or within the same institution, or in relation

to the social identity/ contextual factors such as race, gender, parent/ childless etc.

There was no support or expertise available for use of IT packages such as Nvivo or NiDirt.

Data reduction is referred to by Denscombe (1998) as a process of modifying the data collected as field notes and transcriptions. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe data reduction as an activity which takes place even before data is collected: in the selection of methods, questions to ask, coding selection of cases etc. These data were 'reduced' by using numerical categories to convey patterns in the findings and selecting quotes to illustrate the majority as well as the minority perspective. Where there were no patterns to the data and numerical data were inappropriate to convey meaning, a selection of the disparate responses was included to provide examples of the disparateness.

Content analysis was used, adopting a model similar to that described by Wilkinson (2004). This involved scrutinising the data for recurring themes. As already indicated, the interview schedule was designed using some pre-coding categories based on good practice in widening access to FHE. Thus responses were recorded within 'pre entry', 'on course', teaching', 'family and friends', and 'support services'. The number of responses to closed questions made by interviewees was quantified and new categories were created where questions were open-ended and responses were not easily categorised. Respondents' words were used to provide a 'means of access to something which lies behind and beyond' the words (Wilkinson 2004:187). Therefore excerpts from the discussions and answers to questions are a

feature of the research. As mentioned earlier, coding was validated using a second or third verifier to examine coding by attempting to replicate it (Miles and Huberman 1994).

### **What was learnt from the Research Process?**

The time taken to collect data was underestimated. Gaining access to conduct research in the FE and HE institutions and obtaining consent to participate in the research did not imply willingness on the part of the subjects to participate or to be available. The amount of time wasted in making journeys to conduct interviews when the interviewee was off-sick, had forgotten that an appointment had been made or had forgotten to inform students that they were going to be interviewed was a constant feature of the research. The data being collected was sensitive, whether on student recruitment, retention and achievement or staff and students' perceptions about underrepresented groups' success. The multiple barriers that were placed in the way of collecting this data had not been fully anticipated. The funding councils for FE and HE are now collecting a great deal of this data and therefore future researchers may not need to utilise valuable time in overcoming the levels of institutional and individual difficulties to collect such data.

Multiple case study research for a lone, part-time researcher was very challenging. It involved making complex journeys on public transport to conduct interviews at the convenience of participants in the evenings or weekends and to maintain a family and work full time. Reducing the number of case studies or carrying out the four-institution case study research in stages, over a longer period of time may have been

less taxing. However, the experience and understanding gained from conducting the research was invaluable.

Early in the research, a mainly quantitative study was planned utilising the Individualised Student Record (ISR) performance data as the main source; analysis and interviews were planned as a minor part. However as the ISR data was being analysed in the autumn of 2003, it became apparent that the purpose for which it was collected was different to the purpose of this research: it was too 'blunt' to interrogate with questions related to underrepresented groups in HE or FE. Many of the categories of students being collected on the ISR could be wealthy, privileged individuals recorded with categories that were labelled as 'underrepresented' e.g. White male, Black British, Black Caribbean. All are meaningless labels on an ISR database. This also exposed the ignorance within which most FE and HE institutions with mature students operate regarding the students who attend (their parents' occupations are not collected). It suggested that support staff, who were not interviewed, came into contact with students regularly, and teachers were probably the people in institutions who had the best data on the students attending. The ISR data was not useless; it provided an overview of student numbers and the funding councils' categories of students attending the case study institutions. However, the confidence with which the ISR data had been used at the start of the research diminished as the research progressed.

Interviews were often difficult and contradictions emerged. As a researcher-practitioner and a Black woman, good rapport developed with students (Black and

White) who would sometimes raise negative experiences about how they were being treated by staff, usually teachers, which were in breach of institutions' policies and expected standards of professional practice. These could not be addressed during the interview without invalidating the process. The students' concerns are reported anonymously, in the hope that professionals in PCET, reading subsequent publications, will reflect on their practice and will choose to take action to change the negative student experiences reported into positive ones.

In the latter stages of the data collection, answers to the questions asked on the interview schedule became predictable and repetitive. This suggested that the research was coming to an end. Also towards the end of the research, journals and books that were being published on access became more concerned with success, less on why access students failed, and their contents became familiar. There was then a match between this study and contemporary research by others (e.g. Thomas et al 2003a, Yorke and Londgen 2004).

The interview as a process was also a valuable way to understand and 'feel' the research. It helped to understand the importance of devising a schedule and the need for piloting. Interviews were found to be invaluable in learning about staff and students' perceptions within FE and HE. However, some of the questions asked about the use of Student Support Services may have been better answered within a questionnaire; students may have felt exposed admitting to using Student Support Services. Observations of the students interviewed, for example by shadowing them, would also have been helpful in finding out about their behaviours with regards to



the range of services they used. Students may also have taken for granted some of the services they used such as the Learning Resources Services, yet very few mentioned it. Those who did placed a high value on it. As a reflexive tool, interviews were invaluable as a practitioner-researcher and as a senior manager within education, in examining and developing day-to-day practices such as interviewing staff, exploring and resolving problems between student and staff and staff and staff, to influence institutional policies. Although interviews were valuable to a lone, part time researcher, questionnaires would have made the task less onerous but would have limited the experience.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explained the process used to explore the research question and the methods employed. The theoretical basis for selecting the research approach has been examined and the procedures followed have been described. The difficulties, conflicts and contradictions have been highlighted and how they were reconciled.

## Chapter 4

### PRESENTING THE DATA

#### Higher Education Case Study Institutions: Staff and Students

As indicated in Chapter 1, the two HE case study institutions were selected for their reputation and commitment to widening access to HE for underrepresented groups. One of the two institutions became a university prior to 1992 and is referred to as an 'old' university, UO, and the other was awarded university status in 1992 and is named, new university, NU. This chapter presents the data collected from the interviews with staff and students from both HE institutions, compares and contrasts widening access within and between the two and highlights emerging issues from the interview data. UO is a distinct HE provider: in order to protect its anonymity, full descriptors will not be used for its character as an institution. In this chapter, staff and student perceptions in the HE case studies are presented. Key emergent themes are summarised on pages 159, 186 and 221. Chapter 5 deals with the FE institutions in the same order.

#### Staff

Ten (10) staff were interviewed one to one (see table 1 in the appendices) at the two case study higher education institutions, four from New University (NU) and six from Old University (UO). All but one of the interviews were carried out face to face, one telephone interview was undertaken with a teacher-coordinator at UO. Of the 10 staff, four were male and six were female. They all worked in the same departments (see table 2 in the appendices) as the students, who will be discussed later in this chapter. (Names of the subjects and departments within which students

attended and staff worked will only be used for this reporting stage of the research. To maintain confidentiality a different name will be used to describe the subjects and departments in the final printed thesis).

The profiles of staff interviewed are listed in Table 1 in the appendices. Only two staff, both from UO, provided information on their ethnicity, age and postcode. All staff interviewed were met in person at the initial meetings with senior managers and subsequently after interviews with students and staff. All the HE staff appeared visibly to be White and the two staff who provided personal information stated that they were Irish/ Welsh and White British. Three of the teachers (two from UO and one from NU) stated that they were the first generation in their families to go to university. All staff interviewed were generous in giving their time and facilitating access to students and other staff. All staff interviewed were also teachers within their institutions; two of the senior managers and a teacher co-ordinator at UO were responsible for widening access to underrepresented groups.

### **Managers**

The purpose of the interviews with HE managers was to explore how the institutions were led to widen access, to identify good practice and characteristics, values and barriers to the success and progression of 'non-traditional' students in higher education from managers' perspectives. The aim of the interviews with managers was also to gain access to staff and students for the main part of the research. The staff interviewed as managers were two pro vice chancellors and one professor at

UO and the head of school at NU. Details of the interview schedule used with managers are presented in Appendix III.

### **Managers' Perceptions of their Institutions: Aims, Values and Description of Students**

Both NU and UO have mission statements which emphasise widening access to meet the needs of the diverse populations of London and their local communities. The mission statements also include a commitment to conducting high quality research. Literature, such as the prospectus, strategic plans and website information, made claims to undertaking international research/ consultancy. Reference to the diversity of their student body, representing London's communities, was also made in the literature of both case study institutions.

The managers interviewed from UO provided very individual statements on widening access. They all mentioned the lack of formal policy within UO and the education background of students. In his comments on UO's values in widening access, the professor in continuing education was critical. He mentioned the temporary appointment of a disability officer, whom he commended for raising awareness of equal opportunities within UO. He described continuing education of students within UO as diverse and his personal wish that it should remain diverse.

On widening access to UO, he said that it was:

Not as yet institutional policy, under-represented groups are being targeted, with the exception of the widening participation initiative, which is a separate short-term project. ...are gearing ourselves to foundation degree programmes [to provide qualifications for in the local area]. We provide a certificate course which is the nearest we have to a conventional Access course and provide English for Academic purposes. We have a disability

officer who has generated great awareness of equal opportunities in the two years he has been in post, though it is not a permanent post and is managed by the registry. The nature of the [provision] is such that it caters for students (Professor in Continuing Education, UO)

The pro vice chancellor at UO was in agreement with her colleague regarding UO's tradition of access:

The students come from a diverse education background; they are confident and have IT skills. There is a draft widening access policy.

The pro vice chancellor & professor in OUG5 department at UO were both brief in describing UO's aims and values and both focused on their subject areas:

There is a university-wide, widening participation strategy, which is in draft only. A lot of people with work experience working without qualifications, this was high success and high retention. The supply of these students has been used up and the students we get are low retention and low passes. Many of them come with bad prior experience of maths therefore they [UO] have to teach the students maths. We work closely with employers so we know that there is a demand for good numerical skills. Most of the fails and distinctions are part-time students.

The manager interviewed at NU provided a description of students representing widening access at the university as a whole and then specifically of her school:

[NU] student is a wider spread, wider intake, class mix, and gender, ethnic and cultural diversity. A mix of non-traditional, mature, return to study without traditional A levels. 50% of the School of NUG1 are mature and have non-typical qualifications. (Head of School, NU)

### **Increasing Student Numbers**

The 2002-03 Corporate Plan for UO (up to 2004-05) included the draft widening participation policy, which set out the university's commitment to widening access to meet the needs of a wide range of students. The policy document was quite late in its production and its development was in response to external pressure, such as HEFCE's requirement for funding Widening Participation projects and payment of

the access premium to HE institutions that recruited non-traditional students. In addition, UO's corporate plan and marketing information which describe a widening participation policy, reported increases in student numbers since 1992 and planned increases for 2004-05 and the future. The strategic plan for NU contains similar information to UO's, noting increases in student numbers over the past decade and planned increases in 2004-05 and future years. This commitment to increasing participation is evidenced in marketing and publicity materials, which encourage applications from mature students and students with 'kitemarked' Access courses. In addition NU marketing information says that NU values the life skills and work experience of mature students as much as formal qualifications (NU Prospectus 2004-05).

The three managers interviewed at UO appeared to have different understandings of the institution's approach to increasing student numbers by targeting specific groups. The professor in the continuing education department said that student numbers were being increased for financial purposes. The pro vice chancellor in OUG5 department said:

There is a pressure to increase the number of full time and younger students. We don't keep data on students' ethnic background, roughly two-third male and one-third female, Black and White students. We are trying to expand OUG5 as it attracts large numbers...

However the response from the pro vice chancellor suggested a wide and varying but systematic approach to increase student numbers by targeting specific groups and described a project (below) funded by the HEFCE and UO to increase student numbers:

Using WP [widening participation] HEFCE funds we have been proactive in recruiting refugees and mental health service users. We have developed a programme with Unison and we are thinking about football clubs, Probation Service and the increasing Russian population. The Chair of our Outreach (business) is piloting research into a [multi-disciplinary] Foundation Degree.

The pro vice chancellor described her role in widening access and the success of UO in recruiting minority ethnic students. However, it is important to note that UO is in London and serves a London catchment area with the highest numbers of minority ethnic groups resident in the UK:

I am responsible for procedures to encourage the recruitment of underrepresented groups. The centre for learning and development are implementing the DDA [Disability Discrimination Act]. We provide advice and staff development for academic staff. This is key to WP. Registry provides advice regarding mental health service users and funding. Our HEFCE targets were 180 [WP] and we overreached our target. ...The majority of our students are aged 25-45, 14% have no formal qualifications and 25% are ethnic minority (13% nation-wide).

The head of School at NU described her school's work in increasing student numbers by widening access and why they were targeting Black and minority ethnic groups and mature students. She also noted that students from underrepresented groups, though they possessed standard entry qualifications, did not have expectations to go to HE, nor did they have any idea or indeed any expectation of what it would be like in HE:

In the School, we have a specific programme targeting Black and minority ethnic groups onto NUG1 profession. We have developed new degrees to attract non-traditional students, recruiting mature students who wouldn't usually go to university. These have been designed to appeal to non-traditional students. We have extremely able students with A levels from groups who aren't traditionally in higher education. We noticed that these students didn't have an expectation of university.

During the academic year 2001-2002, HESA returns showed that student numbers in the NUG1 school increased by 16% (to 553) and by 15% (to 625). This included an

increase in the recruitment of Black and Minority Ethnic students by 24% (to 135) and 27% (to 212) respectively. Extra study skills and an extra course were included in these programmes to prepare students for the environment and for undergraduate study.

### **Success and Widening Access**

The head of school at NU and the three managers from UO provided examples of good practice in supporting widening access within their institutions, focussing on student retention. This was one area where there was agreement among the three managers from UO with responsibility for widening access: the focus on retention was an institutional priority. The head of school at NU, though she did not use the word retention nor state that it was an institutional priority, when explaining practices to support success in widening access provided details of school retention strategies. The approaches given as supporting student success were regular contact between students and tutors, close supervision and tutorials. The personal contact made at the interview stage was suggested as a contributor to students' success on the programme as well as:

...timetabling the students in their first year of study heavily means people don't drift away, so that they have access to staff and student colleagues on a regular basis. Students are 'held' better... the regularity with which students are required to come in and meet with staff and student colleagues means they are less likely to drop out...in my experience students who come in [only] once or twice a week are likely to drop out.

The structured induction was highlighted as a useful practice to access non-traditional learners into university life. The induction is a combination of tasters and information about the academic and non-academic offer within the university. The head of school at NU stressed the importance of the tutorial:



...increasingly universities are losing that... you may not like your tutor...but it's important that there is someone who knows about you and sees you regularly. This is particularly important to the non-traditional student ...that they have someone that knows the university system.

The head of school at NU highlighted contradictions in recruiting underrepresented groups, suggesting that the access premium from HEFCE, for recruiting underrepresented groups, was probably not being used inside NU:

...it exposes staff and strands students – how do you take students who have been used to a hierarchical, didactic model of being respectful [who] want to learn at the feet of Socrates...to a liberal, interactive model of learning? Being a student is a deeply emotional experience and ...deliberately recruiting underrepresented groups (older male learners, students from Nigeria and Eastern Europe) exposes staff to accusations of racism, sexism, disableism etc. The middle aged women who never thought they'd get to university feel desperately insecure...unsure of themselves and lack confidence. They are often over dependent on their tutors; we must not strand these students. There is no funding which recognises that staff need time to prepare for working with under-represented students.

Success for underrepresented groups varies, according to the head of school at NU.

For some students within the NU, admission into the university was success itself.

She added that students who are underrepresented in HE, have said when recruited that being at the university is 'a dream come true'. The head of school revealed that one of the tutors within the school was told by a student admitted onto the course,

'you've given me a chance; I couldn't get in without you'. The personal experience of NU's head of school suggests that success for underrepresented groups is receipt of a good grade, graduating with a high pass rate, getting a degree and getting a job.

The manager said: '...if we can keep them through to the end and help them learn to learn [that is success]'

By contrast, the professor in the continuing education at UO emphasised UO's tradition of working with non traditional students and providing courses using various attendance modes to facilitate access to university certificate and diploma level qualifications as well as undergraduate degrees. He also highlighted the commitment of UO to research, a priority that did not emerge from NU's head of school. He described the tensions and contradictions of the UO as a traditional university widening access:

...money, being a research-based institution and an access institution, there is a real tension as it requires resources, equally so does the research effort and the commitment required...What counts as success if we're funded for 'completion' and not 'passing', we have a real dilemma!

The two pro vice chancellors at UO gave examples of retention strategies which support learners but had not measured the effectiveness of these strategies:

We know we need to have student induction programmes. We start off with faculty level rather than cross-university. Very varied [induction programmes] cross-university. There is an induction week; all schools are separate [in how they organise it]. We have courses such as Writing for Academic Purposes, [which] takes place in the continuing education department, and Student Union. The Student Union also provides Student Support Services and they sit on university committees to ensure that students' needs are met. Recruitment and retention is an agenda item at senior management meetings. I co-ordinate provision to ensure that all students can succeed. (pro vice chancellor in department, UO).

The pro vice chancellor at UO outlined institutional strategies to develop teaching and learning and teachers' abilities to support learners:

All academics have had CPD [continuing professional development] in producing power point using large print for students with disabilities. We have standardised the honours degree. Student support and learning development is central to our staff development. Our Corporate Plan proposes the use of a wide variety of teaching methods. We had 90% retention and achievement when we used teaching labs. We have been very poor at data collection; we have not been collecting data until recently. (pro vice chancellor UO).

The pro vice chancellor in OUG5 at UO explained the changes made to the design of a very traditional programme (with 80% examination and 20% coursework) to improve retention in the OUG5 department and to make entry to the programme more accessible:

We put more effort into supporting the students, being clearer with the information we give them, giving them early tests. There is no way of telling if the motivation is there [to keep going] so we have streamlined the course, putting the general aspects of the course in terms 1 and 2 and [placing the difficult] option in the third term. We have also revamped the programme so that many people can qualify in a year. If they get a pass, we award them a certificate and if they gain a [higher grade they can progress to the next level]. We carried out research into the contents and outcomes of interviews as a predictor of student success and we found that there was no match between performance at interview and successful student outcome. We don't have interviews anymore; our selection for mature students is a written essay. Our student induction is straightforward induction type things such as library etc. Most of it is subject specific and the Programme Director is responsible for induction. It is a less formal induction.

He described pedagogical changes to student centred teaching and learning implemented to improve retention, which were not always received positively by students or staff:

Students learn a lot from each other. Using Enterprise in Higher Education, we tried different ways of teaching e.g. group work etc. Students hated it, some teachers did like it. We used interactive approaches when teaching students [at a government department and a well known public institution].

He explained how assessment has changed to support retention in the OUG5 department, the difficulties this caused when the feedback was negative and the strategies used to counter this:

We don't measure all that we teach e.g. students do independent projects. The most important thing is to give them lots of formative assessment early on so that they get lots of practice and feedback. The difficulty with that is that some get very depressed.

The pro vice chancellor in the OUG5 department suggested that entry criteria were unidentifiable and immeasurable for recruitment purposes and provided examples of successfully widening access to non-traditional students:

You can't predict how well students do based on their previous learning experience; it's a very poor predictor. It's whether they can deal with the [most difficult aspect of the course]. A lot of it is just straight motivation. Over half of our students are from non-UK backgrounds, very professional and well paid. I have lots of anecdotal examples of students who did very poorly at school being very successful in the OUG5 department; it's their determination, their motivation and that is unpredictable!

In the OUG5 department student drop out was monitored. The pro vice chancellor in OUG5 department, in describing their approach, highlighted the lack of teaching and learning benchmark data to measure their performance:

When students drop out, we see it as a learning exercise. At particular times we write but not always to find out why they are not coming. Nobody monitors us closely [so] we haven't any natural comparators. We are a research institution. We began the year with 70 students, 21 dropped out, usually after tests, 3 transferred to another subject, five re-sits and 49 progressed to the second year.

He defined success as being different things for different students:

...transforms students' lives, six months after graduation we conduct a questionnaire survey and students always say they have gained in confidence, for other it's qualifying to work for the military. Students are given awards for their units [success for these students] is to take [the units] to enrol elsewhere.

She perceived students' lack of success as due to personal or other contextual reasons and expressed the need for the university to assist learners in managing these personal difficulties. She went on to define success and retention and achievement, stating that there were increases in the number of students and the retention and achievement rate, year on year of about 10%. However the pro vice chancellor gave

examples of strategies to develop staff, evaluate programmes to ensure success  
(improve retention and achievement) for students.

## **Emerging Themes: Managers**

Emerging issues are summarised here and will be the subject of in-depth discussion in Chapter 6. From the interviews with managers it appears that institutional policies and mission statements are not part of the everyday vocabulary of the four senior managers in the two case study HE institutions. Only one senior manager, pro vice chancellor at UO provided an institutional, strategic view of widening access. However, in the examples they provided, all four senior managers showed an understanding of the outcomes of changes to institutional policies e.g. in diversity of the institutions' student population. The three senior managers at UO had their own departmental understandings of how the institution was increasing numbers of students from underrepresented groups. Each had a different, departmental approach to supporting non-traditional students. The one senior manager from NU also provided departmental, that is a 'local', school view of approaches to widening access at the university. Managers from both institutions, as well as having a focus on increasing student numbers and recruiting students from a wider range of backgrounds, also emphasised the importance of student retention to their institutions.

There were indications from the four senior managers that the two universities differed in the type of students they were aiming to recruit. In increasing student numbers, the UO was concentrating on younger students whereas the NU was targeting mature students and Black and minority ethnic students. This was due to their different historical student profiles which they sought to change.

Developing Induction was a common theme expressed by senior managers from both institutions. Tutorial support and the personal/ human touch were emphasised by the NU senior manager and the development of pedagogy was the emerging teaching and learning priority at UO.

The collection and use of robust data did not emerge as a priority for the monitoring of success nor in informing decision making. It was unclear whether the resources obtained from HEFCE for widening participation were used to support underrepresented groups once they had been recruited. The implementation of student centred approaches to teaching and learning, such as group work and independent learning, created tension with students and staff.

There appeared to be tension at UO between increasing student numbers, teaching and research, whereas the senior manager at NU did not mention research. Two senior managers, one from UO (pro vice chancellor in OUG5 department) and the other from NU (head of school) highlighted the emotional aspects of students' lives, implying particular difficulties faced by students from diverse backgrounds which universities were not equipped to manage. One of the senior managers at UO claimed that lack of mature student success was due to students' personal circumstances. These issues will be discussed in depth in Chapter 6.

## **Interviews with Teachers**

### **Selecting the Institution**

Though all seemed pleased to be working at the universities, none of the teachers interviewed (see table 3 in the appendices) appeared to have deliberately chosen to work at the universities. The reasons given by teachers for selecting to work at UO and NU varied from one teacher to another. A combination of convenience and chance seemed to characterise the teachers' reasons for working at NU and UO.

Kelly, a principal lecturer in the NUG3 department, had previously worked in further education and applied for a job at NU when changes in FE in 1992 affected teaching hours and resources. Kelly said that she enjoyed working with the student diversity at NU. Her observations of discriminatory practice as a pupil in secondary school influenced her perceptions of education as having the capacity to help many people with potential by giving them a 'bit of a hand up'. Like Kelly, Gerald, Head of NUG1 department at NU, moved from a different phase of education (school) into HE. NU was not his first choice, his application to another new university was unsuccessful but he now felt that NU was the better of the two.

Erica, recently appointed as Course Director for the Certificate in Higher Education programme at UO, was seeking to work in London and appeared surprised by the lack of student diversity at UO. Her perceptions on diversity at UO contradicted the professor in her department, who had reported diversity within the continuing education department. However, she acknowledged 'cultural' diversity at UO and may have observed a lack of 'racial' diversity, as later in this chapter she comments



on the significant number of EU students in her department. Fay, Course Director for OUG5, was not sure whether UO was her first choice as she completed her PhD part time and continued teaching on part-time courses at UO. Sandra, a full time lecturer at UO, teaching on the vocational diploma in higher education, came to UO from another HE institution as a senior lecturer without prior experience of working with students who lacked standard entrance qualifications. Her first appointment had been part-time and fitted with her family responsibilities.

### **Descriptions of the Institutions**

The teachers used the students' backgrounds and the nature of the university buildings as descriptors of the institutions. Two NU teachers, Terrence and Kelly, described the students who attend the university, using the US definition, of first generation to go to university and the other teacher, Gerald, used its Georgian and Victorian buildings to describe NU and the changing student population as younger, racially and ethnically diverse and including more women students. Kelly characterised NU in terms of its tradition of working with students who are from underrepresented groups in HE.

Erica stated that UO was culturally very diverse and used 'culture' in a broad sense. The data collected by UO to send to HESA for the academic year 2001 – 2002 indicates that 56% of the undergraduate population defined themselves as 'White' but only 7% defined themselves as 'White British' (see appendices). Among this group of 'White' students, may be the 'European' students which she refers to below: Erica also referred to African and Asian students who represented 11% and 6% of the undergraduate population respectively. It was not possible to obtain the

data to explore Erica's perception of the EU population at UO. Fay did not provide a description of UO as she called this making 'generalisations'. Sandra, from UO, said that she was initially surprised that it catered for students without standard university entrance qualifications and found at interview that she was expected to implement equality of opportunity in the teaching and learning process.

### **Perceptions of the Institutions**

All teachers interviewed at NU and UO said their perceptions of their universities had changed since working at their respective institutions. Of the three teachers interviewed at NU, Kelly and Gerald expressed dissatisfaction with the manner in which changes were being managed and only Terrence had positive perceptions of NU. The three teachers interviewed at UO expressed different perceptions of how UO had changed. One of these three teachers expressed surprise that the student body was not as culturally diverse as anticipated, another teacher expressed dissatisfaction with new administrative regimes which required greater accountability and a third teacher did not expect the improvement in management support as she moved from being a part-time teacher to working full time.

As he indicated at the beginning of this section, Terrence was pleased to be working at NU in comparison to another new university. Kelly, who came to NU from an FE college, did not perceive changes between the staff from the two institutions when she moved to NU. She reported recent changes within the School: the details will be discussed later in the chapter. She said:

Just because I really liked where I was, it was a very friendly place where I worked. And it was a very close bunch of staff so I moved from one nice place

to another the [NUG3] School up until recently. There's a lot of politics going on which means we're not offering the service we were offering.

Gerald from NU, like the three UO teachers (below), perceived tensions and unwelcomed changes as a result of widening access. In his earlier description of NU Gerald expressed his disappointment with some of the changes that had occurred at NU. He supported the curriculum change which emerged as the institution increased participation but questioned the management of it:

I think resources are much more limited now. I think the curriculum is much, much better and I think that's a very good thing... But if you don't have the support that goes with it, the infrastructure that goes with it, the university doesn't in my view, and I'm sure goes for a lot of people, doesn't have a strategic direction to its policies.

Erica expressed disappointment that her expectations of working with a diverse student group at UO were not realised. Fay, course director on the OUG5 at UO described the increased accountability and administrative requirements that have been introduced to the HE sector. She was critical of the benefits of such change:

It's changed over time obviously, all universities have, I don't think it's a favourable change. It is more bureaucratic very administered. One can't be trusted to look after your students, then I don't think however much time one spends filling in forms isn't going to make you any better.

Sandra, (UO), commented on the tension which existed between different departments and the difficulties that are being overcome to enable the progression of students from the continuing education department into undergraduate programmes. She was positive about the future of these developments but suggested that moving from being part time to full time may have biased her perceptions.

## **The institutions' Missions and Widening Access**

There was a mixed response from the six teachers at NU and UO regarding their understanding of their institutions' missions. Although none of the teachers knew their respective missions, they all articulated elements within their mission statements. However, widening participation and increasing student numbers were used interchangeably. Terrence was the only teacher who spoke positively about the institution's mission. Terrence illustrated his understanding of NU's mission suggesting that increasing student numbers was obligatory:

I think so, in the mission statement, I'd probably get it wrong, but our mission statement has always been about 'serving our local community, London'...very much what we do. I don't know if that's in the mission statement itself but it's certainly part of the university's plan and, um, in that, I mean whether we want to do that or not [to increase student numbers], we have to do that. That's an important part of the university's intention.

Terrence provided an example of how, within his school, student numbers had increased through targeting specific non- traditional students:

... in a sense we place adverts for e.g. to target different groups, we advertised in a local newspaper in [a local suburb] because we wanted to attract mums to our [programme] because we think there's a market for married women who have dropped education... and having got their children off their hands want to find a job and perhaps get some new skills so that's what we did. We go with the university to target school leavers.. Retention is very important...we certainly target local partner colleges ...and so on.... I think that's probably the only explicit targeting ...

Kelly, principal lecturer at NU, expressed a negative attitude or a lack of commitment to the institution's mission. She disagreed strongly with NU's drive to increase student numbers without increasing resources within her department, which traditionally attracted a large number of applicants. She explains how on principle she resigned from her course director post:

Mission statements annoy me, they're a lot of words put about and they do nothing about them. I feel that quite strongly. They throw up equal opps all the time and when it actually comes down to it, when you're teaching these kinds of students, you need resources. And we are getting bigger and bigger numbers and we're getting less help with it. Of course, they say that they would [increase resources] as they're the kind of students they're trying to attract but I'm not sure. It's just rhetoric they're coming out with. What happened is, we used to have 70 students, then ...we went up to 150 and the thing is NUG3 can recruit; students always want to do NUG3. So if they can't recruit in the rest of the university, they say the NUG3 School can recruit. We've got about 260-280 students with roughly the same staff as we did when we had 70 students. We have staff: student ratio of 40:1 with the service teaching that we do as well. I used to be the [course director] for various reasons I gave that up, I didn't like the way they were cramming the amount of students in, I didn't feel the head was working with the staff. I was teaching anyway. You didn't get a reduction in teaching.

Gerald from NU, like Kelly, raised concerns about increasing student numbers without correspondingly increasing resources. He also highlighted the tension raised by the UO continuing education professor(above), between teaching and the research effort. Again, Gerald, like Kelly, argued that his department's success in attracting students to the NUG1 programme had resulted in greater demands from NU's managers to recruit even larger numbers. Gerald raised concerns about this and explained that the success of NUG1 was not due to targeting specific groups:

The question about are we being encouraged [to widen participation], all the time the university are saying take as many students as you can so that we can meet HEFCE targets, we've gone over HEFCE targets for the university as a whole. If you asked me what my targets were for my courses in the department, I couldn't tell you because although notionally there is a target, ...the university wants us to take more people in to meet targets, things like are going to be 'encouraged' to take as many students as they can. It may not be the right thing in the long term, it certainly has implications for quality. When we started out I had no idea, I had some idea that there would be a market for mature students but moved a little bit to encourage younger students to come as well. We have a bit of a better balance but we do get students coming straight from A Level. We don't target specific groups. We try to encourage anybody that feels what we have on offer might be suitable for them. We do use a lot of APL/ APEL strategies and give people credit for things they've already done. It brings in people with some existing academic experience.

Erica, with a background of working in further education, had a different understanding of an institution's mission to what she said she found at UO. She also implied that UO's interest in widening participation had waned after the widening participation project funding it received came to an end. She identified a senior manager (pro vice chancellor) who she believes has an interest in widening participation who she plans to work with and has expectations that the newly appointed professor in her department will revive widening participation:

When you say mission I would have to say no...having come from FE I think of mission statements in that sense. In the UO context though it's not a specific mission, I have come into a course alongside several other projects my predecessor had developed as part of WP [widening participation] and my understanding is that was a much larger scale project which attracted funding for a number of years and that that funding has reached an end. And some of the project work which had been undertaken fell to one side and the [university certificate programme] was preserved. I do have a sense within [continuing education] that there is some concern about the demise of an overt WP, mission or project or...

Providing education for a diverse student group is part of UO's mission but Fay did not appear to see a relationship between student diversity and the mission. She also perceived targeting new student groups, i.e. increasing the number of younger students to UO, as creating difficulties for the majority of students that were usually recruited to UO:

Yes I think they do, I don't see what the question had to do with what our mission is? ...it is about teaching [non-traditional] students, it's access and giving a second chance. It is what we do. We are positively being encouraged to go in the other direction. It's all financially driven. I don't think it should be encouraged if we are doing it successfully and taking in full-time students. If we start taking [younger students], I think it will change the nature of the student body, it will increase the feeling of self doubt about the subject for people who are returning and haven't had an immediate experience of it [the subject], the good thing about [UO] is that it's dedicated to [specific types of students] and they don't feel slightly unusual.

Sandra, from the continuing education department, also raised concern about the proposed changes to UO's mission to address a more diverse student group. Sandra, like Kelly and Gerald from NU, argued for additional resources to support widening participation students. Sandra also suggests a different approach to teaching and learning to support the success of non-traditional students:

Statements can always appear at face value to support the University certificate programme. I think where university certificate is not fully supported at [corporate and local], it's to do with the type of resources person to person, one-to-one resources, that a good university certificate needs to succeed because it's not. I think success is achieved outside the classroom with university certificate courses, in liaison with staff, pastoral care, student motivation, study skills, everything that is done outside to support what happens inside. And the university is used to the other way round, the level of teaching in the classroom has to be excellent and hope ours on the University certificate progress is. And then there's a reasonable amount of arm's length pastoral care for students who are highly competent socially and intellectually and that. Whereas the University certificate course reverses that because our students are re-entering study and many areas of their lives are in full swing and it is quite difficult making arrangements and organisations and there's a tendency to say I can't do this. Quite a lot of pastoral care time is needed and [managers] are slow to see that need.

Sandra was aware that new groups were being targeted and did not believe that UO could support their needs and advised them accordingly:

So across the board there's a push to increase numbers. I know there's a signal to increase younger students. That creates particular problems for university certificate courses and I don't think that's fully appreciated. The [department] rules that these courses are mostly access but I have instituted an application form, as I don't have the resources to interview. We are not necessarily allowed to turn away someone [who is very young] so I ring everyone personally who could be accepted in that age group and say to them universities may not accept you and you need to do your marketing now, this is usually in the Summer. And I say ring every university's admissions tutor and see who would accept you because otherwise you are going to waste your year here. Again it is just another level of resourcing that's needed.

## **Encouraging the Recruitment of Underrepresented Groups: Information, Advice, Guidance and Selection**

With the exception of the two teachers in the continuing education department at UO, none of the HE teachers interviewed selected students onto their courses and only one teacher prepared course information for publicity materials or for potential students making enquiries. Recruiting students from underrepresented groups was raised by teachers from both UO and NU as a problematic issue. There appeared to be tensions between managers and teachers in both institutions. The power to select students was a centralised process at UO and NU; though it resulted in widened access for underrepresented groups, it was criticised by the teachers. There was a tension between growth and 'access' given the greater resources needed for the latter. There were differences between and within UO and NU teachers in how they perceived their institutions' approach to recruiting underrepresented groups.

Terrence was the only teacher at NU who, as part of his duties, produced information about courses to the public. He was a member of a University committee which coordinated information produced about his department. He was critical of the information produced and suggested that more subject specialists should write the publicity about courses (this was also found in the FE case studies). However, Terrence said that it was difficult to get teachers involved in producing information for course publicity. Two of the three teachers interviewed at UO, Erica and Fay, produced information for the public about courses. It would appear from their accounts of how course information was produced that it was not a high priority at UO. Erica described her involvement and was concerned that information



on support that is offered to non-traditional students within UO was not presented in the prospectus in a way that was easy to find:

The publicity side – yes I am involved in that. When I started...Coming from FE I just got on with what had to be done. I basically got on with it ...which included publicity for the courses coming up in September. At that stage...I was very much in the position of where is the marketing dept.? We weren't recruiting too well, they must know about...publications in London that would appeal to particular communities perhaps minority communities we could advertise to. I have to tell you...in reality ...nobody did have that information. I'm not aware that we've thought through targeting marketing... Yes. I think it's [certificate in higher education] quite hard to find, it's lost in the prospectus...I discovered English for Academic purposes were over subscribed and people weren't been directed to English language Support. UO has now employed someone to coordinate this area of work, which is really a positive move...

Fay implied that students who did not understand the content of the OUG5 programme on the basis of what she had written in the prospectus would be unsuitable for undergraduate level study. She stated that she did not set out to persuade students to join the OUG5 programme:

... I tell them what's there. I am offering an educational facility. I am not particularly trying to woo any group. If people are interested they want to know what the content is and that's my job. If they can't understand the content then...they are what I would call an access student. I would send them to [continuing education] to further education.

The admissions process at NU was devised centrally and recruitment targets were also set centrally for each department. All three teachers at NU suggested that they were recruiting non-traditional students. Terrence not only confirmed this but commented that the admissions tutor was inflexible in her approach to recruiting non-traditional students. Kelly expressed her dissatisfaction with the lack of departmental autonomy in NU's central admissions process:

... In reality we don't really have much choice in admissions, we make offers during the year on the basis of A Level points or Access qualifications and in clearing the university tells us who to take... we used to interview, we

used to have a little test, a précis which used to be quite useful but to a large extent it's out of our control.

Although Gerald raised his dissatisfaction with the pressures from NU's

management to increase student recruitment, he described flexible, accessible

approaches to admissions devised by his department:

We try to encourage anybody that feels what we have on offer might be suitable for them. We do use a lot of APL/ APEL strategies and give people credit for things they've already done. It brings in people with some existing academic experience e.g. we will take students with HNDs, [professional qualifications] we do actively encourage students from [non-traditional] groups.

Fay (UO), stated that she did not select students for the OUG5 programme there.

The other two teachers at UO, Erica and Sandra, both worked in the continuing education department and, though responsible for different subjects, appeared to use very similar, open selection methods to widen access to non-traditional students.

Sandra explained the selection method:

We have an application form and it goes out with a very friendly letter which says, don't be frightened of the application form, we're just looking for [a] basic level of English and primarily because on a three hour a week access course if there isn't a basic level of English there is no way your students can succeed. They cannot do it. If it was a full time course, we wouldn't ask for that. I also talk about that it's not too late to start again and nobody is in competition with anyone else, trying to set the seeds to say, you can do it. ...I think I might have got it half right because students have come up to me and said, your letter made me think I could do this and that was through the application form and they get into the programme. The application form is designed to check out English so that students are asked why do you want to do [OVoc Dip HE]? Where do you see yourself in ten years' time? And to write an essay. But it says things like, we're just looking to see if you can handle beginning middle and end. The essay is supposed to be 300 words but frankly if it's ten lines and the grammar and English is fine then I'd take it. But if it looks a bit shaky then I'll ring the applicant and speak to them...my criteria is, were all the questions answered, what is the nature of any spellings and grammar, is the grammatical problem so severe that I cannot understand what the student is trying to say. And that really would indicate the student who will not be able to arrive 'running' at the level of English.

Sandra stated that the English department within continuing education had introduced English for [OVoc Dip HE] which enabled students to receive support who would not normally be recruited to the OVoc Dip HE. She suggested that interviews would be preferable for recruiting non-traditional students.

### **The Course: Description of Students on the Programme**

All six teachers from the two HE institutions agreed that the students that they were recruiting to their programmes were younger than in previous years, possibly a direct response to the government's HE White Paper (DfES 2003b) as mentioned in chapter 2, which set a target of fifty percent of those aged 19-30 to be participating in HE by 2010. All the NU teachers described the age profiles of the student groups on their programmes. Gerald, from NU, said that there were more female than male students on his programme (57% of HE population overall are women) and another of the NU teachers, Kelly, also mentioned ethnicity in describing students on programmes. Terrence said that students who chose the single honours subject in his department, were usually younger ones who came from school but were likely to take a 'gap' year. However, on the modular programme there were 50% - 60% mature students. Kelly described the ethnicity of the NUG3 students, suggesting that Black and Minority Ethnic students were unlikely to choose NU as their first choice and were therefore more likely to be recruited through 'Clearing' than White students who chose NU as their first choice:

My impression on ethnicity – I would say 50:50, [42% of NU students as a whole are from BME groups and 18% are 'international'] maybe a higher proportion of Black and ethnic minority than White students, quite a few African students but a lot of African Caribbean British students. The African students – we have a lot of African students who have only been here a few years. The African Caribbean students obviously are second, third generation

at least. A lot of Asian students. [Interviewer: What about the White students?] Quite a few of them are local and quite a few actually choose to come here. We don't have as many mature students as we used to – probably about 20% are mature. My own group, probably about 8%. (Kelly, Senior Lecturer, NUG3)

Erica from UO also expressed the changes in the ethnicity and age of students. She stated that her department was recruiting more Continental European students and some people of Black African and Asian origin. Fay highlighted ethnic diversity, equal proportions of male and female students and a mixed age group. Sandra also stated that there used to be older African Caribbean and Asian males enrolled on the OVoc Dip HE. However, recently more young white males were attending the course. This had presented particular challenges for the teachers on this programme

...we're getting more white males in the 20–30 age cohort. That changes the dynamic because young white men have a particular way of behaving that is not the same as women full stop generally. And certainly not the same as the white male cohort that we're used to dealing with. A lot more demand in the classroom, to change attitude and style of behaviour. [Interviewer: what are you having to do to deal with these changes?] Crowd control and that's just a knee jerk reaction, teaching students how to behave in the classroom and having to restate that every week at least that's in a couple of the classrooms and we're not used to that (Sandra, UO).

### **Teaching to Support Non-traditional Students**

To explore successful teaching and learning practice at NU and UO, teachers from the case study HE institutions were asked whether they assisted non-traditional students to succeed on their programmes and the approaches they used which supported success. There was agreement among the six teachers from UO and NU that they assisted learners to succeed. Five of the teachers provided examples of strategies that they used. The examples consisted of developing appropriate course content, utilising varying teaching and learning styles, providing additional language

support and tutorials. Gerald from NU described the tutorial system, which all students were entitled to, confirming the statement made by his head of school (above). This particular system, introduced by the then Vice Chancellor, was confirmed by students in Gerald's department who were interviewed. However, this was not mentioned by any of the other NU teachers or students interviewed:

We have personal tutors who talk to them about study skills. We refer them to workshops. Have you heard of our [Student Support System]? Each first year student sees their personal tutor twelve times during the first year, in which eight or nine hours [are] group meetings, three are individual. So we timetable them so that they see their personal tutor six times in the first term and three times in the second term. But the idea is to build some kind of support and cohesion through that. (Gerald, Head of NUG4 department)

Kelly explained that NUG3 students have lower academic skills than previous cohorts to the programme. She described the skills needed to succeed on the NUG3 programme and how they supported students to succeed:

We've all adapted over the years. I came here ten years ago and the students were all non-traditional in the sense that you're talking about, in the sense that their parents hadn't gone to university or they were mature students. I would say they came with better skills. The really big problem we have now is that a lot of our students can't write very well and gradually you break down your teaching more and more and you spend more time on those issues... we introduced a course where you built up those skills – how to read...we give them short exercises to do. We actually paid for someone to come in and give them support and guidance. And I'm not talking about students for whom English is not their first language. I'm talking about students whose standard of English. She would do things like sentence structure, writing essays things like that. I think gradually you do more and more like that, more reading articles, more looking at the way articles are structured, looking at...but it is quite difficult with NUG3 because you have to learn how to... I think that NUG3 is about rote learning. (Kelly, NU)

Kelly explained the difficulties she perceived in teaching non-traditional student groups, the need to find different approaches and the strategies, which have worked:

For example in my tutor group this year, I've got about five who are just bone idle, my approach is to give them a kick up the behind but it hasn't worked and they're still not working. There are other students, it's not that they're not working at all; it's about under-confidence, that sort of thing, trying to use a

different technique with them. They really need an intensive foundation year, back to basics, back to how to write an essay, how to... I don't know, they've missed out on quite a lot of school. Somehow or other they've got through the schooling and ...the reality of it is that they weren't expecting that much of them. And this is a difficulty because people get through, they'll get a D or an E at A Level, which isn't now that difficult to get and when you talk to them, their perception is that they've done well. And they hit this course and they have problems and they react in different ways. Some of them it undermines their confidence and you can then work with that. Some of them will say it's your fault you're picking on me for whatever reason. Some just buckle down, get as much as they can and they progress. What would we tend to do? We have the tutorials... (Kelly, NU)

Gerald suggested that teachers in the NUG1 team have a similar approach to supporting students to succeed and emphasised the one-to-one support provided to students within and outside the classroom as being important to their success:

We try to give a heavily based tutorial approach. Obviously we have lectures. We run seminars in the traditional way but we have tutorial on a 1:1 basis even though it may not necessarily be on the timetable. But I believe because we're opening up to such a wide community of students they...are not used to stand up lecturing...I would say to students bring along drafts of your assignment/ email them, I would look at them on screen and send them back. When I'm not teaching my door is always open... (Gerald, Head of NUGI department)

Having high expectations of non-traditional students also underpinned the strategies used by Gerald to ensure student success as well as his previous background of working with Open University students:

Because we're taking mature students, to be honest I think I was heavily influenced in my thinking because I worked at the OU [Open University] for twenty-two years. I saw people coming in with nothing and leaving with first class honours degrees. I worked as a part-time tutor for the OU I had people in my group, if you approached it in the right way and you encouraged people. Not to think they're going to fail or they can't choose. There's some very bright people out there who've always been capable. If I've got a mission that's what my mission is and I like to think we're doing a good job. (Gerald, NU)

All three teachers at UO said that they assisted students to succeed. However, Fay, said that she did not use a particular teaching or learning strategy to support student

success. Erica described how she supports and works with part time teachers to develop pedagogy:

...one of the key aspects of my role is to work with the tutors in the development of course outlines. We have two or three new tutors this year. It's very much working with the tutors on the course content and finding connections around the content. But in terms of the teaching method very much so. If I'm looking for a new tutor, I'm looking for someone who uses interactive teaching styles, not someone who stands up to deliver three hour lectures, well one hour in the traditional UO classroom....It might be appropriate to prepare students for that experience as they go off to HE...but certainly group work, student involvement, all things which are within part of the access tradition...

Sandra showed how her class is structured to support student success in light of her earlier comment regarding the recruitment of new student groups i.e. young White males that they were not used to working with. She also described an interactive and flexible approach to teaching and learning to take into account individual student needs:

We don't do lectures, so the whole class debates. There really isn't a lecture slot and we've always had a negotiated learning plan which everyone signs up to. For example body language, actual words, arriving on time, apologies if late, which the tutor and the student signs and we discuss it in class so the ground rules are there.

Sandra discussed how challenging discrimination was integrated into the programme and the difficulties of using this approach to challenge students' discriminatory behaviour in the classroom:

...we're usually trying to encourage our students to speak and of course it's more difficult to encourage our standard cohort to respond in the face of an onslaught that really replicates discrimination they're used to in the world. It's a good opportunity for students to learn about the others in the class as it's such a naked selfishness that they want to be dealt with. I'd say that's the major change. We get through the syllabus in the same way but it really is in some of the classes, that's the major issue. In other classes you end up with our classic cohort... So I suppose it's stretching our teaching skills to respond to the cohort that we've got, not the cohort that we thought we were going to have. And the course is flexible enough to allow you to make micro changes at the three hour level. And we all know the programme enough, if our students

have got a problem, we just leave one session and extend the previous one and that's not an issue (Sandra, UO).

### **Teachers' Perceptions: Addressing Students' Ambitions and Treating Students With Respect**

The responses from all six teachers from UO and NU varied regarding their involvement with supporting students' ambitions. The range of responses (with the exception of Terrence from NU) included one-to-one approaches such as tutorials. None of the six teachers considered referring students to specialists such as careers professionals. The three UO teachers interpreted the questions as assisting students to obtain employment within their subject area; this may be due to the fact that all three teachers work on programmes which lead to vocational qualifications.

Terrence at NU said that the school within which NUG4 is based, suspended the timetable once every year to organise a business game where students have to work in groups. This he felt benefited students significantly. He did not think that enough was provided to support students' individual ambitions and believed that the department was making an attempt to address this. Kelly discussed the tutorial support offered by her colleagues within the NUG3 department to all students on the programme and Gerald described the support with careers offered by him and his colleagues. He said of his students:

It's a struggle for them because it means they're going to have to do a degree, and they're going to have to do on-the-job training or they have to see themselves as investing in their own future for up to five or six years. ...some would say I never thought I could do this. If you make it right for people and that doesn't mean dumbing down or anything like that. There's got to be some latent talent in the first place otherwise you can't do anything with them anyway, if there is you can bring it out and encourage them to work hard and not everyone is happy. Some moan all the time; with others they're so grateful it's embarrassing. ... (Gerald, Head of NUG1 department).



Erica and Sandra from UO identified progression to undergraduate study as the ambition of students on their respective programmes. They supported students with their UCAS applications, through workshops and one-to-one sessions including coaching. However, Sandra said she also encouraged students to wait for another year if they were not academically ready for HE. Erica did not feel that there were sufficient resources to address students' needs in this area. Fay accepted that the university provided opportunities for students to discuss their ambitions through the personal tutor system. She did not consider services such as the Careers Service as appropriate. She believed that students were more likely to discuss these issues with the course tutor as the person they were most likely to have regular contact with.

All teachers interviewed stated that they treated students with respect. Only one, Sandra from UO, was deliberate in taking action to create a learning environment predicated on mutual respect between and within teachers and students. Treating students with respect appeared to be an unconscious, natural activity to the remaining five teachers. All but one teacher, Fay from UO, provided examples in their teaching to demonstrate it. Three teachers, two from NU (Terence and Kelly) and one from UO (Erica) said that they used student feedback and student evaluations to examine students' experiences. Two teachers, Gerald (NU), and Sandra, (UO) described their style and manner with students, inside and outside of the classroom, as measures of treating them with respect. Terence accepted that all teachers will not always treat students with respect and regarded plagiarism as one of the areas where respect for students is most likely to be an issue. He suggested that students would complain if they felt disrespected and identified the on-line student feedback system as the channel for this communication. Kelly said that

feedback from students suggested that she treated them with respect. She discussed the tensions of working with young as well as mature students. She said that she found it easier to challenge the young person who misbehaved or failed to hand in work. She found it difficult to challenge mature students, as their needs were very apparent. She said that she was improving her ability to criticise mature students and recalled an instance when she felt she had treated a mature student disrespectfully and apologised to the student afterwards. Gerald described the emotional difficulties non-traditional students need to overcome in order to succeed. He identified his role as giving confidence and making himself available for students to seek advice by choice. But he recognised that not all students, especially adult students, sought advice and some would fail.

Erica (UO) said that she used end of course student evaluations as a means of measuring students' perceptions of how they are treated. She informed tutors of the outcomes of these evaluations. She observed that the teachers with whom she works have been proactive in adapting and making changes to meet students' needs. Erica went on to say that treating students with respect was fundamental; she encouraged students to contact her if they had a problem in the teaching context. Fay (UO), though agreeing that she treated students with respect, could not provide any examples of how she did so. Sandra (UO), shared how she used to treat students and the changes she had made through discussions with a former colleague, reading and staff development. Her approach aimed to eradicate the notion of hierarchy from the classroom and create an environment of equality:

Perhaps I can say how I used to get it wrong. When I first arrived, I knew I was the [subject] expert, the teaching expert, and I had a very parental attitude towards my students. And I would tell them what to do, to get what they

wanted. And over time and with training, and conversations with [former course director], I became more interested in educational policy, I looked at the work of some radical educators, like Augustus Royale and Paulo Freire and the notion that, at whatever level the teacher has certain knowledge which is placed in the middle of the student and the teacher and we all learn from that. So I started to reach equality in my classroom and to let go of a hierarchy that I carried with me in the role of a teacher. You then realise that it becomes the matter in the classroom. There is obviously a hidden power base because I represent the university, I write the exams, I write the assessments. But I maintain complete transparency; all letters can be seen by the students, and nothing by any member of the course team is said that could not be said in front of the students. And if there are those moments when it can't be said in front of the students then we make a special point in any minute that it can't be said in front of the student. I see each student as an individual and that's a great reminder of respect – and that's really it, it's not as thought out as I'd like (Sandra, UO Lecturer, OVoc Dip HE).

Sandra was the only teacher who articulated using a pedagogical approach to dealing with issues of equality and difference. These themes at the heart of widening access to underrepresented groups in HE, often associated with the 'access movement' are discussed in chapter two.

### **Support Services**

The two HE case study institutions had different arrangements for the provision of Student Support Services. NU had a department, led by a senior manager, with specialist staff, including counsellors, learning support and specialist advisers based at each campus. UO had a Disability Officer based in the Registry and other specialist support was provided by the Student Union. Teachers at UO or those who were designated as Personal Tutors, provided students with much of the help and information on where to obtain support. NU therefore had a better resourced Student Support service than UO.

The six teachers interviewed agreed that they provided support to students though

there were differences in perceptions of the appropriate level of support. The three NU teachers expressed confidence in the quality of their central Student Support Services. Kelly raised concerns about the adequacy of resources allocated to this area against the demands that were made. Both Terrence and Gerald described the relationships, which they developed with staff in Student Support Services:

Most personal tutors refer students to counsellors, financial advisors etc. We are not experts, we don't get involved in our students... We arrange a lunch for people from the support services and staff because when I first started we located very near to them and I knew them well. But since we've moved I don't know all the new staff so we try to organise meetings with them (Terrence, NU).

Unlike Terrence, Gerald suggested that he was involved in the non-academic aspects of students' lives. He was clear about recognising that there were areas that he did not have expertise to discuss with students:

We actually have a very good working relationship with Student Services. I do encourage students who are likely to have dyslexia,...personal counselling. I think they basically do a very good job but I think they're totally under resourced. There's an awful lot of students looking for someone to listen and give them advice, who don't always think the first port of call is student services. They are looking for a totally non-biased, layperson's view, like their career. But I'm very clear, there are things that I can do and there are some things that I am not qualified to do. It comes back to the tutorial support thing. Because sometime what you're doing is not academic support but elements of what tutors have to do in colleges, which is very underplayed in modern universities (Gerald, NU).

The two continuing education teachers at UO, Erica and Sandra, stated that they provided support to students. Erica said that Student Support Services were improving at UO but services for students with disabilities were not as good as they could be and she worked actively with the university's disability officer to assist learners. It appeared that Fay at UO, teacher and Course Director of the OUG6

degree programme, believed that some level of student support should be provided but questioned its necessity at undergraduate level:

You seem to suggest that we should. I think they are university students. One might try to be a little bit helpful - we are offering a degree! (Fay, UO).

Fay's attitude was not typical among the teachers and teacher-managers interviewed at UO. Sandra and Erica were both from the continuing education department and, as can be seen from their earlier comments, they had difficulties establishing progression routes from the continuing education department at UO to its undergraduate programmes.

Sandra stated that English courses and study skills programmes were provided by the department and within her programme she employed a professional, a subject specialist, to support her students with academic competence within the vocational subject area. This additional support operated alongside the personal tutor system. The Student Union provided a range of personal support services including debt advice. Sandra explained how she had fought to establish the fee instalment provision within her programme so that student fees were staggered throughout the three terms.

### **The Most Important Factors Contributing to Success**

No single factor contributing to student success was given by any of the six teachers interviewed. Combinations of factors were said by the six teachers to contribute to success. Five teachers, the three from NU and two from UO (Fay and Sandra) all included motivation as the main contributor and Erica identified a combination of

institutional and personal factors. Of the five teachers who cited motivation, Terrence illustrated the role of family in supporting as well as countering success.

He also talked about the role of the institution:

Motivation, especially on the [modular] degree, ...and I think the...students put in far more hours [and] ...it shows...in their first year. It shows because their degree classification is much higher at the end. And I believe and I'm sure some of my colleagues will agree... so motivation is ... Where you have non-standard students in particular. ...In the past, ...a married woman comes on the course and the marriage falls apart; the husband couldn't cope with the wife [studying] at that level. I know in some cases where good childcare is really important. I think if family is nearby, I mean the institution has it [childcare] but I don't know how many of our students use it [childcare]. Again I think...for some students the support they get from staff is very important, providing moral support for some students, not all students demand that. [Interviewer: if you had to select a single factor, which contributed to student success, which one would you say it is?] I'd say it was probably motivation ...there's bound to be times when things are too much for you and people go through that (Terrence, NU).

Sandra's explanation also suggested that the course structure, the close involvement of teachers and the institution influenced student motivation:

Everything is about student motivation. They [students] have an image of themselves and their ability and that will give them the enthusiasm to get on with the independent learning they have to do every week. I think our constant reference to assessment and talking about assessment is another major contribution. The fact that we have quite a rigid syllabus, that their homework is set up from September to June, they get a three page course outline which can be daunting but it says what we're doing in class, what they're doing for homework and what else is going on that week. We...stop at the beginning of each class. That means if anyone is away they know what they've missed and we can constantly change it and I see it as part of my job as being a conduit for change for students who've dropped out of the classroom timetable, as an extra tutor. And I see this flexibility within the work contributes (Sandra, Lecturer OVoc Dip HE).

The level of intervention Sandra expected of teachers in students' learning was greater than her colleagues at UO and NU. This did not diminish the importance which she placed on student motivation but complemented it:

But to me the bottom line is the students' own motivation, that can only come in relationship to and in partnership with the teaching staff and institution they

have come to. I think we have a responsibility to get involved in that level of emotion, passion and motivation. Rather than stepping back and just delivering the cold subject matter and I think because we integrate study skills into our [OVoc dip HE] skills we have a better grip of where our students are (Sandra, UO).

Erica, suggested a combination of factors, which contributed to student success, without identifying one in particular. She described personal, contextual and institutional factors:

Good induction into the course; on-going support – both academic and personal; peer support groups; a flexible curriculum and pedagogy which responds to student need. Adequate financial support. On the contextual level-support at work and from family is important and the government could do a lot more at the policy level to support adult learners from underrepresented groups (Erica, UO Course Director HE Cert.).

### **Defining Success**

All the teachers' definitions focused on students' concepts of success, many of which did not reflect success measures which are favoured by Funding Councils, namely, retention and achievement of qualifications. A variety of explanations were also given which were based on student outcomes that were profound and enduring. The teachers were keen to align their notions of success with students' perceptions of personal achievement with the exception of Fay from UO, whose focus was on the academic outcome. Below are all six teachers' definitions of learner success:

... I would say achieving what they wanted to achieve or being in a position at the end of the programme where they are better than they were at the beginning (Terrence, NU).

...The grade the student wants...(Kelly, NU).

...if they think they've got out of their time with us what they had hoped to get out, then that would be my criteria for success (Gerald, NU).

In some cases not progressing... but having learnt things along the way that is of value to the student may be a very successful outcome. They may have been

able to realise things, develop understanding, develop skills – It constitutes success. In FE funding is completely driven by do they progress, do they achieve accreditation? And I want to pull back from that. Yes that can be a measure of success but I don't think that's always a measure of success. It's not something I've measured on this programme, it would be arrogant of me to ever suggest that a student who doesn't progress to HE, that I'm somehow saying that you've got this learning experience don't worry. That is not appropriate. They haven't achieved success on their own terms (Erica, UO).

In a sense the academic outcome is, you should be pleased to get it or you should be pleased to do really well (Fay, UO).

Our students have measures of success too – have they a university place offered to them? And have they achieved the grade to take it up? So I suppose it's those two things put together, so that they leave us confident in their ability (Sandra, UO).



## **Emerging Themes: HE Teachers**

Staff interviewed elected to join their HE institution by accident rather than choice.

Only two teachers selected to work at the institutions on the basis of the type of students who attended or the institutions' mission to widen access. Over time, since their employment, both institutions have further widened participation. The question this raises is to what extent knowledge of the institutions as 'access' institutions affected teachers' attitudes to or expectations of students?

There were tensions between the senior managers' perspectives of widening access and the teachers'. Managers identified university-wide practices to support widening access policies but teachers were often unaware of these strategies.

At NU only one teacher identified the ethnicity of students as part of their vocabulary of describing students, whereas UO teachers described the range of ethnic groups attending and one teacher recognised and devised pedagogy which integrated approaches to working with the diversity of the student group.

All teachers placed a positive value on Student Support Services. HE teachers' comments suggested their important guidance role in both providing direct support to students and in referring them to Student Support Services. The need therefore for HE teachers to be aware of the type of Student Support Services offered was evident.

Teachers in NU but not in UO mentioned the inadequate resourcing for teaching and learning to support widening participation/ 'new' student groups as the number of students increased. The teachers implied that 'widening' participation was used as a source of income to increase student numbers.

There was tension between the development of flexible admissions procedures to encourage access and increasing student numbers for financial gain. There was also resistance to widening and increasing participation with concerns raised about students' readiness and its implication for quality.

There were inconsistent approaches within and across the HE institutions yet similar issues raised by them both e.g. managing behaviour of younger learners, meeting individual needs within a diverse student population, giving feedback to students with differing/ non-traditional academic writing abilities.

There were conflicts between teachers' definitions of success and the HE institutions'. Teachers' definitions of success differed from their institutions' definitions, which were student 'retention' and 'achievement'. Teachers (all but one – Fay at UO) defined success as meeting students' aspirations. Five out of the six teachers identified student motivation as the single most important factor influencing success, which questions the role of teachers and institutions in ensuring student success in HE. It also raises issues of how to maintain motivation and not demotivate students, as Hertzberg's 'hygiene factors' concept suggests (1975).

Two senior managers, one from UO (Pro Vice Chancellor in the OUG5 department) and the other from NU (Head of School) highlighted the emotional aspects of students' lives, implying particular difficulties faced by students from diverse backgrounds which universities were not equipped to manage. One of the managers at UO claimed that lack of mature student success was due to students' personal circumstances. Widening access had brought into NU and UO students whose behaviour and attitudes were 'new' to HE, often younger, male students and white male students with discriminatory behaviours requiring teachers to 'stretch' their teaching skills to manage these 'new' groups. Pedagogy was the emerging teaching and learning priority at UO. There appeared to be a tension at UO between increasing student numbers, teaching and research whereas the teachers and senior manager at NU did not mention research. These themes are discussed in greater depth in chapter 6.

## **Presenting the Data: Students in the Case Study Higher Education Institutions**

As indicated in Chapter 2, interviews were conducted with 12 students at the New University (NU) and nine at the Old University (UO), all of whom were 'home' students. These included EU students who paid 'home' fees. The NU students were attending full time courses and the UO students, part time courses. Face to face interviews were conducted with eight students at NU which included a focus group of four students. Telephone interviews were carried out with four students at NU and all nine UO students. Due to the delay in gaining access to students, follow-up telephone interviews were not conducted with this sample. A total of 21 students were interviewed, seven male and 14 female students who were from diverse ethnic backgrounds similar to the population mix of London. The distribution of ethnic and gender groups across the student sample was also similar to their distribution within the overall student and undergraduate student populations of NU and UO respectively. The tables (see Tables 5 – 8) in the appendices provide more in-depth information into the students' age categories, ethnicities and their programmes of study. To avoid excessive repetition, these categories are included against each interview participant in the presentation of the data, early in the chapter and alongside quotes. If required, the categories however, can be referred to in the appendices.

The purpose of the interviews with students was to:

- define success in their terms;
- identify the factors which assisted student success;
- examine whether the institutional practices and support services were

recognised and valued by students

- identify 'informal' / indirect institutional factors which support student success
- find common characteristics among successful A/access students and to identify appropriate students for the longitudinal study.

## **Pre-Course**

### **Choosing the University**

Of the 21 students interviewed at NU and UO, most students (17), had selected the institutions as their first choice; nine of these students were from NU and the other eight, from UO. Only four students said they had not selected NU or UO as their first choice; three of these four students failed to gain entry to the institutions of their first choice. The fourth student, Mark (parent, aged 30-39, male, ethnicity not stated) who did not select NU as his first choice said that he was left without a choice but to attend NU as the HND course on which he was enrolled at a local FE college had closed. At the start of the academic year, he was told by the FE college that the course would be cancelled due to poor retention and achievement on the first year HND programme. If he wanted to complete the HND, an arrangement had been made with NU for HND students to join the first year of the NUG3 programme, Mark expressed disappointment about his situation as he had not planned to join an undergraduate programme and take out a loan.

There was a wide variety of reasons given by the 21 students for selecting the institutions (see Table 1 below):

**Table 1: Main Reasons for Selecting the HE institution**

<b>Reason</b>	<b>NU</b>	<b>UO</b>	<b>TOTAL S</b>
Advised by Family and Friends	3	2	5
Close to Home and Offered Course of Choice	3	0	3
Reputation	1	3	4
Failed to get into Institution of 1 <sup>st</sup> Choice	2	1	3
Problem with Previous Institution	1	0	1
Pathway to Undergraduate Study/ Qualification	1	0	1
Reputation and Advised by Employer	0	1	1
To Meet People at University	0	1	1
Worked at the University	0	1	1
Reputation & Close to Home	1	0	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>21</b>

Students at UO (three) were more likely to select the university on the basis of its reputation than NU students (one). Four NU students chose the University due to its proximity to their home whereas this was not a selection criterion used by UO students. All the UO students interviewed were part-time and in employment therefore UO's proximity to their place of work may have been a factor in choosing a university but a question was not asked to discern this.

Three NU students selected the institution on the basis of advice from family and friends. One was advised that the teachers were good and two were advised that the institution was good for the subjects they had chosen:

I heard it was good. My mum did a BA course there as a mature student and said the teachers were good (Maureen, aged 30-39, Mixed parentage, female, NUG3 student at NU).

A friend who works at a prestigious company said that NU was good for its NUG2 subject (Anne, aged 20-29, Irish, female, NUG2 student at NU).

I chose 3 universities in London and spoke to my friends about which one was the best. They told me to go for NUG2, (Fitzroy, aged 20-29, Black African, NUG2 student at NU).

All three students at NU who gave location and choice of course as their reason for selecting the institution were aged 20-29. Two of the students, Adrian (White, English male, NUG1) and Carmel (White British, female, NUG1) were attending the same programme, NUG1 at NU. Carmel was the parent of a three year old son and lived close to the university at the time of her application but has since moved further away. The third student, Izumi (Japanese, aged 20-29, female, NUG3) said that she had applied at age 18 and did not have sufficient points to gain entry; she re-sat her A Levels to improve her grades.

Three students claimed that reputation was the main reason for selecting UO. One was attending a university certificate programme, Jamila (Mixed parentage – Irish and North African OCert HE) and the other, Abi (aged 20-29, Black African, female, OCert HE) attended an undergraduate programme. They emphasised UO's tradition of academic excellence. The two UO students who said family and friends had advised them to choose UO as their first choice were also studying on University certificate and diploma level courses. One of the students, Veronica (aged 20-29, White European OCert HE), who was attending an academic programme at UO, stated that her friend had attended the same course last year and found the teachers to be very good. The other student, Gina (Black African, aged 20-29, OVoc Dip) was attending a vocational programme at UO and explained that she had heard from a friend that UO was a good institution and the programme she was attending had good teachers.

Students from NU and UO used different descriptors to distinguish their respective institutions as can be seen in Table 2 below:

**Table 2: Students Descriptions of the HE institutions**

<b>Descriptions</b>	<b>NU</b>	<b>UO</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Diversity – age and ethnicity	6	2	8
Buildings/ campus	4	3	7
Location and reputation	0	2	2
Other	0	2	2
Buildings and student diversity	2	0	2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>21</b>

NU students described the University in terms of the student profile (age and ethnic diversity) and its buildings/ campus. In contrast, UO students, all studying part time, used student profile and buildings/ campus as descriptors but also included others such as reputation and location. Three UO students described its location and reputation in positive terms. One student, Veronica (aged 20-29, White European, NCert HE), found the buildings confusing. Two students, all part-time from UO's continuing education department, identified other characteristics; Abi (aged 20-29, Black African woman, NCert HE), described it as 'a place where there is very little time to interact' and Rajinder (aged 20-29, male, British OVoc Dip HE) as 'well organised and traditional' (Rajinder did not describe his ethnicity and only provided his nationality).

### **Students' Perceptions of the University**

#### Students' Perceptions of The Institution Since Becoming A Student

The majority of students interviewed agreed that their perceptions had changed since attending the two case study universities. Of the nine UO students interviewed, three indicated that their perceptions of the university had not changed since becoming



students. This represented a greater proportion than at NU, where only three of the 12 students indicated that their perceptions of the University had not changed. Students identified a variety of factors (see Table 3 below) to describe how their perceptions had changed since attending the Universities:

**Table 3: Changed Perceptions of the HE institutions**

<b>Changes in Perceptions of Institution</b>	<b>NU</b>	<b>UO</b>
Lectures	3	0
Support	0	3
Better than expected	1	1
Administration and Assessment	2	0
Organisation	1	0
Discipline	1	0
Eye opener	0	1
Diversity	0	1
Support and better than expected	1	0
Perceptions had not changed	3	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>

The data showed that students had nearly as many different perceptions of the HE institutions as they were in number. Therefore the students expressed very different views on how their perceptions had changed of the institutions. The two exceptions were three students' perceptions of lectures at NU and three students' perceptions of support at UO. The students were mainly negative about NU's lectures and UO's support for students. Of the three NU students who cited lectures, two in the NUG1 department had expected no difficulties in learning from formal lectures. (Noreen, British, aged 40-49, parent of teenagers and Adrian aged 20-29, White, English) Gerald at NU had indicated, in the previous section that his department (NUG1) was developing strategies to support students to learn through lectures. Adrian's comment, below, expressed his fellow students' opinions well:

I thought it would be a lot easier, taking notes and all that. It's a lot more difficult. It's hard to keep concentrating taking notes. When you go and do the reading, I can do that quite easy but sitting down and listening I find that the hard part.

The third student, Izumi who also cited lectures, expressed an opposite view: she said that she had not expected to enjoy lectures as much as she did. Sara (aged 20-29, Middle Eastern, NUG4) found NU to be better than she expected, the clean, hygienic environment of the university exceeded her expectations:

It is more than I ever thought, especially the facilities, the rooms, even the basic things like the toilets are always clean. It's quite important to me it's hygienic. They always say you can tell how clean the people are when you go to their toilet, isn't it?

Two students from NU, Esther and Carmel stated that their experience of the administrative processes had changed their perceptions of NU. They were both disappointed with the length of time taken to resolve registration problems and for teachers to return essays. Esther and Carmel expressed disappointment with the lack of attention to simple administrative tasks such as adding their names to registers, six months after joining the university and not receiving essays in February that were handed in to teachers in the Autumn term of the previous year. Another student, Anne also expressed having higher expectations of NU's administration. This was in relation to the first application she said that she made to NU, which had been lost. Discipline was mentioned as an issue that Caron (aged 20-29, White British, NUG3) did not expect to encounter at a university. She found the lack of discipline among younger students problematic:

I'm very pleased with the university, ...but the self-control of the other students. Being a mature student myself, I mean I'm not that old myself but I'm 22/23 and I'm there because I have experience of a job and I'm paying to be there now because I want to learn. Whereas quite a few other students who

are there, it's perhaps they don't really see it like that yet and it's having an influence on others...it's the lack of discipline [of those] aged 18 and 19, they should have discipline. I don't think it should be down to the teachers to enforce that...in particular lectures it's unbelievable! ...That's created problems for me...it means extra work when I get home. When you would have learnt it in the lecture. ...because you're not learning what you should be learning in the lecture.

Barbara, (Black Caribbean, aged 30-39, UG4) who found the support offered by NU teachers in tutorials and their additional assistance to be better than she expected, did not appear to have high expectations of the support from the UG4 department :

The tutorials are quite helpful, so I thought I'd just be chucked in and it would be really hard. You do get quite a lot of help and assistance and they tell you where to look if you need help!

Mamood, June and George, three mature students from UO had not found the university supportive. Mamood (aged 30-39, Somali, OUG6) found the course 'tough' and, having previously completed a programme of study in the continuing education department, was expecting more support than he received on the undergraduate programme. June (aged 30-39, White UK, OUG5), also compared her experience of having undertaken a previous course, in her case, with the Open University where she found the support better than at UO. The third student, George, (aged 40-49, White British, male, OUG5) described his earlier experience of HE in contrast with his perceptions of UO:

I did a year at Ruskin College before coming to [UO], you had a much smaller campus, smaller classes. I kind of felt that the students were much better looked after than they are at [UO].

The final two students at UO who commented that their perceptions had changed were Veronica and Gina (Black African, aged 20-29, OVoc Dip). Both were positive about what they had found and like NU's Barbara (above), it appeared that they too, had low expectations of the kind of support they would have received at

UO. Veronica reported being pleasantly surprised by the age and ethnic diversity of students. Gina appeared awe struck in attending an ‘old’ university and commented that UO was more than she had expected from such a prestigious university.

Once joining the university, many students were pleasantly surprised by positive encounters but all appeared to accept the negative encounters as normal and did not complain using the HEIs’ procedures.

### **Information Advice and Guidance**

#### Assistance to Choose the Course

More students from NU than UO reported receiving support from the HE institution in making a decision to choose a course. More students from UO carried out their own research to select their HE course than NU students. Students from both institutions made their selection based on information from attendance on a pre-degree level course and only students from NU received assistance from friends and family members to make their decisions (see table 4 below):

**Table 4: Assistance to choose the course**

<b>Source of Assistance</b>	<b>NU</b>	<b>UO</b>
Chose Course by Carrying out own Research	3	5
Good Information & Assistance from University	5	3
Information from Attendance on Foundation or Access Course	2	1
Advice from Family and Friends	2	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>

Students who described receiving good assistance from NU and UO indicated that the administrative procedures were efficient and the admissions processes flexible and helpful. Carmel from NU described making enquires:

I have a little boy and I live down the road. I applied as a mature student to [NU] and another uni' at a neighbouring borough and [NU] got back to me the quickest with the most options, invited me in and went through what I could do and still take care of my little boy.

Two students from NU received information from the previous courses they had attended. Barbara, one of these students, had attended an Access course at an FE college and was advised by her course tutor. The other student, Maureen, said she had attended a Foundation course at NU and her tutor advised her to transfer to the NUG3 degree level programme. In choosing their course Anne and Caron (aged 20-29, White British, NUG3) from NU indicated that they were assisted by family and friends. Anne stated that she received advice that NU was good for the subject, NUG3 and Caron said that she was advised that NU was suitable because it was best for studying BA3 without having A Level qualifications.

Of the three students at UO who stated that they received good information in choosing their course, Rajinder from UO as with Carmel from NU (quoted above), described receiving information and assistance which was 'stress free'. He had preconceptions of a process filled with obstacles. Mamood who attended an Access course at the UO's continuing education department found the support system, a regular Friday 'Open Night', very helpful. He also acknowledged the role of the tutor in assisting him.

### The Universities' Prospectuses

Most students interviewed from the two case study institutions stated that they had seen their university's' prospectus with the exception of one from NU. This student, Mark (parent, aged 30-39, male, ethnicity not stated), had not seen the prospectus because, as already indicated, he was sent to NU by the FE college where he was

studying after his HND class closed. More than half the students interviewed at NU (nine) and over half the UO students (six), did not comment on the message conveyed by the universities' prospectuses (see Table 5 below). The interview was conducted more than six months after students had applied to the university and students may not have remembered its contents.

**Table 5: Messages Conveyed by the Universities' Prospectuses**

Message conveyed by the prospectus	NU	UO	Totals
Did not comment	9	6	15
Informative	2	1	3
Useful but Limited Information	0	2	2
Strong 'University' Image	1	0	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>21</b>

Some said they had looked at too many prospectuses to remember NU specifically and others had not used it in making their choice. Others had not considered the messages conveyed by the prospectus. Two students from NU (Sara, aged 20-29, Middle Eastern, UG4 student and Maureen, NUG3 student) who indicated that the prospectus was informative said that it provided the information they needed to know about the course. The pictures, the information and how they were presented in the NU prospectus appeared to have been successful in conveying quite a powerful image of the university to Caron, NUG3 student who said:

To be honest I went quite a lot on the look of the university. It seemed... obviously the grounds, the campus, everything screams out university to you. It's a very nice campus; that's what stood out the most to me. I've seen other universities...I feel privileged being there...it kind of, it stood out to me. What they said in the prospectus was good as well. The more I read about it, the more I wanted to be there.

Jamila, from UO, also found its prospectus informative. She said that it was easy to understand and that the modularised programmes were coherent. Two students from

UO commented that the information in the prospectus was useful but limited. June (female aged 30-39, White UK) from the OUG5 programme indicated that the prospectus on the web provided good information on the subject but it was out of date and Gina said that there was good information on the full-time programmes but limited information on the part-time, sub-degree programmes.

### **Main Reasons for Choosing the Course**

There were differences between student responses from NU and UO regarding their reasons for choosing their course of study (see Table 6 below):

**Table 6: Main Reasons for Choosing the Course**

<b>Reason</b>	<b>NU</b>	<b>UO</b>
Qualification and Job	9	1
Qualification	1	2
Progression to Higher Level Programme	1	3
Personal Satisfaction	0	2
Enjoyment and to get a well paid job	1	0
Develop Skills, gain Degree and to Increase Salary	0	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>

The majority of NU students (10) stated that they had chosen the course in order to gain a qualification and a job, for one of these students, it was a qualification only.

No distinct factor dominated the UO students' reasons for selecting their courses.

All but two of the nine NU students who indicated that they had chosen their course to gain a qualification and a job were studying on degree programmes, which could lead directly to employment. The two students from NU, Izumi and Caron, who were not studying on degree programmes with direct routes to employment, would need to pursue a further education and training programme at the end of their degree programme to enter professional employment within their subject specialism. Esther,

from NU wanted a qualification because she wanted to be the first one in her family to become a graduate. Noreen (British, aged 40-49, parent of teenagers, NUG1) explained that she did not have the required entry qualification to achieve her career ambition and had selected NUG1 to enable her to progress to her ideal subject discipline. Sara explained that she gained enjoyment from her course, she expected to get a good job but she also wanted to obtain well paid employment.

Gina from UO, wanted to gain qualifications and a job but was looking long term, she explained:

I have to complete this course and gain an understanding of [the context of the NUG3 discipline], it's not straightforward because after that I have to go to a uni' or stay here and complete a [NUG3] degree, then I have to get into the profession...

Mamood (aged 30-39, Somali, OUG6) and Rajinder from UO stated that gaining the qualification was their reason for selecting the course. Rajinder was employed by a company which encouraged him to attend the course in order for him to be a qualified professional in his field. The two UO students who gave 'progression' as their reason for choosing the course, were both attending university certificate courses which progress students onto HE. Abi and George (White British male, aged 50-59, OUG5) provided personal reasons for selecting their course:

It's a subject that's always interested me and I've always had a field knowledge of it and I thought it was about time that I studied it. Well I'm doing it for personal satisfaction. There are people on the course hoping to do a career in ...but that's not for me (George).

I want to participate in reading and learning from the different perspectives for my own personal satisfaction (Abi, OUG5).

June (aged 30-39, White UK, OUG5), who worked full time, said that she had chosen the course because it was 'vocational... useful in gaining general skills...



and will help me to earn more money’.

It appeared that the UO students were more likely to be attending their undergraduate programme for general interest and personal satisfaction than the NU students, who were attending mainly for ‘instrumental’ reasons, to obtain a qualification or to gain employment. This may be due to the different starting points of students from the two Universities. The UO students were all employed and attending their courses part-time whereas the NU students were attending full time undergraduate programmes.

### **Whether Expectations Have Changed Since Attending the Programme**

All but two students from both case study universities responded that their expectations had changed since joining the programme. The two students who stated that their expectations had not changed, Esther (aged 20-29, White British NUG1) from NU and Veronica from UO did not provide any further explanations.

The remaining students provided a variety of descriptors to explain how their expectations had changed. These related to their self-perceptions, personal expectations, career choices and perceptions of teachers and student colleagues. At NU four students on the NUGI programme described having different expectations of themselves since joining the course. Two of these students explained how their choice of friends at the University were opposite to what they would have expected of themselves:

I found that when I came here, I’d be with all the other [younger] ones but I’ve found that I’ve ended up with all the older ones. I think that’s made me grow up, from hanging around with people who are older than me; I’ve grown up a lot as well, which has impressed a few people (Adrian NUG1, aged 20-29, White, English).

I've always been with younger people. My daughter's 20. I've always mixed with all sorts of age groups so it's not really a big thing. I'm quite surprised that I've mixed more with younger people than with people my age (Noreen NUG1 British, aged 40-49, parent of teenagers).

Barbara and Sara from NU found that their motivation and personalities were changing:

... I've got more enthusiastic to do well. [Interviewer: has that surprised you?] Yes, it has actually; you get to a stage well, you sort of coast but I'm really fired up now. The younger ones, they know much already from school and I feel I have to catch up with them. It's given me more ...to try harder, do better. It's encouraged me...(Barbara, aged 30-39, Black British, NUG4)

I see myself learning a lot...The matter of learning, it's improving. To compare with a friend who is studying at another university, she's still struggling to find a friend, to talk with or to study with or to do some work with. I've found it easy here, really, really easy. The first week we came here it was the introduction week, it was really, really impressive. You get to know more people...(Sara, aged 20-29, Middle Eastern, NUG4)

Students from NU (three) discussed how their perceptions had changed in terms of what they may do in the future:

I knew exactly what I wanted to do when I came but now I'm more open to what I might do. I realise there is more aspects to it. There's more to it than I first thought. You don't have to close and decide straight away (Carmel, aged 20-29, White British, parent 3 year old child NUG1).

Mark, who was forced to change from doing HND in an FE institution to a degree programme at NU said:

I'm more open to what comes along, opportunities, wider access to people than in FE.

Caron explains how her perceptions of what she may do in the future have changed:

It's been a reality check...I did start A Levels and I was doing well but... I had to go to work. ...It is a big jump...I am passing at the moment but I'm not getting the grades that I would hope I'd be getting. I have to look at other possibilities. I don't want to have tunnel vision and then say be disappointed in the end. It's not that I'm going to try to be a [NUG3 professional]. I will. I'm going to try to get that far. It has been an eye opener. I thought I was a very organised person and I now know if I do pass this year I'm going to have to change. I'm going to have to be even more organised...

Two students, Izumi and Fitzroy (aged 20-29, Black African, NUG2), indicated that their perceptions of their peers had changed. Izumi said that she did not think that she would have met so many friendly students and Fitzroy expressed surprise regarding the new ideas he had obtained from his peers. Anne (aged 20-29, Irish, NUG2) stated that she found it very difficult returning to education. Having studied in an FE college on leaving school, she had then not studied for six years. She said the experience of returning to education at NU was 'a shock' to her system.

Maureen explained that the positive feedback she received from teachers increased her expectations of herself.

Similar to NU students, many UO students felt joining UO created opportunities for personal development and brought new aspirations... Three UO students explained that they had higher expectations of themselves since joining the course. George stated that he may undertake a PhD after completing the OUG5 programme and Rajinder said that the highlight of being on his programme, OVoc Dip HE, was the fact that he was doing so well. Gina described the confidence she had developed:

Now that I have more information about those areas, having talked to teachers on the course and the speakers who are invited to come on the course. I am more confident in myself and what I can achieve (Black African, aged 20-29, OVoc Dip).

Two students from UO, Jamila (aged 20-29, Irish-North African, OHE Cert) and June (aged 30-39, White UK, OUG5), reported changes in perceptions of themselves since joining the course. Jamila said that she now wanted to go to university for financial reasons; she believed that her earnings would be boosted by completing a degree level programme. June said that it was difficult settling into the OUG5 programme; she found it to be overwhelming and did not think as highly of

herself as she did before joining. Two UO students stated that their perceptions of what they may do in the future had changed since joining the programme: Mamood said that he had discovered that there were many choices and types of careers that were open him and Victor (English male, aged 30-39, OUG5) said that he realised that the route he had taken was not right for him. Abi emphasised the helpfulness of teachers; she did not expect to find teachers who were supportive at HE level of study. It is probable that Abi's expectations of HE were influenced by friends and acquaintances as her parents had not attended university. She possessed standard university entrance qualifications on leaving school but decided to change career paths which required a change of subject disciplines. She was attending the continuing education department to progress to degree level study in the new career she had chosen.

### **Students' Perceptions of Teachers Helping them to Succeed**

All students interviewed from NU and most students from UO (seven) stated that their teachers were helping them to succeed (see Table 7 below):

**Table 7: HE Students' Perceptions of how teachers helped them to succeed**

<b>What Teachers did to Help</b>	<b>NU</b>	<b>UO</b>
Sensitive to the different needs of students	6	5
Tutorials	3	0
Seminars	1	1
Seminars and setting and marking extra work	1	0
Available outside class	0	1
Control class	1	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>

Two students from UO, Mamood and June, indicated that their teachers were not helping them to succeed, they said:

No, I'm helping myself. No one is helping. I am struggling (Mamood aged 30-39, Somali, OUG6).

In the first term, the lecturers were very bad at giving lectures. They presented and spoke in ways that were not very easy to understand; they did not explain the **how** in their presentations. They didn't seem interested in what they were saying and I was surprised as to how much they expected us to learn (June aged 30-39, White UK, OUG5).

The most popular way teachers helped them to succeed, was in their ability to be sensitive. Students from UO and NU wanted to be treated as individuals. The six students, who identified the sensitivity of teachers to their needs as helping them to succeed, all described teacher behaviours that should be standard practice. These students singled out their teachers as exceptional individuals in responding to their needs, whether teachers were sensitive to their domestic circumstances or their need for academic support, as Sara explained:

...when they teach you they want you to learn everything. I know some teachers who want to tell you everything but there isn't the time... English is not my first language and they are always clear, even if things goes too technical or too English they will say it with another word or meaning so you can get to know it anyway. At the moment the levels of English learning have been helpful (Sara, aged 20-29, Middle Eastern, NUG4).

Of the five students at UO who indicated that their teachers were helping them to succeed by being sensitive to their different needs, four students described their teachers with enthusiasm; Veronica's comment below was typical:

They're brilliant, reading the comments on my assessment. We had an exam and they gave us a mock to prepare us. We do the odd quiz, a way of testing your knowledge without the pressure. They listen to us and make time to see us with personal matters... (Veronica, aged 20-29, White European OCert HE).

George described how teachers helped him by being sensitive to the different needs of students; in doing so he found it easier to list characteristics of the bad teachers:

It's easy to say what the bad ones. The bad ones don't acknowledge the level at which the class is at, the good ones do. The bad ones will do their standard lecture and that's it. You're not allowed to intervene to ask questions and [they] will make you look stupid. Whereas the good lecturer will understand where the class and where individuals in the class are and will kind of welcome questions, even if they are, even if they may be silly questions. There is some sort of preparation; they haven't turned up with their notes written on the back of a cigarette packet but are equally as flexible enough to follow where the class is.

Victor (aged 30-39 English, UOG5) was employed at UO and therefore the university paid for his course. He found it helpful to his success that teachers were available to support students outside of class hours and this included weekends.

All three students who identified that tutorials were helping them to succeed, Mark, Barbara and Anne, also revealed that they found difficulty learning from lectures.

All three students had previously attended FE, and Barbara and Mark had completed Access courses, known for their student-centred approaches to teaching and learning (cf chapter two). Barbara indicated that she would prefer a longer tutorial session.

Anne from the NUG2 programme, who found returning to study after a six-year gap a shock, explained why she learnt best through tutorials:

I prefer tutorials to lectures as I get cross with the chatter, mainly when I don't understand. It gives me plenty of time to ask questions to make sure it's clear in my mind...

Maureen, on the NUG3 programme, identified seminars as being effective in helping her to succeed. She said that teachers forced her to go over what was taught in the lectures. In acknowledging seminars as helping her to succeed, Abi provided very similar reasons to Maureen's; she also implied that seminars provided a more supportive atmosphere for asking difficult questions.

Fitzroy stated that teachers helped him to succeed when they were able to control the class. He cited two teachers who were not supporting him to succeed as they were unable to control the class and therefore he was unable to learn from them.

### **Teachers' awareness of students' ambitions**

Nearly half of the students from NU (five) and over half of the UO students (seven) indicated that their teachers were aware of their ambitions. One student from NU stated that only some teachers were aware of their ambitions. Among the six NU students who stated that their teachers were aware of their ambitions, Esther described her teacher:

She is a lot more personal, she knows you by your name, knows you by your personality, rather than some people who may know who you sit with maybe or your face. She talks to us all the time and we have long conversations with her. She phones us up to make sure we're okay (Esther aged 20-29, White British NUG1).

Of the five students who indicated that their teachers were not aware of their ambitions, two said that they had not been asked and the other three students said that they had not told their teachers of their ambitions. One student from NU, Caron, stated that only some teachers knew of her ambitions.

Students' acknowledgement of their teachers' contribution and awareness of their ambitions were consistent with teachers' responses. Students' responses reflected the level of involvement which their teachers claimed, that they had played in supporting their ambitions.

### **Students' Perceptions of Whether Teachers Treated them with Respect**

The majority of students interviewed from both universities (nine from NU and

eight from UO) agreed that their teachers treated them with respect. In their responses, the students indicated a desire to be treated as adults and as individuals. Three students from NU and one from UO stated that their teachers did not treat them with respect. They provided examples of disrespectful behaviours which amounted to their teachers' being unsympathetic and insensitive. The types of examples given by students to illustrate the respectful behaviour of teachers differed between the UO and NU, though the outcomes were similar. Adrian from NU demonstrated how his teacher treated him with respect:

I think she respects your views and ideas. If you have a conflicting view or idea, there's one or two who will tell you that's right or that's wrong. Most of them will tell you, yeah, that's fair enough. They're really good. They respect you. They've never made me feel stupid for saying something. (Adrian, aged 20-29, White, English, NUG1).

Sara explained how teachers treated students with respect when they treated them as adults, even when their behaviour was somewhat juvenile:

Yes, they respect you in that they don't really treat you like you're a kid. They always treat you in a friendly way as well as in a respectful way. They're not too strict as well as they don't let you do anything you want, which is quite good actually otherwise everything will just go. Especially in the lecture room if someone chucks a lot of stuff, you would go 'shut up', but the tutors are always polite to the students.

As already indicated, the majority of students interviewed from UO (eight) agreed that their teachers treated them with respect. They provided examples of respectful teacher behaviours illustrating their understanding and sensitivity to personal difficulties and treating them as adults:

Yes, she took into account my bereavements; she extended the deadlines for my assignments and also helped me with the assignment via email and telephone calls (Rajinder).

We weren't just all teenagers; some of us were adults and she would just treat us all as her equal, made you feel comfortable. Not she's the lecturer and



everyone else knew less. She always made the class interesting...(Veronica aged 20-29, White European OCert HE).

Among the NU students who revealed that some teachers did not treat them with respect, Caron elaborated on two such teachers. One appeared impatient and bad tempered; this teacher was said by Caron to have difficulties controlling younger students' behaviour. The other appeared insensitive in the manner in which he reminded them of the high drop out rate:

...she's the one who has a lot of problems in her classes. She's very rude and very abrupt to everyone. She's completely unapproachable because of that. And I can understand why to a certain extent but it's a bit daunting when she gets like that with you, it's just um, I don't know, it's just that you can't approach her, so if you have a problem if you can't find it in a textbook, if you can't talk to your peers and bring out an understanding from that, then you leave it. So it creates more work for you when it comes to your exams. And David [teacher on NUG3 programme), basically, his famous words are 'the only thing that keeps me going is knowing that half of you won't be here next year'. It's funny isn't it; it's kind of true, not necessarily for some of us who's working hard (aged 20-29, White, Female, NUG3).

Caron's last point in her statement (above) reflected her teacher, Kelly's earlier statement (Page 165) criticising NU's senior managers. Kelly commented on the central control of NU admissions to undergraduate programmes which resulted in an increasing number of students being recruited to her programme, due to its popularity. However many of the students recruited needed additional support to succeed. Kelly reproached senior managers for not increasing resources to reflect the number and type of students recruited. Caron used the style and personality of teachers to explain how she was treated with respect:

They're willing to listen and accept that you may have other factors, I don't have children personally but I know there's a couple of people who do and they're willing to be a bit flexible and if you need help they're willing to talk to you. If you feel that you need extra understating on a particular thing you can actually arrange to meet them and discuss it. And I know that the others do have surgery times and it's kind of 'I'll be available if you need to talk to me'....whereas others you can provide them with extra work and they will

spend time with you to make sure you understand it. They don't mind how many times you need to speak to them about it. They will try to help you. And I think that gives you respect and you will respect them a lot more for it...

George, the only student interviewed from UO who did not perceive that all teachers treated students with respect, said:

No, some do and some don't. When they do, they listen to your view and think that may be a different way of looking at the world.

### **Support Services used Within the Case Study HE Institutions**

All students interviewed from NU and UO stated that they were aware of the range of support services provided by the institutions. One third (four) of the students interviewed at NU and more than half (five) of UO students said they had used support services within the universities. The range of support services used is presented below in Table 8:

**Table 8: HE Support Services Students Identified Using**

<b>Support Services</b>	<b>NU</b>	<b>UO</b>
Dyslexia	2	0
Careers	0	2
Careers and Study Skills	0	1
Study Skills	0	1
Study Skills and Counselling	1	0
Finance	0	1
Childcare and Finance	1	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

The four students who reported using support services at NU were positive about their experiences. Again, as with their perception of being treated with respect, students valued Student Support Services' politeness and sensitivity. Carmel's positive experience of using Student Support Services was similar to her colleagues who used them:

I've just enrolled on a... course, the presentation we did, I cocked up, excuse my French. So the person there, said I could find out if there were any course I could go on. So I'm on that in March and they've got counselling service as well which I go to. I know about them and that's about it. I haven't been on the little course. And the counselling, I've been twice and she seems very good – Yeah, because I was a bit worried about counselling. I thought by going to counselling, that it might affect my degree or whatever and that and they said it's all confidential and she was really good, she didn't make me feel silly or anything (Carmel, aged 20-29, White British, parent 3 year old child, NUG1).

Adrian, had not yet used the support services at NU, but he described his positive experience of making enquiries and making arrangements to receive support:

... with me, I've just got back obviously one part of my essay for [NUG1] with that I had loads of spelling mistakes and things like that. The teacher in [NUG1] told me to ring up services about dyslexia and things like that. I've rung um up and haven't gone, I haven't actually gone through with anything yet. I've rung um up and they've been really friendly on the phone. They didn't make you feel stupid or nothing (Adrian, aged 20-29 White, English, male, NUG1).

Adrian explained the mistake in his essay, which alerted his teacher to a possible problem with dyslexia. Adrian was unable to receive immediate support but valued his teacher's response to his difficulty in recognising a word; he also acknowledged the politeness of student support staff when making enquiries:

... yeah and I put capture, capture 6, instead of Chapter 6, that's what I do wrong. She's picked up on it. The service, when I've been there they've been very friendly and they're going to sort it out as soon as possible, with whatever is wrong, if anything is wrong. I think it's quite good; it's better than nothing. You know what I mean; it's better than no services at all. It is. I think it's really good that they keep you company and they encourage you to go through it...(aged 20-29, White, English, NUG1).

Anne described the dyslexia support she received as very good and like Adrian complimented the Student Services staff for being easy to talk to. Mark, a parent of a 22 month old child, said that without the childcare and financial support he was receiving from NU, he would not have been able to continue his studies.

Like NU students, UO students who said they had used the support services spoke positively about them. Abi and Mamood used the careers service at UO. Abi said that she found the service to be very good and Mamood stated:

I registered with the careers because I needed to work for money and to get work experience but they found me a job and I couldn't do it because of the hours. They were very good (Mamood, aged 30-39, Somali, male, OUG6).

Veronica, who said that she received careers advice and study skills support stated that they were provided by the course director outside the class. June rated highly the study skills sessions provided by the OUG5 department and Jamila was happy with the fee reduction which she received.

### **Family and Friends**

All students with the exception of one from NU agreed that their friends were helping them to succeed on their programme. Family and friends appeared to play a major part in the range of support received by students who were interviewed (see Table 9 below):

**Table 9: Family and Friends**

<b>Family and Friends</b>	<b>NU</b>	<b>UO</b>
Friends Unhelpful	1	0
Family Unhelpful	2	3
Family Provide Moral Support	2	4
Family Help with Finance	3	2
Family Help with Childcare and Finance	2	0
Family Help with Childcare	1	0
Family Help with Finance and Academic Support	1	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>

Students described being encouraged by friends to continue their studies and supported to remain optimistic. Sara's comment was typical:

I'm staying with my family; I'm not paying anything. I work and pay for the course and got the loan. My family are encouraging; they are more interested

in me going to uni even more than me. They want me to go to uni, to study and finish. (Sara aged 20-29, Middle Eastern, UG4).

One student at NU, Noreen who worked part-time in a semi-professional capacity, reported receiving negative comments from friends:

There's a couple of people... they say, what on earth do you want to do that for at your age? The same age as other[s]... I find that quite offensive! (Noreen, British, aged 40-49, parent of teenagers, NUG1).

Adrian and Barbara indicated that their families were being unhelpful. Adrian described his family as people who worked driving dust carts, identified himself and his family as working class and said that they were not helping him. Barbara described how her father responded to her being at university:

But my dad was against it 'cause I left a full-time job blah, blah, blah. You know, he was like, 'what're you doing that for?' But my friends are like, 'yeah, go for it'. My father just thinks I'm wasting my time. He doesn't say anything now but when I said I was leaving my job he was quite astounded. (Black Caribbean, aged 30-39, UG4).

Five students identified their families (among other support) as assisting with finance. Only three students identified their families as the only source of financial support. Three students acknowledged their reliance on the support of family to help with childcare, and two of these also revealed receiving assistance with finance from their families. Carmel, who moved house after joining NU, illustrated the complex childcare arrangements to study full-time and the extent of her reliance on family to stay on her course:

When I worked full time, he went to a nursery and he's still there. He only goes Monday afternoons, all day today and then it depends if I can get the early train home, whether it's then boyfriend, sister, sister's boyfriend, sister's boyfriend's friend, which was the other week, whoever can get to [the borough] and pick him up from nursery has to pick him up and feed him. I get in about half seven. [Interviewer: Does the university help you at all?] No, I don't get any help from government or anything, So...(Esther: - I thought they had a crèche?) No it costs so much, I'd rather leave him close to

home, if there's anything, my grandma or someone can go get him for me (Carmel, aged 20-29, White British, parent 3 year old child, NUG1).

Four UO students cited 'moral support' as one of the ways in which their families supported them. George and Rajinder's responses were typical; they both worked full time. George said that he lived alone and had told his grown up children about his studies and they were encouraging. Rajinder lived with his father whom he said was helping him to succeed. He said that it was knowing that he had his father's backing which encouraged him to succeed. June explained that her family were assisting her financially to complete the course. She said she received support to pay course fees and often received gifts of stationery items. Three UO students stated that their families were unhelpful. Jamila and Veronica gave similar reasons for their families' lack of support. They had both travelled from EU countries to receive a British education and their families did not see the value of this. Gina, the third UO student who said that her family was being unhelpful said that her family was unaware that she was studying:

I come from a family where I am expected to obey my parents, I was told at a young age that I would become a doctor. I did my A Levels and was planning to do medicine when I changed my mind and found a job. Now I know what I want to do but after years of science I have to do the [Ovoc HE Dip] to learn about the [profession] that I intend to study at degree level. (Gina, Black African, aged 20-29, OVoc Dip).

Families and friends were mainly helpful in supporting students, though there were instances of discouragement from friends and family who did not value HE because of students' age, their class or ethnic background.

## The Most Important Factors Contributing to Success

The determination to succeed emerged as an important factor which half of NU and two thirds of UO students mentioned as contributing to their success (see Table 10 below):

**Table 10: The most important factors contributing to success**

Success Factors	NU	UO
Determination to Succeed	6	6
Family	3	0
Teachers at University	2	1
Teachers at University and Friends	1	2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>

NU students discussed overcoming the barriers of low expectations and becoming the first in their families to have a university education. Students gave many examples to indicate this. Below are examples drawn from three students, beginning with Adrian and Carmel, in conversation with Noreen (British, aged 40-49, parent of teenagers, NUG1) who described what they have had to overcome to be at the university:

I think what keeps me going is that I had so many people telling me that I couldn't do something. That now makes me want to do it even more. I had enough of being working class. Not that there's anything wrong with that but the whole of my family are working class. And I look at them and none of them have got the real..[Noreen: Drive] yeah, they sit there and just moan about having nothing [Noreen: won't do nothing about it] and they won't do nothing about it. They get up and will go to work. They work all of them [Noreen: they have no ambition] yeah. There's nothing wrong with driving a dustcart, which they do but they moan about it, and I think, I'm going to be the first one [to go to university].

Yeah - I'm going to be the first one as well ([to go to university]). Carmel, aged 20-29, White British, parent 3 year old child, NUG1).

Cause I've just had enough of it, so it's a bit of having enough of people telling me what I can't do that makes me want to do it (Adrian, aged 20-29, White, English, NUG1).

And I've had enough of people telling me I can't cope as well, that's a good one, that makes me think, yeah all right, watch me, I can cope, I can hold down a part-time job, a baby and university, sometimes - laughs loudly (Carmel).

Yeah, basically I just want to stick two fingers up at everyone (Adrian).

Fitzroy expressed similar sentiments of having to overcome difficulties:

I have to work hard to do something good for myself, what keeps me going is my ambition to succeed. I've some few problems but my ambition just keeps me going and looks at what lays ahead... (Fitzroy, aged 20-29, Black African, NUG2 student at NU).

The three students who identified family as the most important factor contributing to their success provided different explanations of how their families helped. Mark described the importance of his success to his young son. Anne and Izumi talked about how they were able to dedicate time to study due to financial assistance from their family. They would otherwise have to take time away from study to work.

Barbara and Sara acknowledged teachers as being key to their success. Barbara mentioned teachers' enthusiasm and making the subject interesting and Sara found tutorials important in ensuring her success on the programme.

Esther claimed that friends were the main factors contributing to her success:

Being with this lot. I like this lot... because I actually work, I'm trying ...with other people who get down with it and do things. I'm all right. I was a bit scared because there are girls that hang around and go to the pub. I don't want to get into that because I want to do a course after this as well, ...something to do with NUG1. I want to make the most of this and get a good degree and like have something to prove at the end that I actually worked. Especially as I'm not going to be living here. There's no point coming here to not really work. I come a long way. (aged 20-29, White British NUG1)



Six students cited determination as the most important factor contributing to success. Jamila, June and Mamood's responses were typical. Jamila suggested that self motivation, the course content and the course lecturers who were available to help her to solve difficult problems contributed to her success on the programme. However, when asked to identify the most important factor, she selected self-motivation. June said that the pressure of not wanting to disappoint her friends gave her the impetus to persevere and to succeed. Mamood described progressing from the continuing education department to the undergraduate programme with the support of staff in the former department. He stated that having to work part-time to support himself and his family and his ability to motivate himself to work hard to complete the course were key to his success on the programme.

Gina (Black African, aged 20-29, OVoc Dip) explained that the vocational diploma was very difficult and felt that the help of the teachers was ensuring the success of students. Victor and Veronica noted the contribution of students and teachers in aiding their success. Victor suggested that the combined effort of tutors and students resolving problems were his success factors and Veronica attended the same course as her boyfriend. She said that it was the combination, which she described as equal, of the support of her boyfriend and that of the teachers, which were the important factors to her success.

### **Defining Success**

Students' definitions of success varied across the two institutions and included a number of factors. Success was defined as achievements in career, academic and

personal development terms. At NU all the women except Noreen defined success in terms of completing the degree and or getting a job. Noreen said that she was studying for self- satisfaction. All the UO students mentioned the academic award in their definitions of success, though this was qualified with skills for personal and/ professional development. The following are examples of the range of responses from three female and three male students from NU:

...doing my best and getting a good pass (Esther aged 20-29, White British NUG1).

...I want the degree for myself. (Carmel, aged 20-29, White British, parent 3 year old child, NUG1).

...Good grades in everything. (Sara aged 20-29, Middle Eastern, UG4).

I want a good pass mark and job with all the things I've learnt and more money. I don't want to move backwards. (Barbara, Black Caribbean, aged 30-39, UG4).

Pass, not just having gone through it but learnt something and make some contact with lecturers and students. (Mark, parent, aged 30-39, male, ethnicity not stated).

To understand NUG2, improve communication skills, improve academically, expand my understanding of things e.g. critical thinking, to reason, do things successfully...(Fitzroy, aged 20-29, Black African, NUG2 student at NU).

Adrian from NU recounted his school days and illustrated how a teacher, by the way she taught a subject, had made a difference to him after his parents had separated.

Adrian defined success as making that sort of impact in the future.

At UO, all of the students from the continuing education department cited progression to HE level provision as success, though some students also added a higher grade, the development of specific skills such as confidence, organisational/ management. All the undergraduate students on OUG5 also focused on

achievement of the degree, with two of these students, George and Mamood indicating that they might pursue a PhD. Below is a selection of the comments which covered the range of responses from UO's students:

A good degree, a 2:1 (Jamila)

How I think I've tried; If I come out with a pass and give it my best (Black African, aged 20-29, OVoc Dip).

Get a job or a grant for a further degree (Mamood aged 30-39, Somali, OUG6).

A good degree, learnt a lot about myself and developed confidence (June aged 30-39, White UK, OUG5).

Progress to degree, going to classes, meeting deadlines etc. (Veronica aged 20-29, White European OCert HE).

## **Themes emerging – HE Students**

The HE students appeared to have diverse reasons for selecting their HE institutions.

The next chapter shows that the FE students' reasons for selecting their institutions shared similarities with HE students.

Many students had high expectations of HE and appeared surprised when they found poor administration or poor professional standards. A few students had lower

expectations of teachers and found teachers to be more supportive than expected.

Students from the HE case study institutions exceeded expectations of themselves.

They were entertaining higher expectations as a result of becoming a university student. The behaviour of younger students and teachers' inability to control them was an issue for a small number of NU students. This was also an issue for one UO teacher.

A minority of students received support from the HE institutions in choosing their course. The prospectus was not well used by students as a source of information for selecting courses, though one student stated that she selected the institution on the basis of the image conveyed by the pictures and written information. More students from NU than UO gave the main reason for selecting their course as qualification and getting a job. The UO students were more likely to choose their course independently and their reasons for selecting their course were more diverse than NU students'.

Nearly all students interviewed from both institutions said that their expectations had changed since joining their course and more than half said that the changes were related to perceptions of themselves. Half the students from NU and over half from UO (five) identified teachers' 'sensitivity' to their individual, often personal needs, as helping them to succeed. A few students felt they were very much left to struggle on their own.

Students using Student Support Services, a minority of the total, valued it, even when they had to wait because they were oversubscribed. Students who used support services highlighted the politeness and friendliness of the Student Support Services staff. They also mentioned the quality of the services e.g. confidentiality of counselling, being treated with respect when making enquires, financial support which helped to continue with studies etc.

Self-determination was the single most significant factor identified by most students in contributing to their success. Family and friends appeared to play a major role in helping students to succeed whether in financial or emotional terms. Students identified overcoming adversity within their personal lives or refusing to accept low expectations by family or friends in their determination to succeed.

Definitions of success for most students, though varied, combined personal development outcomes: 'soft outcomes' such as learning something or doing the best they can, with 'hard outcomes' such as completing the programmes with a good grade and getting a job. Male students at NU defined success in less utilitarian terms

than female students. In contrast, the three male UO students defined success as achieving the degree with a high grade. Though HE students' differing experiences and perceptions of HE were very inconsistent, their definitions of success were consistent.

## Chapter 5

### PRESENTING THE DATA

#### Further Education Case Study Institutions Staff and Students

##### Staff

This chapter presents the data collected from the interviews with staff and students from both case study FE institutions, compares and contrasts widening access within and between the institutions. Key issues emerging from the interview data are summarised on pages 237, 257 and 302. All staff interviews at the two FE case study institutions, Beacon (BC) and Non-Beacon Colleges (NBC) were conducted one to one. All interviews with teachers and managers at BC were face to face. The principal, vice principal and three teachers/ team leaders at NBC were interviewed face to face; telephone interviews were carried out with the remaining staff at NBC. In total 17 staff were interviewed from the FE colleges, representing the administration, curriculum and all tiers of management (see Table 23 in appendices). Nine staff were interviewed from BC and eight from NBC. At BC, they were the principal, a vice principal, two heads of service, one head of curriculum (with teaching responsibilities), a teacher/ team leader, a tutor and the management information manager. The eight staff interviewed at NBC were the principal, two directors, two heads of curriculum and three teachers, two with team leader responsibilities. None of the FE staff interviewed as managers (10 in total, five from each FE case study) had teaching responsibilities. Four male staff members were interviewed: the head of construction programmes at NBC, the construction teacher/ team leader and the two vice principals at NBC and BC. The remaining 14 staff interviewed were female. Six staff members gave details of their backgrounds,

identifying themselves as Indian (Access Course Tutor, NBC), African Caribbean (Director, NBC), White British (Learning Support Tutor/ Co-ordinator and Construction Teacher/ Course Team Leader, NBC), Black British (Director, BC) and African (Teacher/ Team leader, BC). All teachers and the two principals interviewed were first generation in their families to go to university. Other managers did not provide this information or their social identities.

## **FE Managers**

### **Perceptions of Institutions: Aims, Values and Student Populations**

The purposes of the interviews with managers were to identify good practice in widening access and to examine characteristics, values and barriers with regards to success and progression of non-traditional students from the managers' perspectives. The interviews with managers were also essential in gaining access to appropriate staff and students for the main part of the research (see Appendix XI, Table 25 for full details of managers interviewed). For the purpose of this research, managers are those staff with senior positions who do not teach as part of their duties. Middle managers and course team leaders with teaching responsibilities were considered among the teaching staff.

All managers interviewed acknowledged that the Colleges, BC and NBC, were located in areas of deprivation as defined by the national government. The missions of the two case studies identified the local population without qualifications and those who were underrepresented in FE who were aged 14 plus as the market segment to whom they widened access to education, employment and training. Managers from both institutions were loyal to their institutions' missions but NBC's



managers were more critical of their institution than BC's. Neither of the two institutions' missions made statements about broadening the horizons of students and there was no evidence among the statements made by managers of raising students' aspirations.

All managers interviewed from Beacon College (BC) interpreted the aims and values of BC in similar ways and made similar observations of the students who attended. These managers also referred to the aims of BC as addressing social or economic disadvantage and described BC students as being educationally disadvantaged. The principal stated persuasively that:

Students are mainly local; numbers from 16-19 age group are increasing in number, attracting more who are educationally disadvantaged. In terms of the mission, [BC] is moving from widening participation to and raising achievement to economic engagement – a range of strategies which enable learners to obtain employment e.g. programmes such as New Deal find jobs for learners, [BC] has an employment agency (Principal BC).

There was consistency among BC's managers' expression of the college's aims with those given by its principal. This was the case for managers at all levels of BC. The following excerpt from the interview with one of BC's senior managers echoed the principal's perception. The senior manager, responsible for the learning centres, described BC's aims and learners as:

...predominantly local, evidence of deprivation, performance measures in learners very low. Second chance, average age 28, many out of education for some time and increasing numbers of 16-18 year olds. There are two main bands of 16-18 year old/ under 20s; those who recently left education, had a negative education experience, a challenging element, which the College works with to succeed. [The other group] people who've been out for some time e.g. childcare, single parent families, lacking in confidence. The students who use the service centre the most are the young students. Professional people who are studying for vocational qualifications will not use the facilities as much as the young group.

This common understanding of the college mission and the student population to whom BC marketed its provision, was expressed by all the managers interviewed, including the manager responsible for management information (MIS) at BC who did not elaborate as much as others but expressed similar sentiments.

BC's managers described the institution's achievement in widening access for underrepresented groups with pride. The vice principal's comment below was typical, not only of senior managers but all staff interviewed:

Something peculiar about BC; equal opportunity – we don't have an equal ops structure or person but equal ops operates throughout. Rooting of the college in the community, a very deprived borough, one of the most deprived. There is a need, an obvious need, we meet it and it can be done. For example, the LEA asked BC to help a failed school with attendance of 30 per cent. We had the pupils' attendance up to 90 per cent now we get 80 per cent of these same pupils continuing at BC ... We do the right things, we do things right. We have special projects, New Deal, a new version of the New Deal, a pilot version of it with the Dept. of Works and Pensions. A local Corporate Bank - we've developed a new programme to inspire young people, a well know investment bank in the City of London – 16-18 year olds entering the computing industry.

There was recognition by BC's vice principal in his statement, continued below, that BC was skilled in facilitating academic success for its non-traditional students at pre-university levels. He also pointed out the success of BC's students at HE levels of study. He acknowledged, unlike any of his colleagues, that academic success for non-traditional students did not necessarily result in successful careers, which was critical to non-traditional students' notions of success, who were returning to a 'second chance' education. BC's vice principal added:

Things don't work well for our students. Qualifications are 'not enough'. We can give our students NVQ or A Levels but they don't get jobs or [they] drop out of university.

The principal of NBC expressed the aims and values of the college, similarly to the principal of BC but quite differently from her senior managers. She expressed them passionately as well as detailing how she perceived the mission operating in practice:

We're here for local people; for the local community. We measure our success against the changing population of the borough of NB. In terms of the mission - increasing student numbers and equality of opportunity is the reason why I get out of bed. I get a buzz out of other people growing and developing. I want to see NB College grow and increase the number of learners through the door and not at any cost. Alongside widening participation and reaching out into the community we must provide added value. For example I introduced myself to a new security guard recently. I asked him what he thought about the College, he said that he wished he was young again so that he could attend College like the young people here at NBC. I called two mature, experienced security guards at the College who had attended programmes at NBC to inspire and encourage this new employee to engage in learning. I also instructed the two experienced security guards to share their knowledge of how to work and study with this new employee. The latter's interest in learning made me happy, not about increasing student numbers...I feel privileged to be doing something what I love.

NBC senior managers expressed the College's mission and values similarly to those of their principal, at least in terms of widening participation and meeting the needs of the local community. However, they also highlighted, unlike their principal and unlike BC's managers, the weaknesses they perceived in NBC's implementation of widening access:

The mission overarches everything the College's does, its background and includes the community - widening participation is the focal point and mission. The strategy is mixed; we don't do enough strategic and pro-active... community forums, engaging the community. The College policy is a little reactive, looking at government initiatives, agencies that may put us in touch with - not a dynamic group. Not meeting groups on a more regular basis. In terms of strategies, the college is 'comfortable' with its client groups. What I'm looking for is a more dynamic strategy - ... I want to deliver less but better quality... reduce the amount of LSC dependency which will free up resources to look at employers and community groups... (vice principal, NBC)

Another senior manager with responsibility for the 14-19 curriculum described NBC's mission as 'brave' in providing for 14-19 learners, given the diversity of the borough with high proportions of young people with disabilities and learning difficulties.

The two NBC middle managers interviewed expressed the same mission as the principal and two senior managers. In their description of NBC's population they commented on the nature of the students within their respective curriculum areas as follows:

Widening participation to meet the needs of the community we serve. Our learners are hugely enthusiastic, very keen to progress and achieve on the whole. They have aspirations to gain employment and to progress and not to stagnate. Many of our students have had poor or disrupted education and therefore aren't always aware of the skills they need and what is required to achieve the kinds of employment. The great majority of our students are reliant on income support, or work in very low paid, antisocial hours jobs in order to remain on course (Health, Care and Access Programme Manager)/

The other middle manager, the construction manager, was critical of the emphasis given to employers in NBC's mission and the lack of returns to students:

I support the College's mission - Widening participation to meet the needs of the community we serve. The learners often get forgotten and feel that they're left off. Although our mission is good, employers get a lot of attention and they don't always offer much.

This was not reflected in the comments made by students in this curriculum area later in this chapter, many of whom defined success as obtaining an apprenticeship with an employer.

### **Increasing Student Numbers**

As stated in Chapter 1, the strategic plans and marketing information of both colleges proposed increases in student numbers and groups that would be prioritised in coming years. Managers from BC and NBC cited similar student groups from

whom their institutions were planning to increase recruitment; these were underrepresented groups in further education. The principal of NBC perceived a possible increase in the recruitment of students from postcodes in NB borough where the indicators of deprivation were high. NBC's principal explained that this data was collected and analysed by her management team. As mentioned earlier, NBC's senior managers highlighted the weaknesses in the college's ability to widen access. The NBC vice principal identified the success of NBC in the recruitment of students who were refugees, migrants and ex offenders. He criticised the institution's failure in changing the recruitment patterns of subjects along gender and ethnic lines, giving the example of craft subjects' recruiting White and African Caribbean male students and business studies recruiting mainly Asian students. The NBC director made similar comments as the vice principal: NBC were increasing the number of young people who continued their post-school education in the borough:

For certain groups of students – evidenced in the large numbers of women of African, African Caribbean [origin] progressing to higher education and employment in Health and Social Care, Childcare and Access to Nursing. Craft courses attract adult returners who progress to learn a trade or craft and set up their own businesses. The College has its own 'niche' markets. There are gaps – more Turkish women, we get younger Turkish and Asian women but the older women...ESOL; across the age range due to refugees and asylum seekers. ... We work with schools – building relationships with schools to get 'fair' share of students...

The NBC middle manager responsible for construction described an increase in the number of learners, the varying number of women on the range of construction courses and the increase in women students on painting and decorating and motor vehicle courses. He explained that a member of his team attended conferences on women in construction. However, he stated that his department did not target any

groups. The manager for health, care and access programmes identified younger learners as the increasing student category and linked the work with schools mentioned above by the NBC director as the reason for the increase.

BC's principal said that the groups they were trying to increase were changing.

These groups were described by BC's principal as 'more needy' than usual:

In response to the college reaching a ceiling on widening participation to its campuses, BC is taking education to the learner, aiming to attract those without the attitude or ability to come to the college, for example, parents or carers responsible for others, those who think they are not good enough for whom mainstream doesn't fit. The intention is to get these groups taught.

The head of BC's learning resources centres also identified increasing recruitment from 'more needy groups'. In the interview extract below, she not only listed the groups and highlighted the changes the service had made to support these groups but showed agreement with her principal on having high expectations of students. In the head of learning resources centre's case, this meant socialising students into study habits through changing their behaviour:

'Disadvantages' range from the school refusers; 15 year olds, people with records – referrals, footballing courses, New Deal, yes all use the Learning Centre. There is open access, most of the time it's supported learning. A lot of it is behaviour management for the workplace, to be able to stay in college and an opportunity to moderate their own behaviour. Our mission is to create independent learners. We start with heavy support which we wean them off and then give them the skills and freedom to try the skills out. Respect for the student is our theme; nothing is too good for them.

The head of learning resources centres at BC commented on the changes to the length of courses in response to government policies. She referred to a number of policies such as the postcode premium paid to colleges for recruiting students from 'deprived' areas. She implied that BC increased its recruitment of 'disadvantaged' students but policies such as the Department of Health and Social Security's '15

Hour Rule' prevented people who were unemployed from claiming Unemployment Benefits and studying for more than 15 hours. BC designed shorter courses to enable those who were claiming social benefits to attend. The head of learning resources centres appeared critical of the shorter period of time students spent in the classroom as BC responded to the government's widening participation agenda. She hinted at a contradiction when she said that:

Most of the students are disadvantaged; the percentage who pay fees is very small. The post Kennedy push meant that we devised courses where they hardly sit down.

The BC director interviewed was responsible for a programme for people who have been unemployed for more than 6 months. She explained that the programme was not a teaching programme per se but a 16 week, skills based programme which aimed to place people who were in receipt of benefits into entry-level jobs. This BC director also echoed the ethos of having high expectations of learners. She explained that having high expectations of students might result in students having to leave the programme if their performance did not meet expectations as the programme outcome is the achievement of a job:

We develop hard skills – IT skills etc. and soft skills, attitude, assertion, professional attitude. Part of the programme is debt management, looking at jobs which pay £15,000 per year minimum to provide this. Setting achievable goals and realistic expectations of students, providing negative and positive aspects to working e.g. not seeing your friends as often. Many of our students have friendships with long-term unemployed people whom they meet in the day time and evening every day. Up to 12 months support is provided once students have found a job, calling them at home, having lunch with them, [the] funding [is for] up to 6 months but [we] keep up support for 12 months after the course. I have [a] 'tough love' ethos. You see very few students get a 2<sup>nd</sup> chance. The programme doesn't allow for this. However with a GCSE or other programme, students can re-sit etc [if they fail]. This is not a criticism of the programme as I feel that the programme needs to be based on outputs, i.e. jobs, as it would not work otherwise.

The skills and personal characteristics (attitudes are not 'skills') that are described by BC's director (above) are explored from students' perspectives later.

### **Success and Widening Access**

The principals of NBC and BC viewed success as a process. However they qualified this with concrete examples of students within their institutions. NBC's principal explained success in terms of diversity, not only in relation to the college population but also in terms of the values of the institution enabling all staff and students to be proud of their identity. The interviews conducted with students (see next section) revealed that not all students perceived their teachers' treating them with the respect to which NBC's principal alluded. The responses managers and teachers who were interviewed gave suggested that NBC's staff perceived themselves as individuals and not 'uniform' in the opinions they expressed. Unlike BC where all (management) interviewed gave very similar responses. NBC's principal said:

The UK system is still elitist and ethnocentric which promulgates cloning. This institution doesn't create clones; we encourage our staff and students to hold on to their identity with pride. After their time with us, our students are armed to find their way through the system. Evidence of our success is provided by our postcode data, student experiences and from talking to people.

NBC's principal also defined success using the college's main funder, the LSC's indicators of retention and achievement but emphasised '...people...having spent the time with us usefully, growing in a whole range of ways'.

NBC's vice principal defined success for learners as the recruitment of groups of learners into vocational and non-traditional areas of the curriculum and that learning should be enjoyable. He also suggested that success was the implementation of some



of the equal opportunities practices of the former single education authority for London, The Inner London Education Authority (ILEA):

Innovative like some of the ILEA things e.g. more young people and young women into construction. ... Learners have grown and progress to vocational areas. ... Learning is not a chore you have to do but is enjoyable, lifelong learning.

NBC's director, like her principal, cited success as completing programmes, achieving learning targets and ensuring equality of opportunities. The NBC director's definition of success was also close to the values cited by BC's principal and director, as quoted above.

The construction manager at NBC identified additional learning support as an important factor which contributed to success. He explained that placing an additional learning support teacher in the same staff room as the vocational tutors had increased student success on construction programmes. His definition of success was broader than qualifications and similar to some of the broader notions implied by NBC's principal. He was critical of the lack of official recognition of 'softer' success factors such as students' punctuality and 'good' behaviour.

The NBC manager for health, care and access programmes also highlighted the value of additional learning support in contributing to learner success. She discussed how using an additional learning support teacher in the classroom, jointly planning and co-teaching with the Vocational Teacher, assisted student success. She also mentioned the importance of joint planning and co-teaching, between the Vocational Teacher and the Key Skills Communications Tutor, as contributing to students' succeeding in their vocational qualification. Her definition of success was

concerned with the attainment of the qualification, employment and vocational skills:

Students achieve and achieve well, gaining qualifications for employment and qualifications for higher education. Essentially it's about having skills for work – more of a dialogue with employers to make sure students are coming out with what employers want so that people can leave the college equipped. ...So that employers will know that students from NBC will have the right skills and knowledge to be able to work effectively. We're not only intending that people just get qualifications, but that they're very good practitioners who you would want to leave your elderly parent, sick cousin or young child with.

BC's principal's explanation of success for students within the institution included similar descriptors to NBC's health, care and access programme manager, such as job opportunities. Success for BC's principal also included progression to elite universities which required students to live away from home:

Learners have progressed into jobs, to further and higher education; Black young people have been accepted at the University of Cambridge. Young people who take up higher education places some distance away from their residence are a good measure of success. Learners who leave to obtain jobs are described as successful. I prefer the word 'succeeding' rather than 'success'; an on-going process of ups and downs.

In defining success BC's vice principal, like NBC's principal earlier, acknowledged the pressures that many students were under, and stated also that BC did not use that as an excuse for failure. He also expressed values that were similar to his principal and head of learning resources centres regarding having high expectations of learners. He challenged the importance placed on obtaining qualifications and felt that they were not enough for the success of BC's students. It was the initiatives developed by the college which he perceived as transforming students' lives:

The standard we expect of people is very high. We accept there's social pressures but we don't excuse them. ...We have schemes which transform people's lives, [mentoring scheme, a special grant aid programme with an enhanced work experience placement, and several special events e.g. Black History Month].

The head of learning resources centres described students' learning independently as her measure of success. She explained how they devised a highly structured support to teachers using IT to develop students' skills in learning independently. An assignment required students to utilise the learning resource centres (LRC) and was jointly marked by teachers and LRC staff. Students learnt research skills in the LRC as they worked independently of their class teachers. The head of LRC explained success in terms of students' learning independently:

... for students to recognise they can learn without the teacher, progression is moving on to the intranet therefore recognition that this is where they need to go. Induction at entry is in three stages, first how to research through books, second is research with the teacher and third is internet searching. We insist that students come into the centre as part of 'leaving the womb of the teacher'.

## **Emerging Themes: FE Managers**

There was more of a corporate culture among the FE managers than the HE managers. This was greater for BC managers than the NBC's. BC's managers' perceptions of their institution's mission and notion of student success were expressed similarly to their principal's. NBC managers, though sharing perceptions of NBC with their principal, were more critical of NBC. Widening access was targeted to specific groups, more 'needy' students at BC and 'ordinary' students at NBC. Managers from both BC and NBC characterised the areas in which the colleges were based and the students who attended as socially 'deprived'. The FE provision was very much to 'compensate' for students' backgrounds and environment.

Both BC and NBC were increasing student numbers among those groups government had prioritised for education and skills: young people, adult basic skills, vocational skills in areas such as construction and health and social care and people from postcodes where students are underrepresented in FE.

Having high expectations of students emerged as a constant theme among BC managers and its absence within the statements made by NBC was noticeable.

The concept of learning independently, outside of the classroom, was an irony in the light of the reduction of course hours at BC (and at other FE colleges).

There was no single definition of success shared between or within the two case study FE institutions. Academic achievement was cited by all managers along with a range of personal development benefits identified by individual managers. BC's

principal's perceptions of student success differed from the other managers in that they were functional. Success for BC's principal was gaining employment or entry to an elite HE institution where students lived away from home. These emerging themes will be discussed in greater depth in chapter 6.

## **Interviews with FE Teachers**

### **Introduction**

The data presented in this section is based on interviews with seven teachers. In NBC, they were a head of school with teaching responsibilities (Elaine), a teacher/course team leader (Thandi) and two construction tutors; a Course Tutor (Juliet) and a Learning Support Tutor (Wendy). Three teachers were interviewed from NBC, an Access Tutor (Zara), Construction teacher/course team leader (Samuel) and Learning Support Tutor / Co-ordinator (Odette). The purpose of the interviews with teachers was to identify strategies which supported student success, to explore staff perceptions of factors which support student success and to identify common characteristics among staff who widened access successfully for underrepresented groups in FE. The FE teachers interviewed did not give responses that were as lengthy as the HE staff or FE managers.

### **Main Reasons for Selecting to Work at the College**

The teachers interviewed at BC and NBC provided a variety of reasons for choosing to work at the colleges. These appeared to be mostly accidental rather than planned. Thandi at BC stated that she enjoyed working with the diversity of students at BC. Wendy and Juliet did not have permanent contracts at the time of the interview. Wendy's post was funded by the College's Standards Fund as the section received an unsatisfactory grade when it was inspected by Ofsted. Juliet was employed on a part-time hourly paid contract at the time of the interview and said that she had applied for another post at a different college and would have taken up the

appointment at the other college if at the time an opportunity was available. Elaine expressed similar reasons for selecting to work at BC to Thandi but also others:

I grew up in the borough and have always been concerned with who attends and who teaches in this College. I like the diversity and different cultures of the students who attend and being familiar with the borough.

Zara said that she applied for a non-teaching post 14 years ago at NBC after leaving university; she was unsuccessful with the application but was offered a teaching post and has worked at NBC since then. Odette stated that she chose to work locally after becoming a parent and began working as a volunteer at NBC because of its ethos of working with local people. Samuel said that he was unsuccessful with his first application for a teaching post at another college but the experience of attending the first interview prepared him well for his successful interview at NBC.

### **Descriptions of the institutions**

The descriptors used by BC and NBC teachers for their respective institutions differed. Teachers at BC related theirs to their perceptions of students' backgrounds and NBC teachers described the ethos of the college, the environment, the nature of the buildings and the teachers who worked at NBC with enthusiasm:

A place which encourages widening participation, supportive place, with narrow corridors to encourage communication and closeness. Motivated lecturers (Zara, NBC).

Odette described NBC as somewhere that students feel they can succeed. Samuel, like Zara, described NBC in terms of the teachers who worked there. He said that NBC was 'a nice place to work, if you put in the effort' and went on to say that it was characterised by the 'camaraderie' of its staff.

The BC tutors' descriptions of the institution focused on their perceptions of the students within their departments, as with Juliet, or the borough within which BC was located as did Wendy, Juliet and Thandi. All BC teachers located the College within the community and associated BC with widening access to underrepresented groups in FE; this reflected the comments made by their managers. Juliet, the course tutor to groups of 16-19 year students at BC, described the college as 'inner city' and the students as 'street kids, struggling young people'. Wendy described BC as 'widening participation to local, disadvantaged groups'. Elaine described NBC's student and staff population as reflecting the diversity of the borough and Thandi said that NBC was 'a College which caters for the local community'.

### **Whether Perceptions of the institutions Changed Since Working There**

There was agreement among all the teachers interviewed that their perceptions of the institutions, NBC and BC, had changed since they began working there. They all said that their experience of working at the two case study FE institutions had become more positive, except Samuel from NBC and Wendy from BC. However, it was different for each teacher. Wendy, the Learning Support Tutor in construction who was employed on a short term contract to provide learning support, tutorials, teaching and learning said 'I didn't realise how set in their ways some teachers are; some have no intention of changing'.

Zara, the Access Course Tutor commented on the bureaucracy and opportunities to develop which NBC offered to staff. Her perceptions of NBC suggested that there was consistency of professional development opportunities. Although there had been changes in NBC through the recruitment of new managers, her experience of support



and personal development opportunities had not changed. Odette stated that she liked the idea of working at NBC because of its ethos but since working at NBC she described feeling like she was ‘achieving or giving... [and] wanted wonderful things to happen for students’. Samuel (Construction teacher/ team leader) on the other hand, expressed irritation with the administrative demands and the constant changes made by the accreditation body for his programmes.

Elaine expressed how her perceptions of BC had changed, based on her observations of its effective widening participation practices. She commented on the accessibility of learning provision to the diverse BC student population. This, she felt, was due to the way in which the college was structured. She also mentioned how BC selected courses and delivered these in a range of locations to target specific groups of underrepresented students. Thandi described similar changes in her perceptions of the college since joining BC. Like Wendy, she talked about BC’s strategies targeting specific groups of underrepresented students as well as a student-centred policy. She mentioned parents coming into BC to study A Levels and described being ‘pushed into taking account of our students’ needs’. Juliet (Course Tutor, construction) had intended to teach adults and now enjoyed teaching ‘problem children’. She said she had not realised that young people were not taught the ‘basics’ at school.

### **The Institutions’ Missions and Widening Access**

As can be seen from the response to earlier questions, staff showed an awareness of their institutions’ missions to widen access. Like their managers, the language used by teachers at BC and NBC to describe the messages given to staff about widening access suggested a very clear, well understood message throughout both institutions.

Similar to the statement made by Gerald from NU, (see chapter 4) the NBC teachers interviewed implied that engaging in practices to widen access was not an option but 'obligatory'. There was one exception, Wendy, who reported that construction teachers were uncooperative with widening access practices. She indicated that the introduction of new, student centred approaches to working with new student groups was meeting with resistance. She did not wholly blame the construction teachers for not engaging with the new systems but the constraints to time and resources. Elaine said that 'there is a great emphasis on access and widening participation' at BC. The quote from Thandi, below, suggested that widening access has led to college-wide staff practices:

Staff have to build a relationship with our students. It's written down in black and white. We're told that we must keep data on tutorials. Staff have to understand the background of our students, e.g. the responsibility of children, the violence they may experience and court proceedings. Staff have to cope with these in the dealings with students.

Zara spoke with pride about the opportunities NBC offered for ESOL students on lower level courses to progress to higher level study. Samuel from NBC, like his manager, who was also interviewed (Manager of Construction department), appeared unaware of the targets that were set by NBC for widening participation. He did however, illustrate his understanding and involvement in strategies to increase student retention. This included contacting women applicants to provide information on NBC's childcare support and assessing all applicants.

## **Encouraging the recruitment of underrepresented groups: Information, Advice, Guidance and Selection**

As with the HE teachers, very few FE teachers were involved in the production of course information for distribution to the public. The only teacher interviewed who said that she produced course information for the public was Elaine the head of school. She was positive about BC's admission system but was critical of the prospectus. Elaine explained that staff who provided information to potential students were usually from a range of different backgrounds and as a result the information sessions and guidance staff ensured that students making enquires to BC were referred to an appropriate person with specialist knowledge. Elaine described the BC's prospectus similarly to Erica at UO, she perceived it as confusing in the message that it conveyed and suggested that it should be made more 'eye catching'.

The FE teachers interviewed, like the HE teachers, appeared to have little influence on the selection process and the targets that were set for the recruitment of students. Unlike the HE teachers, the FE teachers accepted their powerlessness in this process and did not question it. The strategies mentioned by BC teachers as used by the institution to support the recruitment of underrepresented groups were advice and guidance to help make choice, support services such as childcare and appropriate assessment to place students on the right level course or to devise a programme to match students' abilities. The three BC staff who participated in recruitment processes, Juliet, Elaine and Thandi, provided details of how the institution encouraged the recruitment of underrepresented groups with open days, and developing new provision. Support was also provided but Thandi was critical:

There are systems to support students, they don't always work as they are usually insufficient such as childcare; 90% of students are parents and one small crèche with 13 children!

Odette confirmed the competition for students with neighbouring colleges and described 'poaching' students and 'making the college... the place local people prefer to go to'. Despite Odette's and Wendy's role in supporting students, they were not involved in the admissions of students.

Zara agreed with BC's teachers' claims of encouraging the recruitment of underrepresented groups by the offer of support. She identified the need for additional learning support and the absence of policy to address the support needs of underrepresented groups at NBC. Similarly, Thandi criticised the inadequacies of BC's strategies due to lack of resources to meet student demand.

### **Teachers' Roles in Students' Success**

#### The Course: Description of students on programme

The research explored teachers awareness of the information collected on the profile of students attending their programme and how, if at all, this influenced their practice with different student groups. Both HE and FE teachers interviewed were asked to describe the students who attended their programmes. Three teachers, Samuel from NBC, and Wendy and Thandi from BC used gender as the descriptor for students on their programmes. Two teachers, Zara from NBC and Juliet from BC, described their students using ethnicity and gender. Odette, from NBC, and Elaine from BC, used special needs and ethnicity and education background respectively as descriptors for their students.

The frequency with which data on student profiles was collected by FE colleges for presentation to the main funder, the LSC, was discussed in Chapter 1. Despite this volume of data produced, the teachers in the FE case study institutions were impressionistic in providing a description of the students who attended the programmes they taught. The HE teachers were also impressionistic in their descriptions of their students (Chapter 4). However, the HE teachers showed a greater awareness of the proportions of different student groups than the FE teachers. The FE teachers appeared removed from the data sets that were collected by their institutions about the type of students recruited onto their programmes. This suggested that the official data held on students was not part of the day to day knowledge of FE teachers:

Women dominated and usually from African or Caribbean countries (Zara, NBC).

Mainly young Black men or boys that are 'street-wise' but have a mission or goal, they come to college but are still immature (Juliet, BC).

Men and a few women (Wendy, BC).

Mainly women, local people without qualifications (Thandi, BC).

Black and minority ethnic groups without qualifications (Elaine, BC).

People requiring Key Skills Communication and with special needs (Odette, NBC).

Mostly men but in Year One, 30 per cent are women (Samuel, NBC).

### **Teaching to Support Non-traditional Students**

As with teachers from the HE case study institutions, there was agreement among the five teachers interviewed from BC and NBC that their teaching contributed to student success. The FE teachers, like the HE teachers, provided examples of teaching strategies used to support student success. The examples consisted of a

combination of teaching and learning strategies to encourage young students to engage in learning the subject matter and/ approaches which provided pastoral care to students. There were similarities between the strategies given by the FE teachers and their HE counterparts. This was particularly the case with the examples given by the NU and OU teachers from the continuing education department, who cited developing the course content, utilising varying teaching and learning styles, providing additional language support and tutorials.

Wendy described methods she developed to support teachers in making the content of Key Skills lessons more relevant and engaging for construction students on introductory-level courses:

IT/IL[Information Technology/ Information and Learning Technology], is a new role and I am promoting the use of IT in teaching and learning through staff development. ...Students don't see IT as relevant as they did it in school and it was not done well at school. I am using IT to write business letters, numeracy to teach bookkeeping. I also provide enrichment and take them to play football at the [local sports centres] [we visit well-known museums]. I use 'fun' activities to teach Life Skills e.g. buying a ticket on the underground. None of these students knew how to use the ticket machine. They didn't buy tickets when they used the underground...Enrichment and 'fun' activities all help with time keeping and commitment.

Thandi explained how she took a personal interest in students' lives and her perceptions of the different roles she played in supporting their individual and academic development:

In having one-to-one relationships, staff with students, some students don't have a relationship with anyone but their child or no one e.g. refugees. You make sure you're fair. I have a personal interest in meeting students' need like a social worker, I help guide the students, I act as a counsellor. In teaching I used different teaching and learning styles to meet the needs of students by identifying how students' learn and delivering [to suit].

Elaine also perceived teacher interventions during the induction process, where opportunities were provided for one-to-one contact with students through tutorials

and using the Individual Learning Plan (ILP), as the main factors influencing student success:

...Good induction, this I've changed to include, one-to-one tutorial, ILPs, students to share learning issues through learning support and guidance, career aim, do they know what they need to do to progress, strengths and weaknesses.

Samuel (NBC), who teaches craft skills, saw the teacher's presence and interventions as important in ensuring student success. He described a supportive, teacher-focused approach:

Being there, your teaching style, not being afraid to stop things: if they're not going right. It's a practical course – checking and ensuring that students know what they're doing and are able to get on with their work. I encourage them to be confident in what they're doing and to ask questions. I repeat myself to recap.

In contrast to Samuel, Odette taught literacy or provided one-to-one support for students with learning difficulties; she described 'student-centred' approaches, as discussed in Chapter 2, as a key factor. She explained how by learning through experience and learning by doing, she motivated students and ensured their success:

Engaging with what they're doing – if you find something that is from their own experience, using it to make learning enjoyable. Getting to know how the learners learn and teaching to suit that. There's an awful lot of stuff, e.g. in Health and Safety, you can teach through active learning, through discussion, taking students out of the classroom, use role play, videos, drawing on students' backgrounds. I'd never think of doing something without drawing on the massive experience that students have. You have to approach it by bringing their own experience. People like listening to each other. I really like students to participate. It's tempting to do everything but you don't.

Juliet and Zara illustrated how they made the course relevant to their specific group.

In working with a group of mainly young (16-19 year olds) Black boys/ young men

Juliet explained that she used 'verbal, audio, visual information about what they're

doing and what they can gain from it'. As indicated earlier, Zara taught groups of

mainly African or Caribbean women on an Access course at NBC. She detailed how

she helped her students succeed by relating the content of the programme to their personal experiences and cultures:

I move away from Anglo Saxon theories and teach about other cultures e.g. in the role of women in society. I would look at how women are treated in an industrialised society and look at Africa, and how women in Ghana run the community, or, as in Christianity, I would look at the rights of women in the Koran. e.g. Maslow's hierarchy of needs. I would show that it's by doing away with comforts that you achieve self actualisation. E.g. child rearing, I would look at punishment and reward within the cultures of the students in the class...

### **Teachers' Perceptions: Addressing Students' Ambitions and Treating Students with Respect**

Teachers from the FE case study institutions were asked if they were aware of students' ambitions and how they responded to them. The FE teachers, like the HE teachers, said that they were aware of their students' ambitions and responded to them. The responses made on how they supported students' ambitions by individual FE teachers were as varied as those of the HE teachers. Two of the teachers, Zara (NBC) and Wendy (BC), discussed the use of approaches that were innovative. However, Wendy, in her statement below, suggested that the FE inspection and the LSC's financial regimes created barriers to creativity and flexibility when supporting students' ambitions. Two teachers, Thandi (BC) and Samuel (NBC) indicated that they raised students' aspirations. Zara, in recognising discriminatory practices in the workplace, illustrated below, the extent to which she tried to modify African students' behaviour to help them secure employment:

The course must be relevant to students' needs. Time is needed to find this out. 'Courage' is needed to try different ways of working with the students e.g. IT class was changed. The fear is that students may not achieve their key skills therefore we may not have the freedom as we would like to be creative or flexible (Wendy BC).



[I] encourage them to achieve by building on skills e.g. academic skills – make sure they use academic language, that success is not only about knowing but about how to present themselves e.g. I often tell African women not to ‘suck their teeth’ as it gives a particular kind of impression (Zara NBC).

Juliet and Elaine from BC explained how tutorials were used to support students’ ambitions. Elaine also described difficulties faced by students and FE colleges due to the incongruence between courses provided at the equivalent of A Level within her department at BC and the requirements of the workplace:

E.g. someone was interested in carpentry. I talked to him and found out all that he needed to do it. A woman was interested in interior design, I did the same. It’s important to help them in getting the information for them and encouragement to keep their dream [alive] and if there’s no one to help you, you lose your dream. I meet individual students’ needs through tutorials and direct them to others if necessary (Juliet, BC).

At the end of each term, normal timetable is suspended for 1 week to review ILPs. The ILPs [Individual Learning Plans] are excellent- they [each student] come in to a 30 min 1:1 interview / review with their tutor and 1 other person e.g. Head of Department. This has been recognised cross college and is being developed. We have a lot of work to be done vis a vis Workforce Development – all part of mapping qualifications against jobs and supporting employees. Career pathways are very confusing and it affects motivation at level 3, as employers have concerns due to low recruitment in shortage areas. Confusions of levels and job roles, students on courses yet employers have spaces! (Elaine, BC)

Samuel identified a similar approach to Juliet, in explaining how he treated students with respect. He implied that with experience, he had developed skills to find out students’ ambitions and suggested that he set out to raise their aspirations:

Yes, I speak to them, having taught for a number of years. I tell them that painting is not all there is. (Samuel, NBC)

Thandi from BC, as with Zara from NBC, acknowledged the discrimination that non-traditional students faced. She seemed to identify with her students and like Samuel, supported them in overcoming the effects of low aspirations:

Being Black and from an ethnic minority group I see myself as a role model, I tell my students that they have choices, they shouldn't limit themselves to what others think they can do, ...individual ideas and information...break down barriers (Thandi, BC) .

All the teachers interviewed suggested that they assisted students in achieving their ambitions by talking to them. This is encapsulated in Odette's comments below. She also highlights the work pressures and tensions which can prevent teachers from supporting students in achieving their ambitions:

...It's really important to find out what they want to do and their short and long term goals. If you don't try and find out or someone to help them, the danger is as a teacher you tend to be so busy you don't have the time to do these things. On the other hand there are those teachers who are not prepared to let go of their students. You can get very possessive and you don't want to let them go. It's important to listen to the students.

All teachers interviewed at the FE case study institutions, as with the HE teachers, asserted that they treated their students with respect. All the FE teachers, unlike HE teachers, used very specific examples to illustrate how they treated students with respect. Elaine from BC cited how she treated students with respect, using student feedback, she was the only FE teacher who used this example whereas three HE teachers, one from UO and two from NU, gave student feedback as their example. Two FE teachers, Zara (NBC) and Thandi (BC), included in their description of treating students with respect, avoiding treating students like children:

The language I use in class e.g. no name is too difficult to pronounce. If I have to talk about plagiarism, I will talk delicately, not treating them like younger children, like they're my own children. I keep [a] very obvious divide between me and my students. (Zara, NBC).

I don't treat them like they're children (Thandi, BC).

Three teachers from BC, Elaine, Juliet and Wendy, described treating students in ways which dealt with their concerns seriously and took their specific needs and

interest into consideration. Juliet and Elaine to a lesser extent demonstrated making changes to meet the needs of students as opposed to expecting the students to change to fit in with the teacher/ institution:

The majority of staff experienced their students as excellent. The majority are committed. Each course tutor should get feedback about students' perceptions. Student Forums take place where we meet students, Student reps from each course to discuss the feelings in the group. We use the group as a sounding board e.g. recruitment, induction. The role of the rep e.g. we had an IT tutor who was criticised as poor by the group. I visited the class and observed...the class, the tutor improved immediately as [the tutor] needed to be 'reminded'. (Elaine, BC)

Juliet used the example of adapting BC's rules in her classroom to respond to the youth culture of mobile phones by setting new ground rules that allowed her young students to keep their mobile phones switched on in the classroom as evidence of her respect for students:

I know that young people use their mobile phones a lot and that it's important to them, so I allow them to have their phones on in class but they know that they have to answer it outside the classroom, telling their friends that they'll call back later.

Samuel and Odette from NBC shared similar perceptions of treating students with respect. They both gave examples of how they had treated students respectfully and they talked about students' respectful behaviour towards them in return, as measures of the respect they had shown to students:

Having been a foreman on a site, I would never ask someone to do something I wouldn't do. The respect I get from students [is the indication of treating them with respect]. I break down barriers [between teacher/student] but I leave a line separating us (Samuel, NBC).

Cardinal Rule – I would never argue with a student, confrontation is a no-no. You get feedback; students want to talk to you. A student said to me years later that having attended my class, things that I said to her gave her the confidence to go on to do other things. Many of my students from Motor Vehicle and Construction, they may not want to know about Key Skills any more but they will always stop and talk to me (Odette, NBC).

## **Support services**

Similar to NU, the FE case study institutions provided a range of Student Support Services. They were staffed by specialists and located within discrete geographical areas at BC and NBC. The FE Teachers were asked if they provided support to students, whether they supported students to access services such as finance, counselling etc. and their opinion of their college's Student Support Services.

As with HE teachers, the five FE teachers interviewed agreed that Student Support Services were valuable to students. One teacher, Thandi criticised the lack of support services at BC based on the high demand. Zara and Samuel from NBC valued their Support Services. Zara, below, echo the positive sentiments expressed by Samuel:

The College provides support for students to deal with their background but the systems might not always work, needs aren't being met as there is insufficient to go round (Thandi BC).

Most students benefit from counselling, grants etc. the support services they're very good (Zara NBC).

Odette from NBC praised the Support Services but cited weak links with their Admissions Services to meet the needs of the client group with whom she worked, mainly English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL):

It's very well integrated into ESOL; Student Services and Admissions is mixed sometimes but the Refugee [Service] is a very big support. Student [Support Workers] are very helpful with very difficult, younger students. Childcare and Registry, we use a lot. The Admissions Unit's links [needs] to be built on much more after induction.

Elaine said that BC's Student Support Services was 'very supportive– their role is quite wide and they give advice to staff and students'. Juliet confirmed Elaine's statement on the value of Student Support Services in supporting staff at BC, in her comment on supporting one of her construction students who was dyslexic. Juliet

spoke about the basic techniques she had learnt to diagnose students' needs and to adapt her teaching and learning material to support students who were dyslexic:

One of my students with learning difficulties was dyslexic – he didn't 'look dyslexic', he didn't tell me that he was dyslexic because he said, he didn't want to be treated differently. Now, I talk to them and find out for myself. I talk to students to find out about their individual needs and incorporate them into the course e.g. changing the font of the materials and making sure they get extra support by referring them – Student Services gives one-to-one support to staff when you have a student with special needs.

### **The Most Important Factors Contributing to Success**

The seven FE teachers cited institutional factors as the most important factors contributing to students' success. This differed from the HE teachers interviewed, where the majority suggested that students' motivation was the key factor in their success. Juliet from BC, as well as describing institutional factors also listed a contextual factor, the family, as being important in students' success. Five FE teachers provided detailed strategies to illustrate how they supported students to succeed. The four responses below represent the comments made by the FE teachers:

The teacher/ tutor (me), the students' pass rate was 80%, the dyslexic students' were 85%. I give the students lots of little tests, asking them questions to show their understanding. In the workshop, I talk to students and ask them to answer using the technical language for e.g. colour and process in P&D. I try to get them to behave like they're at work, running their own business. I see myself as a role model, having my own interior design business. I tell them about my work and we work like we're in business together. What the students can access e.g. learning resources, key skills – half the students had key skills and the other half didn't and this affected how students learnt. The Students' learning environment [is important]. Where there is a family this helps (Juliet, BC).

Thandi included again that being a role model to Black and minority ethnic students was a factor contributing to the success of learners:

Building up a relationship, setting boundaries, having an informal as well as a formal, being flexible and having a positive aim with students. Being a Black minority ethnic member makes them think they've a chance (Thandi BC).

Zara described the teaching and learning strategies she uses to challenge students' thinking or support them with personal issues and admits failing to follow NBC's administrative procedures:

I have a large knowledge base in my teaching, the institution gives me a lot of leeway to try things out e.g. in my socialisation session I used 'Bend it like Beckham' to show the process of socialisation and the mistakes the teacher [can] make. I'm not afraid to question students on 'touchy' matters or anything that's an issue with them e.g. homosexuality. Although I've been told off for my paperwork but not for my teaching. I don't follow the paperwork others do but I get the same results (Zara NBC).

Samuel from NBC identified as key to supporting student success, institutional strategies at entry, the design of the course and the role of staff in forming relationships with students and making learning enjoyable:

Making sure we have the right students on the right course. Trying to take them through manageable pieces of work, not giving them all of it at once. Building up good relationships with a group and staff making them feel comfortable and enjoying it, not taking them too seriously.

### **Defining Success**

Three out of the seven teachers interviewed from FE, Zara (NBC), Thandi and Elaine from BC, used their own perceptions of success in defining student success. The descriptors used in their definitions of student success, as with the teachers in the HE case study institutions, did not only reflect success measures favoured by the Funding Councils, namely, retention and achievement of qualifications. Personal development was listed by all but one teacher (Juliet, BC) among the criteria given to define success for students. Juliet's definition of student success focused on academic and vocational skills. She implied in her definition that her notion of

student success was based on her knowledge of their ambitions. Wendy from BC also used students' perceptions of success to define success. The definitions given by the teachers are all presented below:

Any kind of economic benefit – nothing like that to spur them [the students] on. Increased levels of confidence (Zara, NBC).

Giving an opportunity to someone who might not have ever done a percentage of what they've never done before. For example, getting them through the door, making them realise they can do something. The word no is hard – not accepting defeat (Samuel, NBC).

Compete and achieve. If they don't achieve rubber-stamped qualifications but their own goal, for example, confidence/ to stay on the course (Odette, NBC).

The value added is not measured – how students have met their targets. What they do next, does it move them on where they want to go? (Wendy, BC).

Personal growth in confidence and security, problem solving. Learners feeling they've learnt something of value and they're making progress. An enjoyment for learning. Being able to relate to others. Personal growth, achieving their learning goals and to progress to the next step (Elaine, BC).

Achieving goals, self-awareness, re-tracking steps and finding that progress was made from the start to the end of course. Achievement of study (Thandi, BC).

Show me they can work safely in P&D. Show me they can work with the products. Answer questions on what they've learnt e.g. paints, health and safety methods etc. They understand and they've held something in their head. At the end of 36 weeks they receive a certificate if they sit an external exam, gain good enough grades to continue in education or get a job. I talk to the students to find out their ambition when they start the course (Juliet, BC).

## **Emerging Themes: FE Teachers**

Teachers' descriptions of the FE institutions, like their managers, were based on a deficit model of the students attending - although they saw the institution as able to remedy this. Teachers from the two case study FE institutions identified the 'disadvantage' of student backgrounds in the selection of descriptors for their institutions.

The quality of information provided to the public was not perceived by teachers to be of high quality. The absence of the involvement of teachers in the production of course information for the public and the inaccessibility of the prospectus emerged as an issue with the FE teachers as with the HE teachers.

Teachers appeared to have low expectations of their FE institutions, prior to working there. Their perceptions of the institutions became positive as their experience of working in the institutions increased.

Teachers' lack of accurate information to describe the students' backgrounds who attended their programmes was evident, despite the regular collation of data for funding purposes by both FE case study institutions.

The high value placed on Student Support Services by teachers in FE to support students emerged as a familiar theme as with the HE teachers.

The important role FE teachers' perceived they played in supporting students' success through their pedagogical strategies and pastoral care as well as the institutional context/ commitment was greater than HE teachers' perceptions of their role. By comparison HE teachers perceived students' motivation as the most



important factor which contributed to their success, HE being the transition from dependency and support (FE/ school) to independence and self motivation. FE teachers' notions of student success, as with HE teachers', were beyond the boundaries of the institutions' and Funding Councils'. Students' personal development emerged as an important criterion in defining student success. The FE teachers, however, were more likely to use their own notions of success rather than their students', in contrast to the HE teachers who, for the most part, used students' perceptions of success.

## **Presenting the Data: Students in the Case Study Further Education**

### **Institutions**

Face to face interviews comprising one to one and focus groups were conducted with 33 students at NBC and 19 students at BC FE colleges. All students were contacted for follow-up telephone interviews in their second year as they progressed within the further education college or to university higher education. At the time of writing, only ten students were available for follow-up interviews, three from NBC and seven from BC. A total of 52 students were interviewed, 22 male and 30 female students, reflecting the diverse ethnic mix of inner London colleges. Tables 15-21 in the appendices provide more in-depth information into the students' age categories, ethnicities and their programmes of study. A further 10 interviews were conducted with former students of NBC who had gained employment, after leaving NBC.

### **FE Student Profiles**

The majority of the students (12) interviewed at BC were aged between 16-19, the remaining seven students were between 20 –49. The average age of students at BC was 27 at the time of the interviews, so the sample does not reflect this. In contrast, the majority of students interviewed at NBC were aged over 19 years of age, 18 were aged between 20-29 and the second largest group of students (11) interviewed were in the age range 30-39. At the time of the interviews the average age of students at NBC was 29, therefore the sample was a closer reflection of the age profile of students at NBC. Only two students were aged between 16-19 and of the remaining students, one was aged 40-49 and the other did not declare her age.

The BC students interviewed attended Access (seven) and construction (12) programmes. All BC's construction students interviewed were aged 16-19 and the Access students were aged 20-49. Most of NBC's students interviewed attended Access programmes (15) and BTEC Diploma programmes (12). Five NBC students attended a construction programme and one student attended an NVQ Administration programme and was aged 40-49. Students on NBC's Access and construction programmes were aged 20-39 with one Access student aged 14-19 and one of the construction students did not declare her age. NBC's BTEC students' age range was between 20-29 with one student aged 14-19.

The majority of students interviewed from both FE case study institutions were from Black and Minority Ethnic communities. This was consistent with the data reported by the two FE institutions on the composition of their student body (see tables in appendix XI). The greatest numbers of students interviewed at BC were students who defined themselves as White British and Black British. The largest numbers of students interviewed at NBC were students who defined themselves as African. Only two students from BC and NBC did not provide their ethnic background (Table 19 in appendix X has the full details).

## **Pre-Course**

### Main Reasons for Selecting the Institution

All BC students interviewed stated that it was their first choice. This was also the case for all but three of the 33 students interviewed at NB College. 'First choice' is used to describe two approaches to selecting an FE college. First choice means students who made the choice of only one FE College above any other. First choice

will also be used to describe student choice where a student refused an offer from one FE College, re-prioritised their choice and selected another FE college.

The dominance of geography and its limits on choice is evident from student responses from both BC and NBC (see table 12 below):

**Table 12: Main Reasons for Selecting FE College**

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>NBC</b>	<b>BC</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Close to Home & Course Offer	6	12	18
Close to Home & Advised by Family or Friend	5	3	8
Close to Home	4	1	5
Close to Home & Attended Previously	3	3	6
Advice from Family or Friend	4	0	4
Childcare	3	0	3
Did not like Attitude of Neighbouring College	3	0	3
Sent by Employer	3	0	3
Opportunities Offered by College	1	0	1
Only Prospectus Delivered to House	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>52</b>

The most popular reason (37/52) given for selecting the institution as the first choice was its closeness to home. Students from both colleges who were parents of young children mentioned the convenience of choosing a college close to their children's school and 12 students identified themselves as parents or carers with family responsibilities. Of the students who stated that they were parents, four were parents of children under the age of five, two students said that they were carers with family responsibilities and six students stated that they had children between 9-18 years of age. The following responses were typical of students who identified themselves as parents:

For me it was local and it meant that it wouldn't affect my children too much. I knew that I'd be able to get them to school and be here in reasonable time (Sheila, White British parent of children aged 8 and 10, Access Student aged 30-39, NB College).

I joined because of its closeness and 'cause I have children (Linda, aged 20-29, White British parent of children aged 4 and 5, Access course – BC).

Five students from NBC and three students from BC stated that the colleges were their first choice based on the recommendations of family and friends who had attended and reported positive experiences. Hatice's experience of selecting an institution because a friend or family member recommended it was typical of the responses from the eight students at NBC who gave similar reasons for selection:

My sister came here to study and liked the Tutor, Elaine. I had a place at Excel College [a neighbouring LSC funded Beacon College]. When I went for the interview, I didn't like the attitude of the tutor. I applied because my friends went to Excel College. I applied to do Fine Art at Excel College. When I came for the interview in NB College, the Tutor asked me what I wanted to do. When I told her that I was interested in designing she said that Fashion would be a better subject. Anyway, I think you can do fine art in your spare time or at anytime whereas with Fashion you need someone to teach you (Hatice, Turkish, female, aged 20-29, BTEC student NBC).

Six students, four from BC and two from NBC, who had previously attended a programme at an FE college, stated that the positive experience from earlier attendance influenced their decision to return. Toke's and Fatima's comments below were typical:

It [BC] was supportive. I was here last year to do my BTEC as well. I mean, it is quite good and I came back to do my access. (Toke, African female parent of four year old, aged 40-49, Access student, BC).

I attended the college about 2 years ago; I was doing English. I live local as well that's why basically I chose the college (Fatima, French, Algerian, female, aged 20-29 Access student NBC).

A course offer which enabled progression to higher education, was the reason given by all students attending Access courses at both Colleges. One student whose response typified the group stated that:

I wanted to go to university but study close to home ...the ...[NBC] College had the right course (Fela, African, male, aged 30-39, Access student NBC).

All 12 BC construction students interviewed stated that they had chosen the college because it offered the course of their choice and was close to their homes. Of the five NBC construction students interviewed, three stated that attending the course was part of the job. The remaining two students differed in their reasons for selecting the College; one was new to the UK from Montserrat and found the college to be 'full of opportunities' and a friend had introduced the other to the course. Advice from family and friends emerged as an important factor in students' selection of their FE colleges. A total of 12 students included advice from family and friends in their responses. Four of the nine NBC students were students on a BTEC programme; two were African, one Turkish and the other Kurdish. One student had a friend who was a teacher at BC and had advised her:

She's been teaching at the College [BC] for years and warned me that all Access courses weren't the same even at BC. She said the health and social care department was a very good department [at BC] and had one of the best Access courses. So, even though I looked at other Colleges I chose this one. (Jane, White European, aged 20-29, Access student, BC).

Three students from NB College did not select it as their first choice. They were local residents within the borough in which NBC was located and were from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. Two of these students, Ashia, Fumi and Marcia had made their first choice an FE college [Excel] in the neighbouring borough which had a better reputation within the local area than NBC. They chose NBC because of a negative first impression and poor administration at Excel College.

There were four students at NBC whose additional reasons for selecting it as their first choice differed significantly from the majority; three of these students used the childcare facilities of NBC and for the fourth student Delia, choice was accidental. Elizabeth's response was similar to comments made by the three parents, 'I chose

this college because it offered childcare facilities and it's closer...' Delia described the 'happy accident' which led her to become a student at NBC:

The only prospectus that came through my letterbox was [NB] College's. I needed to go back to learning. I did things for my children and now it was time to do things for me. (Delia, parent of children aged 17, 15, African Caribbean, aged 40-49, NVQ Admin, BC).

## Entry

### Students' Descriptions of the Institutions:

Students were asked to describe the institutions in order to discover their perceptions of institutional characteristics which may have influenced their choice of FE College (see Table 13 below):

**Table 13: Students' Descriptions of the Institutions**

<b>Students' Descriptions of the FE Colleges</b>	<b>BC</b>	<b>NBC</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Ethnic Diversity	0	20	20
Did not Respond	11	0	11
Building and Facilities	1	10	11
Age Diversity	7	2	9
Size of Student Population	0	1	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>52</b>

The students attending the construction programme (12) at BC had difficulties answering this question; they appeared not to understand the question and seemed unable to find the words to describe the college despite being prompted. This group of students were all aged 14-19 and were mainly young men who appeared shy and required much encouragement to respond to questions.

The students who answered the question from BC and NBC provided contrasting responses. NBC had recently invested in the construction of a new building and is located in a borough of ethnic diversity. The ethnic diversity of the student population (20) and the nature of the buildings and facilities (10) were the main

characteristics of the College highlighted by NBC students. All but one student from NBC mentioned the quality of the facilities or the design of the campus. Only one student from BC mentioned the building and that was in a negative capacity.

Students from BC (7), all Access students, described the age composition of the students. One NBC student described the vastness of the institution to express its character. Students from NBC (2) also used age as a descriptor. These are examples of typical responses:

...there is a mixture of people, people from different cultures. It's a relaxed place. Some places I don't know. No one here's snobby – I feel comfortable because I wasn't the only Turkish person. I like the mixture of people because you don't just have only one group. I like to learn from others (Hatice, aged 20-29, Turkish, Fashion and Design, NBC).

We like the fact that the college is diverse and you meet people from other parts of the world (Group of 5 Modular Access students aged 19-29 of Kurdish/ Turkish, Moroccan, Italian and Indian background at NBC).

Coming back to college after leaving school nearly 20 years ago, I wanted to be with people of my age. This college has a lot of adult students... (Toke, parent of four year-old, aged 40-49, female, African, Access, BC).

The main campus is much nicer than the building we're in. I like where I am but they say that the main building has more things for students. When I went to the open day it was in the main building and it did look like a more modern building (Kevin, aged 14-19, White British, Construction, BC).

## **On-Course**

### **Students' Perceptions of the College**

#### Students' Perceptions of The Institution Since Becoming A Student

All but five students from NBC stated that their perceptions of the institution had changed since becoming a student. Delia was the only student among these five who provided an explanation. She stated that she had made the right choice as she had planned to progress from a part-time, non-accredited course to an NVQ course which



NBC enabled her to do. The 47 students who indicated that their perceptions of the institution had changed, provided a variety of explanations of how they had changed. This group had had low expectations of the FE College and expected that it would be similar to their experience at school. There were 13 students who said that the College was not like school: all were from BC and all but one (Carlton, carer of elderly relative, aged 30-39, Male, African Caribbean, Access) were aged 14-19. The older age profile of the NBC sample may account for the difference in their responses. The following, typical response illustrated that:

No one tells you what to do. You do what you want. There's no one to tell you to go to lessons. They treat you like you're grown up but they do have a go when you don't do your assignments and threaten to throw you off the course (Ian, Black British, aged 16-19, Construction course BC).

A number of students (10) were impressed by the high levels of support they had received from teachers at their college, (six students from NBC and four from BC).

Jane's response typified those of the 10 respondents:

I'm definitely surprised by the amount of support that you get, it's very good. I haven't been in education, yeah, I haven't been in education since high school, it's a long time. I don't think it's like this in university that much, so I'm quite glad that I've been able to do an access course to get me into university (Jane, White European, Access student, BC).

Students used words like 'good' (five), 'supportive' (four) and 'helpful' (one), to describe how their perceptions of the support teachers at the institutions would offer had changed. Among the 10 students who commented on the high levels of support received from teachers, four students included conditions to their statements regarding supportive teachers. The following interview extract is included to illustrate this. It represents comments from over half of the students interviewed at BC who were over 20 years of age as well as two mature students at NBC:

I did think this College was very good on previous courses but I do feel very let down support wise on this course. It has really changed my perception of this College...not having sufficient support the way they're suppose to ...like children instead of like mature students and in the way they teach, yeah, I don't think I'm learning the way we should be, I feel it could be better ... I feel we should be spoken to as adults, they told us things that I now feel they've gone back on. ('Misleading' – whispers Oona loudly). Yeah, they're misleading. They can be quite rude and patronising at times, the way they speak to you, the way they look at you. I feel really judged, ... They judge us and we have no support and they make us quite scared to go to them for support (I agree with that – Oona) and now we don't know who to go to (Linda, aged 20-29, parent of children aged 4 and 5 years of age, White British).

There was agreement with Linda among the group of mature students at BC.

However the comments were constructive and Oona added:

Yes, I agree that there's been equal positives and negatives. As far as my own personal achievements I feel like that lady [Kay]. I surprise myself quite regularly that it's good to get feedback in the way you wouldn't if you weren't in education as an adult but on the other side there have been times when I've felt I've needed a bit more support and the way that you're spoken to sometimes is a bit disheartening for me, you know, because you feel like you're a subordinate as opposed to an equal, some of the time, not all of the time. A lot of the tutors are very good with communication but others seem to let personal opinion affect, you know (Oona, Access student aged 30-39, parent of teenager aged 13 years, did not declare ethnicity, BC).

As mature students, there appeared to be a consensus among the group with regards to confronting inappropriate teacher behaviours:

We challenge anyway. If someone speaks to you like a kid I would definitely speak up (Kay, White English, parent of 12 and 7 year old children, Access student aged 40-49).

...given that we are supposed to be professionals as well now, [loud laughter among the group] we are supposed to be able to articulate in a certain way sometimes but if you're in a set up where somebody says something to you, it's not easy to respond professionally immediately, [lots of nods of agreement] so sometimes you have to go away and reflect then come back. It's not always easy to do. [many in the group saying yeah, yeah!].

I think I would have to say something. (Diana, White British parent of children aged 14 and 11, aged 30-39 Access, BC).

I'm not saying that I don't say anything but it's not easy [Carlton – yeah] and you do feel a little bit isolated, like you're making trouble when you should just be quiet (Oona).

Although these mature BC students stated that they were prepared to confront teachers who behaved disrespectfully, they found it difficult to do that. Oona expressed fear of being perceived negatively by teachers (above) and also of being intimidated (below). Linda's comment below suggested that, even though she will be making a complaint about her teachers in FE, her expectation of HE teachers will be the same as in FE:

When you do say something then they do...and they do ...(very noisy with Oona speaking at the same time- 'you're being singled out') ...treat you differently. ... I'm in the process of making a complaint at the moment myself towards the department. It just, doesn't do much for your motivation, that's all. Then positively I feel like it has prepared me for university, where they say you don't get as much support. If I can make it here I can make it in university (Linda).

Nine students from NBC did not expect to have such a positive experience at the college. They provided a number of descriptions to explain how their perceptions had changed. Eight students, seven from NB College, were impressed by the high quality of the learning environment of further education. They found the people and the environment to be friendly and pleasant. Ashia, had not attended college before but had very strong negative perceptions of college from many friends who had attended colleges:

I think just remembering what college life used to be like, you'd think oh God! But it's quite a refreshing attitude, I don't feel very down hearted, I must admit, I don't feel weighed down (Ashia Pakistani, Access student aged 30-39, NBC).

Only three students, all from NBC, stated that being at college was much harder than school. A bi-lingual, NBC student attending the BTEC Computing course said she

did not expect to do any writing and the feeling of safety provided by the closed circuit television and security controls at NBC was valued by another student.

### Information Advice and Guidance

Students were asked whether they received assistance from the FE case study institutions to choose their course of study. Unlike the HE students reported in the previous chapter, the majority of students interviewed (36) from both institutions stated that they had received assistance to select their course of study.

**Table 14: Assistance to choose course of study**

<b>Assistance when choosing your course of study</b>	<b>BC</b>	<b>NBC</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Good Quality Information at Interview from FE Curriculum staff	14	12	26
Good Quality Information from IAG* staff at College	0	9	9
Advised by family and friends	1	7	8
College Unhelpful with IAG	2	2	4
Already Chosen Course	2	1	3
Other Students and Tutor	0	1	1
Employer	0	1	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>52</b>

\* Information Advice and Guidance

A greater proportion of BC students interviewed (nearly three-quarters) rated as 'good' the quality of the information they received from College curriculum staff, than NBC students (almost one-third). Conversely, nine NBC students praised the high quality of assistance they received from NBC's Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) staff but no BC students stated that they valued this information. Instead, four students, two from BC and two NBC, reported that IAG staff at their respective colleges were unhelpful. They said that when they requested information the institutions were not forthcoming with the information they needed.

Students interviewed (seven) at NBC differed from those at BC in the importance they placed on the advice given by family and friends in selecting their FE courses. Seven students from NBC and only one student from BC used the advice of family and friends in selecting their course. There were three students, two from BC and one from NBC who said they had already known what they wanted to study therefore they did not request any information from the college.

### **Written Information Provided to the Public**

#### The Prospectus

Students were asked whether they had seen BC and NBC's prospectuses and their impressions of them. The question was designed to explore the sources of information used by the FE case study students to select courses and to gauge the accessibility of information provided to the general public for underrepresented students. Similarly to the HE students interviewed, less than half of the FE students from BC (seven) and NBC (15) had seen the colleges' prospectuses. More than half of the students interviewed (30) stated that they did not receive a prospectus. Table 15 below represents perceptions of the 22 students who said they had seen NB's and BC's prospectuses:

**Table 15: Message conveyed by prospectus**

<b>Message conveyed by prospectus</b>	<b>BC</b>	<b>NBC</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Insufficient information	7	2	9
Informative	0	5	5
Friendly College	0	3	3
Nice Pictures	0	1	1
Modern College	0	4	4
Totals	7	15	22

A group discussion with the Access students from BC provided useful comments for improving the content of the prospectus and illustrated the role of the academic staff

in providing advice and guidance. The extract below featured Diana and Linda doing most of the talking, with the rest of the group showing their agreement non-verbally:

The prospectus was quite basic. I think they should concentrate more on career options when you undertake a career, I mean a particular course. The prospectus should say, if you do this course there are various options to go into...to see the bigger picture... [several students nod in agreement] (Diana, parent of children aged 14, 11, White British, aged 30-39, Access, BC). I have to disagree. I found them quite useful. They led me onto this course, because I did previously a [different Access course] which I wasn't enjoying and it was Thandi, personally that led me to doing this Access course, she was the tutor (Linda, aged 20-29, White British parent of children aged 4 and 5, Access course – BC).

...the course tutor, Thandi, gives general sort of guidance. That's separate. If you were to ring from wherever, people from outside as a newcomer, you're already on a course, how [do] you access the information as a newcomer? (Diana, parent of children aged 14 and 11, White British, Access student BC).

## Main Reasons for Choosing Course

All but three students interviewed at BC and NBC gave progression as the main reason for attending FE:

**Table 16: Main Reasons for Choosing Course**

Reasons for Choosing Course	BC	NBC	Totals
Progress to HE	7	27	34
Progress to higher level study within the existing FE College	8	3	11
Get an apprenticeship	4	0	4
Develop Skills and gain employment	0	3	3
Totals	19	33	52

The reasons given reflected the type of programmes students attended. For example, all students on Access courses at the case study institutions planned to progress to university. But ultimately all students wanted to progress to employment. BC students gave three reasons for selecting their courses, progression to HE (seven), progression to higher level study within the FE College (eight) and to get an apprenticeship (four). The last two reasons were given by students interviewed on the construction course. One construction student who wanted to work in painting and decorating said that she was attending her course:

To help get on to other courses [at BC] as you can't get a job without a qualification (Brenda, White British, female, aged 16-19, Construction, BC).

Devon, who wanted to become a graphic designer, and was not accepted on the course, accepted a place on the construction course. He said that he was doing the course as:

I couldn't get on to other courses as I didn't have the qualifications. The course will give me the qualifications to do graphic design next year [at BC]. (Devon, Black British, male, aged 16-19, Construction course BC).

Likewise, students at NBC (27) on Access and BTEC programmes stated that they planned to go to university to find employment after completing higher education.

These are some of the typical responses

I was advised to, because I was working prior to coming here and I was an LSA [Learning Support Assistant] and the teacher in my class had also been an LSA and she had done it, she'd went back and did an Access to Teaching and went off to do a BEd. She said, do an Access course (Sheila, White British female, aged 30-39, Access to Teaching course, NBC).

...I want to go to university and do a Masters and then get a job in computing (Halet, Kurdish, male, aged 20-29, BTEC Computing course, NBC).

I want to teach in a primary school. I've looked after my own kids. I've been a childminder, I've worked in play centres, so I do, I really, really want to be a primary school teacher (Teresa, parent of 19 year-old child, aged 30-39, UK Black female, Access to Teaching, NBC).

I want to further myself, doing medicine or something related to medicine because I'm not working much, I'm not earning much. So I decided I have to go in for something so that when I go to university I won't need to worry about getting a job. I will earn more when I finish. I want to because it would be better for me (Kwesi, African male, aged 20-29, Access to Health NBC).

Three NBC construction students, like many of the construction students at BC, chose their course of study to progress to higher level study at NBC. Three students interviewed, two of whom had chosen construction courses, stated that their reasons for choosing their course were to develop skills and gain employment. Delia, the third student within this group, suggested in her reason for selecting her NVQ

Administration that she had made a well informed choice:

I want to develop competence skills in the placement, to gain greater clarity about the workplace so that I can be successful in the workplace (Delia, NBC).



## On Course

### Whether Expectations have Changed Since Attending the Programme

As with the students interviewed in the HE case study institutions, most FE respondents, 17 from BC and 28 from NBC reported changes in expectations since joining their course of study. The responses were similar to those made by the HE students. They were mainly related to changes in terms of self-perceptions, having a change of mind regarding the specialism within the course chosen and surprises about the content of the courses. The students aged 16-19 who reported changes in their expectations, expressed positive experiences that they had not anticipated on the course. They described being treated as an adult, enjoying the course more than expected, being unprepared to do a lot of writing on a computing course and teachers having higher expectations than those at school.

Devon, one of the younger students attending the construction course, was said by his tutor to be dismissive of painting and decorating as it was not his first choice and he approached the subject as though it was easy to do. Devon articulated how his expectations had changed about the subject:

Painting and decorating isn't easy. It's full of techniques and different methods which were really complicated (Devon, Black British, male, aged 16-19, Construction course BC).

Similar to the HE students interviewed, the students on Access courses at BC discussed changes in expectations of themselves since joining the course and two Access students were planning to change their specialism. Toke and Diana, similar to Mark and Carmel at NU (page 203) had said that their experience of being on the programme and after going on placement had left them unsure about what they wanted to do but they knew what they did **not** want to do. The Access students at

BC whose expectation of themselves had changed since attending the course made similar comments to Carlton and Kay:

Yes it has. It's very interesting, at school I wasn't very interested in history, more in the girl next door to me, but yeah, it is really interesting, I've seen another side to me, learning about another side to me, self...how deep it goes (Carlton, carer of elderly relative, African Caribbean, Access to SW Course Aged 30-39).

I'm surprising myself every day. [Everyone nods in agreement and make noises to say yes]. You just do, you don't think you've got it and all of a sudden you have (Kay, White English, parent of 12 and 7 year old children, Access student aged 40-49).

The NBC students provided similar responses to the younger and more mature BC students. However, there were two differences: no NBC student had changed their subject or specialism and five NBC students expressed views about problems they had encountered and not anticipated. These five students studying the BTEC course identified their backgrounds as African, and all were aged 20-29. They expressed concern about teacher perceptions of copying when working in groups, whether as part of the course work or to support each other. There appeared to be confusion and anxiety among this group regarding understanding the rules of working in groups and approaching the teacher:

There is a problem with helping each other. There is a tendency when you help your fellow student...there is the likelihood for you to write the same thing with her. Then if the teacher, if the teacher understand that you write on the same thing, she is just going to nullify everything. (Kwesi, aged 20-29, African male, BTEC, BC).

Working with fellow students, sometimes you help them and they copy... (Tunde, aged 20-29, African, female, BTEC, NBC).

Some are scared but some are just stingy. Some people are just scared. The advice is not to share work. Some don't share because you'll be disqualified. Some are scared of that...(Lola, aged 20-29, African female, BTEC, NBC).

The BTEC students above expressed the type of sentiments that Gerald at NU raised in his comments on plagiarism in the previous chapter. He explained how plagiarism can become an area of conflict between teachers and students and the potential for students to perceive teachers as being disrespectful in their monitoring of it. This was similar to comments made by this group of BTEC students on how they were treated by teachers regarding plagiarism. They did not perceive their teachers as treating them fairly or with respect.

## Teaching and Student Success

### Student Success and Perceptions of Teachers

Like students from the HE institutions, most students (48) from both FE institutions agreed that teachers had helped them to succeed on their course. Four NBC students did not perceive their teachers as contributing to their success. Table 17 below summarises students' perceptions of how teachers supported them to succeed:

**Table 17: Students' perceptions of how teachers helped them to succeed**

<b>Students' Perceptions of how Teachers Helped them to Succeed</b>	<b>NBC</b>	<b>BC</b>	<b>Totals</b>
All Teachers helpful	17	13	30
Workshops	4	0	4
Tutorials	3	1	4
Supportive Tutor	2	1	3
Preparation for HE	1	1	2
Assignment Feedback	1	1	2
Some not all teachers are helpful	1	2	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>48</b>

Again, as with the HE students, the FE students mainly described 'helpful' teachers as having personal qualities and behaviours to explain how they had contributed to their success. Students' perceptions differed among the Access students from BC and NBC. The four students from NBC who did not perceive teachers as helping

them to succeed, highlighted aspects of teachers' behaviour which they found difficult to bring to their attention. But systems existed at NBC (as well as BC) for such issues to be reported to teachers or their managers. Their statements suggested poor monitoring of teachers and a lack of use of student feedback to inform teaching practice. The FE and HE students' perceptions of teachers who did not help them to succeed differed. The HE students reported being left to learn on their own, whereas the FE students' perceptions of their teachers implied specific weaknesses in the FE teachers' pedagogy, planning and awareness of learning difficulties such as dyslexia.

James attended an Access course with predominantly women who were older than him and many were parents. He found the language used by teachers to be a barrier to his success, suggesting that they did not take his age into consideration:

Sometimes they use words that I don't understand but they forget that I'm only 20 (James, African Caribbean, Access student).

Gulcan also attended an Access course and was critical of NBC for its failure to provide her with a specialist tutor to support her learning difficulty and one of her lecturers for his insensitivity and inexperience in dealing with her dyslexia:

I'm dyslexic and I applied for a dyslexic tutor. I applied to the Manager for Additional Learning Support and he hasn't provided me with a tutor. I had a tutor who called me outside after the lesson to ask me if there was something wrong because I did a piece of work which showed that I wasn't writing very well – the way he spoke to me, I found it very embarrassing. He didn't know that I was dyslexic and asked me if I was Ok, and if I was finding the subject understandable and that I should come to tutorials to see him. I'm not lazy. I'm not dumb. I just see things and do them in a disorganised way (Gulcan, Kurdish/ Turkish, female, aged 20-29, Access, NBC).

The younger students on the construction programme at BC, described their teachers as 'good' and stated that they were helping them to succeed because they were treated as adults. Carlton, a mature, BC Access student, commented on teachers

taking a personal interest in students' progress. He talked about the generous contribution to his on-going development on the course, in his preparation for HE and for the social work profession:

The teachers are good, preparing us pretty well actually, for Uni as well as for work as a social worker. They're giving us their personal, not in depth but of their experiences of social work, and what to expect, not to sit there ...saying how you doing ... They give you the good side and the bad side, expect the unexpected. Especially when people want to help you that's a motivation in itself (Carlton, carer of elderly relative, African Caribbean, male, aged 30-39, Access student, BC).

In the following response, Alicia explained enthusiastically, as did many of the students interviewed, how teachers were helping her to succeed:

I think on the whole the teaching is very good on this course because my niece is doing a course here and her standards of teaching doesn't sound the same as mine. I think we've got some really hard core, veterans teaching us, honestly. There's some that are better than others but overall the standards are very good. And they do actually help, well it's helped me, in particular. The programme manager, I suppose her lessons help to plan your study, stuff like that [James and Teresa nod in agreement]. And the passion that some of the teachers put into their classes! English literature, she's fantastic [the two colleagues nod again and say umm simultaneously]. There are so-so classes.. (Alicia, parent 11 year old, aged 30-39, Black UK, Access student, NBC).

Hatice's description of how two of her teachers were assisting her to succeed was unusual among the students interviewed at both colleges. Hatice explained in depth how the teachers prepared lessons, monitored, encouraged and motivated her to succeed which also included doing extra work with her after the class:

Yes, my teachers are encouraging. They made me do A levels and AS Textiles. Leanna [the Head of Fashion] told me that I can do it. I want to take my time and do things really well and she'll help you out. Nandini [Teacher of Fashion] will stay behind and help. Leanna will encourage the others teachers to check on you. She checks on you too – she says have you done this? Supporting you, pushing. In class on the computer doing work, she tells you off when you're a bit lazy. Nandini prepares worksheets, ready before every lesson – it really helps you to make. You follow pictures and it makes a difference when you're pattern cutting. Nandini checks to see if you need things based on your project. Teachers going through your work with you and

giving you advice helping you to experiment – they all look in the sketchbook both in tutorials and in the class to make sure you get the right things done (Hatice, Turkish female, aged 20-29, BTEC course NBC).

Jane described how her Tutor at BC helped her to succeed by encouraging her to collaborate with other mature students in her group:

I would say that our tutor did encourage us from the beginning to share information, she goes on and on about it, share information, we're mature students we're coming from different, certain backgrounds. I think we really valued that, which is very important. (Jane aged 20-29 White European, female, Access, BC).

Only a few students listed a variety of teaching and learning strategies which, they suggested, were helping them to succeed on their courses. These included workshops, tutorials, assignment feedback and skills development to prepare for HE. These approaches to teaching and learning may have been valuable in supporting students' learning and students may not have been able to articulate this at the time of the interview. Most students mainly commented on teachers' personalities and attitudes which helped them to succeed. Three students, one from NBC and two from BC, commented that some, not all teachers contributed to their success. This issue of inconsistent teaching standards was also alluded to by Alicia from NBC. She highlighted this both in terms of her perception of her niece's experience of teaching at NBC and in what she referred to as 'so-so' (Caribbean Nation language for mediocre) teaching on her Access course.

### **Teachers' awareness of students' ambitions**

The FE students were asked whether their teachers were aware of their ambitions and how, if at all, they were supported to achieve their ambition. Only one student from NBC, Delia, stated that teachers were not aware of her ambitions. The majority

of students interviewed from both FE colleges (51) said that their teachers were aware of their ambitions. This contrasted with HE: only approximately half the HE students felt that their teachers were aware of their ambitions.

BC students reported tutorials as the most frequently stated method which their teachers used to support them to achieve their ambitions. There was one exception: David, who was also taught by his Course Tutor. He explained how she supported his ambitions and that of the whole class by the way she taught rather than through tutorials:

Yes – our Tutor has told us how to get on to the next course and what we need to do. She also told us about herself, how she did her degree and how she set up her business (David, aged 14-19, White British, Construction, BC).

Among the BC students who stated that teachers used tutorials to find out about and support their ambitions, Devon, another construction student, aged 14-19 at BC said that:

I wanted to do graphic design. They know this and they're helping me to get on it next year. I have one-to-ones and she [the Course Tutor] sends me off to do things to get ready for next year (Devon, Black British, male, aged 16-19, Construction course BC).

The BC Access students' explanations of how their teachers and Course Tutors demonstrated an awareness of their ambitions included how they were assisted through tutorials to progress to university, to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the profession they had chosen and they were asked by their tutors if they needed advice. They described assistance with completing the UCAS application forms, the use of placements to obtain a good understanding of the profession together with their teachers' own professional experience of having worked in the field.

As already mentioned, all but one of the 33 NBC students interviewed agreed that teachers were aware of their ambitions. NBC students differed in the supporting methods that they stated were used by teachers.. Tutorials seemed less consistent at NBC than at BC. It was the nature of the course and how teachers taught which were highlighted by NBC students, rather than the use of tutorials which helped them to achieve their ambitions. Fela's explanation, below, was typical of the comments made:

The workload is one thing. I think of all the health care courses in this College, this one, the assignments; it is of a very high standard. ....What you would expect in university ....It's quite interesting as well, after you've come back from the work experience you get to see that it isn't just what you think it is. It's more than that, the practical as well (Fela, aged 30-39, African, male, Access, NBC).

The BTEC students at NBC qualified their statements regarding teachers' awareness of their ambitions. They explained that their teachers were aware of their ambitions to go to university and that the course prepared them well for HE but they assumed that their teachers had no knowledge of their ambitions after university. Mohammed and Halet's comments typify the other BTEC students who were interviewed:

I think they know that I want to go to university but I've never talked about wanting to be a Network Manager (Mohammed, BTEC, NBC).

No, they know that we want to go to university but they don't know that's what we want to do afterwards (Halet, BTEC, NBC).

The only student, Delia from NBC, who did not perceive her tutors supporting her to achieve her ambitions, said:

No, I think I'm seen as competent so I'm not always given constructive feedback (Delia, NVQ student).



Delia rightly said this with resentment, as it would appear that, having recruited a 'non-traditional' student such as Delia on the programme, her successful progression and achievement was sufficient for her teachers. Raising Delia's aspirations or encouraging excellence did not seem to be integral to supporting the ambitions of non-traditional students.

### **Students' perceptions of whether their tutors treat them with respect**

Most students interviewed from BC (13) and NBC (20) claimed that teachers treated them with respect. Six BC students and 12 from NBC stated that not all teachers treated them with respect and one student from NBC (Teresa) stated that no teachers treated her with respect. The examples given by students from BC of teachers treating them with respect varied between their perceptions of teachers behaving in a helpful manner and teachers behaving assertively but politely. Two examples:

It's been encouraging. You can talk to them anytime. There are quite a few who would do that, so that's, you know, encouraging ((Kay, White English, parent of 12 and 7 year old children, Access student aged 40-49).

If they're not busy. If you stop them when they're rushing to another class, they tell you they'll see you later, which is quite understandable. You accept that. They say they're here to help (Carlton, carer of elderly relative, African Caribbean, male, aged 30-39, Access student, BC).

All but two of the 18 students who stated that not all teachers treated them with respect, cited being treated as a child by some teachers. The two students who differed among this group were Oona from BC and Joyce from NBC. Oona claimed that some teachers were impolite and behaved disrespectfully and Joyce said that teachers did not value them as students and treated them with contempt. The criticism of being treated as a child by teachers was also raised by Teresa from NBC. She was the only FE student who said that teachers did not treat her with respect. In

a group interview with two of her colleagues, Teresa expressed her feelings about this. One of her male colleagues, James aged 20, provided her with an explanation in the excerpt below:

... there's some teachers in this college that think we're about 16. I do, I find it very offensive actually (Alicia nods). Sometimes yes, you just think, I'm not a child, why are you talking to me like this? (Teresa, parent of 19 year old child, aged 30-39, Access student NBC).

Because you're older than me you find it more offensive than me but I'm used to teachers talking to me like that. Teachers talk to young people like that all the time. (James aged 20, African Caribbean, Access, NBC).

### **Student Support Services**

The data for this section is incomplete for three students from NBC as one of the disks used for storing the transcription became corrupted and it was not possible to contact the students to fill in the missing data regarding their perceptions of support services, the role of family and friends in contributing to their success and their definitions of success. The three students were James, Teresa and Alicia, all of whom would have been entitled to claim support from NBC as the two women were lone parents and James was unemployed. The total number of students from NBC from which the data is presented is therefore 30 for this section.

#### Students' Awareness and Use of College Support Services

Students were asked if they were aware of their College's Student Support Services, whether they had used these services and their opinions of them. The majority of students interviewed indicated that they were aware of the variety of Student Support Services available (47). Only two students, Sam and Fela, both from NBC stated that they were unaware of these services. Sam, a second year BTEC student (African, male, aged 20-29) said that he had only become aware of the services towards the

end of his course. This was in the spring term of his final year at NBC. Fela, the other student (African, male aged 30-39) who attended the one year Access course, said that he knew about the support services but was not aware that, as someone who was born overseas, he would be entitled to the support provided by NBC. The services used by students are listed in Table 18 below:

**Table 18: Support Services Used by Students**

<b>Support Services Used by Students</b>	<b>NBC</b>	<b>BC</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Study Skills Workshops	10	0	10
Finance	6	0	6
Student Union/ Association	1	0	1
Additional Learning Support	1	1	2
Counselling	1	1	2
Childcare	1	1	2
Students not using Support Services	10	16	26
<b>Totals</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>49</b>

More of the students interviewed at NBC (20) appeared to have used Student Support Services than at BC (three). A comparison of the size of the Student Support Services' budgets of the two FE colleges was not conducted; however, the size of the two Student Support Services departments, in terms of staffing, was similar. The differences of age and ethnic background in the student sample may account for the use of Colleges' Students Support Services. BC students were younger than NBC students and therefore more likely to be supported by their families. Also, there were more NBC students who said that they received their compulsory schooling in the UK than BC students and it is possible that the NBC staff as well as the students themselves may have considered that they needed extra support, such as study skills, to succeed.

A total of 23 students interviewed from the two FE colleges stated that they had used

support services within their colleges. The two main areas of support that students from NBC identified using were study skills workshops (10) and finance (6). Among the six students who claimed that they used finance support services from NBC, Michael (construction course) and Gulcan (Access course) stated that they were unsuccessful in obtaining financial resources. Gulcan felt strongly about being refused financial support because she worked part-time and was critical of NBC's criteria and the treatment that she received. She said:

I applied. I went to the student advisor and I didn't get any financial support. All I got was go and get your pay slip...I didn't even get a come in and sit down and have a cup of tea. They said I couldn't get anything. I was told that I had to go on benefits if I wanted to get financial support. I think benefits are disgusting. Yes I did all the things that I was supposed to do but because I'm not on benefits I couldn't get any financial support. You should be able to work part time and get benefits (Gulcan, aged 20-29, Kurdish/ Turkish, female, Access, NBC).

The students interviewed echoed the FE and HE teachers' and HE students' perceptions of the Student Support Services within their respective institutions. Most students from NBC and the three students from BC expressed high opinions of the support services that they had used. However, two students from BC, Oona and Peter (White British, male, aged 16-19, construction course), reported that they had not received their counselling or additional learning support at the time of the interview and were unable to provide their opinion of these services. They spoke highly of the manner in which they were treated by the staff who had dealt with them. The NBC student, Ashia, who stated that she was receiving childcare support from the college explained that she had spinal problems and therefore suffered with her back and the college provided her with parking as well as a place in their nursery.

## Success - Family and Friends

### Support from Family and Friends

As with the HE students interviewed, FE students described being encouraged by family and friends to continue their studies and remain optimistic. Respondents from both FE case study institutions reported the support of family and friends to succeed on their programmes of study (see Table 19 below):

**Table 19: Family and Friends**

<b>Support from Family and Friends</b>	<b>NBC</b>	<b>BC</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Family Help with Finance	3	11	14
Helpful Friends	9	3	12
Unhelpful Friends	7	0	7
Family Help with Childcare	3	2	5
Friends Can't Help – similar position to me	3	0	3
Teenage Children Help	1	1	2
No Comment	1	1	2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>45</b>

A greater number of students (11) from BC than from NBC (three) stated that they were receiving financial support from their families. The BC students were all aged 16-19 and attended the construction programme. Of the three students from NBC, two were aged 16-19 and one was aged 20-29.

A greater proportion of NBC students (27%) indicated that their friends were helping them to succeed than from BC (16%). The 12 students from the two FE colleges who stated that their friends were helpful mentioned moral support as the assistance they received from them. When asked to explain moral support, students described being encouraged to complete their work and being discouraged from going out. Among these 12 students were three, two female and one male, who also added that much of their childcare support came from friends. Seven students claimed that friends were unhelpful, the opposite experience to the 12 students

reported earlier. For example, a group of four Access students at NBC discussed how friends who were not students encouraged them to miss classes to go out and socialise with them. Being a student and having friendships was also an issue for students who did not disclose that friends were unhelpful. Several students from both institutions described the difficulties of maintaining friendships with people who were not students. In the excerpt below from a group interview with Access students, the comments made about friendships were typical of students from both colleges. Jane appeared to be having an internal struggle regarding her friendships since joining the course and for Linda, her student-colleagues, whom she identified as friends on the course, were more understanding than her other friends and certainly preferable to talk to than her teachers:

I haven't seen my friends since I've started this course (Jane, White European, aged 20-29, Access student, BC).

My friends feel very left out. They don't really like it. Whereas my friends that I've met on the course don't feel like that. They're very supportive. I'd rather talk to my friends on the course rather than the tutors really (Linda, aged 20-29, White British parent of children aged 4 and 5, Access, BC).

I think I make close associations with the people I identify with quite quickly. I'm quite involved in the church and I tend to talk to my friends in the church who are students, mature students, I find that by the time I leave they're the only ones that I've spoken to because now I'm zooming in on students because they're more important to me and encouraging me (Jane).

Five students from BC and five from NBC over the age of 30 were also carers of school aged children or elderly relatives. A further seven students, aged 20-29 were also parents. There were a variety of ways in which students from both colleges said they managed their study and family responsibilities. A few had places in their college crèche or nursery and used friends to pick up their children and baby-sit. Five said they managed their study and family responsibilities with the help of

family members including their parents, husbands and wives. Two students disclosed that their teenage children took care of themselves and the remaining students said they managed on their own.

### **The Most Important Factors Contributing to Success**

Students were asked to reveal the most important factor which contributed to their success on their course. The responses are summarised in Table 20 below:

**Table 20: The most important factors contributing to success**

<b>Factors Contributing To Success</b>	<b>NBC</b>	<b>BC</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Teachers	6	11	17
Friends and Own Determination	9	0	9
Determination to Succeed	5	1	6
Space, IT etc to Study (LRC*)	6	0	6
Family	2	3	5
Friends at College	0	4	4
Other	1	0	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>49</b>

*\*Learning Resources Centre*

There were similarities between one of the main factors given by the HE students and NBC students: determination. For nine NBC students there was a combination of support from friends and their own determination. Most BC students (11), nine from the construction programme cited teachers as the most significant factor contributing to their success, The remaining two students were from BC's Access programme and described how teachers supported their success, using teaching and learning methods which were stimulating and fun:

Teachers keeping the subject interesting, they try to change the different way they try to teach e.g. if you're watching a power point presentation all afternoon for two hours it's very boring. They try to vary which is good (Jane, White European, aged 20-29, Access, BC) [Carlton nods in agreement].

Group interaction, laughing and joking and getting into groups ... (Carlton, carer of elderly relative, African Caribbean, male, aged 30-39, Access, BC).

As already stated earlier in this section, NBC students provided more than one factor when asked to consider the most important contribution to their success. NBC students acknowledged four main factors as being important in contributing to their success. They were: friends and their own determination (nine), teachers (six), the learning resources centre (six) which provided a computer, books and a quiet space to study, and their own determination (five). Friends played an important role (fellow students and friends from outside the college). A group of seven BTEC students, all Black African, six female and one male, commented on how they supported each other at difficult times. They also emphasised the importance they placed on successfully completing the programme. Kwesi's comment expresses the determination of the group to achieve and not to give up:

If you take into consideration, the time that you have been on the course, it's very difficult to leave at this stage...each student stays in the College up to 8.00pm. There's always access to computers and the books  
(Kwesi, aged 20-29, African, male, BTEC, NBC).

The response listed as 'other' in Table 20 was made by Delia from NBC. She displayed self confidence and described a combination of factors including the role of being a student governor and purchasing her own computer, which contributed to her success on the NVQ Administration programme:

My role as a student governor and my placement, understanding the College's business and social networks has given me confidence, knowledge, having access to things I wouldn't have access to. Resources such as printing materials, access to support outside the teaching with other teachers at my own pace and in a different environment. Having a computer at home, I noticed a big change from Christmas when I was able to practise things in my own time and in my own environment (Delia).



## **Defining 'Success'**

As with the HE students, most of the FE students from both institutions included the achievement of the qualification in their definitions of success. All but three students interviewed at NBC and one at BC described success as completing and achieving the qualification. For the Access and BTEC students, their university place was conditional on passing the course. Ashia explained that progressing to university was a confidence booster:

It must give you that satisfaction. You must have done something right on the course to get on to university (Ashia, Pakistani, parent of 4 year old, aged 30-39, Access student, NBC).

Three NBC students stated that they not only wanted to pass but to achieve a high grade such as a merit or distinction. Hatice explained that success was a combination of a high grade and the quality of the work produced:

To get a distinction, looking at my work and feeling proud, it has to be of good quality, I don't want it to be done badly (Hatice, Turkish, female, aged 20-29, BTEC student NBC).

One student, Fela, had made the decision to return to his birthplace after completing his studies. He intended to complete his HE qualification and return to Nigeria as he did not feel that he could succeed as a politician in the UK:

The course should be able to give us some kind of certificate stating that we have passed through the system and we have been awarded successful completion and then go to university and when I make the relevant requirements, hopeful, I love it here but no one here would vote for me. When I finish my access course, I intend to apply for a degree course in Law. We have been given a UCAS form to fill and we are asked to choose our universities. After university in London, with God's help I will go back to my country. Getting voted by the people when I return to Nigeria (Fela, African, male, aged 30-39, Access student NBC).

Another NBC student, Kwesi, perceived his Access course as providing unrestricted entry to higher education. He said ‘the course is a diploma, I think I can use it to do whatever course I want to do in university’.

There were four students, three from NBC and one from BC who did not perceive the achievement of qualifications, employment or progression to another course as definitions of success. Three of these attended construction programmes and the fourth, Delia, attended an NVQ Administration course. Delia’s definition of success used very different language to the other three students. Her use of words such as ‘benchmarks’ indicated her experience and knowledge as a student governor on NBC’s Board. The students provided the following definitions:

Being able to decorate a room (Patrick, Black British, male aged 16-19, NVQ, construction, BC).

To have improved on some skills also being more aware of what to do (John, male aged 30-39, NVQ, construction, NBC).

Being punctual and here every day and concentrating on my work when I’m here (Ken, White English, male aged 16-19, NVQ, construction, NBC, previously attended a ‘Special School’).

Benchmarking myself from the start, what I’ve learnt to achieve, doing ‘actual’ work, doing email attachments, having the opportunity through my placement with the secretary to the Chief Executive (Delia).

## **Follow-up Interviews with FE Students**

As indicated at the beginning of the Chapter, a total of 10 students were contacted and interviewed as they progressed from their FE programmes of study. Seven were from BC and three from NBC. The purpose of the interviews was to examine whether perceptions of the institutions, definitions of success and the factors (identified in the first interview) that contributed to success had changed. At the start of the interview, students were reminded of the statements they had made in the first interview. Students who were continuing their studies were also asked whether the previous studies had prepared them for their current course. Students who were not continuing with their studies were also asked to give reasons for their decisions not to continue and whether the FE institution could have helped them to continue their studies.

Four of the seven BC students were aged over 19 and previously attended the Access course. They were Jane (aged 20-29), Carlton (aged 30-39), Kay (aged 40-49) and Diana (30-39). With the exception of Carlton, who defined his background as African Caribbean, they were White. The other BC students were all aged 16-19 and had previously attended the construction programme. They were Brenda (White British) Devon (Black British) and David (White English). The three students from NBC who were successfully contacted were all male and former BTEC students. They were Sam (aged 20-29, African), Irfan (aged 20-29, Kurdish) and Mohammed (aged 16-19, Bengali).

Eight of the ten students were continuing their studies. Three students from BC and two from NBC were in their first year of undergraduate study. Two of the three

students from BC and one of the two students from NBC attended 'old' universities. Two students, Diana from BC and Sam from NBC were not continuing their studies. Diana did not complete the Access programme at BC; she said that she left the course because she was disappointed with the experience of being at BC. She was working part time when she attended BC and therefore continued with this when she left the Access course there. At the time of the second interview she had recently obtained one of the new jobs which was part of the NHS 'Agenda for Change' initiative; this job offered opportunities for further study. The Access course at BC had not lived up to Diana's expectations based on its course outline. She also felt that the students who attended were not as committed as she was. She added that:

BC always had a bad reputation...and lived up to it. It isn't badly run but...the people are from such a wide range of backgrounds. I don't think the quality of students...don't think they were vetted enough. You must think I sound like a fascist. All these students who get the course fees free. I had to pay £1,000 for my course. But other students didn't. Students' lack of motivation, e.g. at lectures people became abusive; it would regularly get like that. Once a woman in her mid 40s who's lived in England all her life asked who was Margaret Thatcher? (Diana, Diana, aged 30-39, White British parent of children aged 14 and 11, Access student, BC, Working in NHS).

Though she did not have many positive perceptions of the period she spent at BC, Diana identified her Course Tutor, Thandi, as very supportive. She also made a similar statement at the first interview. Diana concluded that attending BC was beneficial:

[BC] helped me to recognise that I wanted to work in the NHS or [in the] medical field. The course was good for that (Diana, White British parent of children aged 14 and 11, aged 30-39 Access at BC, Working in NHS).

Sam (aged 20-29, African, male, BTEC at NBC, working and studying part-time), the other student who did not continue study, successfully completed his BTEC course at NBC but could not afford to attend university. He said that his perceptions

of NBC had not changed. He had thought highly of the college, the teachers and the students and he said that he would be returning to NBC to attend part time as he worked part-time to save to go to university the following year. The five students from BC and NBC who had progressed to HE shared quite different experiences. Mohammed from NBC attended an 'old' university, and lived at home and Kay, the student from BC who was attending a 'new' university, also lived at home. Both Mohammed and Kay felt very ill prepared for HE and appeared quite shocked in their descriptions of the difference between FE and HE:

It's far more different to [NBC]. You don't get the close relationship that you had with teachers at College...The teachers are more distant and they're not as friendly. (Mohammed aged 16-19, Bengali, male, BTEC at NBC, BSC at 'Old' University).

It is completely different to college [BC] and the course we did at BC. The language, you're left to get on with it yourself. I didn't find the course at BC prepared me... [The New University] is such a different world! You can't compare it with BC. The language and terminology – things like, compare, contrast, evaluate, what do they mean? They should tell you what this means on the Access course! It's a real struggle, the course is very hard and we just have to get on with it as best we can. We support each other as we did at BC. (Kay, White English, aged 40-49, parent of 12 and 7 year old children, Access at BC, BA at 'New' University).

Irfan from NBC was attending a 'new' university and like Jane and Carlton who were both attending an 'old' university, shared similar experiences of HE. All three students gave positive experiences of HE:

...I was really disappointed with my exam results. I got passes and merits. People said this [New] university was no good, not teaching very well. I was planning to change in the second year but it's near to my house and it's easy to wake up in the morning and get here on time. The teaching is better than College; there's teaching assistants. You get a lot of help from them. They help us with every aspect of our assignments. I understand things here better than I did at College. The teaching is better. They provide us with lots of help, helping with maths and English. Free courses, I haven't used any as yet (Irfan, aged 20-29, Kurdish, BTEC at NBC, BSc at 'New' University).

Jane and Carlton from BC both attended the same 'old' university. But unlike Kay (above), who attended the same programme at BC, they made positive statements about their university and praised BC for how well it prepared them for HE:

The [HE] course is a much slower pace but it's three years as opposed to the one year at BC. The course at BC was lots of pressure. The teachers told us that we would be getting lots of work at Uni so they packed in a lot of work in the one year with assignments nearly every month. The Access course prepared me for University. I like the way ['Old' University] have designed it [the course]. They introduced us to group work. They're very much into group work and outside speakers. I'm enjoying ['Old' University]. Its so diverse, the age groups and backgrounds of students [Jane said this in the first interview also but was not prompted at this interview]. I like the way we are learning from each other (Jane, aged 20-29, White European, Access at BC, BA at 'Old' University).

At BC I completed two courses...The courses have helped to prepare me for university e.g. how to take notes, what sort of notes to take, what [the course] is all about, different aspects – the history of [the profession] etc. The students from my class are great. It is all very exciting as it's a total career change for me [moving from catering, being a chef to [new profession]. I'm really evolving as a people person. I'm learning so much about people, how they think, their needs, the course is preparing me for the profession (Carlton, carer of elderly relative, African Caribbean, male, aged 30-39, Access student, BC).

The remaining three students from BC, Brenda, David and Devon, were continuing their study at BC. Brenda and David had progressed to Level 2 construction programmes . Devon, when previously interviewed, had originally planned to progress onto a graphic design course. He said he had changed his mind after completing the construction course and decided to pursue a course in brickwork but the course was full. At the time of the interview he said he had enrolled on a sports and recreation course. Devon did not appear resentful that he was unable to progress within the department where he was already a student. He spoke positively about the course, as did Brenda and David. The two male students spoke about the teachers

pushing them and having high expectations. Brenda seemed to enjoy the challenge of performing more complex construction skills.

### **Factors Contributing to Success**

Students who were continuing with their study were asked what factor/s were contributing to their success. Very little had changed between the first and the second interviews in terms of the factors which students perceived were enabling them to succeed. The exception was two construction students, Brenda and Devon who mentioned the Education Maintenance Awards (see Chapter 2 page 81).

Irfan and Mohammed, though they acknowledged the role of teachers in helping them, both felt, as they did at the first interview, that their own determination to succeed and their hard work contributed to their success. Irfan said:

...you have to fight against the temptations to go out, not to want to do any work and to earn money to buy nice things or to pay for things like food and rent. You have to fight for what you want – you have to work hard! (Irfan, aged 20-29, Kurdish, BTEC at NBC, BSC at 'New' University)

Devon and David from BC stated that teachers made them work hard which was helping them to succeed. Devon said that receiving an Education Maintenance (EMA) Award meant that he had to work harder at College to get paid and David said that one of his teachers made him feel as though if his work was not perfect, he should not be at College. This 'threat' kept him working hard. However, Brenda from BC attributed a combination of the receipt of the EMA and the encouragement of friends and family as key to her continued success. She said that being praised by her family and friends for being at College was very encouraging. Kay, Joanne and Carlton, former BC students, perceived the support from friends at university as the main factor contributing to their success. Kay also added that her children, in

allowing her to get on with her studies by taking care of themselves, were also a major factor in her success.

### **Definitions of Success**

All 10 students were asked for their definition of success. All HE students defined success as obtaining the qualification in their programme of study and a few HE students said they wanted a high grade. Two FE students on construction programmes perceived gaining an apprenticeship as success and the third FE student (Devon) defined success as completing a Level 2 qualification and obtaining a job as a fitness instructor or personal trainer. Two HE students provided additional explanations to their definition which were beyond achieving the BA degree:

To pass the course. People may be going for Distinction but to me achievement is to finish the course and get the degree and do some good. (Carlton, carer of elderly relative, African Caribbean, male, aged 30-39, Access student, BC)

My attitude in my first year when I was at BC, success was a 'pass'. Now I feel, I can do more than a pass. I want to get a First Class degree. Equally I would be happy with a 2:1. I also want to grow as a person, be more aware of my prejudices and my personal strengths and weaknesses. (Jane, aged 20-29, White European, Access at BC, BA at 'Old' University)



### **Supplementary Follow up Interviews: Former NBC Students**

Interviews were also conducted with 10 individuals who previously attended NBC. All interviewees were currently employed at NBC. The interviews were conducted in lieu of a 'longitudinal' study that was not possible within the intended PhD research. The purpose of the interviews was to explore how attendance on the NBC programme had contributed to their professional development and whether NBC continued to support their professional development. The 10 individuals interviewed had completed A Levels, BTEC and NVQ programmes at NBC between 1997 and 2000. Five had progressed to university from NBC and returned as graduates to teach (four) and as an IT technician. The five remaining interviewees were employed as administrators (four) and as an instructor.

### **Reasons for Selecting NBC**

Six of the interviewees were female and four were male; seven were aged 30-39, two were aged 40-49 and one was aged 20-29. Full details can be found in Table 25 in the appendices. For all but one, as with the majority of students from the case study FE institutions, geography was the main factor influencing their choice to study at NBC. The 10 staff interviewed discussed the convenience of attending NBC as the nearest college to their homes. The one member of staff who did not use geography as the reason for his choice, was also the only individual aged 20-29 and said he chose NBC because his younger sister had also attended NBC and told him that it was a good college.

## **Perceptions of NBC Contributing to Professional Development**

The staff employed as administrators, the IT technician and the instructor, all completed IT qualifications at NBC. Two of the administrators who were bi-lingual, also stated that they had completed English language courses. A common feature provided on the courses that was cited by this group of former students as contributing to their professional development was work experience. This was provided within as well as outside of NBC and these former students said that work experience gave the insight they needed to apply successfully for a job. Those former students who had work experience within NBC also said that it offered them the advantage of understanding NBC's systems.

All interviewees also identified the role of teachers in supporting professional development. Individual teachers were singled out for the special efforts they had made. Comments such as:

I was impressed by the support. One of the teachers was very chatty and interested in what students were doing. I could ask teachers even in the courtyard questions. If I needed time because I had a young child, they allowed it. I had no knowledge of IT before...the tutors gave me the feeling of confidence which I had lost after being at home with my child (Instructor, White British 30-39, female).

The teachers had good communication. They were approachable. When you wanted to see them they made themselves available. You were able to benefit from their experience. You were 'pushed' and given extra things to do (Teacher, 30-39, African Caribbean, male).

There were differences in the following two responses, though they highlighted the role of teachers in supporting professional development. The first response related to teachers as inspiring role models and the other is critical of teachers for the attention given to progression to HE and neglect of employment development. The latter

response also commended NBC for taking a calculated risk in its application of its staff recruitment procedure:

Teachers were there, not just for the teaching of [the subject] but for life skills. They were helpful not just in college but outside. They would tell you things from their perspectives. The honesty of some of the staff! Career wise they really helped you by putting pressure on to make up your mind. Teachers were really influential. They tried to see problems from the students' perspectives. My ambition is to emulate and be as good as my [subject] teachers (Teacher, 20-29, Black African, male).

The teachers were quite friendly but we did have our problems with them. Quite a lot of the work was down to us. They helped you but the course prepared you for higher education. It didn't help me as a mature student with children. I worked for eight years in China. The course gave you concepts but you have to adapt it for the workplace. Because I have work experience from China, I was able to do that. The College gave me a chance to prove myself to feel like I'm useful, to learn more, improve my English. When I went for the interview, I wasn't confident. I didn't match the person specification. The College saw my potential. That made me feel that I was OK (Administrator, 40-49, Chinese, female).

### **Current Professional Development Needs**

All former students interviewed mentioned the large range of professional development programmes provided in-house by NBC and the regular circulation of events through the College's main internal communication, its newsletter. Line managers were said by all but one staff to encourage continued professional development. A few interviewees mentioned conflicts emerging between the desire to participate in professional development activities when the timing clashed with corporate events or managers' priorities. In addition it was also highlighted that the resources to pay substitute teachers were not always available for them to attend professional development events. The one former student who had not mentioned that her line manager encouraged her to participate in continuing professional

development, implied in her statement that that there were other ways in which this could be supported by NBC:

I'm always encouraged. I think that the College will be able to help me to become a manager once I improve my English (Administrator, 40-49, Chinese, female).

## **FE Students: Emerging Themes**

The dominance of geography limited students' choice of an FE College. It was evident that for most students interviewed, individual circumstances dictated that they could only attend the college nearest to where they lived. Students in the case study FE institutions used more than one source of information, advice and guidance (IAG) in selecting their programmes of study. The most important sources of advice used for the course selection process were family and friends, College curriculum staff and College IAG staff.

Information prior to entering the College was poor; students were not prepared for what they found. One student was shocked by the amount of writing required to study computing. The information in the prospectus was inadequate for FE students attempting to choose a course. It appeared only possible to make a well informed course choice once students had joined the programme. The role of specialist, curriculum teachers in providing good quality information about courses emerged as a key issue when considering the barriers faced by underrepresented groups to access course information from FE colleges. The 'one-stop-shop' as a single source of information does not work for FE students from the case study institutions.

Teachers mattered to the FE students. Many were impressed by the quality of support by teachers as well as the pleasant and well equipped environment. There were, however, some criticisms of poor quality teaching. The FE students perceived teachers as important in contributing to their success. The behaviours and personal qualities of teachers were perceived by students to be more important than aspects of teaching.

Friends were also perceived as playing an important role in students' success, though for others they were a distraction. Being a student placed a strain on friendships that existed prior to commencing the FE programme and for some it was easier to maintain relationships with students than with friends who were not students.

Differences in the use of tutorials by BC and NBC emerged. BC students' experience of tutorials suggested that regular opportunities were provided for students to discuss their individual needs/ ambitions with tutors. NBC's students did not identify tutorials as a consistent feature, nor as an activity that was valued in meeting their individual needs. The lack of raising students' expectations emerged at NBC and not at BC.

Similar to the HE students, all FE students tolerated a great deal from the institution and their teachers, particularly younger students' tolerance of disrespectful behaviours from teachers. The FE students did not perceive all their teachers treating them with respect, though all FE teachers indicated that they did. Unlike the HE students, who had high expectations of HE, the FE students did not. They managed their dissatisfaction because College was better than school and their expectations were not very high prior to coming to the Colleges.

Students' perceptions of the institution and their definitions of success were very individual though there were some shared views. In defining success for themselves, both FE and HE students placed a greater emphasis on achieving qualifications or progressing to HE than their teachers. These emerging themes will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

## Chapter 6

### DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the data presented in Chapters 4 and 5 and contrasts students', teachers' and managers' responses from the four case study institutions. Though differences emerged, strong similarities were evident between students', teachers' and managers' perceptions from the Beacon and Non- Beacon Colleges and the 'new' and 'old' universities. The similarities between the two FE case study institutions confirm research undertaken by Ainley and Bailey (1997) in two FE colleges, one in an inner city area and the other in the home counties. Despite the different locations, more similarities than differences were found.

Whilst there were also many similarities between the two case study HE institutions, NU and UO, different values were placed on research, teaching and supporting students, between the two. It is recognised that most HE academics spend more time teaching than carrying out research (McNay 2000); however, students and staff from the old university placed a greater emphasis on research than at the new university. It is to be expected that 'old' HE institutions would prioritise research as most of the HEFCE research funds have been allocated to them (Watson et al 2000). Developing and promoting their research profile is a measure of their 'excellent' reputation (Shattock 2003), especially in traditional 'elite' or research-led HEIs. UO had more of a tension internally between elements of mission than NU.

There was greater financial investment in Student Support Services at NU than at UO. The value placed on supporting students as well as on Student Support Services, was equally shared by NU and UO staff. The importance placed on support

to students made the HE institutions similar to the two FE case study institutions and the emphasis placed on teaching at UO, within the Continuing Education Department, made it similar to the two FE case study institutions. The strong similarities between the four case study institutions and the emerging themes from the data presented in Chapters 4 and 5 are discussed in this chapter.

### **Perceptions of the Institutions and their Missions**

There was consistency of understanding of the institutions' mission among the managers of both FE institutions, though less so at NBC than BC. In contrast, the HE managers were inconsistent in their understanding of their institutions' missions and provided very individual perceptions of them. With the exception of the most senior HE staff, managers and teachers in the HE case study institutions appeared to be unfamiliar with their institutions' missions. They focused on their areas of responsibility or subject discipline. This disconnection of HE academic staff from the corporate institution is not a new phenomenon. For example, Ainley (1994) describes:

the network of personal alliances cultivated by academics, whose allegiances – like those of feudal lords – are not to the king, the Vice Chancellor of the institution they work in, but to the lieges to ... colleagues primarily (Ainley 1994:93).

Reporting on the attitudes of academic staff to a corporate HE culture, authors such as McNay (1995), Deem and Johnson (2000) and Shattock (2003) argue that academic staff do not value the university as an organisation as much as they do a discipline or an academic unit. They suggest that academic staff are individualistic even though they may work in research teams as scientists do, or in course teams as expected by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for HE. A strong identification



and loyalty to their subject and department was found to be the case among the majority of managers and teachers interviewed at the two case study universities. This may be good, because the smaller unit is manageable and can be the 'home' for students in a big institution.

The corporate culture found among senior managers within the FE case studies was consistent with research by Owen and Davies (2003) in their survey of FE staff perceptions where they also found a corporate culture among managers in comparison to non-managers in FE. It was unusual therefore that some NBC managers were critical of their institution. The criticisms made by NBC and BC teachers however were consistent with the Owen and Davies research. NBC's principal, in her rejection of 'elitism', 'ethnocentrism' and 'cloning' suggested that NBC staff were encouraged to be themselves and express their individual rather than a corporate view point. BC's principal, however saw the college as changing the student, 'compensating' for the student's 'disadvantage'.

The principals, from different standpoints, saw their institutions playing a significant role in changing students' lives. BC's principal perceived her college, using Bourdieu's terms, as attempting to change students' dispositions and habituses by raising their expectations. Her institution also provided social and cultural activities to 'compensate' for students' lack of cultural and social capital. Based on Tinto's (1975, 1987) model of social integration, BC's students were prepared for integration into HE or employment by changing them to 'fit' into the environment (Capital A- Access). In contrast, NBC's principal advocated enabling students to hold on to their identities and cultures with pride. NBC's principal's perception was

more akin to Freire's (1972) democratic and liberatory education. The student's background and culture were perceived as valuable and although these may not be the same as those of the College, this lack of 'fit' was not a barrier, but was encouraged by NBC's principal. She did not, however, provide any examples of how different cultures were 'managed' within the College (and in fairness she was not asked). Unlike the BC principal, the NBC principal did not expect students (or staff) to change but to 'develop' to succeed (Small 'a' access). However, the institution would equip them to hold on to their identity as well as succeed in HE or employment. Both principals shared the view that cultural capital such as qualifications was important to students' success but they differed on the most effective means to bring this about. Methods used by BC's principal demonstrated features of Tinto's model of social and academic integration. However, Bourdieu's habitus model implies that it is not possible to change characteristics that have been culturally inherited. It was clear from this research that most students' attitudes were altered by the experience of becoming a student and many had to reconcile tensions between their private and academic lives. It was evident that BC's principal perceived success for students as attaining qualifications and middle class values. But students did not perceive their lifestyles as problematic and in need of changing. Students should be allowed to explore and discover the opportunities and perspectives which an education encounter provides. The role of the institution can support this and should not be to actively 'socially engineer' students into adopting middle class values and behaviours.

In contrast to the FE managers, HE managers were critical of their institutions' mission to widen access. Compliance with the university's mission to widen access

was expressed as 'obligatory' by a NU manager. This appeared to be the case for all case study institutions as all staff were engaged, sometimes unhappily, in widening access activities (recruiting non-traditional students, providing support to non-traditional students, providing monitoring data to managers). Staff from the FE and HE case study institutions expressed support for widening access but were often critical of their institutional approaches. This was true more for the HE than the FE staff and for NBC more than BC staff. UO staff provided reasons why widening access could not be implemented. This included UO being a 'research' institution. NU staff were equally critical of their institution and wanted more resources to work with diverse student groups as well as with larger numbers of students. As indicated in Chapter 1, the mission and recruitment patterns of the FE and HE case study institutions reflected government policies to widen participation to HE for underrepresented groups. NU staff implied that student numbers were increasing from underrepresented groups to maintain levels of funding against the decrease in the unit of funding per student. This has been supported by many writers on access to HE including Scott (2001), McNay (2005) and Greenbank (2006b).

In contrast to the largely consistent understanding of FE managers and teachers, the teaching staff and some managers from both HE case studies appeared confused and unclear about their institutions' mission to widen access. NU, a former polytechnic, provides a diverse HE curriculum to a diverse population in terms of ability and social backgrounds. It was therefore expected that NU's staff would express agreement with its mission. Descriptions of the changing student body by the HE and FE staff, i.e. non A Level applicants, 'non-standard', disadvantaged and ESOL

etc, pathologised the access student and therefore implied their unsuitability for HE. These students did not 'fit' with the ideal model of a student discussed in Chapter 2. Using Thomas' (2001) typology of universities and its relationship to the recruitment of students, UO was moving to become an even more 'traditional elite' university with its targeting of younger students and focus on research and NU was changing to become a 'real new' or 'modern' (McNay 2005) university by increasing its intake of Black, minority ethnic and mature students.

Ecclestone (2002) contends that FE managers either support the changes and the values underpinning widening participation or go along with them strategically but are not necessarily committed to them. As already indicated, managers and teachers from the case study institutions supported strategies to widen participation in FE but were dissatisfied with resources made available to support students. Both colleges' mission statements declared a commitment to meeting the needs of the local resident and business communities as well as engaging further afield with prospective employers and higher education providers. The emergence of this focus is what Scott (1995:52) describes as the 'broader community-wide comprehensive college'. Although circumstances did not allow for the original research plan to be fulfilled, the adventitious sample of staff and students is in fact sufficiently representative to compare two HE and two FE institutions and make valid conclusions. As indicated in Chapter 1, compared against national benchmark standards, both colleges' ILR databases showed that students were successful in gaining qualifications at the end of their courses. All groups of students with the exception of Pakistani students were more successful at BC than at NBC. The vice principal of BC commented on the successes of students at his college when they progressed to university, yet they

experienced difficulties in gaining employment. His principal's comment contradicted this: she stated that the college (BC) not only facilitated students gaining employment but also offered a 'compensatory' education to provide what students may lack to successfully obtain employment. However, many of the jobs that BC's students were assisted to access were entry-level positions. BC's principal failed to take into account the realities of racism, sexism and homophobia in the labour market which limited the choices available to young people as well as to mature graduates (Ball et al 2000). In relation to adult students, neither BC's nor NBC's principals acknowledged the structural inequalities which students from 'disadvantaged' backgrounds experience; therefore whatever qualifications or cultural awareness they emerged with from college, they would still be disadvantaged in the workplace. However, both principals 'equipped' their students with some cultural capital (BC) or with a strong sense of their identity (NBC) to face the 'real world'. The higher 'success' rate of students from most ethnic groups at BC compared to NBC may be due to the higher staff expectations of students and possibly a more systematic tutorial system than NBC.

The few FE staff in both colleges who showed some resistance to widening access were construction staff, perceived in the sector as still delivering in a traditional way to an unchanged industry. Wendy, the BC construction tutor, was ignored when she tried to introduce new, flexible teaching styles to construction teachers to accommodate the needs of young learners who were 'non-traditional'. The NBC construction manager said at the interview that he had not changed the student target group (i.e. White male students); however, the NBC principal and vice principal

were under the impression that the construction manager had made changes and assumed that he was targeting female and Turkish students. Ainley and Bailey (1997) found that technical lecturers, most of whom had worked previously in industry had a 'hard' attitude to maintaining what they referred to as 'standards', which they associated with their professional identity and self esteem. School-aged pupils, women and Turkish students were not perceived by construction staff at both FE colleges as being capable of maintaining the profession's 'standards'. They were not 'up to it' (Wahlberg and Gleeson 2003:432). The construction staff were increasingly, like other teachers in FE, being asked to teach students who would not normally enter their profession. On the one hand, the construction staff appeared to be protecting their standards from these new student groups (students with learning difficulties, female, Black and minority ethnic, those who failed the construction entry tests etc.), students who would not usually be recruited into FE due to their lack of success in compulsory schooling or their increasing numbers in the UK population. Yet on the other hand, the NBC construction manager showed commitment to supporting students who needed additional learning support (ALS). He demonstrated working closely with an ALS specialist to provide consistent additional support to all construction students. Staff attitudes and practices in widening access were complex and differed both within and across vocational departments in FE. Future research should compare and contrast the different attitudes and practices to widening access between and within different departments.

## **Selecting the institutions: Geography and Student Choice**

The dominance of geography emerged as a key factor in students' selection of the two FE case study institutions and NU. In contrast, this was not a factor identified by UO students despite being part-time. Geography was not only important for students who were parents or carers but also for younger FE students: those aged 16-19 also chose NBC and BC for their closeness to home. In the case of NBC, some students returned to work at the college and in their 'home' community even after successfully gaining HE and other FE qualifications. Students in this research, in their choice of the nearest institution, echoed the findings of many recent studies in FHE (Merrill 2000, Farr 2001, Macrae and Macguire 2002, Beckett 2002, Preece and Godfrey 2004, Pugsley 2004, Reay et al 2005). These studies showed that working class and Black and minority ethnic students were more likely to select the nearest FE college, attend a pre 1992 university and live off-campus, mostly at home, when attending HE. None of the HE students interviewed in this research were resident in their universities' student accommodation. However, like the FE students the majority of the HE students made their institutions their first choice. This was to be expected as all the NU and UO students interviewed were the first generation to go to HE, mature students, and students on part-time HE courses respectively. The idea of the university as an institution with student accommodation on campus is a relatively new, post WWII phenomenon with the exception of Oxford and Cambridge (Scott 1995). The 'new' universities, such as NU, were more likely to recruit students who were 'non-traditional:' who lived off-campus and with a diverse student profile such as mature and Black and minority ethnic (McNay

1994, Beckett 2002, Hayton and Paczuska 2002), which was found in both case study HE institutions.

Both colleges and NU were located in areas that were defined as 'deprived'. This was the descriptor given by the then Department of the Environment Transport and the Regions (DETR) in 1998 to local authorities with over 50% of wards with high indices of 'poverty' factors such as the number of young people achieving 5 GCSE at A\*-C grades, car ownership, crimes reported, lone parents etc. The populations of the boroughs where BC and NBC are located were recorded as having 32% and 48% Black and minority ethnic groups in the 2001 Census (LDA 2004). As stated in Chapter 1, over 80% of students enrolling at both case study institutions were resident in areas of low participation in PCET.

All the FE students and many of the NU students in this research conformed to the habitus of their class and ethnicity in selecting their PCET institution (Bourdieu in Robbins 2000). They not only chose the nearest institution but also selected institutions where the people who attended were similar to themselves. They relied heavily on the advice of family and friends and accepted the limitations placed on them by the institutions. Geography would also limit choice for these students because constraints of travel and finance would make local FHE the only option. This perceived view of student choice is also supported by other research (Furlong 1992, Archer et al 2003 and McGivney 1990 and 1996). In contrast, the UO students, as first generations in their families to go to university, by selecting a (pre-1992) prestigious university, did not conform to Bourdieu's dispositions of habitus. They were not going along with what was 'reasonable to expect' of people like them



(Bourdieu and Passeron 1977: 226). They were acquiring the symbols of cultural capital in obtaining an education from an elite institution. Whilst the FE and NU students were learning among students with whom they felt comfortable, UO students were away from their social class, albeit temporarily. They were not engaging in what Bourdieu called cultural reproduction. However, by studying part time, and living off-campus, the UO students still maintained contact with work colleagues, families and other social links.

The HE case study students were more varied in their reasons for selecting their institutions than the FE students. This was expected, given the older age profile of the HE students and the part-time programmes attended by the UO students. They were generally more confident and articulate in expressing themselves than the FE students. Researchers (Ainley 1999, Field 2000, Fuller 2001) have been critical of the instrumental motivation for the increasing number of mature students entering HE over the past 20 years: to obtain a qualification and a means of getting employment.

The funding of colleges on the basis of the number of students recruited encourages marketing of programmes to reflect the local profile of students. This was evident by the images of students used to illustrate a multi-cultural, child friendly and mixed aged college in the two prospectuses. Many studies on students in FE institutions have found that inner city students in particular select their nearest FE colleges (Merrill 2000; Connelly and Halliday 2001; Hyland and Merrill 2003; LSC 2004a). The research commissioned by the London LSC (2004a) reported differences by ethnicity in the patterns of travel to study and found that students from a White

cultural background were more likely to travel long journeys to outer London institutions. The ILR database for the two FE case study institutions (Chapter 1) show high proportions of mature and minority ethnic students. Many of the mature students had dependants and were resident in close proximity to the colleges. The London LSC (2004a) report showed that less than four per cent of students in inner city FE Colleges in London had a public transport journey of more than one hour. Students' behaviour in choosing the nearest FE college, in this research, was typical. There were strong similarities between the reasons given by the younger students at NBC and BC for choosing to study. These were in agreement with the findings of Hyland and Merrill (2003) which reported that many young people chose FE study for a better education, qualifications and the only way of getting a job. The mature students at BC and NBC gave similar reasons: most of the interviewees were attending an Access course and identified employment as the major outcome after successful completion of their HE vocational programme. How the mature students had arrived at the decision to return to study varied and again conformed to many studies of adult learners carried out in recent years (West 1996, Gallacher et al 2000, Hyland and Merrill 2003).

Adult learners are usually in the majority in FE. It is often the influence of a friend, a significant other or a leaflet through the door (as in the case of Delia at NBC) which are the major triggers for adults participating in further education (Glaser and Strauss 1971). Many of the students who were parents at NBC and BC mentioned returning to education for self-development after caring for their children. This was true for Delia and for many others in this research who were returning to education

to improve their employment opportunities and develop a career. Connelly and Halliday (2001) and Hyland and Merrill (2003) found similar reasons given by adult, access students returning to education.

Students at BC and NBC, who lived in close proximity to more than one FE college, mentioned selecting one local college over another because of a negative encounter. With such a range of reasons for selecting an institution or for continuing/ returning to education, it is evident that institutions with successful widening access practices will need to provide good quality advice and guidance, accessible information and positive experiences at enquiry points. Frontline staff are crucial here and often underpaid, untrained and under-esteemed. But they can provide those positive rather than 'negative encounters'.

### **Information, Advice and Guidance**

More NU students relied on information from family, friends and the HEI than UO students, where the majority carried out their own research. The UO students, in carrying out research prior to making their decisions behaved more like middle class students. The concept of researching education options is a middle class one as well as the skills to decode the language of prospectuses and to look behind their glossiness (Ball et al 2000, Pugsley 2004). Most of the FE students relied on advice and guidance from the institutions to select their programmes of study. Overall, those students from all the case studies who used the advice and guidance of friends in selecting institutions and courses did not appear to have extensive social networks with 'insider knowledge' in making their decisions. That is, their family and friends who provided the advice had not all attended FHE nor were they teachers/ other staff

with an in-depth knowledge or experience of PCET. Students in the case studies, both FE and HE, were particularly disadvantaged on the basis of the limited information they received. Reay et al (2005: 39) state that ‘...institutional habitus...impacts directly on students’ higher education destinations [in] the quality and quantity of careers advice provided’. The prospectuses were found to have insufficient detail for students to make an informed choice. This was noted by nine out of the 22 students who saw BC and NBC prospectuses. Colleges invest considerable amounts of money, designing and producing thousands of copies of prospectuses each year. NBC and BC colleges delivered a prospectus to every resident in their borough, to every public and voluntary sector organisation as well as to a selection of residences in neighbouring boroughs. Given the expense of producing and distributing the prospectus, it is clearly not an effective use of resources. Research conducted by Norfolk Council (Fiddy 1995) into the factors which influenced young people continuing their education after the age of 16, also found that students were negative about the prospectuses that were produced by FE and Sixth Form colleges.

The FE students’ use of information from the prospectus and staff within the colleges corresponded with research by Ball and Vincent (1998). They found that working class students obtained much of their information from prospectuses and from friends and family with little experience of PCET institutions. They described this as ‘cold’ knowledge, in comparison to middle class students who received ‘hot’ information about education institutions from friends and family members who had direct experiences of the institutions.

Unlike the FE case study students, very few of the HE students saw their universities' prospectuses. Of those who did, only two found the information helpful. One student who used the on-line prospectus at UO found that the information was out of date. Compared to the FE students, the prospectus did not feature as important in providing information to the HE students.

Students from all four case studies reported being dissatisfied with the quality of the communication from the FHEIs when making enquiries as outsiders. This was more the case at BC than NBC and for UO than NU. The problem of receiving general information from non-specialist staff was highlighted. It was not until students joined the programme or at interview, that they obtained in-depth advice to make an informed choice. As already indicated, without an extensive network of friends and family with connections in FHE, working class students were disadvantaged in selecting programmes of study. Other studies (Archer et al 2003 and Pugsley 2004) have reported the lack of information by FE and HE institutions in providing satisfactory information for students making course enquires and the bewildering array of courses and qualifications which leave mature people contemplating returning to study feeling isolated. Williams (1998) and Connor et al (2001) reported that there was much misinformation among students who relied on friends and family for advice in selecting post-sixteen institutions due to the many changes which occur frequently within institutions of PCET. This was also found by Archer et al (2003) and the London LSC (2004a:8) travel to study research which showed that the young people they interviewed had 'limited, confused information and misinformation'.

It was therefore not surprising that students from the case studies who had made enquiries to the institutions found the information inadequate. Very few teachers were involved in the preparation of information that was given to the public. Teachers' lack of involvement in the production of information did not appear to be through a lack of effort to engage them in the process on the part of the institutions. Few teachers showed an interest or possibly many were too busy to produce information for the prospectus, with the exception of UO where teachers from the continuing education department wanted to influence the content of the prospect but were not given this opportunity. These teachers suggested that UO had not placed a high priority on making information in the prospectus easily accessible to prospective students. There was a dearth of information in UO's prospectus on the continuing education programmes which was confirmed by Gina (see page 197). It was therefore understandable why these two UO teachers in the continuing education department wanted to be involved with the production of information for the prospectus.

Only one of the teachers interviewed in the four case study institutions participated currently in the recruitment of students. It was at the recruitment stage that students felt well informed about the courses to be able to make an informed choice. FE and HE students found the contact made with teachers, whether by telephone or at Open Days as the best quality information in making their choice of programmes. The preference shown for advice from teachers suggests inconsistent quality of information and advice from all the case study institutions and/ student perceptions of the knowledge status of an 'adviser' versus a 'teacher'. There is no requirement for all advisers to be professionally trained and the Matrix accreditation, the

government-approved standard for advice and information giving in PCET institutions, is largely monitored through 'tick boxes'. Training which builds the competences of PCET staff who provide information, advice and guidance (IAG) to the public would benefit prospective students as IAG staff must be knowledgeable about programmes they consistently administer. The research did not explore whether IAG staff were limited by work practice or set their own limitations in only providing superficial information to prospective students about courses in their institutions. The high value students placed on information provided by teachers in the case study institutions contrasted with the absence of teachers in the production of information for prospective students at the institutions' enquiry points. More involvement of teachers in producing the information that is given to students may help in resolving tensions about mission sharing among teachers and managers which emerged in chapter 4.

Despite the barriers in obtaining good quality information prior to entering PCET, the vast majority of students in the case study institutions claimed to have made satisfactory choices: the FE and NU case study students selected institutions that were local to where they lived, the UO students chose a prestigious institution to study part time and all students chose programmes where they were identified by their teachers as succeeding.

### **Accident and Staff Choice**

Unlike FE and NU students, whose choice of institution was mainly due to proximity to their home, the teachers' decisions to work at the case study institutions

were accidental rather than geographical. At the time of the interview two of the teachers from BC were on short-term contracts. One teacher from NBC of Asian background had originally applied to NBC for an administrative post when she left university and was offered a teaching contract. Of all the teachers interviewed, only two selected the institution on the basis of its characteristics and a desire to be employed there. These two teachers were of African and African Caribbean descent and referred to themselves as role models at BC. The sector has seen an increasing number of African and African Caribbean students entering FE as opposed to continuing their education in school sixth forms (Hillage and Aston 2001). The under-representation of Black and minority ethnic teachers within FE has been reported for a number of years and was highlighted by the Commission for Black Staff in Further Education (2002).

With the exception of one lecturer, Kelly at NU (page 161), none of the HE staff chose the institution based on its mission and the student body. As in the FE case studies, two teachers at UO and NU were initially employed on temporary contracts and later given permanent contracts. It can be argued that many of the features of FE such as increased student numbers, widening access to underrepresented student groups, working with a wider community and an increasing focus on income generating through growth are also part of HE institutions (Wagner 1995, McNay 2000). All these features were explicit in both UO's and NU's missions and on the surface when visiting both institutions, the student body appeared diverse with mature as well as young members of visible minorities and White students, as would be expected within inner London. Therefore HE teachers, like the FE teachers, will have no doubt that UO and NU were 'access' HE institutions. However, unless they



were motivated to work with student groups who were underrepresented in HE, their commitment to the institutions and their missions was questionable. The sections below discuss teachers' perceptions of working in 'access' institutions, the practices they developed and how they and their students perceived these contributing to successful student outcomes.

### **Staff and Student Perceptions after joining the Institution**

All staff and the majority of students from the four case studies identified changes in their perceptions of the institutions since joining them. Not all were positive. There were similarities between the dissatisfaction expressed by the FE and HE staff. This was largely in relation to the pressures to increase student numbers and to widen participation to underrepresented students. The new administrative regimes to record data for funding councils and quality agencies were also unexpected and a source of frustration for staff in FHE. Though both FE and HE students interviewed expressed some dissatisfaction, there was a greater feeling of satisfaction among the students, which developed as they remained in their institutions, than among staff, particularly teachers. The dissatisfaction expressed by teachers in FE and HE in the interviews was also expressed to their students, by some more overtly than others, as this research has shown. Students had to manage their dissatisfaction because their main purpose for attending the programmes in the case study institutions was to achieve the qualification. Teachers at the case study institutions did **not have** to manage their dissatisfaction. They expressed resentment, but got on with the job; they had selected the institutions as they were offered a job. They may have felt unable to leave but this was not explored in the research.

Wendy, the Construction Tutor who was developing construction teachers' teaching and learning strategies, said that her perceptions of FE teachers had changed since joining BC. The construction teachers' resistance to changing their approaches to teaching and learning frustrated Wendy. The construction teachers may have been preparing the students for the workplace and, given the 'tough' world of work which epitomises construction sites; they may have selected an approach which 'equipped' students to succeed in the working environment. A 'caring/ welfare' approach to the teaching of construction in their view may not do this. Frykholm and Nitzler (1993) suggest that teachers of vocational subjects actively shape the identity of learners through the attitudes and character that they convey. They contend that vocational teachers carry out this activity in their role as teachers more than they communicate knowledge of the vocational subject. Wahlberg and Gleeson (2003) discuss the problems encountered by teachers of vocational subjects as more colleges accept younger and more 'needy' students. They describe lecturers with a strong sense of identity with their professions, e.g. Economists and Accountants, teaching Business Studies, and Engineers teaching Motor Vehicle courses. However, these teachers felt de-professionalised and marginalised by the fast changing FE policy arena and the widening gap that is emerging between colleges and schools with regards to pay and conditions. One of the teachers in the Wahlberg and Gleeson study (2003) referred to a situation in the future where professionals in FE will become 'welfare officers' and, even worse, 'key skills' trainers (Wahlberg and Gleeson 2003: 438). These attitudes were mirrored by the construction teachers whom Wendy at BC referred to: they appeared to be holding on to their traditional 'standards' to control their

curriculum and avoid being relegated to being welfare officers (see also Ainley and Bailey 1997). The construction teachers' responses to the changing FE agenda were similar to two of Trowler's (1998) categories: policy reconstruction and using coping strategies – with their colleges' policies which they worked around or changed.

Zara, Access Course Tutor from NBC (page 241) did not expect the negative bureaucracy she encountered as a teacher but neither did she expect that NBC would have provided a number of positive opportunities for professional and personal development. NBC had a termly cycle of continuing professional development programmes and advertised externally held events for FE staff in its weekly newsletter. Zara was a member of a research group within NBC and was also attending an EdD programme during working hours. Bureaucracy in FE (Ecclestone 2002, Ainley and Bailey 1997) and HE (McNay 1995, Middlehurst 1995, Brennan and Shah 2000) is a subject of much debate since the passing of the 1988 Education Reform and the 1992 Further and Higher Education Acts. In recognising the excessive amount of bureaucracy in FE, the LSC established a task force to examine how to reduce it. The committee reported in 2003 and at the time of writing the LSC were in the process of implementing its 'trust in FE' strategy, intended to reduce the administrative burden placed on institutions. Early, anecdotal reports from the pilot FE colleges suggest that FE colleges will need to impose an equally heavy and expensive administrative burden upon themselves in order to avoid incurring punitive financial measures if they fail to provide accurate and timely data to the LSC. The research showed that despite the 'accurate and timely' data provided by

FE to the LSC, it was not available in a suitable form so it was not used by managers and was not known to teaching staff. This was also true of HE.

Fay, Course Director from UO (page 164) complained about HE bureaucracy. She perceived the request for data from teachers about their teaching and their students as mistrust of teachers: ‘...One can’t be trusted to look after your students’. She was critical of the purpose of data collection in effecting change: ‘...however much time one spends filling in forms isn’t going to make you any better’. Fay appeared frustrated and powerless within her department even though she was the course director. Like the construction staff at BC and Zara at NBC, she no longer felt in control of her teaching. Her work was being imposed upon by her senior managers and by bodies such as the Higher Education Funding Council for England (see Duke 2002 and Field 2003, McNay 2005, for a discussion of changes in HE).

FE and HE students within the case study institutions also said that their perceptions had changed since joining their courses. Three factors emerged for many of the FE Access course students which paralleled the Davies and Tedder (2003) study: the students were less certain about what they intended to do but felt they knew what they did **not** want to do. They also found the work placement helpful in becoming clear about specific areas of work that they did not want to do. Some students lowered their goals. A mature student, Caron at NU, who had high expectations of herself based on her previous performance in school and her school teachers’ expectations of her, was forced to lower her goals. She came to terms with and accepted that the standards required to progress to a professional postgraduate programme after her undergraduate programme may not be within her capacity. This

was after many attempts to improve her grades: she was scoring satisfactory grades to pass each unit in her programme but could not obtain a high enough grade to progress to a postgraduate programme. Caron, though disappointed with her grades, was determined to continue to work to improve them whilst accepting that she may have to look at alternative professions, if by the end of her programme she failed to progress to post graduate study. For Caron and many other students, success within compulsory education was not a predictor of a similar level of success in HE: HE was a risk.

Despite teachers' and students' dissatisfaction with their institutions (in the case studies), they continued to study and work at the institutions. The teachers were paid, therefore they had an incentive. Why the students remained will be explored below together with teachers' perceptions of their behaviours which contributed to students successfully completing their programmes of study.

### **Perceptions of Teachers and Teaching**

The strategic plans of all the case study institutions included teaching and learning to meet the needs of diverse students and there was agreement among all staff that they used approaches to teaching such as tutorials which focused on meeting the needs of non-traditional students. Teachers at BC and NBC and the continuing education department of UO described approaches to their teaching that were more easily identifiable as student-centred (discussed in Chapter 2) than the other HE teachers. They described methods which focused on students' social and personal development, developing pedagogy and understanding how their students learned. The NU teachers and Fay from UO also supported non-traditional students but the

approaches they suggested were more akin to 'remedial', 'extra' support provided outside of the classroom, as opposed to methods that were integral to teaching and learning processes. Tutorials are a feature of Oxbridge – here, though, they are remedial. It is therefore not surprising that students appeared 'grateful' when teachers paid attention to their individual needs e.g. language or personal tragedy, identifying such teacher interventions as the personal characteristics of the teacher. They did not expect standard PCET teaching practice to include paying attention to their individual needs. This may change however, with the introduction of higher fees.

Given the financial investment made by the funding bodies for FE in ILT (Information and Learning Technologies) to widen access to FE, since the publication of the Kennedy (1997) and Higginson Reports (FEFC1998), the research found that ILT was not prominent in the teaching strategies of the case study institutions. Only two teachers from the FE college case studies, both from BC, perceived the use of ILT as an important aspect in their teaching. The inspection regimes of OfSTED and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) emphasised the use of ILT as an important criterion when measuring good teaching (OfSTED and ALI 2001). The use of ILT in teaching has also been recommended for HE as a tool to widen access to underrepresented groups (Dearing 1997), as a measurement of quality (QAA 1999) and to stimulate creativity in the FE curriculum (Ogunleye 2000).

Overall, there was little evidence of a variety of teaching and learning strategies, despite the statements made by the managers and teachers in FHEIs. There was a

lack of emphasis on the individual learning needs of students which students in the FE and HE institutions said that they valued. Ainley and Bailey (1997) drew similar conclusions on the poor attention given to the individual needs of students. There was, however, a contradiction between students' expectations of the institutions and the teaching and learning culture of the institution. Two students at UO, Mamood and Gina, both of African descent, expressed disappointment at the responsibility they were expected to have for their own learning and they wanted more support from the institution/ teachers. Wahlberg and Gleeson (2003: 436) described students who placed the responsibility for their learning on the shoulders of teachers as having a 'parcel' model of learning. They argued that 'students perceive learning as an externalised process... Good teachers... offer up the learning and ... they [students] accept the package' (p 436). It can be argued that Wahlberg and Gleeson's perspective fails to recognise the experience of students from non-European cultures whose expectations of teaching and learning will be a didactic one, similar to what the NU senior manager meant in Chapter 4 when she referred to students' expectations of 'learning at the feet of Socrates'.

The majority of students interviewed from the FHEIs agreed that teachers were helping them to succeed and were aware of their ambitions. They identified a variety of factors which were helping, the most important being good teaching followed by workshops, tutorials and supportive teachers. The exceptions were three students from BC and NBC and two students from UO who reported that the teaching was inconsistent and was not helping them to succeed. None of these students had made complaints to the case study institutions at the time of the research. Hyland and Merrill (2003) identified similar findings of students' satisfaction with their

teaching. In addition, the study by Hyland and Merrill reported on a group of students who were dissatisfied and complained to a head of department about poor quality teaching and the teacher was replaced. Students in this research, unlike the Hyland and Merrill group, did not complain, they managed their dissatisfaction individually and collectively.

### **Treating Students with Respect**

The majority of students from both FE and HE institutions felt that teachers treated them with respect and there was agreement among all the teachers that they treated students with respect. There were higher proportions of students from BC (68%) who said that they were treated with respect, than from NBC (61%) and more UO (89%) students than NU (75%) said this. The larger number of young people (under the age of 20) interviewed at BC, who were all very positive about teachers and teaching, masked the claims of disrespectful teachers made by mature students at BC. The higher proportion of NBC students reporting that they were not treated with respect may be due to the greater number of mature students (aged 20 and over) at NBC than at BC. They were more articulate and critical than the younger students at BC. BC's and NBC's younger students' positive perceptions of FE and their teachers echoed the findings by Bloomer and Hodkinson (1997) and Fiddy (1995) where the young students in their studies revealed that teachers treated them as adults. The students from BC and NBC who claimed that not all teachers treated them with respect expressed feeling offended by some teachers' behaviour. They identified being treated like children and being treated with disdain by some of their teachers. These were mainly mature students, many were parents and one group were all from African backgrounds. One mature, African student from NBC stated



that no teachers treated her with respect. Like the FE students, the HE students identified respectful behaviours from teachers as being treated as adults and teachers validating their points of view. A minority of HE students perceived additional support from their teachers and flexibility with assignment deadlines when they had personal difficulties as respectful treatment. 'Respect' for these students was support for solving their problems for which they felt 'grateful'.

It is evident that widening access to FHE required teachers to work with diverse student groups which were the case for the FE and HE teachers interviewed. They have a difficult task in meeting the diversity of learner needs as Guile and Lucas (1996) argue. Guile and Lucas contend that there were new demands on teaching and learning within the present widening participation agenda. Especially to meet individual needs in a diverse group (unlike the homogeneity of traditional Sixth Forms and undergraduates). These broader roles that FE teachers were expected to have required an investment in professional development and training to meet the demands of these roles (Guile and Lucas 1996, Bailey 1991, Guile and Fonda 1998, DfES 2006b). There are also expectations of HE teachers by the Institute of Learning and Teaching (later the Higher Education Academy). The HE teachers in the case study institutions responded differently to these changing expectations. At UO, the continuing education teachers were already responding to a more learner focused approach and made opportunities available for students to make contact outside teaching hours. However, one undergraduate teacher at UO stated that she did not change her teaching to make her subject accessible to 'non-traditional' students and justified her actions by stressing that UO was 'a university which

offered degrees'. The undergraduate teacher, Fay, had a view of 'degree' study and so of an undergraduate student – a 'traditional' one.

All teachers at the four FE and HE institutions said that they treated their students with respect. The HE teachers used the institutions' processes for collecting feedback from students, and making themselves available to students needing support, as examples of treating students with respect. The FE teachers differed from the HE teachers in that they (FE teachers) perceived treating their students with respect as treating them as adults and taking their students' concerns seriously. 'Respect' for these teachers was almost akin to their 'duty of care'. Only one teacher from UO perceived her practice of pedagogy as a way of treating students with respect: Sandra cited Freire's liberatory theory as the framework she used in working with students to bring what she called equality into the classroom and sharing with students the information held by her teacher- colleagues about students. Sandra's approach was a departure from the other FE and HE case study teachers where there was an absence of pedagogy in their vocabulary when describing how they treated students with respect. This was not altogether surprising given the criticism directed at FE teachers in lacking creativity in delivering the curriculum (Ogunleye 2000), the demands for continuing professional development of teachers to meet the 'new' student groups (Guile and Lucas 1999, Wagner 1995) and the paucity of government policy on access to address pedagogy (Burke 2002, Ainley and Andrews 2003, Archer et al. 2003).

Not all students interviewed at the four institutions perceived being treated with respect in the way that teachers did. The FE teachers and students were closer in their perceptions of behaviours which were respectful to students than the HE teachers and students. The FE students and teachers had a shared understanding of respect, which was treating students as adults. The HE teachers were divided in their perceptions of treating students with respect. There were those who perceived respectful behaviour to students as treating students according to their personal circumstances and those who thought it was making themselves available to students outside of teaching times. However, a minority of students identified teachers taking into consideration their personal circumstances. Studies have shown that some students do not welcome student centred approaches (Edwards 1993, Wahlberg and Gleeson 2003), preferring to keep their personal circumstances private and to resolve personal problems independently of the institution. Most students in this current research did not request additional assistance from their teachers, nor did they expect their teachers to be available outside of lessons as a measure of respect. The majority of HE students in the case studies perceived respectful behaviours as being treated by teachers as equals and having their points of view acknowledged and validated. The characteristics of these behaviours were consistent with those associated with the development of empowerment, equality etc, akin to practitioners of the 'access movement' which, as indicated above, was only overtly acknowledged by one HE teacher, Sandra from UO.

Teachers from the case studies believed that they treated students with respect and most students were in agreement. All the students were being offered a 'second

chance' education (Sand 1998, Archer et al 2003) or an opportunity that was not made available to their parents. The FE students found their teachers to be better, certainly, than those in schools (see also Ainley and Bailey 1997). Therefore they accepted negative experiences, they did not complain (see Morley 2003b). These students were succeeding on their programmes of study, and as already indicated, they managed their dissatisfaction.

### **Factors Contributing to Success**

Students from NBC and BC were often parents (17). It is expected that many of the students would have to work to support themselves (McNay 1994, Callender 2003). They were therefore juggling study with complex lives to succeed on their programmes. Although this study did not set out to explore in depth how students financed their study or the challenges they faced in managing their lives, research suggests that many students, both young and mature in post compulsory education have to overcome many difficulties to succeed. Ball et al (2000) and Gibson's (2004) research into young people's choices and decision making after compulsory education showed a series of complex social, academic and personal lives. A number of researchers have highlighted the complexities of mature students' lives (Thomas 2001, Hyland and Merrill 2003, Noble 2003). The discussion below focuses on student and staff perceptions of the factors which supported success in FHE and their shared and contrasted definitions of success.

### **The Quality and Take up of Student Support Services**

The research suggested that a high quality of support was provided by the case study institutions' Student Support Services. Most students were aware of the support

services. However, two students from NBC only became aware of the services after attending the college for one year, one having assumed that, because he was born overseas, he was not entitled to the support available. Due to the pressure on the services, two students from NU and NBC were unable to receive support for their dyslexia and several students, though offered the services they requested, had not been able to use them. All but one (UO) teacher from the four case study institutions placed a high value on the quality of Student Support Services and were critical of the amount available to meet student demand. Yorke (1999) argued that as HE institutions have attempted to be more cost effective and efficient in recent years, institutional managers have miscalculated the cost benefit ratio of having a high grade student support service. Yorke (1999) calculated that the cost of withdrawal was expensive to institutions, suggesting that employing student support staff in sufficient quantities to assist students to remain on courses and successfully complete their studies would offset the student support staff salary costs.

More than half (58%) of NBC students interviewed used support services compared to less than a quarter (21%) from BC. Only one third (33%) of NU students interviewed used the university's support services compared with over half (56%) at UO. The FE students mainly used financial and study skills support and the two most frequently used support services by the HE students were dyslexia and careers. The higher usage of support services by NBC in comparison to BC may be due to the greater need, which may have contributed to the different levels of achievement compared to BC; NBC had a higher index of deprivation than BC. NBC was reported as being in the top 10 most deprived districts of England and BC in the top

20 most deprived districts (DETR 2001). A higher index of deprivation will enable NBC to claim higher proportions of widening participation resources from the LSC which they could offer to students as services (counselling, travel allowance, books etc.) to support successful achievement of their learning goal. The higher usage of support services by UO students in comparison to NU is distorted by the use of percentages due to the small number of students in the sample (12 from NU and 9 from UO). The number of students who used support was four and five from NU and UO respectively. The high value placed on these services by staff and students from the case studies suggested their importance in students' success.

Thomas (2001) noted that non-traditional students have been widely reported as needing additional support once they have negotiated barriers of entry to PCET. She defined support as a range of academic and counselling services which, she argued, along with Gutteridge (2000) should be made available to all students, not only non-traditional students. There was insufficient research to suggest that non-traditional students require more support services than traditional students to complete their programmes successfully. Which groups of students require Student Support Services is not the issue here. The issue is government and institutional strategy.

'Success for All' (DfES 2002), '14-19: Opportunity and Excellence' (DfES 2003a) and 'The Future of Higher Education' (DfES 2003a) have directed FHE to diversify their education provision even further. FE colleges are required to increase progression to HE, provide more basic skills programmes, develop a more vocational focus to courses, increase employer links and increase their recruitment of younger students (14-19). Similar expectations are required of HE including widening their intake of non-standard entrants and those aged 18-30 from working

class backgrounds. The complexities of implementing these policy initiatives are greater than policy makers have considered. This is largely due to the continuing professional development (CPD) required for teachers to address these new demands, the time and process needed for non-traditional students to successfully negotiate vocational education and training and the complexities of adults' and young people's lives (McNay 1994, Guile and Lucas 1996, Ball et al 2000, Davies and Tedder 2003). The recent FE White Paper (DfES 2006b) has taken the need for CPD into consideration but the government will not be paying for any proposed CPD; at the time of writing, a consultation exercise is currently underway on mandatory CPD for all FE teachers as well as the possibility of implementing similar regulations for FE managers in the future.

Among the teachers interviewed at the four case study institutions, only Juliet from BC and Terence from NU identified family as important support in students' success. But most students from the four case study institutions acknowledged family and friends supporting them in a number of ways to succeed. Younger students from BC identified the assistance of their family with financial support more than students over the age of 19 and mature students with children at all four case study institutions mentioned family and friends assisting with childcare support. Students from all four institutions said that friends were helping them to succeed by providing moral support. More students from BC than NBC, all students from UO and all but one student at NU mentioned this. However, some mature students from the FE colleges found it easier to maintain friendships with students than with friends they had made prior to embarking on FE study. They found it difficult talking to their 'old' friends, were more at ease with their college friends and they

operated solidarity and mutual group/ peer support. These students were acquiring what Bourdieu (1986) described as symbolic capital: they were moving in the same circles (education institutions) with students, sharing similar tastes and aspiring to the same outcomes of membership (qualifications). Many FE students found their former friends unhelpful. They described being discouraged from attending classes and encouraged to participate in social activities with friends who were not students, who had a different habitus (Bourdieu in Robbins 2000). These students persisted with their studies similarly to students in the 1995 research by Fiddy (1995). Fiddy questioned whether this was the 'real' situation or not, suggesting that behaving independently of friends was an important value to the students in his study and the young people wanted to give an impression of acting independently. The Hyland and Merrill (2003) study contradicted Fiddy and found that males in particular said that they were ridiculed by friends for being at college. On the other hand, some young people were told by friends who were already in college to attend which encouraged them to participate, as was found at BC and NBC.

The complexities of students' lives were evident from the case studies as can be seen above. Jackson (2004) reported on women students feeling isolated from their friends and one woman refusing her university place due to fear of alienation from her working class friends who were not students. Most students in the case studies did not use support services in their institutions to manage their complex lives or their studies. The majority of students relied on support from family, friends as well as student colleagues within their institutions to succeed.



### The Most Important Factors Contributing to Success

The HE students, in contrast to the FE students from the case study institutions, placed a greater emphasis on non-institutional factors contributing to their success. They identified factors such as their own determination and the support of family and friends. FE students placed a greater value on institutional resources such as learning resources services and teachers in contributing to their success than HE students. The factors which FE staff perceived as important to student success corresponded with their students' perceptions. FE teachers and managers who were curriculum and support service managers perceived institutional factors such as key skills, the relationship between teachers and students and additional learning support as underlying factors to student success. The HE managers identified similar factors to the FE teachers and managers; they perceived institutional factors such as student induction, tutorials and pedagogical changes as factors contributing to HE student success. These contradicted the HE teachers who cited mainly personal factors such as students' own motivation. HE teachers were therefore closer to their students' perceptions of the important factors that contributed to their success than their managers. The HE teachers identified students' determination to succeed and their family as key to their success. The HE managers' responses reflected the practices that were reported in their prospectuses and policy documents: all good practice strategies that would be expected within PCET institutions with missions to widen participation to HE (see Guide to Good Practice HEFCE 2001). These strategies recognised changes to institutional practices (small a - access) to enable students from underrepresented groups to succeed. They also suggested support to students,

not merely to enrol in the institution but throughout the student life cycle. Whilst HE teachers identified ways in which they supported students to succeed, their perception of the main factors contributing to student success was students' cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) and ability to change to 'fit' into the institution (capital A-Access). This distance between HE managers and their students' experiences has been severely criticised by numerous writers in recent years who have described HE managers as creating inflexible, controlling and bureaucratic cultures in HE (McNay 1992, 2000, 2005, Duke 2002, Field 2003). The outcome of this culture on the 'ground' has been teachers who do not share the vision of their senior managers or vice versa. Thomas (2001) discussed at length the good intentions of widening participation initiatives that are imposed strategically by senior managers but which result in 'disempowerment' for those below. She advocated a participatory approach (McNay's 1995 'collegial enterprise model') that involved the practitioners.

More FE (NBC 12/29; BC 15/19) than HE students (NU 3/12; UO 3/9) identified institutional factors as important in contributing to their success in the case study institutions. HE students identified their self determination as the single most important factor which contributed to their success. FE managers and teachers and HE teachers identified the same characteristics as their students. However HE managers differed from their students and teachers. This distance between HE managers, their students and teachers suggested the adoption of widening participation at strategic levels in HE mission statements and policies congruent with the funding council's recommendations and government's agenda for HE, but which were not connected to students' experiences or teachers' attitudes.

## **Defining Success**

Managers at the HE case study institutions perceived success for students as completion of their course and attainment of the qualification. Managers in the FE institutions, though they said that they perceived success as a process for students, provided outcomes such as independent learning, employment or progression to HE as examples of student success. FE teachers used the students' learning goals and personal development outcomes as definitions of student success. In contrast to their teachers, most FE students defined success as gaining the qualification and progressing either to higher education or employment.

HE students' definitions of success, as with FE students' were closer to the HE managers' definitions than the teachers'. HE students used tangible outcomes such as the degree qualification or employment as their definitions of success. The HE students also cited personal development outcomes such as making a difference in someone's life - 'giving back' to the community and using the knowledge such as critical thinking, developed on the degree programme, in future employment, to define success. UO students had perspectives on success similar to NU students but two students differed in their aspirations: two UO students perceived success as obtaining a 'higher' degree – Masters/ PhD. So, academic progression as with some of the FE students. All but one of the HE teachers perceived students' success as individual for each student and successful outcomes as defined by the students themselves. All the HE teachers stated that they were aware of students' ambitions and were supporting them to achieve their ambitions. Most of the HE students confirmed this.

Much of the literature on student success in England has focused on the descriptors used by funding councils. Their concern has been with the number of students participating in education: the number of enrolments, students completing courses, student retention, students obtaining qualifications and achievement (Prosser and Trigwell 1999). International perspectives, particularly in the United States and Australia (Yorke and Longden 2004) inform research into student experience and success in the UK. As discussed in Chapter 2, the work of Tinto has led much of the UK research into student success in HE (Yorke 1997, Yorke and Longden 2004). Much of Tinto's research has been based on first year, full time, campus-resident undergraduates and identified social and academic integration in the first year at university as key to student success. Legislation in the UK and EU requires HE and FE institutions to change, to make reasonable adjustments to meet students' diverse needs based on 'race'/ethnicity, gender, religion/belief, disability, age and sexual orientation (EC 2000). In addition, access researchers and practitioners for over two decades (See Chapter 2) have attempted through their publications to put pressure on policy makers and their colleagues in FE and HE to implement good practice for the 'successful integration' of underrepresented groups. Despite normative pressures such as legislation and gentle coercion through the literature of peers, FE, and HE to a greater extent, remain teacher focused (Prosser and Trigwell 1999).

FE and HE institutions were acknowledged in this research as playing an important role in students' success. FE students cited teachers and the learning facilities of one of the FE colleges as particularly helpful in contributing to their success. However, overall for the FE and HE students it was friends, family and students' own

determination which were acknowledged most as contributing to their success. The institutions were perceived as inflexible but students had to change to ensure 'successful integration'. Students succeeded by being silent when discontented with the institutions, managing their dissatisfaction along with their complex lives, relying on friends including their fellow students, family and their own determination.

Students did not 'integrate' but participated. They developed to be better, not changed to be different; they did not fully cross the boundary into the institution but (to varying degrees) retained their original community roots and identity. All the institutions varied in their extent of being Access or accessible institutions. They did not recognise that the 'new' student groups had their own A/access agenda.

## Chapter 7

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

What has emerged from the research is a discourse about access at corporate level within PCET which implies a changed institution, – small ‘a’ access, through the successful recruitment of an increasing number of underrepresented groups. The research showed some evidence of institutional changes but highlighted that staff practices and administrative processes had not changed to meet the expanded participation. What was in evidence was a largely unchanged provision requiring the student to change to ‘fit’ – capital ‘A’ Access. It is possible that the pressure to widen participation within tight financial constraints may have created a less accessible, less humane and less individualised student experience. The IT- based, centralised processes, can appear dehumanising and may be partly responsible for creating some of the distance between managers and teachers and teachers and students that emerged in the research.

As ‘A/access’ turns into widening participation, the research suggests a third concept of ‘access’ in relation to the successful student experience, where for HE certainly and mature students generally, there is only partial transfer into the institutional community. Identity is personal and strong, community links remain in the home base and it is that base, as much as to institutional processes and provision that students turn to for support, perhaps even sympathy. Their group identity is by voluntary association and affiliation. They seek out individuals for one to one engagement or a bridge to and from the institution which then operates as a service

station, possibly an education 'wall' but not somewhere you go to live, like campus based, 'traditional' students.

The research evidence suggests a different context for successful access to PCET for 'non-traditional' students and the failure of the case study institutions to identify and accommodate it. Individual staff tried to moderate the effects; they worked despite the pressures of the system. Recommendations for PCET institutions and policy makers to increase understanding of this reality and to change the underrepresented student experience are included below.

The first aim of this research was to investigate staff and student experience in four PCET institutions with traditions of widening access to underrepresented groups.

This research utilised documentary evidence and interviews with students and staff, to examine the underrepresented student experience and perceptions of success within the PCET system. It also examined institutional policies and practices to support the success of underrepresented groups from the perspectives of students, managers and teachers.

Concepts of A/access were discussed, from its radical beginnings as education for freedom, self-development and empowerment, through its conflation with lifelong learning and its emergence as widening participation within a social inclusion government agenda with economic objectives. The development of PCET since WWII was shown to be haphazard, unplanned and characterised by social divisions. The emergence of access as widening participation in the latter part of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has continued along the lines of division within

education which existed prior to WWII. HE is largely segregated into 'old' universities (pre 1992) for the mainly young, white middle classes and 'new' universities (post 1992) for the growing numbers of minority ethnic, mature, working class and part-time participants with a vocational/ professional focus. FE colleges, originally established to cater for the working classes (Blythman and Orr 2002), the only 'comprehensive' education institutions, are now funded for 'instrumental' learning, basic skills programmes for adults, training to meet the needs of employers, social inclusion and vocational programmes for 14 to 18 year olds. Most students from the case study institutions identified instrumental reasons for attending PCET. It was a minority of students, mainly from UO, who claimed they were studying for personal development.

The research discussed causal theories of student academic success. It showed that there was a shift away from psychological and towards sociological explanations. Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of academic success, cultural capital and habitus were examined. The quantity and type of cultural capital and habitus inherited from a person's family background emerged to account for academic success. However, education institutions were identified as having the capacity to reproduce or change individuals' cultural capital and disposition (Thomas 2001, Berger 2000). The principals of the two FE case studies expressed notions of providing students with enhanced cultural capital, but perceived the process differently. One saw the institution changing the student (BC) and the other saw the institution supporting the student to be confident in their identity (NBC). The research concludes that theories of student success used in the UK are dominated by those of North America but with an ideal notion of the student, on both sides of the Atlantic, which pathologises the



part-time, mature, working class or minority ethnic student as problematic. Most students in the case studies did not see themselves as problematic; they showed pride in their social backgrounds, chose to live within their own communities whilst they studied, maintained their social identities and did not 'integrate'. These students had much in common with the growth of mass participation where there is a critical mass of HE students who stay at home and FE and HE students who select institutions where there are enough people around them in the institutions with whom they can form an affinity group – a new 'habitus'. Notions of 'rites of passage' of young people leaving home or of a change of identity to engage in PCET were challenged by the findings of this research. The students changed, they were challenged by the new learning and the environment of FHE; key individuals on the staff and student body were points of reference. However continuity of identity was maintained through family and living and learning among their own communities.

As a second aim, the research set out to highlight good practice in widening access to further and higher education. The research approach explored good practice at the different levels of the institutions and sought to validate the robustness of the good practice that was reported by testing it with students, teachers and managers. The case studies showed that FE staff were more aware of and consistent in their understanding of their institutions' missions than their HE counterparts. The FE managers and teachers were more loyal to the corporation which constituted their institution than HE teachers and managers, though this was greater among staff at the Beacon FE College (BC) than the Non-Beacon FE College (NBC). The extent to which loyalty to the corporation ensured the success of the institution was not

investigated in the research. Students' experiences from the four case studies were often as diverse as the students were in numbers, though the younger students, aged between 16-19 and the mature students in the FE case study institutions, shared similar experiences as distinct groups.

The two case study HE institutions had different starting points but managers from both institutions were attempting to widen the recruitment of students from groups that were underrepresented among their existing population. This information was confirmed by teachers from both HE case studies but they were critical of their institutional approaches to the admission of new student groups that were being targeted by their institutional managers. HE managers were not only concerned about the recruitment of students (often to meet targets/ funding purposes) but also successful completion to meet national benchmark/ performance indicator targets.

The HE and FE teachers valued personal development outcomes for students more than managers and students. However, institutional, departmental or student feedback data did not inform managers' perceptions. HE students valued the sensitivity of teachers in treating them as mature individuals, in assisting their learning and a minority of teachers recognised the importance of utilising varying teaching and learning approaches to support students. The research illustrated that not all teachers adapted their teaching and learning styles to suit students' needs and a few HE students measured teachers' competence by their ability to manage disruptive, younger students. It was not the norm for FE or HE students to complain when their learning needs were not being met.

Teachers were important to student success in FE and HE but were more prominent in the factors FE students identified as contributing to their success than for HE students. FE students identified their teachers as contributing to their success by providing advice and guidance and varying teaching and learning strategies. These characteristics were also identified in the study by Martinez and Munday (1998) which found that student success (completing courses) was based on good student/teacher relationships, curriculum tailored to meet student need and effective teaching skills.

Teachers from the FE and HE case studies on the whole treated their students with respect. This was agreed by all teachers and confirmed by most, but not all students. FE students identified being treated as adults as examples of respectful treatment by their teachers and HE students identified having their views taken seriously by teachers. FE and HE teachers agreed that they treated students with respect; however their perceptions of their behaviour which demonstrated this differed from their students'. Managers and teachers must utilise existing methods of student feedback systematically to facilitate a 'genuine' dialogue with students to inform programme and institutional development.

The data collected by the HE case studies showed the successful recruitment of underrepresented student groups. A focus on recruitment is often a criticism of widening participation in UK HE institutions; this is usually in opposition to the development of consistent good practice to support students throughout the student

life cycle (McNay 1992, Thomas 2001, Field 2003, HEFCE 2001). The four case study institutions would better serve their students if they analysed the data collected on students' social identity to tailor teaching and learning and tutorials in response to their diverse interests and needs. This data should also be monitored at each phase of the student experience – entry, on-course as non-traditional students progress throughout their period at the institution and at transfer to the workplace. There is a need however, for better data with a low bureaucratic burden on teachers.

The third aim of the research explored student and staff perceptions of the support services and student-centred administration which addressed the needs of non-standard entrants in FHE. All four case studies, in recognising the needs of student groups who were not 'typical' i.e. 'traditional' entrants to PCET provided a range of support services to facilitate what Tinto (2003:4) described as 'social integration'.

The research showed the institutions' different priorities in funding support services. There were similarities between the range and level of support services offered by the two FE colleges (BC and NBC) and the New University (NU). Student Support Services were recognised in these institutions' missions, resourced by established management units, staffed with specialist support workers and led strategically by a member of the institutions' senior management team. In contrast, the Old University (UO) provided a limited student support service through the Student Union Office, a financial assistance office and the establishment of a Disability Office. The last was staffed by a temporary worker who was based in one of UO's administrative departments. Like their teachers, students who used the support services within the four case studies, spoke highly of them. Teachers at all four case studies, however, were critical of the level of support services provided, observing a lack of

investment in services where student demand outstripped supply. Some dyslexic students, at the time of the interviews, were still awaiting the provision of dyslexic support tutors. The differences which emerged between the provision of Student Support Services by the 'Old' and 'New' universities confirmed the findings of Thomas (2001) in her analysis of the accessibility of universities. Resources to increase Student Support Services were insufficient to meet student demand in all case study institutions.

When FHE institutions successfully recruit from underrepresented groups who are assessed as requiring additional support services, Government and funding councils should meet the costs of these services. Adequate resourcing is also required for the student experience prior to entry. Advisors who provide information and guidance to students need to be better trained. Opportunities for students to obtain in-depth course information from teachers, prior to choosing programmes of study need to be available to enable students from underrepresented groups to select institutions and courses based on genuine 'choices'.

The fourth and final aim of the research was the examination of institutional policies and barriers to widen access and how teachers and learners successfully navigated them. The research showed clear, written institutional policies to widen access within the four case studies. The two case study universities were inconsistent in staff understanding of and in the implementation of widening access policies. There were ad hoc, individual and departmental approaches used to admit and support underrepresented student groups. In contrast, the FE case studies had strategic and operational plans that were linked to their missions, and managers and teachers were

aware of their roles in widening access. However, like the HE case studies there were a few staff who took an individual approach to the implementation of their institutions' widening access policies.

Teachers identified two barriers in widening access: increased student numbers without a subsequent increase in the level of resource and a greater demand for Student Support Services than was provided. Teachers made themselves available to students outside teaching hours to meet the increased student support needs and in one instance a senior teacher resigned from her management post to provide a better service to students. The FE and HE students found many barriers to their success and identified support from teachers, family, friends and student colleagues to overcome them.

HE students, more than FE, perceived the most important factors contributing to their success as the support of family, friends and their own determination. FE students valued and identified the support of their teachers contributing to their success more than HE students. The literature and the policy statements of the FE and HE institutions in this research suggest that in widening participation to their institutions, the quality of the student experience was paramount. Yet there was little evidence institutionally of how student experience was monitored or 'measured'. In conducting the interviews much was learned about how few opportunities staff and students were given to share their experiences and their perceptions of the institutions. The openness with which staff and students spoke about their institutions emphasised their importance as essential resources to managers in

making strategic and operational decisions. The remoteness of managers from teachers' and particularly students' experiences and perceptions was evident. The managers in the case studies, particularly the HE institutions, were adrift from student and staff experiences. HE teachers did not share their institutions' missions as much as FE staff. Duke (2002) and Field (2003) were critical of HE managers who, they believed, have created a management culture which has perpetuated staff dissatisfaction and inequality in HE. Duke wrote that:

...neurotic managers actively promote a loss of institutional memory and low-trust methods of working as mechanisms of control, with the result that staff dedication and creativity are driven into opposition and resistance.

Field likened HE culture to the 'canteen culture' of the police and described the combination of decision-making, 'non-decision' making and the inherited procedures as having made HE racially and socially selective. He suggested that a Macpherson report is needed on HE. This would challenge the 'traditional' provision for 'non-traditional' students (see Parry 1986). Senior managers in FE and HE must devise ways to reduce their distance from teachers to develop a shared mission for effective institutional development and ultimately to enhance the student experience and ensure student success. PCET managers must utilise the knowledge of teachers and students to develop institutional strategies to create a PCET culture that is conducive to supporting underrepresented groups. FE and HE practitioners at all levels should share expertise in working successfully with underrepresented student groups.

The student feedback systems were ineffective in both the FE and HE case study institutions in capturing the students' experience to inform and change institutional

practice. Teachers appeared unaware of students' dissatisfaction as students in the research did not complain. Mercer and Saunders (2004) recommend that HE institutions should study mature students' experiences at recruitment, during their initial transitions to the institution and take a longitudinal approach to explore their experiences over time. Not only mature students' but all PCET students' experiences should be studied using this approach to support their successful development within the institutions.

The findings from the four case studies suggested that as access has become widening participation, much of the 'student centred' pedagogy that underpinned access practice and that of the 'access movement' has been abandoned for marketable approaches to generate income for the institutions. 'Customer-led', part of the rhetoric of widening participation, was not demonstrated by the case studies as the 'customers' (students) had no voice. With the exception of Sharon from UO and the NBC principal, what can be observed were teachers as well as managers who made normative comments about the students. They articulated a view of access that was one of compensatory education. As the principal of BC stated 'what is missing in their [students] lives I provide'. The approach to access that was demonstrated was akin to a statement made by McNay (1992) over a decade ago when he expressed reservations about the use of the term 'access'. He wrote:

It implies that someone is let in to participate and the onus is on them to adapt: to learn the language of academic discourse, to adopt the culture of the institution, to accept its power structures, to change timetables and lifestyles to fit in and to be assessed by it on its own undisclosed and unchallengeable criteria. I prefer concepts of openness and outreach (1992: 127).

Students at all four PCET institutions were expected to change to 'fit in' with the institutions. The institutional structures and processes provided academic,



professional counselling, childcare and financial support, particularly in FE institutions, but the 'institutional culture' was still traditional. Students were largely being supported to adopt the culture, to become middle class (Reay 1997). There were a few examples of individuals attempting to empower students and to challenge inequalities, such as the NBC Principal in the sentiments she expressed about NBC not 'cloning' staff and students. There were also three teachers, two from NBC and one from UO who integrated equalities strategies through teaching and learning. But access pedagogy was not prominent. These three individuals shared aspects of the philosophies of radical access practitioners and adult educationists such as Freire (1972) and Reay (1997). The latter suggested that teachers should work at: '...dismantling and sharing out the economic, social and cultural capital which goes with middle class status' (Reay 1997:23). Funding councils should identify resources for FE managers and teachers to conduct practitioner-led research, especially to engage systematically in research/ action into teaching and learning to develop pedagogies that are appropriate to previously underrepresented learners within the PCET institution.

The research findings confirmed the risks for non-traditional students attending PCET programmes (Archer et al 2002). Teachers in FE and HE complained of the pressures to increase student numbers, to widen the range of students with whom they worked and of a lack of resources, including time to support the 'new' students. Russell (1993: 100) questions whether 'students are being co-opted into battery higher education'. Having risked discriminatory treatment by enrolling at a PCET institution, the difficulty of maintaining friendships (see also Jackson 2004), the financial and human investment of studying may not have the employment rewards

that many of the students in the case study research expected. Employers were increasingly demanding degree-level qualifications for intermediate-level jobs (Brynin 2002) and graduates from minority ethnic groups were often employed in non-graduate positions (Connor et al 1996).

The marketing of education and PCET in particular brought pressures on teachers and institutions to create courses and provide services for the 'customer' that may not be equal to the quality or quantity when education was not in the 'market place'.

The majority of students from the case studies identified success in terms of qualifications and employment outcomes. These 'instrumental' outcomes differed from the teachers' definitions of success in this research, especially the FE teachers who expressed personal development outcomes as well as qualifications and employment. Chapter 2 explored institutions of PCET as widening participation became a government strategy. It showed that progressive ideologies of access and lifelong learning focused on empowering the learner and challenging inequalities. As access became widening participation, government initiatives that emerged following the Kennedy Report (1997) rejected the wider benefits that learning can bring to the individual, outside of employment and qualifications gains. Archer et al (2003) argue for:

The creation of 'meaningful' education ...and commitment to ensuring a system that challenges, rather than reinforces, classed, raced and gendered inequalities. A greater 'joining up' of theory and practice...to ensure that considered and equitable strategies are developed across sectors...through holistic rather than piecemeal and specialized approaches...working class under-representation in higher education might begin to be addressed. (Archer et al 2003:202)

Policy makers can do much to assist the PCET case study institutions to improve their ability to widen access equitably. Bascia and Hargreaves (2002) have doubted the ability of policy makers to learn from research into teaching and schooling to bring about educational reform: they cited the considerable amount of research evidence which government policies have ignored in the last 20 years. Knight and Yorke (2003) have suggested that leaders are supposed to make a difference and to make a constructive difference leaders need to be well informed at the level for which they hold responsibility. There was inconsistent knowledge awareness among the leaders at the different levels of the case studies as well as 'distance' between leaders, their lower level managers and teachers. If, according to Knight and Yorke, these leaders were going to make a difference in widening access to PCET, communication and information between the leaders of the institutions, the teachers and students needs to be more effective. McNay (2003) suggests that leaders make change **wanted**, managers make it **happen** and the rest of us make it **work**.

The research showed hard working but frustrated staff in FE and HE, and dissatisfied but determined students. At a seminar hosted by the SRHE in 2004 in London, Professor Lewis Elton suggested that a student 'dissatisfaction' survey should be conducted. Measuring the levels of dissatisfaction and attempting to address them would be more appropriate than the current student satisfaction surveys used in FE and HE, which only served in this research to enable students to manage their dissatisfaction. The student satisfaction surveys carried out in the case study institutions were a tool for 'managing' the students.

The barriers between FE and HE are diminishing. Both sectors, are faced with similar, externally imposed challenges such as increased competition for students, funding, quality systems and widening participation to underrepresented groups.

The funding methodology should facilitate greater collaboration between FE and HE to enable the sharing of good practice in working successfully with underrepresented groups. Policy makers must recognise and provide for the development of 'new' skills for FHE staff to support the success of 'new' student groups.

It was evident that managers at the case studies, particularly those in FE, were unaware of research/ data within their respective institutions. Policy makers should therefore facilitate the development of research skills among managers in FE and the creation of a research culture within further education institutions. There is a need for the development of institutional research on policy and pedagogy within FHE institutions utilising the vast amounts of data currently collected only for funding and quality assurance purposes.

It is evident that policies to widen access to underrepresented groups over the last 30 years have seen limited success: those from lower social classes are still underrepresented in HE and significant numbers of young people are not in education training or employment (NEET). The government's narrow, skills focus for FE and introduction of fees for HE is intended to increase young people's participation, especially those from lower social classes. Early signs suggest declining applications from lower social groups, though regions such as London with high proportions of Black and minority ethnic populations affect the participation data. Additional rewards are needed from PCET policy makers

including finance to PCET institutions that work successfully with underrepresented groups, and conversely, reduced income for those who fail to recruit and retain underrepresented groups through to full achievement of an award. To achieve equity and diversity in PCET and to facilitate genuine choice of institutions and subject by underrepresented student groups, Government and policy makers must eliminate structural barriers such as finance in relation to student fees and institutional designations (e.g. Beacon v Non-Beacon; Teaching v Research; school sixth forms v sixth forms regulated by FE legislation).

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Due to the lack of time, the interview style used for the research was more formal than informal and more positivist than anti-positivist which limited deviation from the interview schedule and entering into a dialogue with interviewees to examine hunches and lines of interest regarding success in FE and HE. Future research should take a more ethnographic approach to explore individual learners' and teachers' perceptions and behaviours of what enables underrepresented groups to succeed.

The research set out to examine how teachers navigated institutional barriers to widen access. There was insufficient time to explore this fully in the research. This aspect of the research emerged relatively weakly. It is possible that many teachers did not perceive their managers or colleagues impeding their efforts to work successfully with access students. However the research suggests that not all staff in HE and FE were supportive of access students or adopted student centred approaches to teaching and learning. A more in-depth study of how teachers who were committed to supporting access students navigated institutional barriers to support students should be conducted using a small-scale sample and longitudinal study.

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## APPENDICES



## Appendix I: Student Performance Data on the Case Study FHE Institutions

### Non Beacon College

Ethnicity	Starters	Retention Rate (%)	National Average Retention (%)	Achievement (%)	National Average Achievement (%)
Bangladeshi	681	80	79.5	65	60.5
Black African	1729	83	79.5	65	51.9
Black Caribbean	1212	77	79.6	56	53.8
Black Other	550	81	79.2	61	58.6
Chinese	81	79	84.4	77	63.6
Indian	236	79	86.2	77	64.7
Not know/ provided	3983	86	Not applicable	78	Not applicable
Other	1085	84	Not applicable	73	Not applicable
Other Asian	245	85	79.9	74	60.9
Pakistani	135	89	80.6	72	58.2
White	1034	80	85.5	70	74
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13090</b>	<b>83</b>		<b>72</b>	

### Beacon College

Ethnicity	Starters	Retention Rate (%)	National Average Retention (%)	Achievement (%)	National Average Achievement (%)
Bangladeshi	152	88	79.5	64	60.5
Black African	5334	81	79.5	66	51.9
Black Caribbean	2816	78	79.6	64	64
Black Other	2942	80	79.2	61	58.6
Chinese	578	84	84.4	71	63.6
Indian	220	83	86.2	75	64.7
Not know/ provided	6499	79	Not applicable	70	Not applicable
Other	1136	73	Not applicable	73	Not applicable
Other Asian	1290	76	79.9	73	60.9
Pakistani	94	72	80.6	56	58.2
White	7612	80	85.5	75	74
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>28673*</b>	<b>79</b>		<b>69</b>	

\*Enrolments

## Appendix I

### Performance of HE Case Study Institutions

Old University

'Successful' Students: Grades Awarded to Undergraduates in 2000-2003

<b>Student Social Identity</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup></b>	<b>1st</b>	<b>2:1</b>	<b>2:1</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup></b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup></b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup></b>	<b>3rd</b>	<b>Pass</b>	<b>Pass</b>
<b>White</b>	86%	65	39%	17	73%	222	49%	83	33.3%	1
<b>Non-white</b>	4%	6	57%	23	20%	61	33%	69	33.3%	1
<b>Not known</b>	10%	5	4%	4	7%	21	18%	17	33.3%	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>304</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>3</b>

Progression of New University Undergraduate Students 2002-03

	<b>White %</b>	<b>White (No.)</b>	<b>Non-White %</b>	<b>Non-White (No.)</b>	<b>Not known %</b>	<b>Not Know (No.)</b>
<b>Complete</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>3832</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1967</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>335</b>
<b>Progress</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>5562</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>3819</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>588</b>
<b>*Unsuccessful</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Other e.g. progress slowly</b>		<b>1433</b>		<b>1845</b>		<b>261</b>
<b>Totals</b>		<b>10986</b>		<b>7861</b>		<b>1220</b>

\* Fail and leave

## Appendix II

### Interview Schedule - teachers

#### Purpose of the interviews

- To identify staff perceptions of institutional and teaching strategies which support student success
- To examine whether the institutional practices and support services are recognised and valued by staff
- To identify staff perceptions of 'informal' / indirect institutional factors which support student success
- To find common characteristics among staff who work successfully with A/access students
- To explore barriers and strategies used by staff to overcome them in their work with A/access students

What is A/ access and student centred approaches to teaching and learning?

Students who have been excluded from the education system and those without traditional entrance qualifications for e.g. for university and those who are under-represented in education. Under-represented groups include mature adults, working class people, women in the sciences, Black people, people who are unemployed and those with disabilities. Access can be specific courses to enable students to gain entrance onto higher level courses and can be teaching and learning methods, support services, recognising and meeting the specific needs of those are under-represented.

#### Selecting the Institution

1. Why did you choose this College/ University? Was it your first choice? Y  
N
2. How would you describe this institution? Prompt: its buildings diversity/ culture  
students who attend other characteristic (s)  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Did the above affect your choice?
4. Has your perception of your institution changed since becoming a teacher there? Y N  
If answer is yes how?

#### Increasing Access and developing student-centred approaches to teaching and learning

5. Do you know the institution's mission? Y N Prompt: what are its primary aims, what is its main focus, what is the message given to staff and students about its work? If known, what is the mission? (If not known) is you institution trying to increase the number of students it recruits? Y N
6. Are there particular groups of students who are being encouraged to attend your institution? Y N If answer is yes, who are they? What is your role in working with these students?

### Pre - Entry

7. Are you involved in producing information about courses for the public? If answer is yes, is your information 'student-friendly?' How? Does it aim to attract a particular group(s)?
8. Have you seen the prospectus? What message does it convey?

### Entry

9. Are you involved in the selections of students onto courses? Y N If answer is yes, does the procedure you use encourage the recruitment of under-represented groups? Y N If yes how? What is the procedure?

### **The Course**

10. How would you describe the learners on your programmes? Prompt: gender, 'race' ethnic group

### **Teaching**

11. How do you help learners to succeed on your course? Y N  
(Prompt: Tutorials, 1:1 sessions/ workshops, learning materials, teaching/ learning style e.g. group work)
12. Are you aware of your students' ambitions? What role do you play in responding to them?  
Prompts: Do you think it's appropriate to your students' needs? Are you meeting individual needs?
13. Do you treat your students with respect? Y N Prompt: How do you measure / know that?

### **Support Services within the College/ University**

14. Do you provide any support to learners? Y N  
Prompt: do you support learners to access counselling, debt advice, housing, childcare support, finance, careers, revision/ study skills workshops?
15. If your students use/d any of these services how useful were they? Prompt: What is your opinion of the service(s)?

### **The most important factors contributing to success**

16. What are the most important factors, which help your students to succeed on your course/ programme? Any others?  
Personal Y Institutional: Contextual – work or family
17. How do you define success for your learners? Prompt: Is it the same as learners' own definition? Y N If yes how do you know?

## **Appendix II**

### **Interview Schedule – ‘Successful’ Students**

#### **Purpose of the interviews**

- To define success in students’ terms
- To identify the factors which have assisted student success
- To examine whether the institutional practices and support services are recognised and valued by students
- To identify ‘informal’ / indirect institutional factors which support student success
- To find common characteristics among successful A/access students
- To identify appropriate students for the longitudinal study

**Date**                      **Time**                      **Place**

**Name**

**Institution**

**Course/ Programme**

**Year/ Level**

1a. Why did you choose this College/ University?

1b. Was it your first choice?

2. How would you describe the institution?

Students Descriptions of the institutions (its buildings, students who attend, culture etc)

3. Has your perception of the institution changed since you become a student?

4. Did you receive any assistance from this institution when choosing your course of study?

Y N e.g. Information – in writing, on the telephone, advice/ guidance session, interview  
If yes, how were you assisted?

5. Did you see the prospectus? Y N If yes, what message did it convey?

#### **The Course**

6. Why have you chosen your course of study? Prompt: What do you hope to achieve?

7. Have your expectations changed since you began attending the course/ programme? If they have, why? Have your views of yourself changed, have your views of the course changed?

### **Teaching**

8. Have teachers helped you to succeed on your course? Y N

If yes, describe what they have done to assist (e.g. Tutorials, 1:1 sessions/ workshops, learning materials, teaching/ learning style e.g. group work)

9. Do you think your teachers are aware of your ambitions? Y N How do you know?

10. How do your teachers treat you? Are you treated with respect? Y N

### **Support Services within the College/ University**

11a. Did you use any of the support services?

e.g. counselling, debt advice, housing, childcare support, finance, careers, revision/ study skills workshops

11b. If you used any of these services how useful was it? What is your opinion of the service(s)?

### **Family and Friends**

12a. Are your family helping you to succeed on this course/ programme Y N

12b. If yes, how? If not, are they being unhelpful? Y N Please explain further

13a. Are your friends helping you to succeed on this course/ programme? Y N

13b. If yes, how? If not are they being unhelpful? Y N please explain further

### **Family / other Responsibilities**

14. Do you have family/ other responsibilities, how do you manage?

### **The most important factors contributing to success**

15. What are the most important factors which are helping you to succeed on this course/ programme? Any others?

16. How will you define having been successful?

Thank you for your time

## **Appendix II**

### **Interview Schedule for Institutional Managers**

#### **Aims of interview**

Interviews will begin with heads of institutions to gain access to data, personnel and to contextualise the data.

- **To learn how the institution is lead to increase student numbers**
- **To find out whether a specific group(s) is being encouraged to participate**
- **How the institutional policies and practices support access and equality of opportunity**
- **Whether the Senior leaders considers the institution as successful in increasing student numbers through access and equality of opportunity policies and practices**
- **To explore any conflicts/ contradictions/ barriers to widening access and participation and if any exist, how they are managed**
- **To find out whether the Senior leaders of the institution perceives the institution in class /gendered/ ethnic terms**
- **The character of the institutions as defined / described by the Senior leaders**

#### **Interview Qs**

The College's mission/ university mission

1. In terms of your mission, geographical location, aims and values, how would you describe your institution? – How would you define the students who attend?
2. Your marketing information suggests that you have increased the number of students within the College – how would you describe the type of learners this increase represents?
3. In your institution's annual report, one of your strategic objectives related to attracting priority groups – who are these groups?
4. How successful have been the learners from the priority groups whom you have attracted to your institution? What have they achieved? Any statistical evidence for this group' performance? How would you define success? What do you think are the aims of these groups? Do you think they align with your definition of success?
5. What do think the institution has done to enable them (priority groups) to be successful? Prompt: Prior to entry, on-entry, on programme, prior to exit
6. Do you have a section/ unit/ dept., which targets specific WP groups? In setting it up how is it different to what the College does? Is this a response to the lack of participation? is there a particular group(s) of student you are aiming to attract? Why do you think this group(s) are not participating in your mainstream on-campus provision?



## **Appendix III**

### **Information provided about the Research for Students and Teachers**

#### **Access to Further and Higher Education: success and progression of ‘non-traditional’ student groups**

##### **Background to the Project**

The project will investigate access and ‘student-centred’ approaches within further and higher education. The main part of the research will be a qualitative study into the experience of teachers and students in two further education colleges and two universities. The four case study institutions were chosen for their commitment to widening access and their traditions of student participation from mature, minority ethnic and working class backgrounds. The study will attempt to get away from the pathologising of A/access. Individual and group interviews will be conducted with a cross section of students and teachers from each institution. Statistical and documentary analysis of institutional policies will be carried out to examine their effectiveness in addressing equality of opportunity and to highlight conflicts/contradictions.

The investigation will explore support services, student-centred administration, which address the needs of non-standard entrants with the aim of highlighting good practice. The study will also examine institutional policies and barriers to widening access. Staff and student experiences will be the focus of the study. Models of good practice in meeting the needs of under-represented groups in further and higher education will be presented. The success of how teachers and students have navigated institutional barriers will also be reported. The identity of the case study institutions and the names of their students and staff participating in the research will remain anonymous.

Professor Ian McNay and Professor Patrick Ainley from the University of Greenwich supervise the research.

##### **Progress to Date**

The project has begun exploring the history of A/access through desk research and interviews with the education historian Bill Bailey and many of the notable A/access pioneers such as Bev Sands, Gareth Parry, Harinder Lawley, and John Field among others. Student-centred approaches to teaching and learning has also been defined. Having examined the background to access and the key terms in use, the study is now focussing on the case study institutions. Senior managers have been interviewed at the four case study institutions and A/access students and teachers have been interviewed at the two case study FE institutions. Interviews are now being conducted with students and staff at the two case study HE institutions.

##### **Purpose of the student interviews**

- To define success in students’ terms
- To identify the factors which have assisted student success

- To examine whether the institutional practices and support services are recognised and valued by students
- To identify ‘informal’ / indirect institutional factors which support student success
- To find common characteristics among successful A/access students

**Purpose of the staff interviews**

- To identify staff perceptions of institutional and teaching strategies which support student success
- To examine whether the institutional practices and support services are recognised and valued by staff
- To identify staff perceptions of ‘informal’ / indirect institutional factors which support student success
- To find common characteristics among staff who work successfully with A/access students
- To explore barriers and strategies used by staff to overcome them in their work with A/access students

Margaret Andrews  
PhD Student

**Appendix III**  
**Questionnaire for Teachers and Managers**

**Access And Learner-Centre Approaches To Teaching And Learning**  
**Questionnaire**

Please complete in the questions below in the space provided.

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_

2. Institution \_\_\_\_\_ Job Title \_\_\_\_\_

3. Course(s) Taught \_\_\_\_\_ Level(s) \_\_\_\_\_

4. How long have you worked at this Institution?

**5. Educational Qualifications**

a) Pre – 16

---

b) Post –16 \_\_\_\_\_

c) Do you hold qualifications from overseas? Y N

d) If answer to c is yes, what are your overseas qualifications?

**Learning Experience**

6. Did you attend Secondary School? Y N

7. If Yes where (County/ country)? \_\_\_\_\_ What was its name(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
What type? (Grammar , special school Pupil R Unit , single sex , religious  
Independent other (please state) \_\_\_\_\_

**Family Responsibilities**

8a. Did you have family responsibilities when you were a student? Y N

8b. If yes, please state what responsibilities you had? Elderly relative Y N  
Child(ren) Y N Age(s)

8b. If you didn't have children when you were a student, do you have children now?  
Y N

8b Are you a lone parent? Y N ?

**Access And Learner-Centre Approaches To Teaching And Learning**  
**Questionnaire (continued)**

8c. Were you a lone parent when you were a student? Y N

**Family**

8. During your compulsory schooling were you raised in a home with a

a. Single parent: Y N

b Two parents: Y N

c. Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have sisters or brothers? Y N

If Yes please state No. of sisters: \_\_\_\_\_ No. of brothers: \_\_\_\_\_

Did your parents attend university or higher education institution: Y N

Did your parents have professional qualifications? Y N

Did your parents have academic qualifications such as undergraduate degrees? Y N

Type of family home: council flat : council house owner occupied terrace  
owner occupied semi-detached other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_

Age: 20-29: 30-39: 40-59: 60+

Male Female

How would you describe your ethnic origin \_\_\_\_\_

Your postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

The information you have given will remain confidential and will only be used to provide statistical data. You will not be named or personally identified with this information in any publication

Thank you for completing this questionnaire

**Appendix III**

**Questionnaire: Successful Students**

**Please write in the spaces or tick the relevant boxes below**

- 1. Institution \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Name \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. Course of Study \_\_\_\_\_ Level/ Year

4. How long have you been attending the Institution ? \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Educational Qualifications (if any)**

Before the age of 16 \_\_\_\_\_  
16+ \_\_\_\_\_

Do you hold qualifications from overseas? Y N  
If answer to c is yes, what are your overseas qualifications? \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Learning Experience**

Did you attend Secondary School? Y N  
If Yes where? \_\_\_\_\_ What was its name(s) \_\_\_\_\_ What  
type? (Grammar special school Pupil R Unit single sex religious other

Did you attend other post 16 provision before attending this institution? Y N  
If Yes Which ? \_\_\_\_\_ To do what? \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Family**

Please describe your family background . Childhood in UK Y N if overseas where? \_\_\_\_\_  
No. of. sisters: \_\_ No. of brothers: \_\_ Did you grow up with two parents? Y N  
Did your parents have professional quals. Y N Did parents have post 16  
quals. Y N Did parents attend university: Y N Type of family home you grew  
up in : council flat: Y N owner occupied: Y N other(please  
describe): \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have family responsibilities? Y N If yes, please tick relevant boxes:  
Elderly relative Y N Child(ren) Y N Age(s) of children: \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please state):  
Are you a lone parent Y N

**8. Profile**

Age 20-29 30-39 40-49 50-59 60+  
Male Female  
How would you describe your ethnic origin: \_\_\_\_\_  
Your post code \_\_\_\_\_

Follow up

Please provide your address and telephone number if you agree to be interviewed at a later date  
Address \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: \_\_\_\_\_ Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

The information you have given will remain confidential and will only be used to provide statistical data. You will not be named or personally identified with this information in any publication

Thank you for completing this form

**Appendix IV  
Staff Interviewed**

**Table 1: All HE Staff Interviewed**

<b>Role</b>	<b>NU</b>	<b>UO</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Type of Interview</b>
Pro Vice Chancellor *OUG 5 and OUG6	0	2	1 Male 1 Female	2 x face: face
Professor (Cont. Ed.)	0	1	1 Male	1 x face: face
Head of School *NUG 1	1	0	1 Female	1 x face: face
Head of Department NUG4, NUG 1 and NUG2	2	0	2 Male	1 x face: face
Course Director OUG 5	0	1	1 Female	1 x face: face
Course Director OHE Cert	0	1	1 Female	1 x face: face
Senior Lecturer NUG3	1	0	1 Female	1 x face: face
Lecturer OVoc HE Dip	0	1	1 Female	1 x Telephone
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4 Male 6 Female</b>	<b>8 x face: face 1 x Telephone</b>

\*N= New University O = Old University

**Table 2: Programmes Attended by HE Students Interviewed**

<b>Courses</b>	<b>NU</b>	<b>UO</b>
NUG 1	4	0
NUG2	2	0
NUG3	3	0
NUG4	3	0
OUG 5	0	3
OUG6	0	1
OHE Cert	0	2
OVoc HE Dip	0	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>

## Appendix IV

### HE Staff Interviewed

**Table 3: HE Teachers Interviewed**

<b>Role</b>	<b>NU</b>	<b>UO</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Head of Department NUG1 Gerald & NUG4 Terrence	2	0	2 Male
Course Director OUG 5 Fay	0	1	1 Female
Course Director HE Cert. Erica (Cont. Ed.)	0	1	1 Female
Senior Lecturer NUG3 Kelly	1	0	1 Female
Lecturer OVoc Dip HE Sandra (Cont Ed.)	0	1	1 Female
<b>Totals</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2 Male 4 Female</b>

**Table 4: Programmes Attended by HE Students Interviewed**

<b>Courses</b>	<b>NU</b>	<b>UO</b>
NUG 1	4	0
NUG2	2	0
NUG3	3	0
NUG4	3	0
OUG 5	0	3
OUG6	0	1
OHE Cert	0	2
OVoc HE Dip	0	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>



**Table: 5 HE Students Interviewed**

<b>NU</b>	<b>Type of Interview</b>	<b>No. of students</b>	<b>UO</b>	<b>Type of Interview</b>	<b>No. of students</b>
NUG 1	1 x Focus Group	4	OUG 5	3x Telephone	3
NUG2	2x Telephone	2	OUG6	1x Telephone	1
NUG3	1x Telephone 2x 1:1 face: face	3	OHE Cert	2x Telephone	2
NUG4	3x 1:1 face: face	3	OVoc HE Dip	3x Telephone	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1 Focus Group 3x Telephone 5 x face: face</b>	<b>12</b>		<b>9x Telephone</b>	<b>9</b>

## Appendix V

### HE Case Study Sample: Student Profiles

**Table 6: Gender**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>NU</b>	<b>UO</b>
Male	3	4
Female	9	5
<b>Totals</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>

**Table 7: Age Categories**

<b>Age</b>	<b>UO</b>	<b>NU</b>
20-29	5	8
30-39	3	3
40-49	1	1
Did not declare	0	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>

**Table 8: Ethnicity**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>UO</b>	<b>NU</b>
White British	2	3
Irish	0	1
English	1	1
White EU	1	0
British	1	1
Black African	2	1
Black Caribbean	0	1
Somali	1	0
Mixed Race	1	1
Middle Eastern	0	1
Japanese	0	1
Did not declare	0	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>

## Appendix VI

**Table 9: Social Identity of the Student Sample Interviewed at the Case Study HE Institutions**

<b>Profile</b>	<b>NU</b>	<b>% Difference</b>	<b>OU</b>	<b>% Difference</b>
BME	50%	+ 5	44.5%	+10
White	50%	- 5	55.5%	-10
Male	49%	0	44%	- 3
Female	59%	0	56%	+3

**Table 10: Social Identity of Actual Undergraduate Student Population in the Case Study HE Institutions**

<b>Profile</b>	<b>NU</b>	<b>OU</b>
BME	45%	34.5%
White	55%	65.5%
Male	49%	47%
Female	59%	53%

**Table: 11 HE Students Interviewed from the Case Study Institutions**

	NU	NU	NU	OU	OU	OU
<b>Int.</b>	<b>Course</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender and ethnicity F M</b>	<b>Course</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender F M and ethnicity</b>
1 Noreen	NUG 1	40-49	British F	OHE Cert Jamila	20-29	<b>Mixed Irish &amp; N. African C female</b>
2 Esther	“	20-29	White British F	OHE Cert Abi	20-29	<b>Black African F</b>
3 Adrian	“	20-29	White Eng. M	OUG6 Mamood	30-39	Somali M
4 Carmel	“	20-29	White British F	OUG 5 June	30-39	<b>White UK F</b>
5 Barbara	NUG 4	30-39	Black Caribbean F	OHE Cert Veronica	20-29	<b>White EU F</b>
6 Sara	“	20-29	Middle Eastern F	OUG 5 George	50-59	<b>White British M</b>
7 Mark	“	30-39	Not stated M	OVoc Dip Rajinder	20-29	<b>British M</b>
8 Maureen	NUG 3	30-39	Mixed Race F	OVoc Dip Gina	20-29	<b>Black African M</b>
9 Anne	NUG 2	20-29	Irish F	OUG5 Victor	30-39	English M
10 Fitzroy	“	20-29	Black African M			
11 Izumi	NUG 3	20-29	Japanese F			
12 Caron	“	20-29	White British F			

## Appendix VII

**Table 12: Ethnicity of Undergraduate Students at UO**

Type of Study	Ethnicity		
Undergraduate Taught	White	56.45	%
	White – British	6.70	%
	White – Irish	0.17	%
	Other White background	2.18	%
	Black or Black British - Caribbean	3.85	%
	Black or Black British - African	10.72	%
	Other Black Background	1.51	%
	Asian or Asian British - Indian	2.01	%
	Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	1.51	%
	Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	0.34	%
	Chinese or other Ethnic background - Chinese	0.84	%
	Other Asian background	1.68	%
	Other Ethnic Background	4.19	%
	Not known	4.19	%
	Information Refused	2.68	%
	Information not sought	1.01	%
<b>Undergraduate Taught Total</b>		<b>100.00</b>	<b>%</b>

**Table 13: Gender: Percentage of UO Undergraduates**

HESA Level	GENDER	01/02	%
First Degree	Female	3862	53
	Male	3414	47
<b>FD Total</b>		<b>7276</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 14: New University (NU) Undergraduates**

<b>HESA Level</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>01/02</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Univ, Univcentre, Partner &amp; Link Coll</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>10842</b>	<b>58</b>
	<b>Black Caribbean</b>	<b>711</b>	<b>4</b>
	<b>Black African</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>11</b>
	<b>Black Other</b>	<b>238</b>	<b>1</b>
	<b>Indian</b>	<b>961</b>	<b>5</b>
	<b>Pakistani</b>	<b>375</b>	<b>2</b>
	<b>Bangladeshi</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>2</b>
	<b>Chinese</b>	<b>808</b>	<b>4</b>
	<b>Asian Other</b>	<b>471</b>	<b>3</b>
	<b>Mixed</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>1</b>
	<b>Other</b>	<b>501</b>	<b>3</b>
	<b>Not known</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>1</b>
	<b>Information refused</b>	<b>1146</b>	<b>6</b>
	<b>Information not yet sought</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>		<b>18783</b>

**Table 15: Gender- All Graduates at NU**

<b>HESA Level</b>	<b>GENDER</b>	<b>01/02</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>First Degree</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>4930</b>	<b>51</b>
	<b>Male</b>	<b>4675</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>FD Total</b>		<b>9605</b>	<b>100</b>

## Appendix VIII

**Table 16: FE Staff Interviewed**

<b>Beacon College (BC)</b>	<b>Type of Interview</b>	<b>Non Beacon College (NBC)</b>	<b>Type of Interview</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Principal</li> </ul>	1 x Face: face	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Principal</li> </ul>	1 x Face: face
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vice Principal</li> <li>Director</li> </ul>	1 x Face: face 1 x Face: face	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vice Principal</li> <li>Director</li> </ul>	1 x Face: face 1 x Telephone
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Head of Service Learning Resources Centres</li> </ul>	1 x Face: face	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construction Curriculum Manager (with teaching responsibilities)</li> </ul>	1 x Telephone
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Management Information System (MIS) Manager</li> <li>Head of School (teaching responsibilities) (Elaine)</li> </ul>	1 x Face: face  1 x Face: face	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health and Care &amp; Access Curriculum Manager (with teaching responsibilities)</li> </ul>	1 x Telephone
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher/ course team leader- Access (Thandi)</li> </ul>	1 x Face: face	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access Course Tutor (Zara)</li> </ul>	1 x Face: face
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construction Course Tutor (Juliet)</li> <li>Construction Learning Support (Wendy)</li> </ul>	1 x Face: face  1 x Face: face	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construction Teacher/ Course Team Leader (Samuel)</li> <li>Learning Support Tutor/ Coordinator (Odette)</li> </ul>	1 x Face: face  1 x Face: face
<b>Total: 9</b>	<b>9 x Face: face</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3 x Telephone 5 x Face: face</b>

**Table 17: FE Students Interviewed**

<b>Non-Beacon College (NBC)</b>	<b>Type of Interview</b>	<b>No. of students</b>	<b>Beacon College (BC)</b>	<b>Type of Interview</b>	<b>No. of students</b>
BTEC Comp	1 x Focus Group	4	Access	1 x Focus Group	7
BTEC Health Studies	1 x Focus Group	5	Construction	2 x Focus Group (7 & 5)	12
“	2 x 1:1	2			
BTEC Fashion	1x 1:1	1			
Modular Access	1 x Focus Group	6			
“	1x 1:1	1			
Access to Teaching	2 x Focus Groups (5 & 3)	8			
Construction	5 x 1:1	5			
NVQ Admin	1x 1:1	1			
<b>Totals</b>	<b>5 Focus Groups 10 x 1:1s</b>	<b>33</b>		<b>3 Focus Groups</b>	<b>19</b>



## Appendix IX

### FE Case Study Student Profiles

**Table 18: Gender of Student Interviewed**

Gender	Beacon College	Non Beacon College
Male	11	11
Female	8	22
Totals	19	33

**Table 19: Age Categories of Students Interviewed**

Age	Beacon College	Non Beacon College
16-19	12	2
20-29	2	18
30-39	3	11
40-49	2	1
Did not declare	0	1
Totals	19	33

**Table 20: Programmes Attended by Students Interviewed**

Courses	Beacon College	Non Beacon College
Access	7	15
Construction	12	5
BTEC Dip	0	12
NVQ Admin	0	1

**Table 21: Ethnicity of Students Interviewed**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Beacon College</b>	<b>Non Beacon College</b>
African	1	15
African Caribbean	1	3
Black British	6	2
Bengali	0	1
Kurdish	0	4
Indian	0	1
Pakistani	0	1
Turkish	1	1
White British	7	3
White Other	2	1
Did not declare	1	1
Totals	19	33

**Appendix X: Social Identity of FE Students Interviewed**

**Table 22: FE Students Interviewed from the Case Study Institutions**

<b>Student No.</b>	<b>Course</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>BC</b>	<b>Gender F/M &amp; Ethnicity</b>	<b>NB C</b>	<b>Course</b>	<b>AGE</b>	<b>Gender F/M &amp; Ethnicity</b>
1 Toke	A to SW	40-49		African F		NVQ3 Admin Delia	40-49	African C F
2 Carlton	A to SW	30-39		African C M		BTEC Health Studies Ola	20-29	African F
3 Kay	A to SW	40-49		White Eng. F		BTEC Health Studies Kwesi	20-29	African M
4 Jane	A to SW	20-29		White European F		BTEC Health Studies Tunde	20-29	African F
5 Linda	A to N	20-29		White British F		BTEC Health Studies Lola	20-29	African F
6 Diana	A to N	30-39		White British F		BTEC Health Studies	20-29	African F

						Elizabeth		
7 Oona	A to N	30-39		Not stated F		BTEC Health Studies Fumi	20-29	African F
8 Brenda	Constru ction	14-19		White British F		BTEC Health Studies Joyce	20-29	African F
9 Alex	Constru ction	14-19		White Russian M		BTEC Fashion Hatice	20-29	Turkish F
10 Patrick	Constru ction	14-19		Black British M		BTEC Computing Y2 Sam	20-29	Black African M
11 David	Constru ction	14-19		White English M		BTEC Computing Y2 Halet	20-29	Kurdish M
12 Devon	Constru ction	14-19		Black British M		BTEC Computing Y2 Mohammed	14-19	Bengali M
13 Ali	Constru ction	14-19		Turkish British M		BTEC Computing Y2 Irfan	20-29	Kurdish F
14 Kevin	Constru ction	14-19		White British M		NVQ P & D Y1 Ken	20-29	White English M
15 Peter	Constru ction	14-19		White British M		NVQ P&D 2 Yr. 1 John	30-39	African M
16 Omar	Constru ction	14-19		Black British M		NVQ P&D Yr. 1 Erica	Did not declare	F
17 Byron	Constru ction	14-19		Black British M		NVQ P&D Yr. 1 Isaac	30-39	Caribbean M
18 George	Constru ction	14-19		Black British M		NVQ P&D Yr. 1 Harry	30-39	White British M
19 Ian	Constru ction	14-19		Black British M		Access to T Abiola	30-39	African F
20						Access to T Fatima	20-29	Algerian (French)

								F
21						Access to T Sheila	30-39	White British F
22						Access to T Ashia	30-39	Pakistani F
23						Access to T Tunji	20-29	African F
24						Access to T James	20-29	African C M
25						Access to T Teresa	30-39	UK Black F
26						Access to T Alicia	30-39	UK Black F
27						Modular Access Khadijah	20-29	Moroccan F
28						Modula Access Meera	20-29	Indian F
29						Modula Access Gulcan	20-29	Kurdish/ Turkish F
30						Modula Access Sevgi	14-19	Kurdish/ Turkey F
31						Modula Access Michael	30-39	White European M
32						Modula Access Zach	30-39	Black African M
33						Modula Access Fela	30-39	Black African M

## Appendix XI: FE Case Study Student Populations

**Table 23: NBC Student Population\*:  
Enrolments by Ethnicity**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Starters</b>
Bangladeshi	681
Black African	1729
Black Caribbean	1212
Black Other	550
Chinese	81
Indian	236
Not know/ provided	3983
Other	1085
Other Asian	245
Pakistani	135
White	1034
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13090 *</b>

**Table 24: BC Student Enrolments\* by Ethnicity**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Starters</b>
Bangladeshi	152
Black African	5334
Black Caribbean	2816
Black Other	2942
Chinese	578
Indian	220
Not know/ provided	6499
Other	1136
Other Asian	1290
Pakistani	94
White	7612
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>28673</b>

\*each time a student enrolls on a course this is calculated. This figure does not record the individuals who are attending more than one course.

**Appendix XII****Table 25: Profile of Interviewees (Telephone): Follow up****NBC Former Students**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Black African	Teacher	20-29	Male
Black African	IT Technician	30-39	Male
African Caribbean	Administrator	30-39	Female
African Caribbean	Teacher	30-39	Female
African Caribbean	Teacher	30-39	Male
Pakistani	Teacher	30-39	Male
Chinese	Administrator	40-49	Female
White European	Administrator	30-39	Female
White British	Instructor	30-39	Female
White British	Teacher	40-49	Female