Widening Participation in Higher Education: A Case Study and Evaluation

A project submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Professional Studies

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Summary

Purpose

This report is an outcome of a research project exploring lecturers' understanding of widening participation (WP) and how this influences their practice in one North London University. The project was undertaken as part of my DProf studies and was developed from my role and position within the School of Health and Social Sciences in co-ordinating and communicating WP activities. This project was undertaken over five years (2004 – 2009) and was influenced by local and national political and social changes most particularly the range of Higher Education Funding Council documents impacting on WP.

Main approach used.

In a desire to explore WP and through multiple perspectives a mixed methods methodology was selected epistemological umbrella of transformative learning arising from an emancipatory paradigm. Meizerow's (2003) epistemology of transformative learning provides a lens by which to explore lecturers' perceptions of WP and practices, challenge conventional notions of WP, explore the extent to which WP is mainstreamed or embedded WP within the organisation and the relationship with pedagogical practices. This project was in three stages. Firstly, a focus group of lecturers, then separate individual lecturers were interviewed to explore perceptions of WP and pedagogical approaches (n= 12). Secondly, groups of diverse students completed a questionnaire (n=195) asking for their experiences of teaching and learning with a few (n=6) interviewed individually. Thirdly, an internal working group explored the wider university commitment to WP and how embedded this is in departments and services. Quantitative data from questionnaires and institutional data was analysed descriptively for frequency and correlations (Pearson's correlation co-efficient via SPSS v.15). Qualitative data was analysed using textual thematic analysis, both manually and using CAQDAS (Nud*st) software.

Conclusions.

There were several conclusions:

1. Lecturers and teaching.
   a. No single understanding of WP.

b. Some lecturers demonstrate sensitive and intuitive support but this is not widely disseminated.

c. Identify limited insight into students' lives and experiences.

d. View WP as deficiencies, remedial and someone else's 'job'.

2. Students and learning.

a. As a group students would not describe themselves as diverse but 'typical' students

b. Students value personal connections with lecturers.

3. University Role.

a. Initiatives to address the student experience subsume the needs of WP and all students.

b. Communication across services and departments is unclear and not cohesive.

c. Varied discourses of WP at different levels and high level commitment demonstrated at senior level.

Recommendations.

The key recommendations focussed on promoting WP in existing good practice in teaching and learning and utilise existing process to make WP core and embedded.

1. Lecturers:
   • Promote dialogue of WP and raise issues pertinent to teaching and learning.
   • Staff development in relation to practice for inclusive teaching or teaching diverse groups utilising existing procedures via preparation route (PGCHE) or established teaching observations or appraisals.
   • WP 'Champions' to advocate and promote inclusive practice.

2. Students:
   • Build on good practice to maximise students' sense of 'value' and positive student experience.

3. University:

- To locate a 'home' for WP so it can be more effectively monitored and disseminated and accounted for.
- Embed WP within core working processes (e.g. validation or programme monitoring) and
- Promote the dialogue of WP and inclusivity consistently from higher levels to student interface levels to enhance a culture of diversity and inclusivity.

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Abbreviations used in the report.

AD LQE	Associate Dean for Learning and Quality Enhancement
AoA	Action on Access
API	Age Participation Index (values used by HESA in their WP categories)
CEWBL	Centre of Excellence in Workbased Learning
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DoH	Department of Health
ELLS	English Language Learning and Support
ETLA	Experiences of Teaching , Learning and Assessment strategy
ETLQ	Experiences of Learning and Teaching Questionnaire
FE	Further Education
HE/HEI	Higher Education (Institution)
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HSSc	Health and Social Sciences (School of)
ISLER	Impact of Student Learning and Retention
LGU	London Guildhall University
LOTS	Level One Transferable Skills module, year one key skills module
LQE	Learning and Quality Enhancement department
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
NAO	National Audit Office
NLCHS	North London College of Health Studies
OFFA	Office of Fair Access
PDT	Personal Development Tutor (personal tutor)
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate in Education
PGCHE	Post Graduate Certificate in Higher Education
POLAR	Participation of Local Areas
SAA	Student Achievement Advisor
TESS	Teaching Enhancement and Students Success (funding)
UCAS	University and College Admissions Service
UNL	University of North London
V&A	Validations and Approvals
WP	Widening Participation

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Chapter 1:   **INTRODUCTION**

Reducing inequalities in access to higher education (HE) has long been one of the persistent themes in British government policy since the mid 1990s (Dearing, 1997; Kennedy, 1997; Fryer, 1999). The approach known as 'widening participation' (WP) became a buzzword in New Labour policy documents and as such was used within funding and advisory bodies. Widening participation has been defined as 'extending and enhancing access to HE experiences of people from so-called under-represented and diverse subject backgrounds, families, groups and communities and positively enabling such people to participate in and benefit from HE' (Watson, 2006a: 4).

WP originated and gathered momentum in the 1990s as part of equal opportunities policies and discourses to improve social mobility and opportunities. This comprised of targeted activities to particular social groups with little regard for the teaching and learning experiences in higher education of those who progressed. At the time of writing this report it was reported that one of the challenges that faced educational practitioners in diversified societies is the adoption of inclusive educational practices that are aware and sensitive of the cultural, societal, language and differential learning styles of the various groups that make up the increasingly diverse student body (Egbo, 2005). Indeed, while liberal theories provide frameworks for educational policies equalising educational opportunities for all students there is some agreement that the success of such policies depends on pedagogical practices adopted by lecturers and teachers at the practice level (Thomas, 2001, 2006, Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003, Cunliffe-Charlesworth, 2006).

Middlesex University is a former Polytechnic that achieved university status in 1992 (commonly referred to as a post-1992 HEI) and expanded in 1995 with the inclusion of the North London College of Health Studies (NLCHS). Before and after this expansion the diverse student body within Middlesex was consistently above the HEFCE benchmarks for socio-economic groups and ethnicity (NAO, 2008) and it prides itself on its wide range of vocational and academic provision which is also reflected in marketing documentation and in the Mission position as a: *… global university committed to meeting the needs and ambitions of a culturally and internationally diverse range of students*. This is also reflected in its strategic aims of: *championing a socially inclusive approach to participation in higher education'* and aims to '*transform lives'*
(http://www.mdx.ac.uk/regulations/allprogs/stratstat.htm). This has implications for the broader business of higher education and moreover the government driven social inclusion agenda as it impacts on daily student – lecturer engagement. This critical research report will

explore the concept of social inclusion under the term Widening Participation'(WP) and how this is reflected in lecturer engagement with students and the experiences of 'WP' students thereby challenging the notion of traditional pedagogies and the institutional position to widening participation. This critical research report will critically question my peers' anecdotal perception of 'we are practicing widening participation' so why bother looking at it and the generalised notion that widening participation students are 'weak'. Having diverse students does not raise the profile of widening participation and open up dialogue amongst lecturers, however it is hoped that enquiring into and reflecting upon lecturers' perceptions and their practice will.

This chapter will outline the context of the project in terms of the University and the wider educational context in which widening participation and teaching and learning occurs. It will justify the component parts of the project as well as explain my position, role and responsibilities in the project.

The context of the project and my role.

This project arose from my personal and professional interest in the concept and practice of WP and also from my role within the school of Health and Social Sciences (HSSc) Learning Development Unit at Middlesex University. This is in both developing and advocating WP outreach and awareness, instigating and chairing the HSSc WP group and also the positions I held within and outside the University, all revolving around WP activities (see Review of Learning appendix 1). The main aim of this project are to contribute to the understanding and development of widening participation especially as it contributes to teaching and learning within HSSc. There are two additional aims: to contribute to teaching and learning discourse across the HE sector and explore the implications of this for improving professional practice of HE lecturers. This will be achieved through a series of objectives which will be expanded in chapter 2 but are included in brief in table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Key objectives of the project

1. To explore lecturers understanding and engagement with Widening Participation initiatives or activities.
2. To identify groups of 'diverse' students representing WP and explore their experiences of teaching and learning in HSSc
3. To explore the perceived benefits of 'support' given to WP students for their personal and academic achievements.

4. What are the perceived benefits of 'support' given to WP students?
5. To explore aspects of teaching and learning which contribute to success for widening participation students.
6. To identify how mainstreamed and embedded is WP within HSSc and the University

In my role as a lecturer I have taught a large number of students of varied ethnic and social backgrounds both in professional courses (Nursing) and non professional health related courses (e.g. Health Studies, Sports Science). It has been increasingly apparent to me that the groups I have taught, whilst very varied, continually have needs which require a reflexive and responsive approach. Although HE curriculum and practice at Middlesex University have addressed student skills and abilities in accordance to political or research findings (i.e. Dearing Report and key and transferable skills) this does not appear to have impacted on lecturers daily contact with students. Providing key skills and pedagogical practice then are seemingly unconnected with the implication that students are 'skilled' up to deal with higher education not higher education adapting to diverse student needs.

My work role has a number of components each of which puts me in contact with student groups and academic lecturing staff. This places me in a key position to listen to and influence lecturer approaches to the teaching of diverse student groups. In my position as a member of Validations and Approvals (V&A) committee and Curriculum Development groups (nursing and other programme groups) I exert influence which may be more sustained and can embed inclusive practices which are responsive to WP students' needs. This may be potentially through programme developments: influencing whole programme teams as well as individual lecturers.

I have acted as a contact for outreach and networking activities both within the University (across departments and schools) but also as part of the (now redundant) University wide WP group acting as a communication and dissemination conduit to HSSc. This latter group reflected the ongoing changes within the University in response to outside pressures and policy changes. In the HEFCE 99/24 document, institutions were required to provide a strategy in order to receive additional funds for WP. The funds were later subsumed into teaching and learning strategies and also 'embedded' in fair access and other agreements. There also was no further requirement for institutions to present a specific WP strategy to HEFCE (HEFCE, 2003). This group did provide a unifying valuable function, and efforts to resurrect it have been fraught. But ironically the central funding providers now require evidence, not only of

accountability for funds for WP, but also of cohesive and embedded approaches to WP. The landscape of WP is difficult to navigate and monitor (Watson, 2006a) and WP is a complex area with no simple definitions, easy solutions or approaches. This has been one example of a number of changes since this project began which impacted on this project and will be discussed later (see timeline figure 1.1)

The range of experiences, knowledge and skills I have acquired throughout my career both as a nurse and a lecturer within HE, have equipped me with the wider issues of WP and the intricacies and demands of an academic position in relation to this. I have striven to improve my practice and be an advocate for WP, through representation in various committees and representing the academic position. The breadth and extent of my involvement and contribution to teaching and learning was recognised in 2004 when I was awarded a Teaching Fellowship by Middlesex University and later promotion to Principal Lecturer. I have used this award and my position as a vehicle to explore the issues of WP and engage actively in discourse around this. As a reflective practitioner I challenge my own ideologies and position and thus I believe act as a role model. I am grounded in the reality of Schon's (1983) 'swampy lowlands' of practice striving to achieve the higher ground and wider perspective to improve practice overall. In my current position and in University groups I have the support and influence to make significant contributions to my immediate School (HSSc), University and higher education as a whole.

I advocate the wider WP position in curriculum developments and teaching and learning practices through my involvement on Validations and Approvals (V&A) committee, HSSc Retention Committee, mentor to new lecturers (PGCE course), Student Engagement committee and in an advisory capacity on 14-19 curriculum development activities outside of the university. Core to all these aspects is my tireless advocacy for the WP cause. However I am cognisant and sensitive to the debates and the challenges for practitioners at the micro level of practice. My position is thus broad, effective at the appropriate level and permeates the University infrastructure as well as other organisations outside.

This project contributes to my studies and works toward my Doctorate in Professional Practice. It draws together the experiences and work I have been involved in, my role within the teaching and learning arena within HSSc and the University and how I anticipate making an impact on this both personally and across the wider institution. It also addresses the challenges of a continually changing landscape of higher education

and issues which have and are continually arising and addresses strategies which were utilised and the prominent discourses which ensued.

Figure 1.1 Timeline of changes impacting on this project (2004 – 2009)

Local Developments/Changes

Pre 2004
- HEFCE 99/2 University WP strategy
- LOTs module commenced

2004
- ISI FR research (first year retention)
- School WP strategy devised

2005
- Year 1 Transition (Reality Check and review)
- Learning Framework (curriculum) changes

2006
- Practical support: Pre university Bridging Material, Student Achievement Advisors (SAAs)
- Stop LOTs module

2007
- Action on Access Maintreaming and Embedding project
- Times Higher award for Disability Support
- Review of Teaching,

2008
- University restructure (Schools)
- Campus relocation and closures

2009
- Development Student Mentor project

National/Government Developments

Pre 2004
- HEFCE 99/2 University WP strategy

2004
- Higher Education Act 2004
- OFFA established

2005

2006
- HEFCE Outreach WP funding reduced (Health Stream)
- HEFCE 2006-2011 Strategic Plan

2007
- Action on Access Maintreaming and Embedding project

2008

2009
- HEFCE WP Strategic Assessment Requested

Widening Participation: local context.

The position of the University in relation to government and society also has implications for the accountability of its stated mission and vision. The University is funded by government indirectly via departments such as the Higher Education funding council (HEFCE) and also the Department of Health (and regional Strategic Health Authorities for healthcare provision). As such it is accountable to these areas, and often the most valid way of providing evidence of the work it engages with is through quantitative data. Whilst this provides some insight into the experience of HE it is in an era of limited resources available to help prioritise issues. However it does not provide the full picture of WP perceptions, culture and practices or experiences.

The HEFCE (2006a) strategic plan 2006-2011, renewed a commitment to this agenda and highlighted widening access and increasing participation as 'central' to their mission. The introduction to the strategic review does, however, make reference to the challenges inherent in this mission and its implications for both teaching and for funding. This includes meeting expectations, expansion of student numbers and funding, employer and society knowledge and skill demands, and ensuring public confidence in a quality HE experience. Most literature in the area of student experiences of university life relates to student non-completion (or retention) and is largely concerned with why students fail to finish their university career. Overall the latest published UK retention rates (in the NAO 2007 report on retention) for health related areas i.e. subjects allied to medicine increased from 89.3% (2002-3) to 90.2% (2004-5), alongside entry increasing by 30% overall. Middlesex data published in the same report indicates a continuation rate of 84.8 % (2% below the benchmark) in 2001-2 rising in 2004-5 to 1.8% above benchmark.

It is well recorded in the literature that retention rates vary due a number of reasons. Yorke and Longden (2004: 132) suggested 'focusing on maximizing retention risks mistaking symptom for cause'. However it is this backdrop which guides the institution strategies and the myriad of interventions to enhance the student experience and improve retention. As Yorke and Longden (2004) argue retention is a significant consideration in a period of increased competition in higher education and institutional research and improved retention will be critical to the continuing success of some institutions.

There have been a large number of changes in Middlesex University which have resulted in major upheavals for the Schools and also programmes and staff. Changes

made include geographical moves (campus moves), academic restructuring, timetabling and resource challenges all of which have impacted on the teaching and learning experiences (figure 1.1). Whilst many of these changes are a result of internal research (ISLER [1]– Impact of Student Learning and Retention project) other evaluation data (progression, student achievement etc) these are linked to policies such as the Teaching and Learning Strategy or the Retention Strategy. These were intended to improve the student experience yet WP as such, is subsumed rather than overt and remains unclear.

Widening Participation Policy and Influences for HEI: Policy Context.

'Widening Participation' refers to action and activities aimed at creating a more inclusive higher education system. As a policy and as a practice it aims to 'include' and bring into higher education all those who could benefit from higher education but may be deterred by existing social and cultural barriers, not least institutional barriers. The government set a target of increasing to 50 per cent the participation of 18-30 year olds by 2010. Initially, progress towards the 50% target was measured through the Initial Entry Rate (IER). This measured the percentages of students entering higher education for the first time at each age between 18 and 30, expressed as a proportion of the total population for each of those ages. This was replaced by the Higher Education Initial Participation Rate (HEIPR) in 2004. Unlike the IER which measured the number of young students starting a course, the HEIPR measures how many are still there after six months. However, the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) cautioned comparing the data due to revisions to methodology of data analyses 'due to underlying data' (BIS, 2010a:8) thus the figures are difficult to compare over time spans. The latest figures indicate 2008/09 the HE participation rate was 45% so still short of the 50% target. The data on socio-economic groups and HE participation indicates that a gap still exists between the top three and lowest three socio-economic groups with only marginal difference between 2002/3 and 2008/9 (17.8 to 14.1 percentage points) in the Full-Time Young Participation by Socio-Economic Class (FYPSEC) at age 18 measure (BIS 2010b).

Harrison and Hatt (2009) caution that the rising socio-economic grouping of 'unknown' reported by students in UCAS applications (25% of fulltime students in 2007/08) challenges the validity of the official statistics concerning socio-economic groups and

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[1] ISLER stands for the Impact of Student Learning and Retention Project, commissioned by Middlesex University Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement in 2004. This aimed to investigate the transition factors which impacted on first year students and causes of attrition. Also see chapter 2

consequently the evaluation of WP policy. But *increasing* participation does not necessarily imply *widening* participation. Indeed it is clear that increasing participation in some respects actually increases class differentials and differences, including ethnic differentials in participation levels. Furthermore, overcoming barriers to participation and fully widening participation at all points on what has come to be called 'the student life cycle' (Jary and Jones, 2004) has led to activities focussing on different aspects of the 'life cycle' rather than a more holistic approach.

Jary and Jones (2006) identified several policy aspects introduced by the current incumbent political party which impact on HEIs e.g. Annual Performance Indicators and Performance Benchmarks of HEIs of widening participation groups based on retention and progression of socio-economic groups, state school pupils and low participation neighbourhoods. Furthermore the requirement for Institutional Widening Participation Strategies, required by HEFCE, ostensibly a commitment to use of the specific funding intended for WP were subsequently not required under the Access agreements (also known as 'Schwartz Report' or initiatives).

The funding issue is intricate as funding streams indicate which priorities are to be met (e.g. Disability widening access etc) and in terms of teaching and learning quality enhancement, this is broad. Currently the funding for WP is divided into two steams: widening access and improving retention – the latter now funded through the teaching enhancement and student success (TESS) funds (HEFCE, 2009). One could view this as diluted in the wider resource budget implying a general good for 'all' students with less overt accountability for WP.

Policy requirements reflect the student life cycle from before, during, and completion or after university. This has implications for teaching and learning. Hockings (2010) argues that with changes in student demographics it is the learning environments which ought to change not the student. The response by academics to the increased monitoring and demand for flexible and innovative course design and delivery is mixed and often ambivalent and seen as overly bureaucratised and fragmented rather than looking at the whole student experience (McNay, 2007; Trowler, 1995). Any gains are disproportionate to the effort and also critically impact on academic identity (Henkel, 2000. In part this may also be due to a perceived overload on staff arising from the demands of teaching more students and undertaking more research within an 'audit culture' in a less well-funded system. For some, there is a perception of a decline in student quality and motivation (Haggis, 2006).

Ramsden (2008) reported that the student demographics have changed in HE over the previous decade they are more diverse have different lives and responsibilities and different expectations of HE. The challenges of a good student experience and quality teaching and learning in the face of changes persists and how to fund this. Diversity and WP then are linked then but if perceptions are of increased need alongside this the response can be to accept that WP is in principle a good thing, but is in need of better funding to support this (Jary and Jones, 2006).

Thomas (2006) argues that admission to HE is insufficient, students also need to be able to succeed. The concept of 'success' however does vary amongst institutions, students and HEI staff. Widening participation policies and monitoring (performance indicators) appear to consider success in terms of retention and completion of courses within a specific time frame (HEFCE, 2007) for prescribed groups of people determined to represent the WP population. This narrow view of success is reinforced by data categorisation, collection techniques and funding regimes, which omit forms of study other than degree level fulltime equivalent (Quinn et al, 2005). This is at times at odds with some professional courses or even students managing other commitments and requiring flexible start, exit or interruption points. This creates tensions in determining 'fitness for practice' as a result of negative perceptions of student ability associated with professional ability. One could argue that this creates sustainability issues for institutions in which WP-type student groups form the core business. This also presents issues for teaching and learning activities perceived to be flexible and adapted to student groups or not which impact on the institution reputation and sustainability for example in the NSS Student Survey.

Teaching and learning is important in student engagement and also in the success of students from a non traditional or any background. Yorke and Longden (2004) stress that broader indicators of success are required such as the 'student experience' emphasising its importance as 'to focus on student success is implicitly to focus on the enhancement of the quality of the student experience', (ibid p.135). Anecdotal evidence suggests that the plethora of interventions to 'skill up' students from diverse backgrounds to survive university have been variable. As this project will show, in Middlesex the institutional response was to provide specific modules of Key Skills (numeracy, literacy, time management, employability issues etc) on the basis of the Dearing (1997) recommendations. Though important in principle, it is unclear the effect it has had on widening participation students or whether it ought to have had an effect or if this was intended to address diversity or diverse needs. Certainly anecdotal reports, from lecturers teaching this module and students participating, are mixed. The

perception of how helpful this module was and the experiences of teaching and learning generally will form part of this investigation. This sense of key skills 'fatigue' amongst staff and students may be in part due to perceptions of the value of keys skills, incongruent teaching styles, abundance of 'key skills' prior to university or perceptions effectiveness. Overall it appears the literature is inconclusive on whether such measures do work (Gorard et al 2006).

By exploring the experiences of lecturers and students around WP, and teaching and learning, at the micro level of practice I hope to improve the experience for both students and lecturers by influencing practice locally and challenging pedagogies across the institution. Ramsden (2008) argues that even with the increased student diversity and evolving student expectations teaching and the quality of the student experience in the UK is 'among the best in the world' (ibid: 1). This however is in a changing world and to maintain this, practice needs to be increasingly more flexible and responsive. For this research project the collective knowledge, practices, experiences and wisdom of lecturers are viewed as a valuable resource to impact on the teaching approach across the University and the sector as a whole. This could be an influence to new and existing lecturers to reflect on practice and step outside conventional practices and assumptions in a reflexive and responsive way. As Thomas, York and Woodrow (2001: 39) assert '*a key barrier to overcome is a lack of involvement and commitment of all staff to the philosophy of widening participation and to supporting the success of more diverse student cohorts*'. This project intends to explore the rhetoric of inclusion and challenges perception of WP including any negative perceptions of what Haggis (2006) refers to as 'dumbing down'

Examples of Diversity and Implications for Teaching in HSSc.

In reflecting on the student groups in HSSc and my own teaching experiences I concluded that students in two distinctly identified programmes within HSSc (Sports and Nursing) potentially represent the diversity reflective of WP students. As a lecturer for both groups of students I have been closely involved in their learning journeys and also the challenges which have been evident at times. I have engaged in debates about the nature of WP and the label of WP is linked very closely with 'weak' which appears to be the prevailing attitude. As a module leader and member of Learning Development group in my school I rise to the debates and endeavour to clarify and challenge attitudes to WP, influence the teaching environment and programme developments. As these students are present in such significant numbers they also represent a source of rich data for the issues and progression of widening participation

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groups. Sports students and nursing students vary in prior educational attainment, exit level (sports students with a degree versus nurses exiting with a diploma) and professional benchmark knowledge and skills achievements. These students also represent a wide range of age, gender and culture or ethnic diversity. Furthermore the lecturers associated with these programmes will also be a rich source of exploration.

The government aims to widen access especially for under-represented groups specifically those from lower socio-economic groups and certain ethnic minorities (HEFCE, 2009a). This gives rise to a variety of issues such as variable levels of expectations of higher education demands which ultimately impact on student and lecturer motivation and persistence (Ramsden, 2008). This may be compounded by current practitioner shortages (derived from workforce planners), and profession changes which dictate the format of education and skills development in all programmes especially vocational programmes in an inflexible way. Howard (2002) and Mello (2004) argue for other poorly recognised issues which arise with non-traditional students which impact on their learning i.e. their perception of their role, struggle between stress and distress whilst on a professional programme and personal relationship conflicts. Other external pressures which may also impact include the introduction of variable tuition fees imposed by government under the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) agreements, though this does not affect nursing students (funded by Department of Health) it will impact fee paying students. As a condition of charging variable fees Universities are required to set out how they will safeguard and promote fair access - in particular for students from low income groups either through bursary or other financial support and outreach work (OFFA, 2004). This has implications for the type of student, and their particular circumstances, the needs with which they enter university life and potential future hardship.

Action on Access [2] maintain that students enter into the 'student cycle' but it could be forgotten that fair admissions is only one aspect (Gorard et al, 2006). Other factors impact on students and ultimately their success. Aspects which impinge upon success are erratic and under recognised such as experiences during the first year and flexible progression and destinations beyond University. Thus interventions which impact on one part of the student lifecycle may have limited impact if they do not consider the holistic view of the student experience. For the students within HSSc employment continuation is an issue especially in light of a changeable economy and work environment particularly with the potential of being burdened with debts for a HE

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[2] Action on Access is a National co-ordination team for HEFCE, LSC and DfES in the UK to support Widening Access to and promotion of diversity and inclusivity in higher education.

course. Ramsden (2008) argues that a significant consideration in a period of increased competition in higher education is institutional research on student success, completion and employment destinations of students. This will be critical to the continuing success or continuation of some institutions.

Throughout the period of this project there have been a number of developments (figure 1.1) within the University to support student diversity including student support services (advice centres etc), creation of core modules such as the level one transferable skills modules, and strategies to address learning and teaching as well as retention and progression. These were core activities intended to address issues of retention (attendance monitoring, student achievement advisors to attend to students disengaging etc). The plethora of changes have all been student focussed and intended to engage students and make staff more aware of problems arising. However, this does not explicitly address the issue of what student success is, teaching diverse students and how staff perceive WP in relation to their role. WP as presented is more than widening access and as such requires further examination.

The focus of this project.

HEFCE (2009a) has produced inclusion and target group indicators with which to benchmark the diversity of the core student body in higher education institutions. This benchmarking is based on a number of factors such as population ethnicity, geographical distribution, social or income defined categories of students (i.e. low socio-economic), groups considered to be 'under-represented' in higher education and historical trends in attendance patterns by gender, sexuality or race. Some institutions therefore may be described as 'successful' at WP if they exceed the benchmarks (Quinn et al 2005). However exceeding numbers does not necessarily make an institution responsive to WP students or 'good' in practice (David, 2009).

Anecdotally diverse or WP students group are seen by lecturers, and staff in general, as weaker requiring increasing resources to support them. By opening up the discourse of WP and the issues impacting on higher education and teaching and learning, a more cohesive approach to WP can be explored. This critical report of the project will also provide information of benefit in the recent call to institutions to report on the strategic assessment of WP within their institutions (HEFCE, 2009a). It has also enabled me to critically evaluate my own practice in and understanding of WP and been a challenging learning journey (see Reflections of this project Appendix 2).

Hockings (2010) insists that change (for diversity) benefits all students. However it is unclear if the changes in my own institution are a 'bolt-on' for diversity in an atmosphere of unchanging or static teaching practice or whether staff subscribe to WP and adapt their practice accordingly. The key participants in this study are the lecturers and the students selected from programmes that represent the diverse or 'WP' population within the university. By exploring the lecturers' experiences of teaching and learning on their modules or programmes and their perceptions of WP a clearer picture of their understanding and their own teaching approaches will be elicited. It is also important to understand the differing roles of lecturers and the extent to which they acknowledge WP and how it impacts on the wider teaching and learning approaches. Furthermore, eliciting the students' views of their learning experiences within the University will provide an insight into the WP perspective and if they perceive interventions such as Key Skills modules made any impact their learning needs.

As outlined in this chapter since starting this project much has changed. Early in this project the HSSc WP strategy was developed, this reflected the wider University WP strategy. However, as mentioned throughout this project period organisational changes resulted in policy and strategy revisions. In the intervening years the overall co-ordination and cohesion of WP throughout the institution altered. The process of monitoring and reporting of WP within the institution needs to be considered by identifying who monitors, identifies the needs of WP students, evaluates this and is ultimately accountable and responsible. As a consequence I have had to revise my aims and objectives accordingly sometimes even reframing some of the questions and emphases. The core issue remained in this changing environment and clarification and elaboration of the aims and objectives will be addressed further in the next chapter.

Chapter 2:   LITERATURE REVIEW AND FRAMING THE PROJECT

This chapter will discuss the aims and objectives of this project as well as the relevant literature that has informed it, particularly in terms of framing the subject of widening participation in higher education discourse. The literature review will focus and discuss boundaries within which this project has operated and any conflicting issues associated. It is acknowledged that as part of an interpretative research approach additional literature may emerge during the project process and therefore whilst not considered at the outset will later illuminate certain issues or themes. This chapter will commence with an outline of the aims and objectives of this project with accompanying rationale for these thus informing the project processes.

Elaboration of the Aims and Objectives of this project.

The literature in WP continues to evolve with as varied and diverse foci as the subject area itself. The vast array of aspects range from policy and economic analyses to research of students perceived as excluded, pre HE choice and information, aspirations and abilities, experiences of students at varied points in the student life cycle, curriculum issues, employability and the persistent population social inequality of HE participation.   However, the key focus of this project concerns HSSc in Middlesex University, lecturers and their perceptions of WP and their own practice. As such, a selection of the literature will be explored to provide background and a more specific frame for this project.

In reflecting on my own role and position with HSSc I am concerned with my practice and local sphere of working. The overarching research question concerns the identification and elucidation of the discourses around WP including teaching and learning, pedagogies and associated practices within my School (HSSc) and Middlesex in general. The specific research question which emerges is: to what extent is the School of HSSc adopting a culture of WP and how is this translated in action and provision? At the time of commencing this project in 2004 there was little research on the relationship between WP and teaching and learning or how lecturers or teachers in HE perceive WP and approach this within their role. It was also unclear what constituted a 'WP student' or even if the groups identified as marginalised or under-represented in HE were 'WP students'. However what is evident is that as a term 'WP' has been alluded to a 'stigmatising' or 'labelling' emphasising 'difference' and a focus

on practice that is inclusive. However, it could be argued that highlighting 'difference' may also be counter-productive, causing further stigmatisation and potentially be exclusionary (Hockings, 2009,).

Given the above, my main project aim is to contribute to the understanding and development of widening participation especially as it contributes to teaching and learning within HSSc. There are two subsidiary aims: to contribute to teaching and learning discourse across the HE sector and explore the implications of this for improving professional practice of HE lecturers.   To guide the development of the research process and data collection relevant research and other literature were consulted tools. Finally, dissemination of the findings within my own organisation (lecturers, support staff, department heads etc) and within the wider community of HE practitioners was planned through workshops and conference presentations.

Table 2.1: Aims of Project.

The project aims to:
To contribute to the understanding and development of widening participation as it contributes to teaching and learning within HSSc and also to contribute to teaching and learning discourse across the HE sector. Extensively explore the literature around WP and teaching and learning and relevant research To disseminate the findings with the wider community of HE practitioners (lecturers, support staff, department heads etc).

The aims and associated objectives which were developed to fully explore the research question are summarised in table 2.1 but expanded below. The objectives to accomplish the aims involve the following:

To explore lecturers' understanding and engagement with Widening Participation in HSSc**.**

This objective emerged directly from the main aim. It was planned to develop an initial exploration of lecturers' perceptions and experiences of WP to determine the prevailing perceptions within HSSc, and to follow this up with deeper richer individual

examinations of lecturers' understanding. This involved asking who were the lecturers involved in WP, what they understood by WP and what they considered engagement with WP to be. This also included identifying the key stakeholders involved in WP within HSSc (and Middlesex).

To identify groups of 'diverse' students representing WP and explore their experiences of teaching and learning in HSSc.

This objective addresses teaching and learning as experienced by diverse students. Cohorts of diverse students were selected as most likely to represent 'WP students' and as such the recipients of lecturers' teaching approaches (see chapter 3 p.67). Information provided by students provides the students' perspective and give insights into their perceptions of success and any challenges in their 'journey' before and during HE. This also triangulates the inquiry and adds a further dimension to the exploration of WP and increasing the internal validity of the methodology.

To explore the perceived benefits of 'support' given to WP students for their personal and academic achievements.

This objective relates to the main aim but also to the subsidiary aim of implications for professional practice for HE lecturers. In this research project this meant exploring lecturers' and students' beliefs of support and particularly the benefit of the mandatory core module in year 1 which was intended to equip students with key transferable skills to support them academically on their journey through HE. Senior students (final year undergraduate) were to be asked how this module assisted them and what other skills and achievements they believe they gained. This aimed to capture any perceived emancipation or transformation experienced due to HE (Thomas, 2006) or at the least any key points at which this was perceived to be developing.

To explore aspects of teaching and learning which contribute to success for widening participation students.

This objective expands the main aim and focuses on pedagogical approaches which complement WP, elaborating what 'success' is and how pedagogy influences it. This raises the question of what lecturers and students perceive as 'success'. It was anticipated that if WP students (or diverse students) could be identified as a group they would have a particular vision of 'success' however it was unsure if this would be

recognised as developing from the mandatory key skills modules (LOTS - level one transferable skills module) which was intended to nurture capability and ultimately individual 'success'. Lecturers' understanding of 'success' are also a key aspect and the extent to which it parallels students conceptions. Capturing examples of practice in relation to diverse students and how this contributes to student success will inform practice and teaching and learning development locally and at a strategic level.

To identify the consequences of embedding a Widening Participation strategy upon lecturers' understanding and teaching approaches.

This objective concerns an intervention (embedding) a School (HSSc) WP strategy intended as part of this research project. As the project progressed a series of local and national changes meant this was not possible. The aim was amended (this is elaborated further in chapters 3 and 4 and outlined in the timeline in chapter 1) to: *Identify how mainstreamed and embedded WP is within HSSc and the University*. This expanded the perceptions and practices within the University which are associated with WP. The previous University wide WP Strategy attempted this. However without a strategy it was concluded that this project would be ideally placed to explore who was involved, the wider staff understanding of WP and what they perceived their roles as in relation to WP. This was an opportunity to explore WP more widely and understand the environment in which lecturers work and thus conceive of WP and their practice. This was anticipated to create a wider dialogue on the pragmatic issues of WP and how this impacts on perceptions and practice. This engaged colleagues and challenged belief systems to reframe their approaches to teaching and learning and begs the question of any shared beliefs about WP. The question of what is meant by mainstreamed or embedded is important including any barriers or promoters to this.

In considering the objectives indicated above, I formulated a series of sub questions to expand and clarify the objectives. This was to guide the research and effectively answer the main research questions. The aims and objectives, with additional sub questions, are summarised in tables 2.1 and 2.2. respectively. These will be addressed further in the project activity sections in chapter 4.

Table 2.2 Key objectives of the project and sub questions**.**

To explore lecturers understanding and engagement with Widening Participation initiatives or activities.

Key sub-questions:

Who are the lecturers involved in WP?

What constitutes 'engagement' with initiatives and activities and how is this measured?

Are any other stakeholders involved if so to what extent?

What are the differing views of WP?

To identify groups of 'diverse' students representing WP and explore their experiences of teaching and learning in HSSc

Key sub-questions:

To what extent can widening participation students be identified?

Do lecturers consider the needs of WP students in their teaching?

To explore the perceived benefits of 'support' given to WP students for their personal and academic achievements.

Key sub-questions:

Are lecturing and other staff sensitive to needs of and knowledgeable of the resources available to support students from non traditional backgrounds?

What are the perceived benefits of 'support' given to WP students?

To explore aspects of teaching and learning which contribute to success for widening participation students.

Key sub-questions:

What is meant by student success and how is it measured?

To what extent can widening participation students be identified?

Have the developments of teaching and learning (i.e. LOTS [1]modules and key skills threaded through the curriculum) addressed the needs of WP students?

To identify how mainstreamed and embedded WP is within HSSc and the University

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[1] LOTS module – was the mandatory Level One Transferable Skills module which was the core Key skills module for year one students as Middlesex's response to the key skills required in the Dearing report (1997)

Key sub questions:

What is meant by embedded and how is this manifest in policy and practice across the institution?

What are the shared understandings, if any, of WP across the institution?

Are there promoters or barriers to actively embedding and sustaining WP?

Project and Programme Outcomes.

The proposed outcome of this project is a report to contribute, inform and evaluate future curriculum and learning and teaching developments within the HSSc and the University. This will also encourage lecturers to reflect critically upon their practice and challenge adopted teaching practices and awareness to diverse student needs. A further outcome is knowledge of WP students' experiences and learning needs in HSSc, as a diverse student group, and how these are addressed to enable student success.

The key products which are envisaged include this 'Critical Review of Widening Participation' paper intended for colleagues identifying the key issues for WP for HSSc and the institution. This critical mass of knowledge will then progress on towards identifying good practice in teaching for inclusivity in WP. A further product will be the development of 'Diversity and Inclusivity' resource guidance for staff linked with professional development and lecturer preparation (appendix 18). The identification of beliefs and perceptions of WP and the associated pedagogical philosophy in relation to diversity will be central to lecturers' continuing professional development and also new lecturer development. The discourse on pedagogical practice will contribute to the wider dialogue on WP in professional centres and HE community.

What is Widening Participation?

The term 'widening participation' appears to have multiple meanings and applications in literature and lies in a number of 'terrains' i.e. school, community, HE each contesting the exact meaning and role. HEFCE (2009e: website) identifies WP as to: '*promote and provide the opportunity of successful participation in higher education to everyone who can benefit from it*'. This is further expanded to indicate that it addresses the large discrepancies in the take-up of higher education opportunities

between different social groups namely: *disabled students, mature students, women and men, lower socio-economic and all ethnic groups* (HEFCE, 2009a). Burke (2009) identifies that WP is a complex concept and shaped by local and national political discourses.

The concept of WP in HE, as distinct from simply increasing or expanding student numbers, took root in HE and employability policy discourse throughout the last decade. Whilst it is widely perceived to be a consequence of the publication of the Dearing review of HE in 1997 (Maringe and Fuller, 2007) it has longer history and can be traced back to the early 1960s (Harrison and Hatt, 2009) with emphasis on opportunity within secondary (raising school age) and later further education following publication of the Kennedy Report (1997) (Parker, 2003, Jones, 2008). These waves of expansion in HE resulted in increased student numbers from all strata of society with the lower socio-economic groups under-represented in HE (NCIHE, 1997). Since the 1990s there have been a raft of government reports and policy papers to address this e.g. The Future of Higher Education (DfES,2003), Widening Participation in Higher Education (NAO 2002, 2008), Young Participation in Higher Education (HEFCE, 2005) among others.

There appear to be several different strands of widening participation reflecting a range of differing interpretations of the term. On the one hand it is proposed that HE requires reform to enable entry of a more culturally and socio-economically representative cohorts (DfES, 2003). Such reforms include development of responsive and flexible curricula, a more inclusive institutional environment and practices and interventions to facilitate student progression and completion for 'non traditional' groups (HEFCE, 2009a). The counter argument to this is that the HE sector is already capable of being culturally and socio-economically welcoming and representative and that any inequalities or factors impeding the further or higher education of students lie beyond institutions for example differences in qualification levels amongst socio-economic groups (secondary or primary schools) result in poorer attainment which impedes progression to HE (Jones, 2008, Harrison and Hatt, 2009).

Although widening participation is debated in the literature in quite polarised ways this is a reductionist pragmatic view. However it does help to illustrate the potentially contrasting positions of HE WP policy. It has been suggested that a policy focus on widening, and not just increasing, participation places an emphasis on social justice and equity (Watson, 2006; Greenbank, 2009). Watson (2006: 2) points out that

'*succeeding at it* [WP] *contributes to social cohesion*'. The aim of WP appears to be participation in HE which mirrors the characteristics of the general young (18-30 years) population. Ultimately this is presented as a 'problem' with policy makers instructed to address under-represented groups in HE. There have been changes to the student population entering HE over the last twenty or so years however, this however remains a rather complex picture. The growth in female participation in HE has impacted on the social composition of universities, with women comprising approximately 54% of students in British universities (HEFCE, 2010), while, overall, students from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds are also now proportionally over-represented in HE (HESA, 2009). Though this is complicated by some groups remaining under-represented e.g. Afro-Caribbean males and Bangladeshi females (Stevenson and Lang, 2010). It still appears that HE participation by social or ethnic groups is highly variable across type and level of courses as well as within and between institutions (Stevenson and Lang, 2010).

Gorard (2008) asserts that it is difficult to establish who is missing from HE with the current data sets due to missing or incomplete data and complexities of the categorisations used. Ultimately the categories used are arbitrary and interact with each other making trends and patterns difficult to establish over time (Gorard and Smith, 2005) and self reporting or recording (coding) are a matter of judgement and as such potentially variable over time. Harrison and Hatt (2009) further caution that the rising socio-economic grouping of 'unknown' reported by students in UCAS applications (25% of fulltime students in 2007/08) challenges the validity of the official statistics concerning socio-economic groups and consequently the evaluation of WP policy. There is some notion that the unknown group is drawn from the lower socio-economic groups (ibid), however this indicates the complexity with determining what is WP, who it applies to and the challenge to evaluate it.

WP and the massification of HE.

The end of the binary system in 1992 when more universities were 'created' or re-named led to increases in the number of students participating, leading to what is referred to as the 'massification' of the HE sector (Stevenson, 2010). In 1997, Dearing (NCIHE, 1997) highlighted the existence of unequal rates of participation most acutely in lower social class groups. In the early 2000s, HEFCE (2003) pointed out that 40% of the population could be categorised as manual, partly skilled and unskilled family backgrounds. This compared to approximately 20% of young people from this social

grouping entering HE. This contrasts sharply with 55% from families with professional and non manual parental occupations (Stanton, 2008). Policymakers have avoided the term 'class' in favour of alternative terminology such as 'disadvantaged' 'social exclusion' (Archer et al, 2003), 'social mobility' and 'under-represented' thus reframing the concept by utilising more positive terms such as 'diverse' and 'inclusive'.

The expansion of HE has been enormous. Blanden and Machin (2004) report that in the early 2000s one in three people participated in HE compared to one in sixteen in 1960. That is an increase from 400,000 to over 2,000,000. According to Trow's categorisation and formulation, British HE became a 'mass' system (i.e. transmission of skills and preparation for broader roles) in 1988 when its age participation index surpassed 15 per cent. The American system passed the 40 per cent mark to become a 'universal' system (adaptation of whole population to technological and social change) in the mid-1960s (Trow, 2005). The emphasis then was a move away from HE as an 'elite' system and according to Trow, the preserve of 'ruling' classes. The UK system, in the late 1990s, was stable at around 30 percent though this is clearly insufficient in the social inclusion agenda of current national government aiming at 50 percent. This is recently reported at 43% (David, 2008) despite the government pouring millions of pounds into increasing the 'non-traditional student' entry between 2001-2008 (Jones and Thomas, 2008). Qualitatively and quantitatively, however, both systems have been transformed during the past decade. Student numbers overall have increased, but not necessarily widened as much as was expected (Blanden and Machin, 2004; NAO, 2007). Along with increased numbers and types of students as mentioned earlier students were perceived as less likely to be well prepared for HE (Quinn et al, 2005). It has been reported that this may in part due to students not possessing the same cultural capital as for example middle-class students and thus not knowing about HE (Archer et al, 2003). In addition, that it is the preserve of upper classes (Marks et al 2003) or they do not feel they 'fit' (Reay et al, 2010) or due to poor attainment whilst at school (Greenbank, 2009). In essence widening participation is a complex area but central to it is social enhancement and opportunity.

The composition of staff in universities has changed too. In 2007/08 it has been reported that there was a slow but consistent increase in female fulltime academic staff (38%) and ethnicity (11.6% compared to 5.5% in 2001/02) and disability (3% compared to 1.8% in 2001/02) across all institutions in the UK (HESA 2004, HESA 2010). Thus the greatest change was in gender and ethnicity. Interestingly the average age was reported 43.1 years and 27.5% were reported as employed in medicine, dentistry or

health (HESA, 2010). This indicates a substantial difference from the student population. Academic staff are also increasingly more likely to come from professions outside academia and are more likely to be involved in vocational subjects and new disciplines with newer domains of knowledge (Burke, 2009). This latter point can be a strength especially in terms of currency of knowledge, practice and research. In relation to this research, one of the strengths of School of HSSc is that the health related courses are taught by practitioners or former practitioners, who in many instances maintain their professional status (i.e. Nursing and Biomedical Science Professionals update their practice and re-register annually). All of these factors are pertinent especially since there is evidence of increasing appeal of health related courses. It is reported that students entering university to study subjects allied to medicine (which would include nursing and other health related courses except medicine and dentistry) increased by 32% between 2002-02 and 2006-07 (NAO 2007: 44). However, It is unclear how and if academic staff compare their diversity (socially or ethnically) to their students or even how this impacts on their teaching and if this has changed due to increased student numbers.

WP Policy outline.

Policy implementation in the area of WP in HE integrates diverse stakeholders to work together to achieve the aim of a more representative student population. Stakeholders from the perspective of HE include the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE), DfES, Higher Education Academy (HEA), Universities and College Admissions Service (UCAS), HEIs, and bodies of education outside of HE such as Further Education (FE) colleges and schools. It also includes providers of advice and guidance services and beyond including public and private sector employers, Trades Unions and community groups. The 'collaborative model' for the 14-19 curricula changes is associated with constraints such as funding, targets and inspection to shape stakeholder behaviour at all levels (Hodgson and Spours, 2006b). However, the same measures and constraints are not prevalent in HE. Hodgson and Spours draw on Bowe *et al*'s (1992) 'policy triangle' model to point out that policy creation, implementation and practice provide three 'contexts' (influence, policy text production and of practice) within which there can be interaction between policy and stakeholders. This 'policy triangle' model may then explain why policies may be conceived in one way at the level of policy production but be interpreted in another at the level of implementation, and illuminate why intended and unintended outcomes may occur. This is pertinent when considering the varied ways WP policy is experienced and interpreted and the consequent perceptions by

stakeholders unable to visualise it in its entirety. For example, interpretation of widening opportunities for participation to HE have been interpreted as lowering standards (or qualifications) (Haggis, 2006) which has implications of relationships between stakeholders and students.

There are tensions between market driven institutional behaviour, the business of HE and student recruitment and retention (and achievement) and collaboration between stakeholders to implement WP policy. This 'partnership approach' to WP (HEFCE, 2008) in HE is consistent with the wider New Labour strategy of creating and using stakeholder networks and collaborative arrangements to implement a range of public policies. Clearly there are constraints. However, whilst there are 'targets' such as increasing numbers entering HE, or increasing diversity, this may be achieved quantitatively and is certainly monitored nationally (HESA returns) the actual experiences of students at university, which may be positive or negative, is subject to local interpretation of policy by HE management and staff and available resources. Overall nationally, as well as in Middlesex, despite the attention and prominence given to these policies, the literature on students' or lecturers' perceptions of their experiences is not extensive and this is further complicated by what is defined as 'WP' and what is a 'WP student' and 'success'.

Local context.

The government policy process therefore guides wider national approaches to WP but not necessarily local drivers and stakeholders in HE. In Middlesex, the array of stakeholders is wide and includes many of those mentioned above, each with its own position in regards to students, i.e. in specific stages in student 'life cycle'. Locally, the stakeholders in WP extend to the local community and professional organisations, especially in HSSc where there is a multiplicity of professional programmes with professional qualifications regulated and guided by Professional and Statutory Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs). The students are equally important stakeholders, as are the academic and support staff who face students on a daily basis.
Middlesex University has long maintained a commitment to diversity and flexibility engendering a culture of lifelong learning as indicated in its Mission statement. It evolved as an amalgamation of several colleges within the county of Middlesex, and was formerly known as Middlesex Polytechnic, before being awarded university status in 1992. In 2007-2008 a QAA audit (QAA 2009) noted that the university had approximately 22,000 UK students of which two thirds were fulltime and more than half

emanating from London. The university continues to expand with now several campuses overseas.

Middlesex (UK) has a wide diversity in age, gender, ethnicity and disability. A summary of these is presented in table 2.3.

Table 2.3: Middlesex University Student diversity data.

Category	2006/07 Number/percentages	Regional (London) comparisons
Total student number	22,500	-
Ethnic minorities	48%	33%
Local boroughs	51%	N/A
From London	26%	N/A
Social class (4 - 7)	36%	33%
Mature Low Participation Neighbourhood (LPN)	12%	N/A
Overseas	21%	15.8%
Women	58%	N/A
Disability (Known)	959 (number)	N/A
Fulltime students	72%	63%
Part-time students	25%	37%

Source: Middlesex HESA returns July 2007, Presented by Middlesex Marketing department at Student Experience Conference (July 2007).

According to HESA[2] data for 2002 – 2006, Middlesex University draws more of its undergraduate student intake from deprived neighbourhoods than is usual for HEIs in London and the rest of England. Middlesex University is more ethnically diverse in its undergraduate intake than other HEIs in London and the rest of England. HESA (2009) reports that students from China and India accounted for nearly one third of all non-EU

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[2] HESA is the Higher Education Statistics Agency is the official agency for the collection, analysis and dissemination of quantitative information about higher education. It was set up by agreement between the relevant government departments, the higher education funding councils and the universities and colleges in 1993, following the White Paper "Higher Education: a new framework", which called for more coherence in HE statistics.

students at UK HE institutions in 2007/08 and is rising year on year. Whilst there is no definitive data available for Middlesex at the time of writing, it would be logical to assume that this ethnicity distribution would also be reflected in the student body alongside the ethnically diverse UK domiciled students.

The ethnic minority students are much more likely to come from areas of deprivation when compared to their white peers (Allen, 2010). Middlesex University is the most popular destination for North London resident students, especially for those from more deprived neighbourhoods as determined by HESA (i.e. POLAR[3] geographical areas formerly postcode areas). This is reflected also in the campus differences (table 2.4). Nursing is by far the most popular primary subject for undergraduate entrants into Middlesex University and specifically into HSSc. When compared to the Middlesex University average, these nursing students are proportionately more likely to come from less affluent neighbourhoods. As these are diverse student groups, in terms of socio-economic provenance and ethnicity, the issues of WP are quite relevant and real. As a lecturer in nursing and health related subjects this issue resonates loudly for me and affects my day to day practice but also the departments and peers with whom I work.

Table 2.4 Middlesex University student profile according to campus (three of the four main campuses and one hospital satellite campus (Archway*)

Campus:	Cat Hill	Enfield	Archway*	Hendon
Courses:	Arts and Creative design	HSSc (including Sport)	HSSc mostly Nursing and Midwifery	Business and computing
Part-time students	12%	43%	52%	41%
Full time students	78%	57%	48%	59%
Age under 21years	20%	15%	29%	17%

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[3] POLAR is a HEFCE data determination of deprivation of an area which focuses on geographical data formerly collected as postcode data. The POLAR maps and data sets show how the chances of young people entering higher education vary by where they live

Age over 21 years	50% (21 – 24 years)	85%	71% (over 30 years)	83% (46% 21-24 years)
Female	51%	71%	82%	48%
Black	46%	33%	46%	22%
Asian	11%	11%	11%	41%
White	34%	39%	34%	17%
International /European	8% 13%	8% 7%	2% (total)	22% 8%
Recruited through Clearing	7%	33%	N/A	33%

Source: Middlesex HESA returns July 2007, Presented by Middlesex Marketing department at Student Experience Conference (July 2007).

The position of the university in relation to government and society also has implications for the accountability of its stated mission and vision. The University is funded by government indirectly via departments such as HEFCE and in respect of HSSc, the Department of Health (and regional Strategic Health Authorities for healthcare provision). To evidence the work it does or the 'success' of students the university collects and presents vast amounts of data to funding agencies. Success in this instances can be measured quantitatively (e.g. student numbers, ethnicity, progression and achievement) or through quality measures (excellence in teaching, student learning and experiences). This does pose a conflict with what information is valued and what constitutes success for students (or HEs) and the consequent broadcasting of this in league tables. It has been reported that institutions which excel in WP access may not have the excellent measures of success (i.e. level of degree attainment in BME or gender groups) (Broecke and Nicholls, 2007) this implies it may not be due widening access but factors within the university and may be interpreted as 'not successful'.

There have been a number of developments within Middlesex to support student diversity including student support services (advice centres etc), creation of core modules such as the level one transferable skills (LOTs) modules, and strategies to address learning and teaching as well as retention and progression. There has also been a profound curriculum change (Learning Framework) which has as yet to be evaluated (see timeline figure 1.1, chapter 1). These changes impact on micro-level of practice driven and guided by institutional policies. It is these changes and associated University policy and strategy statements which provide a useful resource for exploring

interpretations of WP (see policy sources in table 2.5). The link between the policies and how they effectively address WP as a whole, or converge to form the organisational approach to indicate the embeddedness of WP, is relevant to practice especially in light of the reduced need for an overarching WP strategy by HEFCE in 2006. Analysis of policy documents specifically related to student experiences and teaching practices enables identification of the language and terms related to WP and diversity and the point at which they impact on diverse students. Students' experiences are described in terms of the student life cycle and as such policy (and practice) will reflect this eliminating the notion of 'barriers' indicative of institutions are trying hard enough (Baker et al 2006). If policies are not reflective of the institution philosophy of WP then institutions open themselves up to criticism of the inclusion rhetoric and conflicting practice.

Table 2.5 Middlesex documents as secondary sources.

Policy Document
APS5: Sustainability APS7: Admissions APS8: Bursaries and Scholarships APS11: Academic Policy Statement APS19: Teaching Observations APS 20: Student Employability
Strategy Documents
Equality and Diversity Strategy *Enhancing Learning, Teaching and* *Assessment (ELTA) Strategy (2007-12)*

Internal research such as the ISLER project, mentioned in chapter 1, have explored these issues and driven many of the changes mentioned. It is recognised that several aspects impinge upon student success, including experiences during the first year, flexible progression, destinations beyond University and teaching and learning experiences before and during university. Other factors include engagement with university staff and student personal difficulties encountered whilst studying (Thomas, 2006. NAO, 2007). This has guided the policy and strategy development around student experiences locally and to date has mirrored the rapid rate of change to policy and interventions nationally with little evaluation of the impact on WP students.

<u>WP and access to HE</u>.

The UK widening participation agenda is predicated on the notion that particular social groups, defined perhaps by social class or ethnic background, are *unfairly* under-represented in higher education. The under-representation is identified in official data publications (BIS 2010b) clearly highlighting groups such as the lowest three socio-economic groups, white males and Afro-Caribbean males. However, Gorard (2005) and Stevenson and Lang (2010) argue that this is flawed since no single large-scale dataset to establish that this unfair under-representation. Procedures and processes in recording data, missing data and even recoding of data all add to the confused picture (Harrison and Hatt, 2009). Gorard (2008) further asserts that categorisation by social groups is a matter of judgment which is compounded by coding, changes in categorisations over time and what is categorised focussing largely on young people and not mature students.

The literature on widening participation in HE is largely focused on barriers and blocks faced by groups or lack of motivation or opportunity. Prior to New Labours' WP agenda widening entrance and participation to HE was apparent in the 'access' agenda which focussed on providing tailored courses and thus an alternative route or 'second chance' to HE for those lacking traditional entry qualifications (Jary and Jones, 2006). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s an increasing proportion of the population entered universities. This increase in numbers however led to a disproportionate uptake by social groups: smaller increase in lower socio-economic groups and greater uptake by higher socio-economic groups, thus defeating the purpose. Reay et al (2001) identified that students from many ethnic minority backgrounds and also disabled students were far more likely to be negatively positioned within the higher education system and to study less prestigious subjects in less prestigious institutions. There is also evidence that ethnic minority and more deprived students are more likely to select degrees that have perceived high economic value, which may imply that these students could be more focused on the importance of careers and labour market opportunities (Chowdry et al 2008). Whilst this is subjective it raises questions as to why diverse groups gravitate to certain organisations and to certain programmes of study and may be more about identity and safety than aspirations. Furthermore issues exist in retention and progression through HE, though this is contested as being poor for lower socio-economic groups (Yorke and Longden, 2008), not poor (Glanville et al, 2007; Thomas and Quinn, 2006) or poor for ethnic minority groups (HEA, 2008). This does indicate a more complex situation which must reside within aspects of the HE institution impacting

on these student groups. It has been reported that even if successful on graduating, these student groups were also subject to less successful employment than other non traditional students (Reay et al, 2001; Blasko, Brennan and Shah, 2003). Burke (2009) is quick to caution against oversimplifying WP and its practices as it is invariably shaped by local micro politics as well as wider competing and pressing economic and market forces.

Jones and Thomas (2005: 1) offer a comprehensive critique of widening participation Government 'Access' discourse which is couched in terms of 'problems' for certain groups needing to be rectified. They identify two policy strands and a more progressive perspective.

> 'The academic strand seeks to attract 'gifted and talented' young people into an unreformed higher education system. The second strand, […] the utilitarian approach, posits a need for reform. However, this is undertaken largely to meet the requirements of employers and the economy. In contrast, a transformative approach values diversity and focuses on creating a system of higher education that does not place the burden of change upon potential entrants'. (ibid: 1).

These strands (academic, utilitarian and transformative) are presented to categorise the approaches to WP by HE institutions in their attempt to interpret WP policy and highlight that change is needed but at what level is dependent upon differing university values and culture. It could be argued that this is an over simplification and the business of higher education is more complex with WP as merely one part of this business.

Research into WP in HEIs.

There appears to be no clearly agreed definition of WP in the literature. As mentioned earlier the definition of WP held by researchers differs in two ways: a focus on pre-admissions and admissions and a focus on the whole of the student lifecycle resting on specific groups or inclusion more generally. Sheeran et al (2007) argue that there are several competing philosophies of inclusion (and WP) focussed around the purpose of higher education and who should have access to it that is elitist or democratic thus there is no agreement among institutions. Shaw et al (2007) usefully surmise that WP can therefore be understood simultaneously as an outcome, a process, or a type of student. There arise two key issues in the literature which are pertinent to this research

project: 'barriers' to HE (Gorard et al, 2006; Fuller et al, 2007) and the perception of student 'deficit' (Thomas, 2006) impeding progression through HE. These will be explored in relation to this project.

The difficulty in conceptualising the challenges and influences for students moving through the higher education system is not assisted by measures such as HEFCE performance indicators which inadequately reflect the diversity of the students groups and experiences (i.e. subject level performance as opposed to institutional). Layer et al (2002a) identify this as crucial as the majority of the support for students lies at subject level and incomplete pictures of this make comparisons of curricula difficult. Additionally Layer et al (2002) reports only 38% of institutions analysed admitted carrying out research into interventions to enable them to evaluate the effect of activities to support students. This has lead to some, though limited, exemplars of good practice. Though as Gorard and Smith (2005) highlight a substantial proportion of research reports do not actually report new research evidence or analysis of any kind. They cite the dearth of 'research' literature per se and in its place an array of 'thought-pieces' with no clear empirical content, no summary of the research of others, and no assistance to others intending to conduct research

Gorard (2001) asserts that there is lack of direct transferability of research in the UK to improve pedagogic practice. This may also be due to a perception of the value of pedagogic research being placed lower in comparison to 'subject' research and therefore not taken seriously. It therefore seems appropriate that research is best conducted by individuals or practitioners, who will then be in the position to act upon findings to improve practice which is the key driver to undertaking this research project. Within WP there is a range of research on the differing aspects of the student life cycle and how this applies to the concept of social inclusion. In a series of studies commissioned by Action on Access (AoA) 'effective' institutions, performing well in widening participation did so at a 'macro' scale through institution policy and activity (Yorke and Longden, 2004). These still provided insufficient research on demonstrable good practice in securing and retaining WP students. In addition, not enough is known about the experiences of WP students as they progress to a higher education institution and through the critically important first year (Thomas et al, 2002, Layer et al, 2002a, Layer et al, 2002b). However in more recent years this is an increasingly prolific area of research (Quinn et al, 2005; Yorke and Longden, 2008). Alongside this lies a further dearth of research into lecturers and HE staff perception of the levels of

awareness, sensitivity and developments to widening participation approaches, practices and pedagogies in relation to WP students' needs and issues.

a. 'Barriers'

Gorard et al's (2006) review of WP research for HEFCE suggests the term 'barrier' to HE as a metaphor which:

> '... *is an attractive one that suggests that an explanation for differences in patterns of participation between socio-economic groups and contains its own solution – the removal of the barriers* (Gorard *et al*, 2006, p.5).

The metaphor of 'barriers' is pervasive in WP education policy and research discourses (Fuller and Paten, 2007). In terms of WP in HE, policy revolves around the idea that people who are unable to or fail to participate in HE are in 'deficit' and removing barriers 'corrects' the deficit. The range of barriers which exist within the literature is broad. Sociological barriers are proposed to exist (socio-economic or 'disadvantaged', cultural and gender) to explain the differential participation (Bowl, 2001, Reay et al 2001, Archer et al 2003). Fuller and Paten (2007: 1) suggest a three-way classification of barriers: 'situational' (e.g. costs, time, geography and individual's life circumstances); 'institutional' (e.g. timetabling, admissions procedures and requirements); and 'dispositional' relating to individual motivation and attitudes to learning (often reflecting previous educational experiences). However, they caution that evidence for 'barriers' is weak and not always useful as it implies 'overcoming the barriers' and is based on research from those successfully doing this.

The metaphor of barriers can be extended for those enrolled in HE and provides a platform to examine issues of progression or achievement. This includes the introduction of up front tuition fees in 1998 and the subsequent introduction of variable fees in 2006 which may well change again in 2011. Although the fees are means tested, there continues to be fears that fees create yet another perceived barrier to participation by poorer students (Powdthavee and Vignoles, 2007). In addition to this, empirical studies have shown an increase in the proportion of full-time students who work part-time throughout their course, which to some extent is attributable to the rising costs they have had to meet. Studies by the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (CHERI, 2002) and Hunt et al (2004) found that students from lower socio-economic groups (and by implication WP groups) in employment during their term-times saw working as a way of reducing borrowing and debt. Callender and

Wilkinson (2003) indicate that 20% of students' income, on average, comes from part-time employment, a 48% rise on four years previously. Almost half of all students undertake paid employment during their term-time (Blasko et al, 2002) with the hours worked ranging from 12½ to 40 per week for over 40% of students (Careers Research Advisory Centre, 2002). There have been a number of studies that claim that working during term-time has an adverse effect on students' academic output (Barke *et al.*, 2000; Metcalf, 2003). However, students in a study by Curtis and Shani (2002) stressed the positive effects of working, with the most important benefits being improvement of skills and building of confidence. Nevertheless, the prevailing conclusion is that beyond a certain limit (often seen as 16 hours per week), paid employment during term time for a supposedly full-time student is detrimental to their experience of, and potentially success in, HE though as Holmes (2008) indicates in her research is considered by students as a reality to live and survive. This begs the question of to what extent is this a barrier and how HE or academic staff are aware of or acknowledging this.

A further barrier identified in the literature is student preparedness and support during HE transition. Ertl et al (2009) in their research conclude that students who commence university with vocational qualifications have a greater need for individualised support and integration of their vocational background into their new learning environment. They argue this can only be effectively addressed by teaching and support staff and is clearly a gap in provision. It appears that lecturers' awareness and attitude towards students with vocational qualifications is an issue and even those who are sensitive find it challenging to integrate vocational experience into their teaching. In contrast Crozier et al (2009) conclude the impact lecturers have on controlling the HE environment and as such tight pedagogic framing enables students whereas 'weak framing' (relaxed attendance, flexibility in assignments and online distance focus) served not to liberate but confuse students providing a further barrier.

A recent government report indicated a full-time, first-degree student is much more likely to continue their studies into a second year than a similar part-time student, the latter as an indicator of a 'non-traditional' student (NAO 2007). Furthermore, a full-time student with three A levels at grade A is much more likely to continue than a similar student with two A levels at grade D which has implications for resources and support mechanisms as well as entry routes (and success). Chowdry et al (2008) present a powerful argument from analysis of linked administrative data that prior educational achievement is a key factor in succeeding in HE. Thus prior educational attainment is

an issue and as Gorard (2008) points out poor school attainment is evidenced in lower socio-economic groups which has wider implications for exclusion from HE or attainment whilst in HE. This supports the conclusions of Bekhradnia and Aston's (2005) study on student completion attributing open student access to low motivation and a consequence was a low achievement expectation. This may be further complicated by what Simpson (2010) terms 'dropout disempowerment' - the feeling that dropout is a fact of life and unchangeable mitigated by attitudes of staff and the organisation.

Professional standards and PSRB requirements can also be a barrier. It is acknowledged that this may impede disabled students under the 'fitness to practice' standards. This then accounts for the under representation of disabled students from courses where this standard applies such as social work, nursing and teaching (Hockings, 2010). This is not a core consideration in my own research (lecturers and teaching) but it is an issue especially of disclosure and the implications for students and lecturers in making reasonable adjustments. It is also clear that 'disability' is a broad term and can take a number of forms. Fuller (2008: 2) points out:

> *'It is invidious to treat disabled students as a separate category. They fall along a continuum of learner differences and share challenges and difficulties with other higher education students. Sometimes the barriers are more severe for them, but sometimes they are not. Two students with the same disability may have widely different experiences.'*

This has implications for inclusive learning environments. Finally there is a plethora of research on identity in HE which asserts the difference in social and cultural capital between students from differing socio-economic or ethnic groups in HE positioning this as a barrier (Archer et al, 2003, Reay et al, 2010). This also further highlights issues of 'deficits' (socially, financially etc) in preparedness or expectations of HE.

b. <u>A 'deficit' view of non traditional students</u>.

WP discourse does appear to position students as 'subjects' of WP and whatever groups chosen are framed as disadvantaged and having 'potential' (Burke, 2009). Government HE access agenda appears underpinned by a double deficit model positioning students as lacking aspiration, motivation, poor qualifications and entry criteria and also poor preparation for HE (Thomas, 2006, Medway et al 2003). Thomas (2002: 424) found that there was a temptation to link greater participation in HE with declining input standards, '*to blame students ...for lacking academic ability*'. This

results in a 'problem' which lies with the individual that is to be solved diverting attention from structural and institutional factors that constrain success. It has been identified that approaches to non-traditional students is costly: one study has claimed that the additional cost of support for recruitment, retention and progression for the average WP student amounted to as much as 35 per cent (Boxall et al, 2002).   This is further compounded by focus on remedial measures to rectify presumed deficiencies (Griffen, 2006). This includes skills deficits identified in the Dearing review of HE (NCIHE, 1997). Addressing basic skills such as numeracy, information technology and literacy has been enforced in HE however this has lead to 'skills fatigue' with repetition in secondary further and higher education. This has lead to a resistance from students to key skills and diverts attention from core fundamental knowledge which further illustrates scepticism of the ability of students in study skills but also their knowledge base. Within Middlesex (Level one transferable skills (LOTS) modules), and anecdotally not well received by students. Preece and Godfrey (2004) purport that such interventions are proactive and thus not only beneficial for all but more over especially for those who perhaps are too intimidated to ask or seek support such as WP groups and yet the perception by students and some lecturers is, anecdotally, less than positive. Cullingford (1991 cited in Thomas, 2006) notes positions and powers which students will have been familiar with in school education. Schools are sites of teachers with the pupils as guests passing through. Furthermore, universities can be perceived as similar thus reinforcing the notion of 'difference', position and power. The theoretical construct of Bourdieus' 'cultural capital' and associated term 'habitus' has been used by researchers such as Thomas (2002), Archer (2003) and Hart (2008) to explain how lower social groups may place students at a disadvantage during HE. Bourdieu (1977) used the former term to represent a collection of non-economic forces which influence academic success. These include family background, social class, commitment to education etc. Glanville et al (2007: 2) explain the term 'habitus' as:

> '*socially acquired, embodied systems of dispositions and/or pre-dispositions, the combination in each person of their biography, identity, lifestyle, personality cultural backgrounds, beliefs and values.*'

It could be argued then that students find the prevailing habitus of HE the opposite to their own and as such themselves. Thomas (2002) proposes the notion of an 'institutional habitus' which influences student success and progression. This is theoretical and intangible and whilst it has strength in its explanatory power it is difficult to describe and translate into practice.

Students are increasingly diverse however the prevailing perception of difference is 'weakness' (Watson, 2006b). If the problem is constructed in lack or deficit then Thomas (2001, 2006) argues a compensatory approach is unlikely to engage students and thus will not create a diverse and inclusive HE sector. Reay (2001) further argues that a non traditional student's learner identity tends to be fragile especially given the way they are positioned within the wider discourses of the higher education institution. Arguably, the 'non traditional student' is needed within higher education to meet the government's WP targets, yet perhaps not valued or integrated effectively (Ertl et al, 2009). This may be through overt or covert exclusionary practice or attitudes of the institution or staff (Hockings et al 2008). This does beg the question of whether the current changes within Middlesex are compensatory or a fundamental cultural shift and how they have engaged students. Though this is not the central investigation in this project it does link to the lecturers' position and perception of WP and their own role.

From a personal perspective, I do question whether my own prior experiences of being a mature student and my experience of HE (whilst a Polytechnic) is a significant factor in how I perceive students and how I approach teaching. In my own WP role encouraging colleagues to engage in WP outreach (career aspiration) activities I have noticed a difference in their attitude towards diverse undergraduate students. I believe the wider experiences create an insight and appreciation of student diversity which impacts on their teaching approach. The question is how does it impact on practice and is it an example of 'good' practice and how best this can be captured and disseminated.

Learning and Teaching and WP

The literature on the determinants of success in HE is more limited (Layer, 2005, Thomas, 2006, Watson, 2006a). Institutional responses to widening participation rates have varied (Layer, 2005). In a simplistic interpretation it is suggested that many of the Russell group and the research intensive elite '1994' group universities have comparatively low numbers of so called 'widening participation' groups defined by ethnicity, socio-economic groups, mature students etc. However they do have excellent retention and success rates (Sheeran et al, 2007). The WP effort is concentrated into a few aspects – civic commitment, compact agreements, bursaries for the fewer numbers which will apply and the provision of internal schemes and activities to support these low numbers. Layer (2005) cautions that this view is not so straightforward and that these organisations are not homogeneous nor do they reflect

the varied range of activities and approaches within. On the other hand the post 1992 universities appear to have a more mixed response and are more commonly associated as destinations for WP students (Ertl, 2008). Middlesex is a 'recruiting' university and in some subject areas does rely on the clearing period for student numbers. In HSSc programmes such as nursing select by interview and qualifications or ability. There are bursaries or scholarships, e.g. Nursing, Sport, thus overall students entering health programmes vary and this has implications for preparing students, orientation to university life and managing expectations. Interestingly whilst post 1992 institutions are criticised for poorer retention rates the groups which are quoted as being subject to this are not the lower socio-economic groups (NAO, 2007).

Thomas (2006) argues that teaching in higher education is likely to be more effective if it emphasises the positives rather than the 'deficits' among the skills possessed by non-traditional students and, at least in part, adapts to the needs and aspirations of students rather than always expecting the students to do all the adapting. The prevailing stereotype of those students who have been brought into HE as the result of efforts at WP is that they are more demanding, less likely to complete and generally less academically able than the more traditional entrants (Haggis, 2006). This perception of WP students will inevitably impact on teaching practices and student experiences and as such will be explored in this study.

A number of authors (Warren, 2003; Powney, 2002) argue that diversifying the student body and widening participation can result in innovations in forms of teaching, learning and assessment which improve teaching and learning outcomes for all students. However, this is an enormously complex and contentious area that, as yet, lacks a sufficiently robust evidence base from which to come to any firm conclusions (Gorard et al, 2006).

Trowler (1995) and others have indicated that the general response of academics to the 'New Higher Education' and the Widening Participation agenda is mixed and often ambivalent. In part this is due to a perceived, usually real, overload on staff arising from the demands of teaching more students and undertaking more research within an 'audit culture' in a less well-funded system. For some, the perception of a decline in student quality and motivation can lead to low morale and result in a good deal of negativity, in which responding to WP is rejected or is seen as an additional burden (Ramsden, 2008). Another response can be to accept that WP is in principle a good thing, but is in need of better funding or targeting prior to university rather than at university (Watson,

2006a; Baty, 2008). Staff morale and funding are key to quality experience, as a negative mind set from low morale will detract from the student experience of HE. WP does attract government funding directed towards resources to support students in a 'deficit' manner however funding it will not impact on staff attitude nor contribute to staff development which is also a point for consideration. In arguing for institutions to position WP 'as a business case' Shaw et al (2007) report that lecturers perceived WP as 'extra work' and there was not enough recognition of this. However the 'extra work' did not address pedagogy more the curriculum design.

An increasingly diverse student body has implications for the provision of learner support. Consequently, most institutions seeking to meet the associated challenges do this by increasing investment in learning resources and providing higher levels of academic and personal support. The QAA (2006) institutional WP audit reports provide several examples where initiatives which were originally developed to support and enhance the learning experience of students recruited through widening participation and have since been made available to all students. Hence in some cases the formation of student retention groups or task forces has had effects reaching beyond 'non-traditional' students to all undergraduates. Some institutions have developed e-learning or technology based tools to address the learning needs of large numbers of diverse students even relying on virtual learning environments (VLEs) and other technologies (web 2.0 based platforms e.g. wikis or mobile devices). This has the advantage of 'delivering' the curriculum and supporting learning and is flexible to those students unable to attend or who wish to learn 'on-the-go' (Taylor, 2008). However there is evidence that it is tempered with isolation and alienation (Crozier et al, 2009).

In relation to disabled students, e-technology and the availability of modified devices or downloadable applications can transform accessibility to the teaching and the curriculum (Gkatzidou and Pearson, 2009). Sims et al (2005) analysed several HE institutions as 'case studies' for use of VLE concluded that there were examples of wide use of e-technology and VLEs with many students possessing laptop computers or other portable devices. Whilst these enhance and enrich the curricula and can be inclusive to they also create a digital divide especially in assuming access to computers, portable mobile devices, broadband or even the technological skill to navigate these systems. In this research students' perceptions were not sought on this thus weakening the conclusions. It does raise the question of assumptions made by HEIs and lecturers about the lives, abilities and accessibility of a diverse student body. In their study of FE colleges, Corfield and Pearson (2007) found that it was the

academic staff not students who had deficiencies in relation to learning technologies with basic functions such as attaching documents to e-mails or creating or inserting images on slides on powerpoint. This is relevant to the VLE expansion within Middlesex and whether this contributed to WP specifically, is used by staff or is perceived as effective by staff.

Bekhradnia & Aston (2005) have shown that the differences in completion rates between institutions are not necessarily simply explained in terms of differences in intake. They found that the University of North London (UNL) had a significantly higher drop-out rate for first year students than the otherwise very similar London Guildhall University (LGU) with whom they merged. Interestingly despite their different provenance the student characteristics (A level etc qualifications) were similar and yet the year 1 non completion was higher in UNL than in years 2 and 3. They speculated over the factors but overall they were left to conclude that:

> '*it was probably not differences in the characteristics of the two student bodies that gave rise to the different rates of drop-out, and this suggests that it was something about the way the two universities were organised or about their culture and direction that was the cause*' (Bekhradnia & Aston, 2005: 6)'.

This implies the culture impacted on the sense of 'inclusion'. The impact of the consequent merger and culture change on student retention is not yet clear. However what is clear are the key vulnerable points, the impact of organisation culture, structures and engendering student motivation and commitment. Interestingly pedagogical issues were not explored in this study but one of the conclusions indicates a (tentative) link between department structure, impact on course delivery and thus pedagogical approaches. Thus the micro-level of practice or pedagogical approach is reflective of department culture. This could be inferred as related to cultural habitus and the social and academic integration, mentioned before, experienced at the micro-level of practice. The perceptions of WP and practice of lecturers therefore could be seen as influences by organisation cultural and social capital.

Much of this literature on WP and student retention suggests that there is a wide range of interacting personal and social attributes, as well as institutional practices, which impact on both retention rates and performance (Archer et al, 2003; Hart, 2008; Hockings et al, 2008). Students apparently have complex lives and their experience at university is compounded by their own life commitments but also university factors

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which do include their interactions with lecturing staff and support staff. As a lecturer and also part of a learning development team I am concerned with learning experience of students, their retention in HE and appreciate their complex lives. Lecturers are one part of the HE experience and I am not clear if lecturers appreciate this information, or the complexity of their students' lives, and perceive students complexities as difficulties or lack of ability or disinterest which may be more prevalent if the students are non-traditional and thus not familiar with the HE environment.

Mass HE has been associated with increases in student withdrawal, although as was noted earlier, there is not a clear correlation between *wider* participation and early withdrawal in the UK in recent years. There is however a tendency to attribute lower levels of completion to greater student diversity and a lack of `academic preparedness' of these new student groups (Scott, 2008; Daly et al, 2010). In this study `academic preparedness' is an issue and is interpreted as the extent to which students feel they are ready to study at HE level, and the ways in which the institution provides academic support if it is needed. Thus student perceptions of these are important and giving a voice to their experiences and any support. In addition to the academic preparedness of students (i.e. input quality of students) a second, related issue is the `academic experience'. This embraces curricula, teaching and learning issues, accessibility of and relationships with staff, flexibility (e.g. timetable and deadlines) and both modes of assessment and opportunities for re-taking courses. Traditional course or module evaluations do not always provide this information and from my own experience students prefer to use their own 'words' when feeding back opinions. I believe that asking diverse groups of students to reflect back on their support and 'learning journey' will give a broader view of their experiences and the university interventions to support them whilst studying. Thomas (2006) and Kernan and Lerner (2006) assert that students prioritise relational and pedagogical issues over perceived additional or 'remedial' measures such as skills modules. Furthermore the student voice is paramount in informing policy and practice and has to date been given limited importance.

Reay et al. (2001) usefully identifies influential aspects on students' perceptions and experience of HE. These include staff attitudes and relationships with students, which minimize the social and academic distance between them, and enable students to feel valued and sufficiently confident to seek guidance when they require it. In addition inclusive teaching and learning strategies which do not assume that the habitus

of `traditional' HE students should be the habitus of new cohorts. Included in this is an awareness of previous educational experiences, language, socially-orientated teaching and learning. Reay et al (2001) also assert that a range of assessment practices flexible enough to give all students the opportunities to succeed with opportunities for reassessment are needed. If students feel that staff believe in them, and care about the outcomes of their studying, they seem to gain both self-confidence and motivation, and their work improves (Thomas *et al*. 2001). This does underpin my investigation into the perceptions of lecturing staff as their attitude towards WP and WP students will inevitably impact on their pedagogical approaches.

Students who have regular and meaningful contact with tutors, inside and outside the classroom, have improved experiences and outcomes (Zepke and Leach, 2005). Furthermore they also suggest that having student-oriented teachers has a big impact on academic success. Thomas (2006) highlights the differing perceptions and priorities which exist between students and staff albeit at one university. She points out that staff are more likely to draw on a deficit model of new student cohorts which positions students as lacking and in need of change to fit into and succeed in a largely unchanged higher education system. This is clearly a stark contrast to the altruistic transformative view of WP. I do intend to explore the espoused practices of lecturers in association with their perception of WP and these issues mentioned provide a complex view of WP which the analysis of the data may reveal. The data is likely to be discursive through interviews or focus groups or perhaps questionnaires though to fully explore lecturers perception they do need to use their own words and reflect on their own experiences and positions thus lending itself to interview process.

In looking at the position of students and the nature of power and disempowering, it is worth noting Freire's seminal work on critical pedagogy (1977). In this he criticises traditional education and the way it positions learners as accepting and passive and 'oppressed'. He views education as an opportunity for 'empowerment', and the progressive educator as one who "*unveils hope"* (Friere, 1992: 3). There are then links between what Thomas (2001: 32) calls "*knowing, learning and action*". Crucially,

> "*Freire sees the primary function of education and educative processes to be the dynamic development of critical consciousness, which involves critical thought and action*" (Thomas, 2001: 32).

Therefore, Freire (1977, 1992) sees learning as a reflexive and critical endeavour, and if these tools are developed, they operate as a means to challenge disempowering political practices. This view is key to transformation particularly for potentially

oppressed diverse students. Even if the oppression is unintentional it is a useful frame to consider our own pedagogical approach. If one accepts this then the notion of traditional pedagogies is severely challenged.

Bourdieu's (1990) work and that of Tinto (1987) have influenced the most recent wave of research into widening participation in the UK. Thomas (2006) and Reay (1998) have both written extensively in this area, and both are advocates of Bourdieu's theories in relation to higher education. Thomas (2002) adapted the notion of social and cultural capital to include an idea of *institutional capital* relating to the secondary school of origin of students and the habitus indoctrinated in the students, alongside that which they receive from family background. Habitus as a concept is understood as 'worlds' within 'worlds' comprising a variety of elements common to the 'worlds': social values, history, identity, lifestyle, personality, class, cultural background, and beliefs, attitudes and values, in short, a series of dispositions. Thomas (2002) argues that there is such a thing as '*institutional habitus'* and that although the dominant culture of HE favours the more privileged, in some universities it may actually benefit WP students meeting their needs and resulting in their high retention and success rates. However, according to Archer et al. (2003), those who did make it to university were apparently conscious of taking a number of risks, both financial (time spent not earning, or not earning as much as they might, to set against the possibility of higher earnings in the future and the certainty of increased debt) and social (the threat to their class identity following alienation from their families and friends). For students from low-income families it is argued that all this is exacerbated by their greater aversion to debt (Callender, 2003; Christie and Munro, 2003).

Institutional habitus therefore could be understood as more than the culture of the educational institution; it refers to relational issues and priorities, which are deeply embedded and sub-consciously informing practice (Thomas, 2006). This is possible as educational institutions are able to determine what values, language and knowledge are regarded as legitimate, and therefore confer award qualifications (and success) this basis. It could be argued then that this unconsciously is enacted in exclusionary practices. Thomas (2001) argues that that pedagogy is not simply an approach to teaching, so much as an tool to manipulate socialisation and maintain societal status quo.

Tinto's (1987) work on retention and attrition provides a platform to explore student retention and understand the underpinning issues for students and particularly WP

students. Retention may be an issue for diverse (or WP) students considering the discussion of 'habitus' above. Therefore any resulting changes in non progression could be an indicator of WP success. Tinto (1987) interestingly has parallels with Bourdieu in that he related student retention at university to the ability of the university to position itself as a new social group and adopt practices which integrate new students into its community. The implication is that the quality of social and academic integration into the university community experienced will influence students to stay or to leave, thus welfare and society acceptance are core to integration. This is a key factor which is identified widely in the literature on retention (Braxton and Hirschey, 2004). Yorke and Longen (2004) argue that this is far more complex and exclude factors such as economics which are equally as pressing in decisions to stay as well as an increasing sense of 'depersonalisation' (Whittaker, 2008).

Archer et al (2003) reinforce that if a student feels that they do not fit in, that their social and cultural practices are inappropriate and they are undervalued they may be more inclined to drop out. This work, and more locally the work on the first year experience in relation to transition and retention mentioned in chapter 1 (ISLER), has driven many of the initiatives within Middlesex. These include improved induction experiences, bridging materials for supporting students prior to university and the periodic reviews (week 4 and week 10 etc) within the first year and overall curriculum changes (learning framework). These are all valuable and diverse changes to the education and HE experience for students and address a wide range of student needs. With so many interventions it is unclear which students they apply to, and how effective they are, implying a 'catch-all' approach. I believe the issue of WP and diversity, as a distinct entity, is not addressed but rather subsumed by such broad changes. Furthermore, lecturers' (and other staff) perceptions of WP may also be assumed and subsumed into such changes. Considering the notion of habitus and cultural and social upheavals incumbent on becoming a student, these are addressed to a point but perhaps not far enough if attitudes and perceptions of WP at the micro level of practice is not explored ad challenged or even changed.

These selected theoretical underpinnings and research provide a framework from which I will interpret my observations and data on Middlesex practice and make comparisons within the context of wider recent research. These and other theories currently being used to explain non-traditional student experiences may also provide a framework to develop practice, or to determine best practice. Investigating and seeking better ways to enhance the student experience is fundamental to this project.

Undertaking this project also allows me to examine the dominant discourses of current policy makers and how these are reflected within my own institution.

Role of Universities.

A shift in the perceived purposes of HEIs has accompanied its massification. In both the USA and UK there has been an increasing emphasis in government policy and rhetoric on the vocational functions of HE, in terms both of its role in supplying qualified students for the professions, industry and commerce and in terms of its research function. This has meant the de-emphasizing of its other roles, those concerned with the general development of individuals' minds and capabilities, contributing culturally to the community and enhancing knowledge and understanding for their own sakes rather than for utilitarian ends. This perceived shift in the HE curriculum towards operational competence as opposed to academic competence highlights fundamentally the question of who defines what counts as useful knowledge and whose discourses achieve dominance. Private industry has been gaining the advantage over universities in technological development and exploitation, not only because of its ability to invest but because it is not restrained by 'mode 1' (technical rationale) knowledge. Increasingly science involves 'mode 2' or tacit trans-disciplinary, problem oriented knowledge. Projects such as this contribute to this mode 2 knowledge and unpick the tacit knowledge of professional practice to codify it for shared practice. The strength of work-based learning in developing such knowledge sources is evidenced in centres dedicated to this transformative form of practice and knowledge development, such as in Middlesex (Centre of Excellence Work Based Learning). In addition Duke (2005) maintains that transformative change will be generated from outside the universities rather than within and that moreover universities are resistant to change.

In an era of 'social demand' for education, as well as an economic demand, successive generations of 'new students' will in many cases have new needs, as will the economy and society. Ramsden (2008) argues that students' expectations of HE have not undergone major changes in the last decade or so despite massification and societal change. Differentials between institutions and between subjects certainly exist. Some of these have more to do with the persistent legacies of 'cultural capital'.   Shaw et al (2007) argue that 'older, more traditional' institutions had a different concept of knowledge than those of 'newer' institutions. It was suggested that the newer institutions such as post 1992 (like Middlesex), especially those running vocational and professional HE courses, were underpinned by an epistemology that admitted different

forms of knowledge such as life and professional experience to exist as equals with a traditionally academic view of knowledge. The 'traditional' universities were developed in a bygone era to satisfy the needs of that time. It could be argued that in this change lecturers are struggling with their own role, work conception which impacts on their identity.

My role as worker/researcher.

This critical report of research into one institution lecturers' perceptions of WP and teaching and learning was undertaken was written by me as an individual researcher-worker. However the learning development team under which the organisational role lies supported this. Having been involved in several aspects of WP and from my own education journey it needs to be acknowledged that I am biased towards its ideals and this will be evident as the research process unfolded. I am conscious that the inquiry process, and any proposed changes are likely to be resisted by some colleagues. As an 'insider researcher' and working within a learning development team I am well placed to access support and 'expert opinion' for addressing any individuals who may act as 'resistors' to developments. I have positioned myself in many working groups within the School so that my influence can extend to peers and colleagues in teaching roles (and support roles). Also as part of Validations and Approvals (V&A) committee and the School Progression and Retention committee, I can influence programme and organisational processes and evaluations to include issues arising from my WP research and any significant issues. It must be acknowledged whilst I do not manage 'people' I have taken the lead in developments and carry the authority and support from senior colleagues in the School and the University in general to carry out my role. The main influence in this project will be practice development yet I am also mindful that this can be a significant driver for collaboration in participative action research (Greenbank, 2004) which appeals as a research process. As such the impacts and changes must be reported with accountability to the main stakeholders: colleagues and quality guardians (management team including Head of Teaching and Learning and the Director of Learning, Curriculum and Quality).

Conclusion.

The literature discussed within this chapter has considered the issues surrounding WP and the main debates within it at national but also at local HEI level. It is evident that there is substantial research on WP though most of this does focus on outreach or

aspiration raising aspects, benchmarking of target groups entering university and only fairly recently with students experiences and teaching and learning in HE. The prevailing conceptualisation of WP is one of challenges, barriers, gender, ethnic and socio-economic or disability group representation and completion. There is a growing body of evidence focussing on student experience of HE, retention and progression and ultimately, one surmises, employability and destinations after HE. The prevailing perception appears to be one of problems and deficits located more often within students and the extent to which HEIs are sensitive or moveable in terms of traditions, culture and integrative. The pedagogical beliefs and approaches by lecturers are influential in the experience of all students but moreover the diverse students who start off with a deficit label. The project aims and objectives are identified and supported with a summary of issues emergent from the literature.

Chapter 3:   **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In chapter 2 the rationale for this project was outlined with the research question alongside the aims and objectives. The overarching research question concerns identification and elucidation of the discourses around WP including teaching and learning, pedagogies and associated practices within Middlesex. The specific research question which emerges is: to what extent is the School of HSSc adopting a culture of WP and how is this translated in action and provision? In this chapter I will focus on the ontological and epistemological rationale for choosing a flexible and interpretative research approach. This approach will revolve around emancipatory research. It is recognised that this has multiple meanings. The specific epistemology which was selected for this project will be explored and presented including the philosophical and pragmatic issues of research processes: reliability, validity and ethical approval processes. The potential issues and dilemmas due to the role of worker and researcher will also be presented and discussed. Furthermore, the issue of external (and internal) forces which impact on the research processes will be presented and analysed with a view to subsequent insights and appropriate adjustments.

Research Approach.

Researching the 'natural world' is fraught with difficulties (Robson, 2002. McNiff, 2002) that is: it is complex, relatively poorly controlled and messy. Workbased research is equally as fraught (Costley et al 2010). As a consequence there is no single right method or strategy which addresses this research. In essence the selection of any one of a range of strategies under a particular paradigm will each hold its own specific advantages and disadvantages. There are many ways of looking at social reality and practice reality, each compounded by construction of correspondingly different ways of interpreting it (Cohen et al, 2000; Costley et al , 2010). Denscombe (2002) advocates careful selection of strategies and approaches appropriate for the specific aspects of investigation and to specific research questions, though not necessarily to fit specific paradigms. This research is based in practice (or work) and as such requires an approach which emerges from the worker-researcher's position, practice setting and professional and institutional context and aims (Costley et al 2010). Thus it is necessary to abandon data sources which are solely qualitative and quantitative data but a combination of both which makes use of the most valuable features of each and addresses the research aims (McKenzie and Knipe, 2006).

The approaches to the 'real world' align to subjective and objective views (or antipositivism and positivism) and have led to differences in approaches and beliefs of the nature of knowledge and truth. The paradigms position informs many elements of the research process and one could argue conflicting views or divergence of a phenomena. In social research the drive to understand or transform (and emancipate) has led to more participatory approaches which have been arguably criticised as not being research per se but a form of evaluation or change management (Creswell, 2009). Todhunter (2001) also asserts that interactive social research maybe regarded as pragmatic, utilitarian or a 'user –oriented' approach to research which is democratic and a powerful force for social change. Research approaches such as action research, participatory research and collaborative research all fall under the under a participative and emancipatory paradigm. Whilst appearing qualitative, these participatory approaches have at heart a value base committed to change in a convergent manner achieved through adopting a range of strategies (Greenbank, 2004). This is appropriate for work or practice research. The ontological distinction between qualitative and quantitative research is well documented. Denscombe (2002) identifies each has historically been associated with certain disciplines i.e. positivist research approaches with hard science disciplines with some areas particularly successful at providing explanation of how the world works (ibid: 6) also highlighting significant boundaries and limitations (p. 16). Lincoln and Guba (2000) argue that inquiry paradigms may be viewed as sets of basic beliefs about the nature of reality and how it may be known. They identify positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructivism as the major paradigms that frame research. Heron and Reason (1997) add another paradigm 'Participatory' and a further defining category 'Axiology' to define what is intrinsically valuable in human life, in particular, what sort of knowledge, is intrinsically valuable. Disciplines focussing on one approach and its requisite methodologies polarise knowledge and practice sometimes to the detriment of addressing the issues falling under the other paradigm (Denscombe 2002). Bryman (2008) asserts that many of the paradigm differences (and hence strategies for research) are held in the minds of theorists and philosophers rather than the practise of researcher (or practitioner). Costley et al (2010) assert that division of paradigms is rather crude and that paradigms do not have to be completely exclusive and may possibly cut across more than one still providing a coherent world view. Evidence is relevant and is not necessarily 'owned' by or representative of any one paradigm and may be described as a 'false dualism' (Gorard, 2001) (ibid: 6). This may obfuscate issues of 'real world' (or in this instance HE) relevance by poor quality research (made to fit a specific paradigm or method) or an artificial attempt to categorise it to fit skills or

abilities of the researcher. Worse would be use of differing standards of rigour appropriate to one method and compromising value and truth.

I considered a wide variety of approaches to research practice (and my workplace) with the view of making a difference, i.e. capturing and improving or transforming practice. This is where I stand ideologically. Ideally participatory research approaches appealed, having the benefit of a broad methodological approach which could vary depending on the ontological perspective and epistemological needs. Interactive or transformative researchers 'believe *that inquiry needs to be intertwined with politics and a political agenda'* (Creswell, 2009, p.9) and contain an action agenda for reform with a variety of approaches that will impact widely i.e. on participants, the institutions in which individuals work or live, and the researcher (Creswell, 2009). Humphries et al (2000) argue that that there are several methodologies which could fall under an 'emancipatory' research paradigm and that indeed such a paradigm is necessary when focussing on marginalised groups. These methodologies are drawn from a number of traditions and provide a complex picture of knowledge bases and theoretical influences such as humanistic psychology, critical theory, feminism and post structuralism (Humphries et al 2000: 4). Some of these influences (Friere etc) were discussed in chapter 2. Here, it is argued that a broad emancipatory paradigm is required drawing on elements of a number of 'emancipatory' approaches leaning towards a critical theoretical stance. From my own personal ontology I am intent on considering individual experience, collective (student and institution) experiences for understanding but also incorporate a reflective approach and impact on practice (teaching). It is not intended to identify a clear 'oppressor' or 'oppressed' group but an understanding and 'emancipation' through 'enlightenment' moving towards a change in practice. This points to a mixture of data collection techniques generating measurable quantitative data and qualitative 'personal perspective' narrative data. The main research question guides this and inevitably was modified a little in the research process. Having identified the 'ideal' and my epistemological position I then explored a series of methods appropriate to my research question aiming to provide a coherent approach. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) argue for the benefits of mixed methods pluralism (see figure 3.1) and indicate that a research paradigm ought not to dictate or be constrained by a specific method or rather be lead by the research question. This is also a key consideration in workbased research (Costley et al 2010) and educational research and considered relevant to this research project.

The purpose of this research project is to explore the awareness and extent to which the School of Health and Social Sciences (HSSc) adopts a culture of WP and how this

is translated in action and provision. This project aims to contribute to the understanding and development of widening participation within HSSc and also to contribute to teaching and learning discourse across the HE sector. The core question focuses on practice and WP as it influences practice and is meant to be local and meaningful to practitioners in HSSc and Middlesex. Thus it is hoped by enquiring into beliefs and perceptions of WP in relation to practice this will evoke a critical self reflection in myself and my colleagues, which will also uncover examples of good practice and contribute to a development or 'transformation' ultimately improving the student experience. The research question ideally lends itself to a participatory approach and reflection on practice, by lecturers. Practice and its application: praxis is a complex concept. The increasing complexity of the teaching profession calls for engaged professionals to interrogate practice and professional development. It is with this premise in mind that a participative critically reflective approach seemed appropriate. Additionally, due to the rapidity of changes locally (and nationally) an eclectic mixed flexible method would adapt whilst still remaining under a 'transformative' epistemology.

Figure 3.1 Ontological and Epistemological approach and consequent methodology and methods.

| Issue: Perception of widening participation (WP) in HSSc, impact on teaching and is WP embedded in practice? Research work to improve work. | Paradigm position (presumption) Knowledge as power, Emancipation, Critical theory and reflection, Diversity and individuality |

Methodology:
Mixed methods (embedded approaches).
Qualitative approaches: narratives, experiences, opinions
Quantitative approaches: Demographics, experiences,

Application of methods:
Qualitative: Interviews, focus groups
Quantitative: Questionnaire, numerical data (ethnicity etc),

Rationale for research approach.

As indicated in Chapter 2, this research is grounded in work (practice) and aims to engage lecturing colleagues in HSSc and across the University in a wide and evolving dialogue as to what WP is and how it impacts on our practice as lecturers. In framing this project, 'praxis' is understood in the Aristotelian sense of reframing personal and institutional 'mind sets' and in creating new and relevant knowledge out of experience. This is intended with collegial participants engaging in the critical reflexive process. The associated contributors or 'collaborators' are practitioners and as such this will be a social process which is interactive and developmental (Kemmis and Mc Taggart, 2000). In researching practice it was necessary to select a methodology which involves people to understand them, their beliefs and perceptions and emerged form my own personal (and organisational) values and beliefs. Thus methodologies which enable 'transformation' (as in Meizerow's, 2003) epistemology of transformative learning) are necessary.

This research concerns my own professional teaching practice and practice in general within the institution. If WP is a key issue for HEIs and the government then the experience at university of 'WP students' is important and key to that are their learning experiences. With this in mind, my own history of engagement with WP and how it impacted on my own practice I drive this research project forward. If practice can be improved then it must be. Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) maintain that practice is a poorly understood term. This may stem from researchers focusing on practice from different intellectual traditions and fragmented elements incoherently resulting in confusion. They offer a differentiation of five elements to practice which are worth considering:

- Individual performances - viewed as an objective perspective from an outsider
- Wider social and material conditions and interactions - viewed from external perspective of an outsider (social interactions)
- Intentions, meanings and values of practice - viewed from the subjective insider perspective of individual practitioners
- Language, discourses and traditions of practice from the subjective internal social perspectives of practitioners or discourse communities
- Change and evolution of practice accommodating all four types mentioned understood as reflexively structured and transformed over time (historical)

This is expansive and this research will address the third and forth elements ideally leading to the fifth. As such engaging with changing practice and specific elements of it must involve practitioners. As mentioned earlier a participative approach is eminently suitable but not appropriate in the prevailing climate of continuous change. Emancipatory paradigms require some sort of participative methodology and exploration to acquire a range of 'knowing' i.e. propositional knowing, practical knowing, experiential knowing, and thence action for change (Humphries et al 2000). Mixed methods approach was selected to provide address the research question and provide breadth of exploration leading to '*more complete and full portraits of our social world through the use of multiple perspectives and lenses'* (Somekh and Lewin, 2005, p.275). This would also provide an understanding of diversity, values and positions. This would then enable the aim of exploring lecturers' perceptions and practices, challenging conventional notions of WP, exploring WP within the organisation and the relationship with pedagogical practices.

Change is however inevitable in social situations, the problem therefore is understanding the extent to which we have any control over its nature or have a sense of 'agency' or capacity to transform social practices (Somekh, 2006). The question which emerges is what constitutes an intervention for 'change'. For some this is pragmatic for others it can be the process of asking the questions or generating data that is the 'change' (Creswell, 2009) as is the intention here.

Epistemology and Ontology Considerations.

My own epistemological position directed this research to explore practice, tacit knowledge and assumptions and consequently transformation. Meizerow's (2003) epistemology of transformative learning or 'subjective reframing' occurs through awareness of tacit assumptions. I aimed to use interactions between myself as researcher and my colleagues (and students) as participants to create personal and peer knowledge. Through dialogue I aimed to enable critical reflection with (potentially) transformation of practice or receptiveness to alternative approaches and practices. I intended to maximise the opportunity to utilise some quantitative data already in existence within the organisation but also create new data and understandings qualitatively for a holistic view. This is a reflection of my own epistemological stance which must be acknowledged. My personal commitment is to diversity and widening participation and teaching to enable learning in an inclusive way for the potential both scholarly and personally of all individuals. Thus my personal values and belief lie in the development of practice in an environment of diversity and widening participation.

In focussing on WP as a social concept, the perception of that and the issues in practice, then knowledge for practice and the power to influence own and others' practice is construed as empowerment. Bearing this in mind then specific research methodologies take second place to the emergent processes of collaboration and dialogue which empower, motivate, increase self esteem, and develop community solidarity. The urgent sense with considering this project is the co-operation and participative approach and how to frame this. Initially a participative approach such as action research (AR) was considered eminently useful for this project. Critical action research is a self-reflexive investigation, enhancing understanding and transforming and improving practice with dual outcomes of action (in the form of transformation or improvement) and research (in the form of learning and understanding) (Dick, 2000). The social construct of WP and the research question could transect a number of AR methods in existence. However, there were a number of limitations to this project which meant that AR was not practicable and the research question and practice element required a more 'fluid' approach. It was accepted that epistemologically a transformative or emancipatory view was held and that this would provide the underpinning theory guiding a mixed methods methodology.

Operationalisation of the research project.

In this project an emancipatory 'paradigm' provides an *orientation* to inquiry, the methodology selected to enable this was mixed methods. The enquiry concerns practice and is set in the workplace and as such is grounded in individuals experience. The research questions, the nature of the enquiry and the prevailing changing climate within Middlesex, mean changes in practice were difficult to conceptualise and identify. The operationalisation or mechanism by which the data was collected combined elements of both qualitative and quantitative strategies (mixed methods) in a coherent way. It was believed appropriate to combine the approaches in an embedded manner, such as suggested by Creswell (2009) providing differing approaches to the research question with each strategy supportive of and connected to the issue hence relevant, coherent and providing the data desired. This will be explored in the next section.

This 'bringing together' of approaches considers three strategies of inquiry which are highly interdependent. Reason and McArdle (2004) assert that good research strives to stimulate inquiry at each of these levels and create connections between levels:

- First-person research practices address the ability of individual researchers to foster an inquiring approach to their own lives, to develop awareness and choice, and to observe and explore effects in the outside world while acting.
- Second-person research/practices such as co-operative inquiry address our ability to inquire face-to-face with others into issues of mutual concern in small groups to develop both understanding and practice in a matter of mutual concern.
- Third-person research/practice includes a range of practices which draw together the views of large groups of people and create a wider community of inquiry.

This research project focussing on WP touched on all three strategies mentioned. However, the emphasis intended was on the third person practice. In doing so it impacted on first person practice (i.e. myself) as a participant but also in my role as a lecturer and researcher. As a researcher I constituted an active 'subjective' element rather than an objective and distant part. This influenced the final conclusions (professional conclusions) however this was viewed as pertinent to practice development.

Concern may be expressed of the 'doing what works' notion which problematises translating any research which is 'transformative' into action. This means there is a risk that reflection, by being so focused on the specific situation, fails to consider the broader consequences of outcomes and process (Bridges, 2003). A further criticism is of tautology such that rather than enlightening and transforming there is describing and maintaining or reinforcing the current position without adding any new insights or awarenesses for practice. There is a danger that research does not consider more complex relationships and also that reflection fails to consider the meaning of what is happening:

> 'we need to apply a critical and reflexive gaze…. we cannot afford to let …. research become a taken for granted set of precepts and procedures' (Holloway and Wheeler 2010: 17)

This is an issue and I planned to build into the research process a critical external viewpoint, either by a senior colleague or by another colleague unassociated with the research process, to ensure that a key part is critical dialogue and critical reflection. This enabled me to stand outside the process and see the wider issues which emerged and impacted on the inquiry (i.e. WP and practice). This 'critical friend' maintained a neutral non-emotionally bound position (as I tend towards) within this process and challenged me to make sense of my interpretations and conclusions.

Methodological approach: multi-strategy (mixed methods).

The data collected from this project was derived from engagement with colleagues at a variety of levels. The planned methods fit the needs of the issue being researched and the purpose (i.e. practice). Coghlan and Brannick (2005) contend that acts which are intended to collect data are themselves interventions and this is explicitly what was intended here.   Thus asking the individual lecturers questions about the core concept of WP it not only collected data but generated data for both the researcher and the individual. This also contributed to the lack of neutrality. This was anticipated to 'empower' or effect change in practice through a process of questioning, enabling critical reflection on assumed knowledge or as Humphries (2002: 184) asserts enabling action through 'enlightenment' or awareness. Creswell et al identify that

> '*The commonality across transformative studies is ideological, such that no matter what the domain of inquiry, the ultimate goal of the study is to advocate for change'*
> (Creswell et al, 2003: 161).

 The practice consequences are difficult to anticipate and measure or determine but this research was aimed at contributing to the understanding of the core issues, to reflection on the situation and to impact on practice.   In devising the methodology the features of transformative approach identified by Kemmis and McTaggart (2000) were considered to provide a guiding framework. These included planning:

1.   A social process which deliberately explores the relationship between the individual and social interactions.
2.   A participatory process engaging people in examining their knowledge (understanding, skills and values) and interpretive categories.
3.   Practical and collaborative processes examining social practices and linking them with social interactions.
4.   Emancipatory exploration of the way practices are shaped and thus freeing them from constraints.
5.   Critical of ways of interpreting, describing worlds (discourses), ways of working and relating to others (work and power).
6.   Recursive (reflexive/dialectical).
7.   A transformation of both theory and practice through critical reasoning.

These features fit within a mixed methods approach utilising an orientation of transformation or advocacy. The final methodology embedded quantitative data collection methods into a core qualitative (discursive) approach or orientation. The

concern remained whether this ought to follow a sequential or concurrent format. A concurrent approach was preferred as the elements could be viewed as stages complementing each other and expanding the exploration and understanding of the core concept of WP. As such there was no value in doing the differing elements sequentially. This was also influenced by timing since the lecturers and students involved would not be followed longitudinally and if current perceptions and practice were to be explored this needed addressing in as short a time as practicable. The weighting of the quantitative and qualitative elements were considered relatively equal however it was envisaged the qualitative methods may overwhelm in the end. In many respects this design could be identified as providing a triangulated approach. However the aim was not to offset weaknesses inherent in one method and not to separate methods but converge and integrate in exploring the research question. The multiple methods do 'triangulate' to a point to provide strength in the breadth of the exploration as opposed just confirming and validating the findings which they also do. Furthermore utilising one strategy would polarise the concept whilst a broader approach would enhance the validity of the inquiry as well as gaining acceptability from a wider audience.

The embedded approach for mixed methods finally decided upon (figure 3.2) of embedded quantitative elements in an overall qualitative strategy (Creswell, 2009) provided a diverse perspective and a richness and depth to the data and give the diverse participants a 'voice' in the process.

Figure. 3.2 Concurrent design of embedded (nested) mixed method approach (qualitative and quantitative methods) based on Creswell et al, (2009)
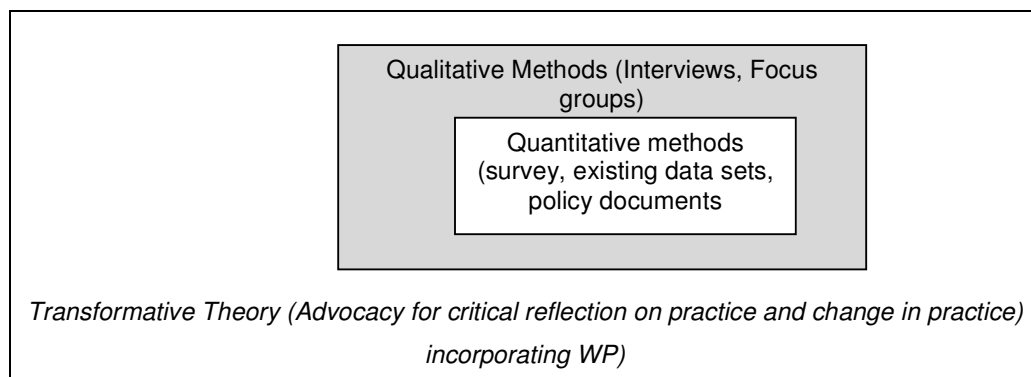
Before embarking on this research project, the appropriate methods, approaches and key components of the inquiry (WP) needed to be clarified. Consideration to identifying what constituted 'practice' was also necessary. This guided what data and evidence

were relevant in exploring perceptions and beliefs and in describing practice and analyses. These were relevant in interpreting and evaluating people's perceptions and how they impact on real practice. Some participatory approaches have cycles which of reflection and evaluation, there were none here but reflection and evaluation were built in as key processes. Inquiry ranged from individual lecturers and students to the whole organisation level. At each, the process, the data and the implications for practice were identified and are addressed in chapter 4.

Bounding the study.

This research project was conducted on the campus of Middlesex University, my own work organisation, a post 1992 HEI as mentioned before. The mission and vision of the university was set out in the introductory chapter and firmly recognises diversity as a central tenet in its role in serving the community. The key research participants were lecturers from across the school of Health and Social Sciences (HSSc) and also lecturers from other schools in the university. To provide breadth students' perceptions of teaching were also be included, these were from HSSc. Terms such as 'practice' and 'WP' appear frequently and consideration was given to these terms to provide grounding at the start of the research. These are not 'variables' as this is a mixed methods approach rather enable some contextualising of terms for exploration and interpretation.

1. Practice.

Wenger (1998) refers to practice in a number of ways and indicates that it cannot easily be defined but revolves around a 'sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise' (Wenger, 1998: 45). These are the property of a 'community' and evolve over time. This has implications for this research. It is accepted it comprises a series of elements and this ought to be implicit within the data collection tools. In short then practice is:

a. Contextualised and thus cannot be discussed independently of the settings in which it occurs (Schools, disciplines etc).
b. Necessarily embodied and involves whole persons including their motives, feelings and intentions (lecturers, previous experiences, values).
c. Co-constructed that is, it occurs in relation to others and their views of practice construct it (Boud, 2000) (i.e. peers, departments, teams, professions or disciplines)

2. <u>WP.</u>

Watson (2006a) identifies this as a portmanteau term. The definition in literature is vague and is different according to differing proponents of it (Thomas, 2006). The term was explored retaining cognisance of the synonyms used for WP: diversity, inclusion, exclusion, social manipulation. This research then tried to discern the differing understandings of WP and its influence on practice to give new insights into the concept and as such was not defined at this stage. Gaventa and Cornwall (2006) contend that new insights, priorities, definitions of issues surface more democratic and inclusive forms of knowledge and are a sound basis for decision making in this instance for practice. This also has implications for this research project.

Project development.

This project aimed to contribute to the understanding and development of widening participation within the School of Health and Social Sciences and to contribute to teaching and learning discourse across the HE sector. This process also aimed to explore practice and by doing so create an awareness of this to ultimately impact on practice using change or development opportunities. This part of the project benefitted from an external reference group, in this instance the Higher Education Academy Widening Participation service and also Action on Access. These sources were considered critical reference points for contemporary research, political imperatives and also expert opinion into WP. This is most important in making statements regarding the whole institution and has the benefit of using external reference points as indicators of good practice, grounding it in national discourse but also acting as a critical friend in the research process. An internal reference group was developed comprising: subject supervisor, project advisor and peers in teaching and learning developments roles. Support for the development of the project internally is crucial and as such key figures include the Associate Dean for Learning and Quality Enhancement (AD LQE) and the Head of Learning Development. Ethical considerations are critical and institutional ethical approval was obtained prior to the project commencement, as discussed in the next section.

Ethical considerations.

As research involves collecting information from people and organisations there were a number of ethical issues to consider before, during and after the research. There is a need to protect research collaborators and participants, build trust with collaborators and participants, promote the integrity of the research, guard against impropriety that

might reflect on the institution and prepare for potential challenging problems which may arise (Creswell, 2009). Ethical concerns which were considered included: confidentiality, disclosure, authenticity, truthfulness, researcher role and influence and data protection. The ethical considerations of this project focussed around clarity of purpose for this work. The potential conflicts between confidentiality and tensions with my role needed consideration. In addition I was mindful of the responsibility for knowledge gained and impact upon situations and services.

Ethical safeguards prior to the research

In considering the research question and area of exploration the key ethical tenet was to be clear and explicit. A core principle of this approach was to empower and support the research participants and not disempower them. This was guarded against by establishing trust and respect among the research participants and developing a methodological data collection strategy which focussed on the key aspects of the research question and sought to explore a wide range of perspectives, revisiting and refining the research question as data emerged. Opinions and contributions from colleagues were sought to determine if their perceptions were fully explored and the impact this has on them i.e. to ascertain that the approach did not make them feel marginalised.

Approval by an Ethics Committee was sought prior to the project. The early process of this project (Programme Planning) did include ethical approval from the Institute of Workbased Learning (IWBL) and in addition the local HSSc Ethics Committee approval was also sought and given. Clear cover letters and research information was given to potential research participants to avoid deception (Creswell, 2009) and for clarity and co-operation. Informed and volitional consent was necessary. It was necessary also to minimise any perception of 'coercion' in my position as insider-researcher (Costley et al, 2010) but also as this research attempted to not only explore and understand practice but also ultimately influence it (Robson, 2002). Group methods such as focus groups may open people to criticism and challenge by peers and appear intimidating. However, this was addressed by providing full information, seeking consent to participate and planning effective co-ordination of the group process. The incorporation of Risk Assessments in the ethical committee approval procedure ensured consideration of research participants' potential vulnerability by considering physical, emotional or psychological safety. In relation to this project there were no anticipated physical risks though emotional and political effects (i.e. to their position) are difficult to establish and predict. Protection of participants from the data collection

process was considered important. This included direct effects of the research or criticisms of inadequate practice. This begs the questions whose notions of right or wrong are applied and with what criteria. Change actions imply value judgements and as such these social constructs were considered as possible sources of tensions and conflicts.

'Whole truth' issues could create tensions between exploring professional practice and lecturers' perceptions and understandings. This could potentially alienate colleagues and peers. This research project was not intended to be subversive but raised issues for participants in terms of their position, support mechanisms and sense of being valued. The focus was on practice. However, it is recognised that micro political forces have an impact on practice, which can also impact the wider organisation (macro politically). In this case the intention was to raise the question of WP, moving it from the margins to wider mainstream practice.

I remained cognisant of the relationship between researcher and the researched. All parties ought to benefit from the process and not be alienated by abuse or imbalance of power or exclusion (Humphries, 2002). This was potentially an issue in my role and position as an insider-researcher. I ensured I presented myself as not seeking to coerce, exert power and be fair and responsive to peers and others. This research effected me as a worker but also colleagues.

Ethical considerations in data analysis.

There are ethical considerations in data analysis process and interpretation. The key aspects considered were:

- Anonymity in the data transcription and reporting process
- Storage and retrieval processes for any data according to Data Protection legislation and local policies
- Ownership of the data, this is important especially in a participatory process. As the purpose was to engage with lecturers and explore perceptions of WP and impact on practice the outputs are therefore owned by the participants
- Interpretation of data ought to provide an accurate account of the information. This was best achieved using more than one strategy to examine and critically challenge the interpretation (for example, referring back to participants for congruence or fellow researchers or supervisor).

In the final process of writing up and reporting the research further ethical issues were considered. There are several aspects which Creswell (2009) proposes that are potential biases i.e. against gender, sexuality, ethnicity etc. WP concerns diversity or difference which may be construed as bias. The intention was to explore WP and issues with it including any tacit bias in practice. Representation of the findings ought to be authentic and not suppress, falsify or be 'invented' to comply with the researchers' perspective which is also fraudulent and evidence of misconduct. This was considered and strategies to verify data with participants were planned. It is also suggested that the repercussions of the findings ought to be considered and the temptation to present findings to advantage a particular group – in this instance, the intention is to advantage lecturers and students in examining practice and creating awareness. This too, ought to be clear and explicit. This further emphasised the need for effective planning, being open and seeking critical questioning from colleagues. The credibility of the research will be judged by the readers and consumers of the research project and as such consideration was given to all these aspects in preparation with detailed description of processes and procedures. A critical reflection on the process of the project will be presented in the next chapter to further enhance the transparency of any changes and modifications which resulted from unforeseen changes.

Data collection strategies.

The main research question outlined before gives rise to further questions. A search of the literature (outlined in chapter 2) identified key issues to consider in developing the subsidiary questions and formulating the data collection strategies. Many of the complex interrelated aspects in the literature can be presented as: student aspirations, the first year experience, transition and entry points, progression and completion. As my research question focussed on lecturers' understanding and engagement with WP within HSSc, this was best determined though an exploration with colleagues within the school using dialogical tools; in this instance, focus group and individual interviews. The proposed advantage of using these tools was that in a group format, opinions and ideas would emerge and develop through a dialogue, with each participant having a synergistic action within the group. Furthermore, differing perspectives would emerge and overall a group's shared understanding of the issues. The research question was elaborated and a series of sub questions (presented in chapter 2) and data collection processes pertinent to them will be addressed here.

a. To explore lecturers' understanding and engagement with Widening Participation (WP) initiatives or activities.

- Who are the lecturers involved with widening participation?
- What constitutes 'engagement' with initiatives and activities and how is this measured?
- Are lecturing staff sensitive to needs, and knowledgeable of the resources available, to support students from non traditional backgrounds?
- What are the perceived benefits of 'support' given to WP students?
- What are the differing views of Widening Participation from other schools?

The data was collected from lecturers from a variety of departments across HSSc. The participants were lecturers from HSSc and the other schools across the university. Lecturers were invited to take part there were no limiting or excluding factors i.e. duration of employment, programme affiliation, or experiences of teaching preparation or qualifications. The key inclusion factor was that they were a lecturer teaching students. The focus groups were to determine the prevailing perceptions within HSSc and in-depth interviews sought descriptions of individual opinions, perceptions and examples from teaching practices and any other roles held in the university. It was intended to have a minimum of two focus groups initially with a minimum of 4 to 6 participants from an invitation across the school. However, this proved logistically challenging (failing to attend etc) and in the end only one focus group was convened of five lecturers from a variety of departments across HSSc. The individual lecturer interviews aimed to include a minimum of twelve lecturers, approximately two thirds from HSSc and the remainder from across the university. Access to colleagues as participants within HSSc was unproblematic. I am well known in the school due to my varied posts and participation in various working groups. An invitation to participate was sent to a wide range of colleagues to ensure the minimum number could be achieved. This was convenience sampling within HSSc, however it is also considered purposeful as the invitation was sent to a wide pool of lecturers (the population) for a representative sample. All had the opportunity to participate voluntarily. Ten HSSc colleagues responded to the invitation but only seven attended for interview. A more direct approach was sought for other Schools in the University. This was through 'snowballing' i.e approaching familiar colleagues and seeking suggestions of lecturers to approach. A small pool of lecturers was also approached through across university working groups. In the end a small number of participants (5) volunteered from the dozens approached. This resulted in a total of twelve (12) lecturers interviewed.

Focus Group considerations

The main purpose of focus group research was to draw upon respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions for fuller exploration of the key issue, in this instance WP. There are potential drawbacks. It is recognised that fuller and frank opinions may not emerge as focus groups revolve around group dynamics and the efficacy of the moderator (Gibbs, 1997). This was selected as a first stage to gather areas for exploration in individual interviews. More importantly a focus group was selected as a data gathering tool which would also pose the question 'what is WP?' and act as a trigger in its own right for reflection on practice by lecturers and thereby an awareness raising activity too.

A focus group was selected as an initial approach to provide a range of information from a range of participants and allow them to interactively probe each other's feelings on the topic of WP. It also offered me as a researcher the opportunity to see some ways in which the individuals collectively make sense of WP and construct meanings around it for themselves and their practice. Bryman (2008) asserts that focus groups are more naturalistic in comparison to in-depth interviews in that they reflect group processes through which meaning is constructed in everyday life. However, the issue of dominance in the focus group was considered and techniques were planned to address this. There were acknowledged limitations such as control over the process. Considerations included tangential issues arising or domination of the discussion by some participants or reticence of some to make a point or articulate no strong feelings at all. A further consideration was group consensus or intimidation rather than lecturers' voicing their own views. In operationalising the focus group it emerged that the participants all knew each other to a degree (either as part of the School or same department). None of the questions asked personal or intimate details. However as the topic was WP, cultural and social issues could have arisen which created tension, this was anticipated and the strategy to deal with this was to focus on practice and debrief participants at the end of the focus group. The questions asked were devised to be clear and open ended to enable all participants to express their own views. The data could be difficult to analyse and the main themes were elicited from group interaction, consensus and discussions. In terms of practical considerations these are addressed in table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Practical considerations planned for conducting the focus group

Consideration	Action to address this
Clear and broad questions to address research questions but explore topic of WP broadly	Pilot questions with small group Amend if necessary
Questions are open and reflective and	Pilot with small group and review

designed to encourage group discussion avoiding closed questions	responses
Convening focus groups of adequate size	Use existing meeting structures (WP Group or other meeting structure) or other inducements
Familiarity with the setting	Will be in pre-arranged room (for meeting)
Strategies for controlling group i.e.: • Those dominating discussion • Silences • Tangential views	Prepare cue questions to focus on individuals • *What do you think about this?* • *Thank you for your contribution how do the rest of the group feel?* • *Acknowledge the relevance of the view, and then indicate going back to....* • *Prioritising questions to research question and experiences*
Data recording and transcribing	Obtain digital recorder to record up to 2 hours (no longer anticipated). Make backup recording Post focus group notes of location, atmosphere, tones of voice, any 'double talking' or when several people talk at once to indicate key areas addressed Researcher to transcribe verbatim, group views elicited not individuals

From the focus group several points emerged which evolved into trigger questions for semi-structured interviews with lecturers at a later date. Initially it was unclear how many focus groups would be required or needed. It was felt that the process of data generation would guide this decision. Comments made by colleagues in the focus groups revealed a sense of importance in HSSc in regards to WP in comparison to other schools in the university. This necessitated exploring perceptions of lecturers from other schools across the university too. Anecdotal accounts of practice and perceptions of the impact of WP on work practices were offered but the underlying reasons for this was unclear. This was an area for exploration further through the interview process. In order to maximise the amount of data and information from participants, the interview schedules encompassed aspects from sub questions a and b.

Creating the research interview schedule.

The questions for the semi-structured interview with lecturers were constructed from two sources. First a literature review of the sector and the concept of WP viewed from the differing stages of the students' journey. Secondly, through the focus group exploration and identification of areas of WP considered important and what questions

would most pertinent to put to lecturers concerning their perceptions and how this impacts on their work.

Initial focus group discussion was broad and addressed five areas: what is WP, who does WP, what happens as WP, expectation issues and what is student success. The results from this then emerged as a series of themes which guided the final interview questions to the individual lecturers. The individual interview questions which developed fell into six broad areas:

- what is WP,
- what is the lecturers role in relation to diverse students,
- description of WP student groups,
- teaching and pedagogical approaches for diversity,
- perceptions of student success and
- their department's approach to WP.

The in-depth interviews were the next part of the data collection strategy. Semi-structured interviews were selected as a strategy to develop the broad questions areas identified above. In the main all the question areas were asked but not in a specific order. However, the same wording was used for consistency. It was anticipated that whilst there was a question schedule that this was flexible as other aspects may arise in the individual interviews which may be of relevance and illuminating. The interview questions to the individual lecturers were amended form the original compilation following consultation from the focus group to ensure that wider aspects of the lecturer's role within the department, and their perspective of their wider department approach, were also included. Practical considerations considered included preparing the interview questions (or guide) with a list of prompt questions if the topic is not answered or there is silence or omission. The interview aimed to last between 45 and 60 minutes. The questions were prepared in a thematic grouping – so they flowed and were not distracting in jumping from topic to topic. Creswell (2009) and Bryman (2008) identify a few other practical considerations which were incorporated:

- Alignment of questions to research question.
- Clarity of language using short questions, if possible.
- Familiarity with setting and arrange furniture to be less intimidating (i.e. informal and comfortable).
- Quiet undisturbed setting.

- Using good quality recording equipment ensuring backup recordings maintained.
- Cultivate interviewer skills (after Kvale 1996, cited in Bryman, 2008) i.e. Be knowledgeable, structuring and rounding off interview, clear, sensitive, open, guiding, critical, remembering aspects, clarify and interpret, and be ethically sensitive.
- Include post interview notes of impression of how the interview went, atmosphere, feeling engendered by the interview any issues with setting or process.

Following this the interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed (described below). Seven lecturers from HSSc were interviewed plus a further five from the other schools in the University, thus in total 12 interviews were carried out. The ethical procedures for holding and securing the recorded interviews and transcripts were adhered to.

 b. To explore aspects of teaching and learning that contributes to success for widening participation students

- What is meant by student success and how is it measured?
- What aspects of teaching and learning contribute to success for widening participation students?
- To what extent can widening participation students be identified and what are their experiences of teaching and learning?
- Have the developments of teaching and learning (i.e. LOTS modules and key skills threaded through the curriculum) addressed the needs of Widening Participation students?

The data for this part of the project emerged from a questionnaire survey of year 3 students, follow up interviews with students concerning experiences of teaching and learning and interviews with lecturers (already mentioned above).

Access to Student Subjects.

The subjects were selected from two student groups considered to reflect the most diverse student groups within HSSc: nursing and sport and exercise science. These student groups provided a large number of potential participants.   Access to these students was via a core module on their programme, which enabled a large number of

students to be approached in a limited time frame. All students were in their third year of their course towards the end of their programme. The students were approached at the end of a module teaching session and asked if they wished to participate.   As a lecturer within the school access to lecturers on these programmes, and thus students, was not an issue. Information on the project, and any follow up interviews, if the students were willing, was fully explained as required for student consent. The students were approached in line with the ethical principles mentioned earlier and their consent was obtained prior to any data collection.

The nursing students and sports students provided varied groups in terms of age, gender, ethnicity and socio-economic backgrounds reflecting the categories attributed to WP identified in chapter 2. Final year students were selected as most appropriate as they have had a longer and wider experience of university and had experienced at least eight modules and two years as a student and thus had a breadth of experience in teaching and learning and student life. The nursing students were a large cohort (at least 240 students) and the sports students conversely a smaller group (approximately 35). The survey data elicited a large body of data about experiences of teaching and learning and the perceived benefits of the core key skills modules which were intended to equip students with skills and support in preparation for academic study.

The questionnaire and interview schedule.

The data collection was in two parts: a questionnaire and individual student interviews. The survey questionnaire selected was a previously content and criterion validated questionnaire entitled: Experiences of Teaching and Learning Questionnaire (ETLQ) developed by Entwhistle (2003). Permission was obtained for its use (from Professor Ray Land as an originating ETLQ researcher). The original research was from a Teaching and Learning Research Programmes grant (TLRP). Furthermore it is freely available on the Experiences of Teaching and Learning project website (http://www.etl.tla.ed.ac.uk/publications.html) with an open invitation to use the questionnaire as long as the source is acknowledged as one of the wider dissemination routes. The questions on the questionnaire were reviewed for applicability and considered appropriate to ascertain WP or diverse students experiences of teaching and learning and was easy to complete. The applicability to WP includes: teaching (or pedagogical) and learning approaches, how effective they perceived key skills modules and how they viewed their own success. This ETL questionnaire was developed utilising a variety of conceptual frameworks which complement this particular research project namely: student learning research, teaching for understanding and constructive

alignment. One further section was added by which included demographic information (age, gender, parental occupation, other family attending university etc) and also their perceptions of the key skills module and how it impacted on their learning. Students were provided with an information sheet with details of the project and invited to participate. This was confirmed by signing a consent on the questionnaire. A copy of this is included in appendix 3.

A Likert scale was used for the responses (1 to 5, with 5 = highest score or Strongly agree) for most of the questions on the questionnaire with very few asking open questions. The questionnaire consists of four sections: approaches to learning, experiences (including environment, lecturers and assessment), perceived demands and overall evaluation of what was learned (variables). (appendix 4). Nested amongst the items in the questionnaire were also eleven subscales (see table 3.2). Subscales were formed by combining the items on the questionnaire together which would also allow analysis of factors which impacted on teaching and learning.

A pilot of the questionnaire (not with the intended participants) was undertaken to establish reliability. This indicated that the questions were clear, answerable and more importantly the estimated time to complete was correct (15 to 20 minutes). As this was previously validated by ETL project leaders and so no further validation measures were undertaken.

Table 3.2: Subscales of ETLQ questionnaire.

Sections of questionnaire:	Subscales of variables
Approaches to learning and studying	Deep Approach
	Surface Approach
Perceptions of the teaching and learning environment	Alignment
	Staff enthusiasm
	Encouraging high quality learning
	Interest, enjoyment ad relevance
	Support from other students
	Clarity and Feedback about assessment
	Assessment for understanding
Demands made by course and	Learning achieved (Knowledge)
Learning achieved	Learning achieved (Communication and organising)

In total 124 completed useable questionnaires were obtained (109 nurses and 17 sports students) giving a response rate of 68% and 49% respectively (overall 64.6%).

The students indicating an interest were invited to participate by letter explaining the project and, if willing, complete a consent form. The questionnaire included an invitation to a follow-up interview and students were to indicate this by providing contact details to arrange a mutually convenient date and time. This element was undertaken between January and June 2007. It was expected that 20% of the student surveyed would be interviewed (twelve). In the end six students were interviewed. The low numbers were due to other constraints such as coinciding with assessment time, other course commitments (placements etc) and difficulty negotiating convenient times and at least two failing to attend appointments. Whilst this does not reflect the diverse student population and will not be generalisable it was intended to give some insight into their individual perspectives and supplement the questionnaire data.

The interview questions developed from the key themes in the questionnaire to explore the issues further. There were five question areas: choice of course and feelings about it, preparation and expectations of HE, reflections of teaching and learning on the course, perceptions of support such as study skills modules and their perceptions of success. Some of the questions mirrored those put to the lecturers and others were aimed at investigating the students' background and motivations.
Interviews with these students also explored comments arising from the questionnaire regarding perceptions of teaching and learning. This provided an additional dimension to the student questionnaire data but also to the lecturers' perceptions.

Ethical issues were addressed. It was emphasised that students were free to choose not to participate in any part of the research project and that they could withdraw at any time during the project with no detriment to them or their studies. Anonymity and confidentiality was assured. Their consent form was held separately to their questionnaire data or interview transcript. Identification was through code numbers.

c. <u>To identify the effects of embedding a Widening Participation strategy upon lecturers understanding and teaching approaches.</u>

- Are any other stakeholders involved if so to what extent?
- Are other staff (than lecturers) sensitive to needs, and knowledgeable of the resources available, to support students from non traditional backgrounds?

- Will the embedding process constitute a change to Widening Participation beliefs and practices?
- What is the change and how can it be measured?
- Are there promoters or barriers to actively implementing the school Widening Participation strategies?

This part of the research revolved around the question of examples of good practice and the impact of embedding a widening participation strategy. At the time of the project several key changes occurred in both national and university reporting and policy requirements (see timeline chapter 1). The data collection for this project commenced in November 2006 and extended over two years (to December 2008). Over such a timeframe external changes affected the students and staff. Whilst this was important the key central question concerns perceptions and responses to WP were still relevant. This was adapted to focus WP more widely in: What is meant by embedded and how is this manifest in policy and practice across the institution? What are the shared understandings, if any, of Widening Participation across the institution? Are there promoters or barriers to actively embedding and sustaining Widening Participation? Support and participation from colleagues within the HSSc Learning Development Unit and also the HSSc WP Forum groups was sought as influential to any proposed practice changes. These colleagues acted as critical reference groups to challenge the processes and aid in analysis and clarification of the data.

In the processes of collecting data on lecturers understanding and engagement with WP, they were asked about their understanding of the WP strategy and how this impacted on their work. Key department heads and programme leaders were also surveyed on their perceptions of WP, what stakeholders they believed were involved and how they perceived WP was embedded within their department and programmes (staff team and curriculum). The process of identifying how embedded WP was across departments and schools was explored initially in the focus group and followed up in interviews.

Strategy to explore mainstreaming and embedding of WP

As mentioned, the embedding of a WP Strategy became obsolete during this project and the focus changed to exploring how mainstreamed and embedded WP was throughout the University. This was through participating in a national project overseen by Action on Access (AoA) for HEFCE supporting institutions exploring how mainstreamed and embedded WP was in the institution. This involved a participative

process generating quantitative and qualitative data with the findings influencing the subsequent stages. This was reflexive in that each element (stage) was critically analysed and interrogated in relation to practice and the institution overall. AoA did stipulate one output from their perspective, the production of a policy discussion document. This policy discussion document was to be a 'live' evolving document reflecting the key WP areas of consideration for Middlesex and how these are to be addressed. The document was to be the culmination of engaging departments in critical discussions of WP, an exploration of WP as it impacted on departments and issues or areas where practice was considered 'good' or in need of development. This was a key vehicle for me to explore WP in the institution more widely than the embedding of the strategy within the school team consisted of a senior manager (executive), a researcher, and representatives of student achievement advisors from schools across the university and me. The project team was limited to five (by AoA). The institution working team was much broader.

This part of the project involved a more collaborative approach with colleagues across the university. The strategies used were negotiated as part of the larger working group. This project was undertaken in several stages:

a. Identification of and convene a cross university project working team representative of all stakeholders.
b. Evaluate the meaning, current perception of and position of WP within the institution.
c. Identify areas of good practice and the means to disseminate this.
d. Identify areas requiring strengthening.
e. Staff development via an Institutional workshop facilitated by Action on Access.
f. Synthesise all the above into a policy discussion paper.

Each working party meeting resulted in a series of actions the results of which were collated and fed back to the group. There were five working party meetings over the eleven months. These included discussion on and actions associated with the key objectives. The four key areas to research identified by the working party were:

a. Commitment to WP across the institution (who, how and where)
b. Communication and cohesion across departments in approaches to WP
c. Funding and investment in WP

      d.   Sustaining and mainstreaming WP alongside other competing and equally pressing priorities.

The key actions undertaken were:

a. Invitation and inclusion of key stakeholders – e-mail invitations were sent to all Service and educational services, academic staff, Outreach and Volunteering team, student support in terms of Disability and Learning Support (ELLS) services and student achievement advisors, Management (HSSc and University level), Institute for Workbased learning and representatives from other areas (Human Resources).

b. An analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis) in relation to WP was undertaken to identify key areas to address.

c. A brief questionnaire was compiled to establish the perceptions and position, including responsibility for, WP in the institution. This was distributed to all Heads of Service, these included:
   - Outreach team and Aimhigher
   - Marketing
   - Communications
   - Admissions
   - Finance services
   - Summer School
   - Student support services (Academic Registry)
   - English Language Learning and Support/Numeracy Support
   - Disability service
   - Centre for Excellence in Work-based learning
   - Associate Deans for Teaching, Learning and Quality
   - Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement

The specific questions were formulated. The rigour was in the collective agreement of the wording, purpose and focus on eliciting specific information. These were:

1.   What do you think 'Widening Participation' is?
2.   How does Widening Participation impact/relate to your role?
3.   Who is responsible for Widening Participation in your area and to whom do they report?

4.   What in your view are the main benefits and problems of Widening Participation in HE?

A staff awareness event for all stakeholders was planned and facilitated by the Action on Access expert representative to elicit views and generate further insight into WP.

<u>Policy analysis:</u>

To establish how embedded WP was in the University in regards teaching and learning, it was decided to examine relevant working documents. WP issues locally were unchanged but 'incorporated' into other university policies and practices, with HEFCE monies for WP distributed across areas which would service WP aspects: outreach, teaching and learning and disability or student support. As a consequence accountability for WP as a specific entity was no longer a requirement. The mixed methods approach was flexible enough to respond to this process. The documents selected had to have direct association with teaching and learning (teaching staff and students). Those with remote relevance i.e. human resource or indirect influence (health and safety) were not considered. Working documents in departments (i.e. department strategy, marketing plan, teaching and learning action plans) were reviewed in regards to how WP is addressed (i.e. the language of diversity, equity etc) and any other examples of WP type initiatives i.e. outreach work or working with central WP areas and modifying marketing material. A selection of policies for analysis was made from the range of University policies. All policies concerning students were considered pertinent, others focussed on the functioning of the organisation i.e. human resource policies, were excluded. The policies were freely available on the intranet site. In total eight documents were selected: six policies and two strategy documents (APS5: Sustainability, APS7: Admissions, APS8: Bursaries and Scholarships, APS11: Academic Policy Statement, APS19: Teaching Observations, APS 20: Student Employability, Equality and Diversity Strategy, Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Assessment (ELTA) Strategy (2007-12). These were analysed for reference to WP and relationship to the University Mission. Key terms which reflect WP were selected including: diversity, inclusive, inclusivity, widening participation, equality and potential (synonyms determined from the body of literature on WP).

Data Analysis and Validation Procedures.

The data analysis in mixed methods research was appropriate to the type of research strategy chosen for this project (Creswell, 2009). This particular project was

qualitatively focussed with embedded quantitative parts. Thus for the main data qualitative data analysis (QDA) process was used in a method outlined by Seidel (1998) involving three steps: noticing, collecting and thinking (NCT). This is a long manual method to analyse data and it was anticipated that if this became too unwieldy then software such as NUD*ST software could be employed. However the manual method was preferred for close engagement with and saturation of the data and also for close line by line attention to detail with occasion to stand back and look at the themes in relation to the 'full' picture. The aim was constant reference to the original source material and the participant 'voices'.

There is a potential problem in that coding manually can generate too many codes. However, as Bryman (2008) points out the skill is then in eliciting commonality in the codes and combining them into higher order more abstract codes. This was anticipated in using the QDA process and the following stages were selected:

1. The interview was transcribed verbatim.
2. The interview transcripts and interview notes were thoroughly read noting only general points (Noticing)
3. The transcripts were re-read with marginal notes of significant remarks or observations eliciting a broad range of codes (or terms) (Collecting)
4. Codes were reviewed (Thinking) in relation to transcripts (and interviews) with a view to:-
    a. Recognise if any relate to existing concepts/themes in literature
    b. Rationalise repetitive terms for same concept
    c. Making connections between themes
    d. Consider characterising connections
5. General theoretical ideas in relation to codes and data (Thinking)
6. Perspective of themes were made – to lives of participants, the research question reflecting on the researchers own interpretations.

Several researchers propose similar steps i.e. Colaizzi's (1978, outlined in Sanders, 2003) seven step procedure. Seidel (1998) recommends an iterative and progressive sequence of three processes where noticing, collecting and thinking are applied to the data. Consideration was also given to the analysis as more than disassembling data and coding, sorting and sifting but also a process of building patterns and threads then mapping to create a 'landscape' of features. Consideration was also given to coding with use of objectivistic codes or heuristic codes. Due to my familiarity with the positivist paradigm I felt more comfortable in the objectivist coding structure but

acknowledged that heuristic codes provide a more holistic complete picture and are more evolutionary. The process of iterative coding, analysis, recording and revisiting the original raw data was considered a necessary endeavour to prevent assumptions from shaping the data analysis process. This also enables discovery of possible biases, prevents imposing the researcher's understanding and constructions on the data and provides an ethically based 'truthful' representation of the data. To triangulate and reach a sense of 'truth' and not an imposed bias, a reflective diary was maintained prior to and during the process of the project. Thus, this continuous reflection and self-questioning approach aimed to bring personal perceptions, presuppositions and biases to the surface.

The questionnaire data was quantitative and analysed to elicit descriptive patterns and trends (frequencies, descriptive and correlations). The questionnaire items were analysed using Statistics Package Software for Social Scientists (SPSS v15). The questionnaire items were collapsed and grouped into subscales (factors) and relationships were analysed using correlations (Pearson correlation co-efficient) or Chi squared. The open questions were clustered into themes and categories with frequencies of occurrence noted. Demographic information was analysed and grouped into similar categories i.e. occupational groups, family experience of higher education and observed for occurrence and association with the subscales on the questionnaire. Methodological rigour.

Qualitative and quantitative research approaches both require rigour. Creswell (2009) advocates validity procedures for differing types of strategies (quantitative and qualitative), including for the instruments used (i.e. the questionnaire as mentioned) and identify internal threats such as researcher bias.   In order to address this a number of considerations were given to the research stages: methodology, data collection strategy and data analysis. Methodological rigour requires consideration of 'fit' between the research strategy and the research theoretical approach, furthermore other issues are equally important to ensure transparency and validity (Fossey et al, 2002) the measures taken in relation to these is outlined in table 3.3.

Table 3.3. Fossey et al (2002) Considerations for methodological rigour.

Methodological rigour	Considerations	Measures taken
Congruence	Research design 'fit' with the theoretical approach. Methods fit with methodology. Congruence with data collection and theoretical approach.	A transformative 'umbrella' based on emancipatory principles utilising a mixed strategy (methods) approach to gain a diverse view of the issue (WP) in a congruent manner.
Responsiveness to social context	Research design adapted to respond to real life situations and social settings. Researcher engagement with study participants and study context.	Interviews, questionnaire and exploration of documents are highly flexible and responsive to changes in organisation routines and other prevailing considerations. Insider-researcher as part of the organisation and thus holds insight into the context and challenges faced by participants.
Appropriateness	Sampling – to inform research question. Suitable data collection means.	Research participants are lecturing staff and academic leads and are the key source and recipients of the research findings.
Adequacy	Sufficient sources of information. Detailed description of people involved. Detailed description and analysis of data. Corroborating, illuminating and rival accounts to explore multiple aspects of the research issue. Description of methods detailed enough to understand context.	Full and accurate accounts of research processes. Data analysis clearly outlined and combining of themes identified. Multiple aspects to research issue (student perspective and lecturer perspective). Descriptions of people (age, gender etc) related to research question and WP.
Transparency	Data collection and analysis.	Clearly outlined in the final report.

The ETL questionnaire schedule used for the student survey was a previously validated instrument, the original authors citing the criterion and content validation procedure (Entwhistle, 2003) and it is accepted as valid for this research project. The pilot mentioned before established the clarity and reliability for this use.

Feldman (2003) recommends a series of approaches to ensure truth or validation of research process. These have been considered in preparing the methodological schedule and are outlined in this chapter as:

1. Providing a clear and detailed description of how data will be collected and make explicit what counts as data.

2. Providing clear and detailed descriptions of how data representations are constructed.

3. Triangulating with multiple sources of data to include explorations of multiple ways to represent the same aspect of study.

 4. Providing evidence of the value of any changes and how these contribute to professional or other knowledge.

Herr and Anderson (2005) identify a number of categories in relation to quality and rigour. Whilst these categories refer to action research which is not the methodological approach it shares an epistemological perspective of being transformative (in challenging beliefs and practice) and therefore consideration is given to their recommended rigour criteria (table 3.4).

Table 3.4 Herr and Anderson (2005) Quality validation measures considered beneficial.

Goals of Action Research	Quality/Validity criteria	Measures taken to establish and ensure validity
The generation of new knowledge.	Dialogic and process validity.	Dialogic: discussions with colleagues and other stakeholders and feedback on data and conclusions. Process: triangulation of data collection methods, personal reflective journal and external support and feedback.
The achievement of action oriented outcomes.	Outcome validity.	Actions which will address a key issue: heightened awareness of WP, increased discourse of WP in key arenas concerning student experiences and teaching and learning.
The education of both researcher and participants.	Catalytic validity.	Re-orientates the participants towards change: increased understanding by participants promotes and embeds change in practice and raises awareness and critical evaluation processes.
Results relevant to the local setting.	Democratic validity.	Extent of collaboration: all stages will involve stakeholders from academic, service and student areas, views and responses will be invited, incorporated and appreciated providing application of new learning to practice.
A sound and appropriate research methodology.	Process validity.	Framing and solving problems using new learning: audit trail of evidence and learning log, triangulation of data sources and benchmarking against external markers (professional groups, subject experts).

In relation to rigour regarding interpretation of the data, Fossey et al (2002) identify that there are a number of key considerations which enhance the quality. These considerations are: authenticity, coherence, reciprocity, typicality and permeability of the researchers' intentions, engagement or interpretations. Authenticity was considered by presenting the participants views in their own voice (verbatim) and by also presenting a range of voices and views. The power relations in data collection and analysis were taken into account by documenting, checking and reviewing the data and processes. Coherence refers to the 'fit' between the findings and the data from which it was derived and not a 'fit' of the researchers perspective. Professional conclusions are also important as well as research findings and provide another dimension to interpretation. Seeking feedback from participants on the clarity of the interpretations ensured reciprocity. The researcher's role ought to be transparent in the interpretative process and the researcher's preconceptions, values or preferred theories revealed. This was evidenced in the notes made during data collection and utilising these in interpretation stages. In addition the researcher's personal experience during the research process was made explicit as much as she was aware.

Triangulation was not intended with this embedded mixed methods approach. However the use of multiple forms of data collection tools and approaches does imply a rigour akin to triangulation. The approach did utilise a number of methods and as Bryman (2008) argues can only contribute to the robustness of the process. The mixing of the methods was planned to provide different views on the issue (WP and teaching and learning) and whilst this could also provide a means to validate the approaches it was intended as mentioned earlier to give breadth and depth to the exploration and increase the trustworthiness of the findings. The purpose was to explore the concept and to provide a means for transformation or improvement in practice (hence the theoretical frame selected). In my opinion the use of a number of data collection tools to explore the perceptions of lecturers, students and the wider university provided a valuable diversified and 'triangulated' approach.

Insider researcher.

As a worker and researcher in the same organisation there is a duality which can be complementary but also provide challenges. A significant challenge for insider researchers is to combine advocacy with inquiry in presenting their own inferences, attributions, opinions and viewpoints as open to testing and critique (Argyris et al 1985). As a worker, I posses valuable knowledge of the organisation's academic culture, internal structures and functioning. From my own ontological position I already

had a prior understanding of my own and my profession's explicit and tacit knowledge. Thus immersed within the organisation in this project I acquired a better understanding of its role in society and my own role within the organisation.

In planning this methodology I was aware of a key challenge of being part of the organisation's culture and finding it difficult to stand back from it to assess and critique it. The use of external reference groups provided an opportunity to ensure a level of criticality and externality which could have been lost in the process grounding me as a researcher. There was a possibility of being distracted by a determination of where the issues lay and the complexity surrounding them (local politics etc), but also the frustrations engendered in advocating change. This project did take a number of turns in light of organisational changes however the mixed-methods approach was flexible enough to accommodate these and the findings fed into some of the changes.

Lecturers' and students views were explored from two different angles. Furthermore using these perceptions illuminated aspects of practices at the student-lecturer level which informed understanding of the translation of the school or university position in relation to WP. The awareness building (transformative approach) was necessary to maximise self and peer reflection, learning and critical consciousness. Reflection itself is considered to be embedded in practice as praxis and this process was intended to contribute to that. This is an issue not only for the weak and powerless but also for those in influential positions who may themselves be trapped (possibly oppressed) in received versions of their own situation.

Indicative outcomes from this research project.

There were several outcomes intended from this project. The primary outcomes for the project activity included:

a. A comprehensive literature review in relation to WP from both student and teaching perspectives.
b. A better understanding of lecturers' conceptions in relation to WP and how this impacts on their perceptions of their role and engagement with students.
c. An improved understanding of how lecturers respond to the needs of diverse groups (such as WP) and how sensitive they are to diversity.
d. Identification of examples of positive and good pedagogical approaches in relation to WP which highlight effective methods of facilitating WP groups.

e. Findings will influence key working groups across the university to improve experience of diverse student groups i.e. Student Experience Group, policy development (teaching and learning), programme validation and Staff Development.

f. Dissemination through the annual university Teaching and Learning conference and local workshops e.g. Teaching Fellows showcase etc.

g. Wider dissemination of the findings and significance for lecturers' not just in Middlesex but across the sector and contribution to the dialogue challenging belief systems. This will hopefully enable a 'reframing' of lecturers' approaches to teaching and learning and to inform teaching and learning developments locally and at strategy level.

Anticipated challenges.

There were a number of anticipated and unanticipated challenges considered. This concerned data generation, interpretation and insights for the Discussion of Findings chapters. The process of data generation and exploring the issue in question did contribute to new knowledge. However, this knowledge was local and not widely generalisable but contributory to the HE pedagogical dialogue. There is the potential that consensus around WP is implied among the community of lecturers and that this was a replication of dominant discourses rather than a challenge to them. Attention was given to the positionality of the participants and what this meant in terms of the perceptions they presented. The invited participants reflected a range of positions and influences within the university and this was considered a positive challenge as this then represented a variety of levels and positions associated with teaching. There was also a challenge to participants in their own self-reflection, perhaps encouraging a process they do not normally engage with (WP and diversity in relation to practice) but also the influence they exert within their sphere of practice.

Chapter 4:   **PROJECT ACTIVITY**.

This chapter will consider my research activity, including the processes of data collection throughout the phases of activity, which I will present under the following headings: assess, plan, implement, analysis and evaluation. This is a model with which I am familiar in regards to my professional background (i.e. the nursing process) and has served me well in previous tasks with creating structures. It also complements the reflexive research approach proposed by Cohen and Manion (2000). This section will demonstrate how each part of the research process evolved and developed and the relationships between them. It is set out as phases, not because they are necessarily distinct and separate, but to provide a more coherent whole for ease of critiquing the research process and the challenges which arose.

There were three phases of activity which overlapped and evolved during the project as a result of the changing environment and landscape of higher education, specifically my own organisation Middlesex University. This chapter also addresses the process of the project evolution emerging from the research questions and how the outputs contributed to the different parts of the research process. Ultimately, the progression of the phases was not linear nor consecutive, emerging instead in a more simultaneous pattern.

This research project was an evolving process and as it developed it became evident that the findings of one phase did impact on the next but more evidently it raised questions and aspects which required further exploration for understanding. In 'real time' this did appear to be 'messy' and incoherent. However in the periods of 'standing back' and analysing the components and reflecting on the connections this could be perceived as any creative enterprise (building or making something). That is components do not make as much sense individually when taken out of context only making sense when pieced together. As mentioned in chapter 3 the transformative epistemology provided the theoretical approach whilst the strategy which evolved was an embedded mixed methods strategy. This meant quantitative data collection methods embedded into a core qualitative (discursive) approach. Consideration was given to whether this ought to follow a sequential or concurrent format. A concurrent approach was preferred as the stages complemented each other and expanded the exploration and understanding of the core concept of WP.

There is also the need to be mindful of internal power mechanisms and the influence of these for this project. Power and knowledge inextricably intertwined. The Foucauldian

view is power works through discourses, institutions and practices that are productive of power effects, framing the boundaries of possibility and governing action (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2006). Power is exercised by some over others through expertise. As a worker researcher finding areas where power is wielded may indicate disempowering of people especially if where that dominance is unchallenged. In this research it was hoped awareness of lecturers' own reality would enable their ability to act for themselves. In Foucauldian terms power is not within individuals but in the positions they occupy and the ways in which discourse make these positions available to them (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2006). I believed that as an insider-researcher and in my position as lecturer, I hold credibility and by challenging the realities and practice I confer agency to lecturers to critically self reflect. The question remains whether they can then act on this individually and also at a more strategic or curriculum level.

PHASE 1: What is Widening Participation (WP)?

Phase 1: Assessing.

This phase aimed to explore HSSc lecturers' understanding and engagement with Widening Participation (WP) initiatives or activities. This involved exploring further sub-questions identified in chapter 2. The sub questions which were addressed here were:

- Who are the lecturers involved with widening participation?
- What constitutes 'engagement' with initiatives and activities and how is this measured?
- Are any other stakeholders involved if so to what extent?
- What are the differing views of Widening Participation?

There were two main activities within this part of the project which aimed to gather data: focus group and individual interviews with lecturers.

Phase I: Implementation.

In considering my role and position within HSSc I endeavoured to use as many avenues as I could to gain access to lecturers as participants. Access to lecturers was not problematic as they are colleagues with whom I worked regularly and in a variety of ways. I was, and am, fortunate in that my roles, and extended interests across the university, enable me to meet a wide cross section of lecturing colleagues and recruitment was not a problem. Lecturers were approached and invited to participate

through an invitation letter outlining the purpose of the research, consent was established though signing a consent form (appendix 3).

a. The focus group.

This comprised colleagues from the HSSc, the meeting lasted for approximately 45 minutes. In total there were five lecturers from differing departments across the school. Following this the data and themes were taken back to some of the focus group participants to ensure they reflected the conversation. Following this confirmation of 'reality' the individual interview questions were formulated as open ended questions reflecting the focus group discussion and themes, with the intention of developing the perspectives of individual lecturers. These were sent to colleagues from the focus group for their opinion and comment as active participants in the exploration. As identified in chapter 3 only one focus group was convened this proved sufficient as the data gathered was expansive. There were logistical difficulties (gathering a group, locations and availability) and colleagues not turning up to appointments. The use of one group did provide considerable data and was a lively interactive discussion between the participants which I perceived as a positive experience for all involved.

b. Individual interviews.

The individual interview participants were lecturers reflecting a range of disciplines across HSSc: from nursing, sport, biomedical science and social work. Lecturers from across the university represented a variety of disciplines in the Business School, the School of Computing Science (now called Engineering and Information Science) and the School of Lifelong Learning and Education (now called the School of Arts and Education). It was recognised that whilst there were a wide range of disciplines across schools the responses do not reflect the whole of any school, rather the individual lecturers and thus gave their personal impression of their department's approach or belief. In total 12 lecturers were interviewed. The data was recorded digitally, transcribed and analysed using the cycles of QDA process identified before (chapter 3).

Phase I: Analysis.

This initial phase was intended to address several elements of the subsections to the research questions. I intended to commence this research project with the view that WP is a broad area and a key political agenda which provides challenges and opportunities for HE. It is positioned in various ways in HE and has implications for lecturers' engagement with students. In trying to address the questions the actual

meaning of the questions did require some clarification. The term 'culture' was used and accepted widely and there appears to be a shared understanding of its meaning. When questioning participants on perceptions of WP it became unclear if this focussed on the noun: shared understandings, patterns, traits, beliefs, qualities or ways of living/working or the verb: developing, growing and nurturing. The range of results implied that both were being represented. This gave rise to further questions which were intended to clarify this and the research question:

a. To what extent is the School of HSSc adopting a culture of WP and how is this translated in action and provision?
b. What examples are there out there of good practice and how best can this be disseminated and emulated?
c. Is there a difference between or within schools across the University?

As data emerged it was also clear that more questions developed than answers. This is inevitable as no 'solution' was being sought but an understanding of perceptions and practices. The opinions of students on their teaching and learning experience was planned into the methodology to enable a wider view of lecturers' 'practice' and strategies to support diverse students from diverse or WP students. This triangulation was important to strengthen the research process and findings but also to contextualise what may emerge as 'good' or 'effective' practice, if the latter can be identified. If WP is an issue then the experiences of WP students, if this group can be identified, is relevant.

The themes from the focus group proved to be extensive (table 4.1). Once the themes had been identified, (by QDA process) and refined they were then condensed further through a series of stages (NCT). During the analysis process it was concluded that starting with objectivist coding would be appropriate with the view that as the analysis progressed a more fluid heuristic approach could be developed. The key questions provided the initial broad *a priori* coding structure (objectivist) then inductively themes were identified.   There were several themes: meanings (values), personal symbols and significance, states (conditions experienced) and constraints.

Table 4.1. Themes from Focus group.

Broad Themes:	Sub-themes
Definitions of WP	Information and guidance
	Challenging values and beliefs

	Setting inside and outside
	Meanings and values (professional, personal and occupational)
	Stakeholders
Who does WP	Roles and dedicated people
	Community engagement
	Conditions/constraints
What happens as WP	Opportunity and choice
	Symbols (workshops)
	States experienced (sense of agreement)
	Relationships (to students)
Expectations	Language and Social Constraints
	Teaching challenges
	Role of university
Own experience	Safety and Support
	Staff awareness of services
	Emotions
Success perceptions	Institution reputation
	Student satisfaction
	Relationships and Connections
	Measures

The focus group revealed that WP was understood in a variety of ways such as giving information and reaching a wider pool of people and providing guidance prior to university.   This also provided a foundation upon which to further explore individual lecturer perceptions. A few other aspects which were worthy of exploration from the focus group were recruitment and engagement with potential students to those who would not normally consider these courses. One comment was: '*widening participation is reaching those groups and seeing what we could perhaps offer them that they want and what the market place wants*' (FG 2). This did appear to be located outside the university and at entry point to university. However, it was acknowledged that those same groups would need support throughout their studies though not how or why. This also meant challenging the values and beliefs for lecturers but also for students. It was evident that students entering professional programmes holding certain beliefs would be counterproductive '*peoples' values are not quite what we would want we explored the concept of it not being appropriate to talk about normality y'know and that could be discriminatory* ' (FG 3).   The focus group ended with a comment on how 'caring' HSSc was in reference to the health and social care nature of the school and programmes. This comment was quite influential and was one which I believed needed to be explored in the interview questions. The implication was how this unique quality enabled a sensitive and effective support for WP students. This comment was worthy

of consideration and raised the question of values and 'fitting in' and why they thought they were more caring and was this unique and found only in HSSc.

I commenced a reflective log at this time to document the project progression, any external or internal influences and also my own feelings and thoughts throughout this process. This provided a critique of the processes from the researcher perspective but also addressed the constraints of being a worker researcher and the duality that may be present. The abstraction of the concept and necessity to explore this was an issue and the sense that this did not happen often.

> '.. *the focus group did work as a productive conversation seemingly an essential conversation which doesn't happen often .... the answers are quite abstract and opinionated without concrete examples so the reality of it is vague..' (Reflective Log 8th May*)

The findings from the lecturer interviews were diverse and in many instances very broad. The trigger questions identified from the focus groups guided the themes and a series of subthemes emerged (table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Themes from Lecturer Interviews.

Broad Themes:	Sub-themes
Definitions of WP	Symbols
	Constraints
	Practices
	Benefits of WP
Role and relation to students	Varied positions
	Strategy
	Scope in practice
Description of student groups:	Typology
	Location and environment
	Constraints
	Connections with students
	Other wider/organisational aspects:
Teaching approach:	Control and influence
	Perception of student ability and engagement
	Student centred
	Remote/teacher centred, content driven
	Reflexive attitude and approach/humanistic, constructivist
Own experiences	Contradictions
	Focus and purpose
	Impact of WP
	Realisations and awareness
Success perceptions	Symbols

	Values
	Consequences
Experience with WP	Outreach/other
	Awareness of it remotely
	Value
Wider department approach/perception	Openness
	Strategic approach
	Constraints

The themes identified above these be further analysed and explored in full in chapter 5. In brief, polarised views of WP emerged among lecturers both in HSSc and other schools. This was similar to the focus group: there was support for it and acknowledged benefits but also coupled with constraints. The political and philosophical issues were addressed to a point and could have been explored further. They were mostly in relation to entry qualifications and enabling more people to go to university that would not previously have considered it. Typologies of who was a 'WP student' were indicated and it was acknowledged that it '*happened*' '*out there*' and '*in here*'. However, whose role it was remained unclear.

Symbols of WP ranged from identifying student characteristics such as ethnicities, mature students, differing qualifications to prior education or qualifications. The comment 'non traditional student' was used frequently in relation to WP. This could have been explored further most especially what 'traditional' referred to or whether this implied some prejudiced view of who university education is for.

The cost of WP was perceived as high due to being labour and staff intensive, though this was identified mostly in association with outreach work and recruitment activities. Students who were admitted to the university through these 'persuasion' means were then seen as lacking skills and abilities. This deficit model was a theme across the other schools as well as HSSc but more an issue of believed poor prior education. This emphasised a difference in standards and attaining the 'right qualifications' with a sense that HE must accept it and work with it.

Overall there were no unique themes within any particular area (discipline or School). The issues identified were similar and resonated across the university. However there were some aspects which did make one question the ontological antecedents: personal values, pedagogical beliefs or a discipline trait. This also necessitated a reflection on my own personal values, health related profession practice and knowledge for practice but also the position and perception of diverse disciplines within higher education.

a.   Focus group key issues.

The structure of the focus group was satisfactory. The question schedule was prepared and the room and equipment were adequate. Transcribing the data presented a challenge when more than one voice was heard but reference to the post focus group notes assisted in clarifying any points. All the participants appeared to contribute equally which was reassuring as there was no need for control or intervention which may be a characteristic of lecturers in general or their appreciation of the research process from their own experience of active research. This may also have been a facet of their professional skills i.e. communication skills, especially listening. The guiding questions were appropriate and triggered a number of responses which then propagated themselves, addressing a wide range of relevant issues. The subject of WP is expansive, and the discussions revolved around the opinions, perceptions and experiences of the lecturers themselves. The focus group was composed of a mix of ethnicities and ages. This was not planned as I was unsure who or how many would turn up. Interestingly there were no male participants though whether this changed the dynamic and responses is unclear. This may have been a weakness and a consideration for a second focus group however the composition of a second focus group would be equally difficult to predict. The challenge of knowing when the purpose of the focus group was fulfilled would be similarly difficult. As such the perceptions of male lecturers were planned into the individual interviews.

The lecturers involved were all very experienced and the depth of discussion was evident. The breadth of discipline areas also enabled a wider view but still remained within HSSc. The lecturers who participated clearly did have opinions about WP. I acknowledge that this group of interested individuals may not represent the wider school view. However, as a starting point it served a valuable purpose. As volunteers for the focus group with an interest in WP, it is possible this may have influenced the flow of the discussion. The discussion also served a further purpose in providing a trigger for colleagues to reflect on a topic which may have been seen as more peripheral in their work. In addition to exploring their perceptions it was also intended to raise awareness of WP and that asking about perceptions and practice consequences would trigger a 'change' or difference towards practice even if only a more acute awareness. This in itself was an output though was extremely difficult to evaluate or measure. The findings from this group however were valuable in enabling the next part of the data collection to proceed. Furthermore, lecturers had a desire to know what

other opinions there were and expressed a desire to be included in dissemination processes.

The focus group discussion highlighted the issue of 'connections' and 'care'. The comment that HSSc "is a caring school" was interesting. When the individual interviews were undertaken the data was analysed to identify similar perceptions or any differing themes in HSSc compared with other schools. Twelve lecturers were interviewed which reflects a small proportion of teaching staff and as such comparison across Schools or disciplines is limited. Certain notions such as 'caring' could be shared across disciplines or more importantly within teaching as a discipline and as such is an element to explore and conceptualise. Costley et al (2010) identify that 'caring' carries a moral obligation and if it carries a '*disposition to act on behalf of others*' (ibid: 43) could be a powerful aspect to transform, or change practice. If this is a professional trait (in professional programmes) then this might reflect a heightened sense of need in WP students in HSSc. As a trait in teaching then, this may present no difference across Schools or disciplines. This is another consideration for the analysis of the findings.

b.   Lecturer interviews key issues.

The interviews were very varied and spanned a considerable period of time (3 years). This was a constraint as the environment around the lecturers was changing constantly in campus moves, curriculum overhauls and departmental restructurings. The results in any event will reflect some of the key concerns of those issues which may not have been apparent in the early interviews. As a lecturer and working in a placement learning capacity I have a cross-school work role. I meet various people frequently and whilst this is an advantage in terms of accessing colleagues for interviews. It is also difficult as I know some colleagues quite well and I found it a challenge when, during some interviews, I felt the urge to challenge their responses as I knew that they were influenced by my presence as an interviewer. This could be managed differently with an independent interviewer.

I believe there are two key issues here. Firstly, asking questions on a subject that lecturers may well not have actively reflected upon before would be challenging for them and they may not have formed their ideas and opinions concretely and may be more open to me as a colleague in a scholarly exploration of the topic. This was desirable as this was an aspect under investigation and unformed opinions and awareness will be evident in teaching approaches. This process was designed to not only acquire data but also to use questions to heighten awareness. Secondly, as

Reason and Bradbury (2006) point out this process involves high researcher and subject involvement. As a worker researcher I was not prepared for the emotions I would feel during the process of data collection nor of the strength of emotion from colleagues. Personally the reflection element was critical in not only digesting the information and the key issues raised, but also of the unsaid elements. I did question if my colleagues and I would benefit from further debriefing especially given the emotional reactions. As a topic WP is not controversial, but having opinions about it did seem challenging and politically fraught. I recall one colleague after interview asking for reassurance that the interview would be anonymous for fear of saying the 'wrong thing' and I question myself on what was the 'wrong thing'. It was unclear if this was due to fear of management or more realistically a fear of change and wanting to 'fit in' where challenging or championing WP would be perceived as fighting the system. This I believe does have implications for comfort zones and how lecturers could be trapped in this or the perception that it would impact negatively on their position or role.

The volume and velocity of the changes in the organisation had an impact on the project progression. The period of data collection and the initial questions seemed to be incorporated within the curriculum changes but in the name of retention and progression as opposed to WP per se. Thus the changes which occurred over a period of four years affected all students and this also impacted on the needs of WP students. The teaching, learning and assessment strategy also underwent a review and alongside the learning framework (curriculum) changes and these would undoubtedly have had an impact on lecturers' perspectives, roles and workloads. Some aspects were introduced and interpreted in a way which may have appeared to increase stress and workload. Aspects such as formative assessment, improved and detailed feedback with concentrated staff development events and the speed of change will have undoubtedly impacted on lecturers. Whilst these interventions were aimed at supporting students and increasing progression it was borne in mind that the tension and any consequence may colour perceptions with connotations of targeting WP students and their perceived level of ability. The changes could also be a useful vehicle to increase the dialogue of WP and to reframe approaches to diverse students and pedagogical approaches.

The interviews with lecturers and the next phase (with students) were almost concurrent in that student interviews and questionnaire collation commenced before the lecturer interviews were complete. This was unintentional but did give a rich insight by considering the student perspective contemporaneously. It became evident, as McNiff and Whitehead (2002) identify, that the organised notion of research provides a

structure and process but it is not always so elegant and sequential. This process did develop like that. I believe whilst I commenced this project in one place I ended up in another, completely unexpected but not unrelated. The concurrent changes within the organisation did confound the original intentions of this project. However, they also provided a useful platform to a develop dialogue and look at how we approach diversity at an individual, departmental and institutional level. This resonates with McNiff and Whitehead's (2002: 56) claim that it is possible to address multiple issues whilst still maintaining a focus on one in '*a realisation of Plato's idea of holding together the one and the many*', in this instance lecturers perceptions of WP and the impact of this with students.

PHASE 2: What are 'WP students' and what constitutes success in WP?

Phase 2: Assessing.

This part attempted to address the student perceptions and staff perceptions of what constitutes success in WP. The first two objectives were addressed in part through exploring lecturer perceptions of whether they could identify WP students and what constituted student success. This phase built upon that and focussed on asking students from diverse backgrounds what they thought of the teaching and learning environment and to share their experience of modules and key skills developments intended to support them. The sub questions which were addressed here were:

- To what extent can widening participation students be identified?
- Do lecturers consider the needs of WP students in their teaching?
- Are lecturing and other staff sensitive to student needs and knowledgeable of the resources available to support students from non traditional backgrounds?
- What are the perceived benefits of 'support' given to WP students?
- What is meant by student success and how is it measured?
- To what extent can widening participation students be identified?
- Have the developments of teaching and learning (i.e. LOTS modules and key skills threaded through the curriculum) addressed the needs of Widening Participation students?

Phase 2: Planning.

This phase was undertaken and overlapped and almost part of phase 1. The issues which emerged pointed to connections with students and lecturers and relationships on

a number of levels. The perceptions and experience of students within higher education has been researched rather extensively and in a variety of guises. Entwhistle et al (2003) investigated teaching and learning environments and points to two pivotal conceptual frameworks for understanding and promoting student learning: Biggs (1999) theory of constructive alignment and Perkins (1998 cited in Entwhistle et al, 2003) framework of teaching for learning. During their project, aspects which impacted on student learning included similar issues pertinent to WP which were useful in this project: entry characteristics, previous experience of education, social engagement, peer group, culture, motivation and perception of the learning environment. More significantly for me was the lecturer influences on students including lecturers' subject knowledge, lecturers' beliefs about teaching and pedagogical approaches, interpretation of student understanding and the affective quality of student-teacher relationships. As the interviews with lecturers indicated a range of relationships with students and at times, an intuitive pedagogical approach, I wanted to explore the experiences of a diverse student group. I also wanted to explore how they perceived their teaching-learning environment and whether interventions such as the LOTS (key skills) module impacted on their learning. At the time of this research project students were all still required to take the Key Skills module in year 1 which was intended to equip them with core skills with which to engage in learning in the academic environment.

Given that students on any programme or module are likely to differ in their aims, learning histories and skill in learning, the extent to which alignment can be achieved for diverse groups is an important concern. This was explored within the questionnaire and to an extent in interviews. Students' sense of belonging to communities both within and beyond academic settings and aspects of their identities is also integrated with their experiences of learning in higher education (Bamber and Tett, 2000; Tett, 2000). The literature suggests the importance of students' experiences of teaching on their courses in relation to their engagement but also to their developing a sense of 'community' (Entwistle 2003; Trigwell, Prosser and Waterhouse, 1999). Some of the findings from these studies suggest that enthusiastic and empathic teaching with good explanations can have a noticeable positive effect on students' learning. Previous research has already suggested that students see 'good lecturing' as depending on four basic aspects - *clarity* (clear speaking and illustrations), *level* matched to students prior knowledge, *pace* appropriate to ability level, and clear logical *structure* (Kember and Wong, 2000)and *interaction* (Ernst and Colthorpe, 2007). Whilst not asked explicitly these aspects were incorporated into the question subscales and identified as linked most closely to a deep approach are the accessibility and thoroughness of

explanations, the *enthusiasm* shown for the subject, and the *empathy* that is shown for students' difficulties and the quality of support that follows. Given that diverse or WP students have a range of prior experiences, preparation and understanding or aspirations of HE, it was intended to investigate if lecturers are aware of their needs or of the students' perceptions of what constitutes a 'good experience' or even success for themselves?

Access to Student Subjects.

The subjects were selected from two student groups considered to reflect the most diverse student groups within HSSc: nursing and sport and exercise science. Access to these students was via a core module on their programme, which enabled a large number of students to be approached. In the main the students were willing to participate and few opted out. All students were in their third year of their course towards the end of their programme and had a wealth of experiences from their university studies. As a lecturer within HSSc access to lecturers on these programmes, and thus students, was not an issue. The students were approached in line with the ethical principles mentioned in chapter 3 and their consent was obtained prior to any data collection.

The questionnaire and interview schedule.

The data collection was in two parts: a questionnaire and individual student interviews.

a.   The questionnaire used was a content and criterion validated instrument available from the ETL project website as mentioned in chapter 3. This was a self-completion questionnaire which consisted of five short sections which included the addition of a section for personal demographic information and information specific to HSSc and reflections on their first year (see appendix 4). The themes addressed in the questionnaire were outlined in chapter 3 and were not changed. The pilot of the questionnaire indicated that the questions were clear, answerable and more importantly the estimated time to complete was correct (15 minutes).

b.   The interview questions developed from the key themes in the questionnaire probing to explore the issues further. There were five question areas outlined in chapter 3. These were not piloted and the semi structure of the interview meant that the question areas were addressed but there was scope to explore some aspects which may emerge from participants. Some

of the questions mirrored those put to the lecturers and others were aimed at investigating the students' background and motivations.

Phase 2: Implementation.

The nursing students were a large group one cohort of the adult branch nurses (year 3, n=160) on the Diploma in Nursing (and combined Registered Nurse status) programme. The availability of ethnicity data enabled the selection of this group as diverse: culturally, in age and academically. The sports students were a smaller group studying a general sports degree as opposed to a professional sports rehabilitation degree and were also in year 3 (n=35). The majority of these students were young (21-26 years) and entered the university with qualifications such as BTEC or having undertaken a foundation degree as opposed to 'A' levels and as such had varied prior academic experiences which appeared to be mostly vocational courses.

The students were invited to participate and then received a letter explaining the project and if willing, signed a consent form. In total 124 completed useable questionnaires were obtained (109 nurses and 17 sports students) giving a response rate of 68% and 49% return rate respectively (overall 64.6%). Six students overall were interviewed, the low numbers due to other constraints such as assessment time, other course commitments (placements etc) and difficulty negotiating convenient times. Several appointments were made but failed to proceed for a variety of reasons resulting in the lower numbers than originally intended. Whilst this does not reflect the entire diverse student population and is not be generalisable it was intended to give some insight into individual perspectives and supplement the questionnaire data.

Phase 2: Evaluation.
This phase dovetailed with the previous phase and did not emerge from it in the strictest sense. The main intention was to generate data on perceptions and experiences gained during the programme. The assumption was that these would reflect a diverse group which represents WP student groups.

Initially, I intended to devise my own questionnaire or just to interview groups of students. However, the pre-validated questionnaire found during extensive literature review was fortunate and with the addition of one section fulfilled the information needs I had and was eminently suitable. The inclusion of a section for demographic data and specifics on the year 1 LOTS module would then provide the breadth of information

required. As a self completion questionnaire this phase of the data collection was easier. Access to the students was also unproblematic. However, being known by the students may have been a disadvantage impinging on openness and honesty in the responses. I did notice that many students were happy to answer the questions in sections 2 to 5 on teaching and learning. However, in many instances students did not complete sections on parental occupation or family experiences of university. Whilst some demographic data is held on students (postcode data, prior educational attainment and age or ethnicity) the other aspects mentioned above are not but would have provided a more complete picture of the characteristics of WP students as defined in some of the literature. With these sections incomplete this was limited. Since some of the students were of a wide age difference the question of parental occupation may not have been appropriate. Some of them were very mature and were parents themselves and as such perhaps their parents' occupation was not appropriate indicator of socio-economic status. This ought to have included their former or spouses' occupation. Overall however as a mature student they were in a category of their own (HEFCE categories) and postcode data may have sufficed to indicate socio-economic status.

Table 4.3 Data themes from data from student interviews.

Theme	Sub-theme
Being a university student	Belonging Conscious decisions Hardships Intellectual capacity
Being a professional	Choice Placements and careers
Learning about learning	Support Traditional pedagogy 'Good student' ' Feedback
Constraints and frustrations	Guidance Poor teaching Independence
Power and control	Choices as power Change agent Independence as helplessness Peer apathy

These were year 3 students towards the end of their programme and they were graduating and moving on. The time frame available to interview them was thus limited. It did however provide a snapshot of the students' individual perceptions of their experiences of teaching and learning (table 4.3).

The data from the students provided a snapshot at one point in time. Ideally this would have been repeated with more groups and comparing groups from other schools. This would only be useful if diverse students could be identified and if they are considered a homogeneous group. The main focus was student perceptions of teaching and learning and their relationships with the university and the staff. The central research question was on lecturers' perceptions and practice and as such the student findings were not central but supplementary and to triangulate. The students provided some valuable information regarding their experiences, in particular the nature of relationships with lecturing staff and their engagement with their studies. The student 'voice' is increasingly an issue in higher education and as such also an aspect which was considered relevant for this project. I enjoyed talking to the students. They all had different perceptions and experiences and felt happy to talk about these and more importantly the journey they had made to go to university.

They all knew me from the various roles I hold and I had previously been involved in their programmes in some form or at least as part of the programme team. I was not teaching them at the time of the interviews. I realise this may have impacted on how frank they were but they appeared quite open about their perceptions. It was interesting that they wanted to talk of their experiences both good and bad and I question whether this was a debriefing for them and a chance to be heard. This is an issue that is probably not addressed towards the end of programmes and the existing evaluation processes may not take into account the individual voice. This may be an issue for inclusive teaching practices.

The omissions in the questionnaire were quite revealing, particularly in aspects that students clearly thought were either too personal or irrelevant. On more than one occasion a student challenged me on this information which did emphasise the aspect of pigeonholing students into categories which were not always so clearly defined.

PHASE 3: Good practice and embedding of WP.

Phase 3: Assessing.

This phase revolved around the question of examples of good practice and the impact of embedding a widening participation strategy. However, at the time of the project several key changes occurred in both national and university reporting and policy

requirements. The data collection for this project commenced in November 2006 and extended over two years (to December 2008). Over such a timeframe external changes impacted and evidently affected the students and staff. In my mind whilst this was important the key central question concerns perceptions and response to WP. The key sub questions which were addressed in this phase were:

- What is meant by embedded and how is this manifest in policy and practice across the institution?
- What are the shared understandings, if any, of Widening Participation across the institution?
- Are there promoters or barriers to actively embedding and sustaining Widening Participation?

There were also other compounding changes such as campus changes and rationalisation of the number of schools within the university and fundamental curriculum changes. These changes included: a new learning framework, year-long modules, pre- university bridging materials, closer monitoring of the first year experience (week 6 and 10 reviews) and an amended and renamed Enhancing Teaching, Learning and Assessment (ETLA) strategy which urged all staff to embrace diversity and inclusive practices explicitly identified in one of the three aims of the strategy. These were developed to address issues of student retention and progression through the stages of their programmes, not specifically WP, using 'diversity' as the term to embrace disability, ethnicity and gender issues.

Furthermore, there were new positions among support staff to monitor and manage students with difficulties and help students to navigate any support needs they may have (School Academic Achievement Advisors or SAAs). At this point with so much change and that HECFE no longer required universities to have a WP strategy in place and hence a school WP strategy, my research question had to be amended. However, the question of how embedded WP was within the university and the schools remained.

Prior to this the University WP policy and strategic plan meant that aspects of WP were delegated to a number of areas for monitoring and evaluation. As part of the University WP steering group it was evident that the overall co-ordination and overview of WP was diffuse and aspects delegated to specific teams i.e. outreach, teaching and learning or student support. Each school was to develop their own strategy in response to the university strategy to try and coalesce or operationalise this larger strategy. Thus the objective I had identified, as a key author of the HSSc strategy, was to

monitor and evaluate embedding of the strategy. I had developed this strategy to reflect the university and also the student life cycle and the various areas of work within the school (HSSc). This became obsolete with the demise for the need of a university and hence school strategy. The issues were unchanged and 'incorporated' into other university policies and practices. As a consequence accountability for WP as a specific entity was no longer a requirement. The mixed methods approach included multiple methods and as such was flexible enough to respond to the changing environment, structures and processes (including curriculum). Its pathway did change somewhat as outlined in the changes to the WP strategy and demands of external stakeholders, such as HEFCE regarding information about the institutional actions towards WP. This worked to my advantage in giving me a different but related route by which to explore the wider institution view of WP and the issue of 'embedding' of this.

The issue of WP remained on the horizon and, fortunately, this could be further explored though a national project overseen by Action on Access (AoA) for HEFCE. This was then a key vehicle for me to explore WP in the institution more widely than the embedding of the strategy within the school. Politically this arose from a number of documents and funding issues associated with student retention, WP audits and the review of WP research as identified in chapter 2. The purpose of the AoA project was for institutions to reflect on what WP meant for them and in what ways it was mainstreamed and embedded within practices and processes. I encouraged a team of colleagues from across the university to explore this within Middlesex as outlined in chapter 3.

Up to this point the external reference points for the progression of this project were the support and critical advice from my Programme advisor and Subject advisor. The project was focussed on practice level but the changes identified meant a reframing of the project. The advantage of the emergence of the national AoA project to the third phase of this project was an opportunity to address the wider institution position and overt commitment to WP. It afforded the authority to ask the challenging questions of WP and complement the project elements and AoA was a recognised authority to act as an external reference point or 'critical friend' to processes and practices. This element of criticality was important to provide objectivity and stimulus to explore deeper into the organisation and the evidence for the conclusions and actions suggested.

Thus whilst the research question remained the same, the objectives had to be modified to address the revised approach. In this instance the term 'strategy' was removed as this was now obsolete. An overview of WP and the process of

mainstreaming or embeddedness was explored with identification of good practice which could be disseminated, and areas which could be strengthened. The focus was also not now solely on lecturers but on all university services and as such was a much larger investigation than originally intended at the commencement of this DProf project.

Phase 3: Planning.

The AoA project referred to in chapter 1 and above aimed to explore the extent of mainstreaming and embeddedness of WP in institutions was critical to my exploration of the lecturers' understanding of WP and its impact on their practice. I integrated this project to run alongside my research to provide a further richer dimension. The working team I convened ensured a participative approach complementing the research process.

This project was funded by HEFCE (Action on Access, 2008) in terms of AoA advice, guidance and support. The aim of the project was to provide a focused programme of events and support to stimulate institutional internal reflection and dialogue aimed at developing, integrating (mainstreaming) and sustaining WP. In addition to this, AoA also provided external information, guidance and a critical reference point with its expanse of research and expertise. The project was aimed at senior staff, WP leads or influence and other staff, the main aim being to achieve a commitment from institutional staff at all levels. This project was intended to last for 11 months involving approximately 18 other institutions across the country. The key objectives for institutions were identified by Action on Access (2008) were to:

• Review their institutional approach to mainstreaming and sustaining WP.
• Identify the strengths and limitations of the approach.
• Develop, implement and evaluate institutional policies and practice to overcome gaps in their current strategic approach to WP.
• Draft plans for the future to further integrate and sustain WP.
• Produce a policy discussion paper reflecting on the future of widening participation within the institution.

The AoA objectives did link quite closely with my own and provided the opportunity to answer my sub questions: strategy embedding, shared understanding and barriers or promoters to embedding and sustaining WP. The project working team comprised five members of the university. However, initially I was aware that to ensure a wide range of participation and effective organisational support and change required a larger working

team within the university of colleagues from a wide range of services and departments. The larger project working team devised a strategy to operationalise the AoA objectives. This was undertaken in several stages as outlined in chapter 3. The key output for public scrutiny was a policy discussion paper.

Phase 3: Implementation.

The project working team were not exclusively academic staff and represented the following departments : English Language Learning and Support (ELLs), disability services, teaching fellows, outreach services, equality and diversity (human resources), AimHigher, student support (SAAs), student union representative and summer school projects. The range of people reflected the services delivered in the university and was open to anyone who wished to join through open invitation. The working group was not exclusive and aimed to be inclusive to incorporate a wide range of experiences and opinions. The implementation was undertaken through a series of working party meetings in the university, support and guidance workshops from Action on Access and a staff development event. Each working party meeting resulted in a series of actions the results of which were collated and fed back to the group.

Phase 3: Analysis.

The central focus for this part (phase 3) was not on teaching and lecturing staff specifically but on the wider services of the university which impact upon the student experience. In specific, the question: '*Is there a difference [in WP] between or within schools in the University?'* is addressed by this phase and the objective: '*To identify the effects of embedding a Widening Participation strategy upon lecturers' understanding and teaching approaches'.* '*Are there promoters or barriers to actively implementing the [school] Widening Participation strategies*?'. The term 'school' and 'strategy' had to be omitted but the process of embedding WP practices remained. Whilst this particular project was not designed to fulfil many of my research questions, participating in this project answered elements of my question by exploring the bigger institution picture specifically: What is meant by embedded and how is this manifest in policy and practice across the institution? What are the shared understandings, if any, of Widening Participation across the institution? Are there promoters or barriers to actively embedding and sustaining Widening Participation? It also, more importantly, was an opportunity to actively use participative approaches complementing the epistemological underpinning of my research approach. This phase enabled me to

work closely with a wider team across the university and have a more profound influence on WP discourse and practices associated with it.

There were challenges for and to the working party in relation to meetings, task allocation, analysis etc. Gaining representation from all the service areas was an issue as well as consistency of representation. Some areas were stretched and had varied levels of involvement. This was most notable from Student Union. This group was key and yet did not have the staff or membership to attend which in retrospect is an issue of planning meetings. Contribution at a distance was the compromise. The participation levels did vary from active to passive but attention was always focussed on inclusion. However this may have been hampered to a point but individual perceptions of how and to what level they could be included. Power and position was also a challenge especially as this work and groups was being driven forward by a few individuals some with a lower position in the organisation to more senior colleagues resulting in some tensions and conflicts.

In this phase of my DProf project (and the AoA project) there were five working party meetings over the eleven months. These included discussion on and actions associated with the key objectives. There were several strengths from this phase this included the identification of key stakeholders which wished to be involved in issues of WP and consequently the working party. In addition a SWOT analyses by the team provided an accumulation of the perceived key issues by the working group following full and frank discussion. This enabled a view of the varying contexts under which teaching and learning are practiced. These were organised under macro-, meso- and micro- level of the institution. The macro level referred to the overall institution in terms of structures and guiding the function of the university (policies etc). The meso-level was taken to represent the focus on the school organisation and structures. The micro-level was taken to represent the individual departments or subject groups and the staff in daily work and the interface with delivery of higher education. The results of these are presented and discussed in chapter 6. A further strength was the opportunity to analyse relevant policy and other documents to ascertain reference to, and embedding of, WP. This enabled colleagues to reflect on the guiding frameworks in a coherent way to see the holes or omissions and how to address this. The documents were selected for relevance to teaching and learning but opens up the necessity to view all policy and strategy documents for 'joined upness'.

The key points addressed within this phase of the project included consideration of the key opportunities or drivers for change so that the university could consider how these

might be tackled and what 'embedded and mainstreamed WP' looked like in a changing HE sector. The university needed to demonstrate high level commitment to sustaining WP within the mission, management, culture and practice of the institution. Furthermore, it brought certain issues to the fore:

- Where WP currently fits within the institution and why it remains of strategic importance.
- What the current principle commitments are, asking challenging questions such as what is the institution actually doing and why? For example, how is WP shifting the culture? How is WP embedded across different departments? How does the HEI sit within the local community and how is this shaping its strategic developments? What are the current core activities? How success is measured?

These questions fitted with my own research questions which were focussed on one particular area: lecturers understanding and pedagogical practices. This then positioned the lecturers within the wider institution and the wider influences which impacted on their perceptions and practice.

Phase 3: Evaluation.

This part was a large project in itself and was completed in less than one year at a rather rapid rate. Only some of the issues and outputs are identified here, the significance of these will be explored further in chapter 6. The main frustrations were the consistency with which the project working team met and were supported by more senior staff. The project itself was finite but the repercussions are longer term. The opportunity to meet with and explore the issues of WP with other colleagues was a valuable experience imbuing a sense of cohesion and desire to improve the student experience. There were not many lecturers who contributed to this phase but the services around the teaching provision and student experiences were equally important and represented. There were several tensions within the working party and many of these could be construed as power issues raising the question of leadership, responsibility and accountability. It was evident that working with such an influential organisation as AoA was generally done by more senior colleagues and whilst the 'team' appeared to be working effectively together this was more to do with the industriousness of a few rather than the equitable contribution of all.

This was not an easy project to manage but was an example of how influence and leadership can be projected from many levels within an organisation. There were

colleagues who were reticent to critically reflect on their own areas and were protective and others who had their own agendas either based around funding issues or other perceived needs. This was an opportunity to engage and make WP part of the cross university Student Experience group and make WP embedded within key working groups. Certainly there were enthusiastic and committed colleagues who believed as passionately about WP as I, however, this was not uniform and tensions in the working group at times resulted in slow progress.

The WP and HE landscape is continually changing and since this AoA project there have been more changes, in that HEFCE are now asking for a Strategic Review report identifying institutions commitment to and success in WP and as such demonstrating this dynamic and fluid environment of WP.

As an outsider in the school management team, and ultimately the university management teams, I had a limited opportunity to impact in the wider changes within the organisation. I was also aware of the pressures from outside the organisation (HEFCE, unstable financial climate etc) and also within the organisation (academic and geographical changes). As the project developed it emerged that influence has many levels of impact and subtle changes could have more enduring impact. However as an insider, challenging the notions of WP being 'done' by 'someone' and the insider knowledge of peoples perspectives and practices it was evident that actions were not always what they espoused. This raised questions of beliefs and relationship with others, idealism and questions around the role of HE but also wider issues of truthfulness and authenticity which will be explored in the next chapter.

I attempted to analyse the institution from a macro-political angle during this phase (AoA project). This involved consideration of power, diverse and conflicting goals within the organisation, educational and social positions and diverse personnel and professional interests. This was expansive and revealed the context. Blythman and Orr (2002) suggest analysing organisations to determine where power lies, how it operates and where there is space for action. To do this, reflections from the second part of my study were utilised with reference to the processes (meetings) and data (as presented in chapter 6).

Evaluation of overall project coherence and progression.

The three main phases of the data collection element of this project were conducted over a period of three years. The initial research question was devised in light of my

position at the time and my various roles and emergent understandings of WP. In planning the project the phases were quite distinct but as the project progressed the phases had to be modified to address the external and internal changes which occurred within the organisation. The phases as outlined above do blend and move from a micro level of practice to the broader organisational commitment and accompanying policy formulation and supportive infrastructure. The findings revealed a complex tale of how WP is constructed and practiced, if it can be practiced. This is discussed in-depth in chapters 5 and 6. Certainly this challenged my own perception of what WP is. My intention was to investigate and ask questions of WP, challenge belief systems and practices, then enquire of any changes in practice as a consequence. This however was complicated by the aforementioned changes however it also opened up the opportunity to address WP more broadly with potentially a wider impact on practice. The support and critical dialogue with outside organisations such as AoA provided an opportunity for adding emphasis to the issue of WP and increase my position of influence. This project did have coherence and retained focus on the key issue of WP. It was fortunate this remained a key political issue and will continue to do so and the findings will therefore have relevance for future work of higher education and teaching and learning.

Chapter 5:   DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS: Perceptions of WP and Teaching and Learning.

The outcomes of this project have focussed on a particular organisational aspect: lecturers' understanding of WP and the impact of this on their teaching approaches which would inform their practice. Additionally by exploring this, I hope to raise awareness amongst colleagues and aim to improve practice. Part of the initial aim was also to explore this understanding with a view to evaluating the embedding of a WP strategy locally. However, this was curtailed due to wider changes nationally and locally as outlined in chapter 4.

The results of this project will be divided into two chapters. This chapter (5) will consider the key themes arising from the main question 'lecturers' perceptions of WP'. It is structured thematically to address the outcomes from the research activity in phases 1 and 2 outlined in chapter 4 with the quotes from 'FG' indicating from the focus group and 'L' indicating lecturer interviews. The next chapter (6) will consider the outcomes of the embedding and mainstreaming of WP element (Action on Access national project) as it attempted to contextualise the findings from the lecturers. It will also address the extent to which the project objectives have been achieved and relate the findings to pertinent theories and literature and dissemination process. Some insights from an insider-researcher perspective and the limitations of this part of the project will be addressed also. The conclusions to the entire project activity will be expanded in chapter 7.

This project was operationalised in three interrelated phases. This was via the methodology outlined in chapter 3 which was an embedded mixed methods approach within an orientation frame of transformation or advocacy for critical reflection on practice to evoke change in practice. The third phase was more collegial and participative as it involved several departments internally and encompassed involvement in a national project co-ordinated by Action on Access. This organisation also advantageously served as a 'critical friend' and an external reference point enabling and supporting the logical questioning enquiry, challenging of claims and evidence and overall coherence of the process and conclusions. Being part of this was vital to exploring how mainstreamed or embedded WP was at that point in time (2007 – 8 without a WP strategy) and also how this impacted on lecturers' attitudes, understanding and their teaching approaches. I realised that in the changing environment, both internally and externally, maintaining a focus on key issues was important. This project was flexible enough to adapt to the changing environment and

associated pressures. The AoA project was incorporated into my research, such that as HE was evolving and changing this project provided opportunities to challenge, influence and improve practice.

My initial purpose was not to make the issue of WP problematical. However, this project revealed a number of issues, one of which was the perception of WP as a 'problem' or an 'issue' to be solved from a range of lecturers (table 5.1). The main issues that emerged highlighted that WP is framed as a number of discourses each of which has a different focus, on the nature of WP, resulting in diverse practices and approaches. These, at times, competed and occasionally conflicted with each other. One consequence was the limited ability to see WP as impacting on daily practice. These complexities also appeared to indicate, in some areas, tendencies towards 'safeguarding' disciplines and professions from 'unworthy' or 'less able' students. The potential therefore was for barriers and blocks to learning illustrated in the types of relationships and connections between students and lecturers. However, at the same time, there was an overarching discourse of social advancement and the opportunity of tapping into a talent pool. This was combined with a reluctant resignation that WP is a recruitment approach and that the inherent deficiencies of this were to be endured.

Table 5.1 Details of research participants.

Research process	Participants	Numbers
Focus Group	Lecturers (all HSSc)	5
Interviews	Lecturers (HSSc) Male	3
	Lecturers (HSSc) Female	4
	Lecturers (non HSSc) Male	2
	Lecturers (non HSSc) Female	3

	Students
	    Nursing
	    Sports and Exercise Science
		
		3
		3

Questionnaires	Students (Nurses)	109
	Students (Sports)	17

From the wider department and institutional perspective, WP discourse was an reflection of national and local (institutional) policy framed around Middlesex University's mission and vision which linked to wider national drivers of social justice and inclusion. This reflected the so-called 'knowledge economy' evident in government policy (Jary and Jones, 2006, David et al, 2008). The policies and strategies arising from the university mission are overall framed in actions for the 'wider benefit' of all students as opposed to focussing on WP as an issue itself.

Generalised perceptions of WP.

The focus group was the early exploratory part of the research project and aimed to provide a platform for the perceptions of WP. This group engaged in a vibrant dialogue uncovering a series of issues and opinions reflecting the position and relevance of WP to the lecturers. As identified in chapters 3 and 4 only one focus group was conducted but was sufficient (table 5.1). The issues which emerged were categorised into two main aspects relating to their sphere of working: internal (directly related) focus and external (not directly related) focus (see table 5.2). This provided a platform to further explore lecturers' individual perceptions.

Table 5.2 Focus group findings.

Internal focus: - Idealistically in support of WP and have a vague idea what it is   'Non traditional students' but unclear what this means   - Sense of paternalism   - Own sense of accomplishment and failure, student success   - Lecturing is not just job but also use of self and emotions   - Empathy for students from own experiences of university
External focus: - A feature of post '92 institutions, have a reputation for WP   - Language divide is alienating i.e. 'academic speak' 'discourse' 'values' resultant expectation gap   - Programmes are laden with people connections (sport nursing, social work etc) these skills seen as important and central to success   - Purpose of university - for personal, academic and professional development   - Multiple aspects to WP (entry gate, outreach, information)

In the focus group lecturers' perception of their own role, identity and their perception of WP students and their abilities was diverse. What happens as WP was rather diverse in relation to students and their needs. This included students being able or being deficient and 'under the radar' thus needing significant help to progress. The issue of filtering out 'unable' students was evident with some lecturers of specific vocational courses. Additionally, surprise was expressed at 'WP' students who struggle as if this is

unthinkable following successful navigation of complex entry gate requirements. At one level, pedagogical understandings associated with WP revealed a 'lacking' or 'deficit' belief of WP students, whilst on another level WP is a community obligation, socially inclusive and transforming. A picture of WP 'students' as a group, whilst not clearly defined or evident was associated overwhelmingly as a group possessing deficits.

> *'it's a very mixed picture ... once they've been short listed they have to undertake written tests and a numeracy test ..... for whatever reason although they've passed the test will struggle but in terms of who those students are, whether they fit the widening participation typology I'm not sure*' (FG 3).

The focus group acknowledged rather reluctantly that the university considered hard data, statistics and monitoring of student academic achievement as important measures of student success. They also emphasised their view of subjective measures as equally or more important to indicate success, such as student satisfaction, feeling valued and persistence despite personal difficulties. They did acknowledge completion of courses of study and graduation as also important. The limitation of this was identified too in that student completion within a specific time frame is important but this was not always achieved. Furthermore it is bound with funding sources and constraints. This was agreed as a narrow view but a reality with arguably student life balance or student experiences being less important.

The focus group identified challenges to WP in the social inclusion sense for certain programmes of study. These included prescribed rigid programmes with stringent entry criteria which excluded WP students or the amount of support needed by WP students which would make such programmes impossible to deliver. It was almost as if WP was an issue but, due to the deficit perception of WP students, meant that some areas were 'exempt' from WP under the umbrella 'professional programmes'.

In reflecting on the research objectives, the focus group provided some insights into lecturers' perceptions of WP expressing empathy and sensitivity to the needs of WP students. This was caged in terms of 'needs' and 'deficits' and implied a difference, using terminology such as 'non-traditional' inferring a marginalised problematical group different from 'traditional' students. This also resonates with a wide body of literature focusing on difference and deficits (Haggis, 2006, Thomas, 2006, Northedge, 2003). Success furthermore was defined by the lecturers in tangible terms as either longevity (endurance) or development of skills and qualities with considerable investment by lecturing staff emotionally or pedagogically.

Perception of what is WP.

The initial phase of this research intended to explore HSSc lecturers' understanding and engagement with WP initiatives, or activities, which could be described as establishing if there was a 'culture' sensitive to WP (see chapter 3). This aimed to explore aspects of teaching and learning which contribute to success for WP students. These were expansive objectives to address and the approaches chosen (focus group and interviews) were appropriate in the main. The participants reported a range of experiences and understandings which were quite diverse with some elements of similarity. The attempt to clarify or conceptualise the meaning of WP was enormously difficult and resulted in quite obscure and polarised opinions and generalisations. At one end this included simply the provision of information advice and guidance by groups of people for recruitment and at the other views of an altruistic approach and social engineering reflective of the dominant political aim.

Individual interviews.

Twelve lecturers were interviewed, seven from HSSc and five from schools outside HSSc (non-HSSc). The interview schedule comprised of six broad categories of questions:

- what is WP,
- what is the lecturers' role in relation to diverse students,
- description of WP student groups,
- teaching and pedagogical approaches for diversity,
- perceptions of student success, and
- their department's approach to WP.

The themes that emerged following analysis have already been outlined in chapter 4 (table 4.2) and in table 5.3.

In addition at six students were interviewed and the interview schedule comprised five similar broad question areas as those for the lecturers:

- choice of course and feelings about it,
- preparation and expectations of HE,
- reflections of teaching and learning on the course,

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- perceptions of support such as study skills modules and their
- perceptions of success.

Table 5.3 Themes from Lecturer Interviews.

Broad Themes:	Sub-themes
Definitions of WP	Symbols
	Constraints
	Practices
	Benefits of WP
Role and relation to students	Varied positions
	Strategy
	Scope in practice
Description of student groups:	Typology
	Location and environment
	Constraints
	Connections with students
	Other wider/organisational aspects:
Teaching approach:	Control and influence
	Perception of student ability and engagement
	Student centred
	Remote/teacher centred, content driven
	Reflexive attitude and approach/humanistic, constructivist
Own experiences	Contradictions
	Focus and purpose
	Impact of WP
	Realisations and awareness
Success perceptions	Symbols
	Values
	Consequences
Experience with WP	Outreach/other
	Awareness of it remotely
	Value
Wider department approach/perception	Openness
	Strategic approach
	Constraints

There were five themes which emerged and 21 subthemes. These were presented outline in table 4.3 (chapter 4) and in table 5.4 and will be discussed below The key findings from these interviews will be discussed under the following subheadings: Perceptions of WP, roles and relationships between lecturers and students, conceptions of teaching and learning, perceptions of academic challenges, expectations, conceptions of success, lecturers' perceptions of their wider department approach, lecturers' espoused practice in relation to WP and frustrations with teaching and learning.

Table 5.4 Themes from student interviews.

Theme:	Sub-theme:
Being a university student	Belonging Conscious decisions Hardships Intellectual capacity
Being a professional	Choice Placements and careers
Learning about learning	Support Traditional pedagogy 'Good student' ' Feedback
Constraints and frustrations	Guidance Poor teaching Independence
Power and control	Choices as power Change agent Independence as helplessness Peer apathy

Perceptions of WP from lecturers and students

The first level of analysis revealed a sense of difference among some lecturers. Some were aware and sensitive to students' varied, and at times large, outside commitments and varied life and work experiences. However, this was not uniform among the lecturers.

All the lecturers were experienced and all held a teaching qualification (see table 5.5). The lecturer responses were rich as individual narratives however for the purpose of my research it was necessary to distil responses to derive themes and examples. It does need to be noted that individuals were at times rather awe inspiring in their comments, attitudes and practice. The challenge is to capture this and disseminate it into the teaching community. There appeared to be an emotional investment and genuine need to relate and connect with students by some colleagues beyond that of 'work' to one of using 'self' and really wanting to make a difference in students' lives. Something I personally and professionally have always aspired to. There was sensitivity to students and connections at an individual level evident in some lecturers' responses. This was disparate crossing schools in the University implying the influence of personal characteristics and perception of teaching. One aspect which arose in the HSSc focus group was a mention of pride for being 'caring', a feature referred to as

possibly 'unique' to the health arena. The interviews conversely indicated some lecturers' limited sensitivity and (or seemingly desire to have) limited insight into students' lives and experiences. This was evident in all Schools represented by the lecturers. This was embodied in their tendency towards a distant and teacher-focussed pedagogy.

Table 5.5 Details of lecturers interviewed.

Schools	Number of lecturers	Years of teaching	Teaching qualification
Health and Social Science (HSSc)	7	Minimum 3 years Maximum 16 years	PGCE (n=4) PGCHE (n=1) Certificate in Education (n=1) City and Guilds Teaching certificate (n=1)
Computing Science	2	Minimum 5 years Maximum 9 years	PGCHE (n=2)
Business School	2	Minimum 5 years Maximum 10 years	PGCHE (n=2)
Arts and Education	1	6 years	PGCHE (n=1)

This caused me to reflect on my own perceptions and awareness of students and the increased student diversity I have observed over my teaching career. In my approach to students I ponder on my own 'authenticity' or 'being myself' in the sense outlined by Kreber et al (2007). As a former diverse student myself I critically analyse if I translate this into my teaching using my 'diversity' as a positive step towards inclusion and authentic teaching. This does relate to how I, and probably other lecturers, form our lecturer 'identity' and whether WP is a challenge to this or influences pedagogical practice.

In the lecturer interviews phase polarised views of WP emerged among lecturers both in HSSc and other schools. It was interesting that the polarised views were shared across the schools - i.e. both extremes were expressed with no particular view associated within one school. This was similar to the focus group in that there was support for WP and acknowledged benefits coupled with constraints. The political and philosophical issues were addressed to a point but mostly in relation to student entry and guiding more people to go to university who would not previously have considered it. Typologies of who was a 'WP student' were alluded to and it was acknowledged that it (i.e. WP) 'happened' 'out there' and 'in here'. Whilst it was as a visible entity, what it

was, or who was involved, remained unclear. This also resonates with the focus group views of 'internal' or 'external' impacting directly or indirectly on their work.

Symbols of WP ranged from identifying student characteristics such as ethnicities, mature students, differing qualifications and prior education or qualifications and the type of recruiting activity. The comment 'non traditional student' was used frequently in relation to WP:

> *'trying to get people from all areas of life the non traditional student, people from all different ethnic background..'* (HSSc L2).

The varied understandings of WP elicited from the data thus far resonates with Watson's (2006a: 3) description of WP as 'a portmanteau' term referring to the many different concepts and to which the expression 'non-traditional' student is often used as a catch-all. As it could refer to any of the characteristics of students i.e. lower socio-economic groups, first generation students, students from minority ethnic groups and mature students. It is rather expansive. The student typologies mentioned do reflect the HEFCE categories (HEFCE, 2009) which are used as monitoring and targeting strategies in relation to WP strategic approach though the extent to which lecturers knew this was not evident. It also begs the question of what, or even if, there is a 'traditional' student. Placing students into categories is challenging and as Hockings et al (2008) assert due to the nature of a diverse society students do not neatly fit into 'traditional' or 'non-traditional' categories.

Student and staff backgrounds.

I selected the students in this study according to my understanding of `diversity', of `social and cultural backgrounds' and `academic experiences prior to university'. The students in this study were selected as they represented what I perceived to be a diverse group in terms of social and cultural backgrounds and academic experiences prior to university.   There were more nursing students (year 3, n=109) than sports students (n=17) who completed a questionnaire thus the overall results will be skewed in favour of the nurses. Approximately 10% of the nurse students were male which is reflective of a female dominated profession.   However, 64% of the sports students were male, again reflecting the selected programme gender domination. Approximately 70% of the nursing group were aged over 30 years (mean 32.6 years 9.01 standard deviation (SD) though interestingly 16.5% of students did not identify their age. All sports students were under 27 years of age (mean 22.9 years 1.9 SD) so a much younger demographic. This did correspond with the data outlined in chapter 2.

The ethnicity data was not asked for in this questionnaire and on reflection ought to have been. Data from the university student database indicated that for these particular courses (Nursing) the students have abroad ethnic mix: nurses: 46% black (African or Afro-Caribbean) 11% Asian, and 34% white with approximately 2% from other European countries. The data for sports students was not available. This highlights a highly diverse ethnic mix.

In HSSc it was identified by some lecturers that many of their students were from diverse backgrounds and it was a case of identifying needs and seeking ways of helping them with a sense of resignation: '*we do actually support those students and we've got to live with that'* (HSSc L 3). One or two lecturers mentioned issues of social deficits or difficulties and not just academic performance. This consisted of 'getting it wrong' in terms of social interactions either mixing only with own ethnic, cultural or age groups and consequent retraction behaviourally. This could be witnessed adopting behaviours to address this either by disappearing or pretending to be someone else. For example with online discussions:

> '*people can be somebody they pretend to be and then join in the discussion they might actually then do the thing that will really help them'* (non HSSc L4).

One might see this as acclimatising to the university culture or as Thomas (2006) and Reay et al (2001) identify, a barrier created to students as a consequence of social habitus and a sense of alienation or dissonance.

Appreciation or acknowledgment of students' cultural frame of reference was an issue. In proposing that WP students emanated from diverse backgrounds, lecturers identified that this was addressed at a pragmatic level in the classroom situation. This was reported as being addressed through using cultural and ethnic examples to enable students to connect with the theoretical point or learning issue. This was emphasised to the point that if examples were not from the same or similar cultural groups as students this may impair their learning:

> '*when you use examples you might actually make reference to their cultural background and bring in examples that they can understand and appreciate'* (HSSc L 3).

These comments acknowledge a differences in backgrounds between the lecturers and the students. Conversely, it was acknowledged by some lecturers that a student's culture might create challenges. This, it seems, was evident in class discussions with issues of language and the confusion in using appropriate terminology:

> [*we*] *explored the concept of it not being appropriate to talk about normality y'know and that could be discriminatory (FG3).*

Thus it begs the question of whether lecturers expect students to have the appropriate 'moral' stance before their studies or acquire it during their studies. Furthermore, what then is the role of universities in preparation for a vocational profession? This is clearly a programme team issue in that language barriers extend beyond academic language to the professional and even the social.

When asked about family participation at university, the nurse students identified that 67% had at least one family member who attended university and for a large proportion it was a sibling (brother or sister, 27%) or cousins. This was similar for the sports students (family one member 66.7%, sibling 32%). A small proportion indicated that their parents had gone to university (nurses = 4% mothers, 4% fathers. Sports students = 5.9% fathers, 0% mothers). As such then these students, if not the first person in their family to attend university, were certainly generally from the first generation to attend.

When asked about parental occupation (as a crude indicator of socio-economic status), these were categorised using the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) (ONS 2008). This comprises eight classes which are also crudely collapsed to four groups for data management. The four main groups which are identified for this question were:

1. Managerial and professional occupations,
2. Intermediate occupations and
3. Routine and manual occupations plus another category of
4. Long term unemployed or never worked.

This data is derived from students' self reports and my interpretation and then classification into the occupational categories (see table 5.6 for the occupation data). I do acknowledge that this may not be as accurate as a formal census. However, overall it appears the age range, ethnic mix and first generation at university is highly indicative of the WP type students indicated by HEFCE criteria.

Table 5.6 Student self reported parental occupation data of nursing and sports students.

Occupation group	Nursing students	Sport students
Managerial and professional	44.5%	50.2%
Intermediate occupations	14.5%	21%
Routine and manual occupations	20%	21%
Long term unemployed of never worked	1%	0%

The students self report of parental occupation is also open to interpretation. Comments such as 'business man' or 'manager' can be misleading they appear middle class but the students may not know job titles or positions and there were a range of occupations identified. As such the data is viewed with caution in terms of socio-economic groups many of those classified as 'managerial' may be intermediate professions. Nevertheless in terms of occupation these students do reflect a more advantaged socio-economic group. These students do not neatly 'fit' the HEFCE defined WP categories which resonates with the view held by Hockings et al (2010). If viewed in other terms i.e. emanating from low participation in HE neighbourhoods (i.e. POLAR geographical areas formerly postcode areas), ethnic minorities, first generation at university and disabled groups (HEFCE, 2009) then there is a 'fit'. However, it is acknowledged that some of this information was difficult for students to impart demonstrated by the large number of non responses from students (Nursing n=23%, Sports n = 18%). This information is clearly an issue for them. This is potentially a resistance to 'labels' or 'types' which may engender negative stereotypes however this could not be determined from the questionnaire.

Whilst labels, or categories, are used to determine performance (i.e. completion by types and numbers of students) it does not indicate the subjective nature of experiences at university. Reay et al (2001) identified that students select institutions which they feel will enable them to blend in and feel comfortable. Further that they will select institutions which are a 'safe' option for them. In the focus group lecturers alluded to this as a role of post 92 universities or former polytechnics like Middlesex, implying more traditional universities were too different for WP students to feel comfortable. Reay et al's (2001) work focussed on black female mature students which are a highly diverse group themselves and as such has parallels with WP. This of course may also be intermingled with the belief that post 92 universities with their history of vocational courses (and being former polytechnics) attracts students who are

different from 'traditional' students and thus who may also see themselves as lacking ability or aspirations. Clearly some lecturers also harbour beliefs about what is a university and some possibly still feel that the newer (i.e. post 92) organisations do not quite fit that standard:

> 'we were once a polytechnic and not a university therefore we're more likely to recruit individuals who don't see themselves as higher fliers' (HSSc L3).

Lecturers did align programmes with certain 'types' of students either by virtue of the subject or the particular profession involved in the degree. They then perceived WP as adjusting or manipulating student groups to ensure a 'balance' or redressing the imbalance. Though why this needed redressing was not clear:

> 'but er it does er depend on what that a subject area .... if you look at a lot of the nursing type courses then they have a lot of ethnic groups then [WP] its recruiting white middle class background students' (HSSc L 2).

The 'reputation for WP' was also identified as an issue and a feature and attitude in post 92 HEIs implying a benefit to the student:

> 'y'know I think we've got a very good attitude towards umm bringing in the non traditional student.. if you went to a an old university a non polytechnic then all they'd see is success is someone coming out with a very good degree and if you happen to have fallen by the wayside well you just weren't up for it' (FG 1).

WP as guidance and recruitment.

Lecturing staff identified that they had varied experiences with 'WP activities' (outreach i.e. workshops or taster days) but did not generally initiate any activities themselves. Overall, WP activities were perceived as outreach work that may or may not result in student recruitment. Lecturers' also identified WP as persuading students to come to HE specifcially those who would not normally go to university. WP was identified in relation to information, advice and support at various points prior to university. The cost of this 'type' of WP was viewed as high as in being labour and staff intensive. In HSSc, WP was identified mostly in relation to recruitment and altering the 'entry gate' to facilitate entry to HE.

> 'Opening up the doors I guess and bringing in people and trying perhaps to help people who wouldn't come to university' (HSSc L 1).

Lecturers in all schools identified WP in terms of earlier intervention in the potential students' life, such as events and activities at secondary school and further education institutions aimed to advise and encourage them towards university. This still resonated with persuasion to come to university or a 'recruiting' activity. The issue of WP as a

recruitment element was evident with labels attached to students from certain routes associating them as WP e.g. the Foundation degree students, the foundation year students, the Access students and so on which persisted throughout the students progression even up to completion.

<u>WP as deficits.</u>

The consequences associated with receiving such 'non traditional' students was a perception of lowered ability and minimal entry requirements. Thus it appears WP was equated with not only information and guidance or access but low ability of students. This perception then appears to confuse 'widened' access with lowered ability or poor to no prior qualifications. Furthermore, students perceived by lecturers as 'WP' students were seen as lacking a wide variety of skills and abilities as well as prior attainment:

> '*people are coming in with quite a low standard of education in some ways even if they've got the right exams the english the maths those sorts of skills are quite low and if they come we've just got to accept that*' (HSSc L6).

The pathologising or debilitating picture of WP as a group was very strong in the focus groups and in the interviews. It reflects a similar significant theme in literature (Walker, 2008, Haggis, 2006). This reflected on other themes such as struggle, emotional investment, resource issues, support, paternalism and expectation gaps. This resulted in the perception of a 'contra flow' with students travelling along the path of HEI against the odds and at a cost to lecturers, the students and the HEI. One comment did resonate this feeling:

> '*trying to get them [students] to to understand some of the basic academic concepts is hard work for them and hard work for us and em we're usually quite glad that they're only doing sort of a bit of a module and not a whole programme*' (FG 4).

This deficit model was a theme across the other schools as well as HSSc. It was reported by some lecturers as an issue of poor prior education due to a multiplicity of factors such as socio-economic level or deprived neighbourhood. This was also associated with not having the 'right qualifications' which HE ought to accept and work with.

Deficits also emerged from two lecturers. This was as perceptions of students not coping, having emotional difficulties or expressing mental health problems. It is clear that they include this as 'WP' and under the umbrella of 'diversity'. One lecturer identified mental health problems as a particular issue:

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> *'with diversity there is an issue with mental health I'm getting more and more students through really they don't need me they need proper intensive counselling and they don't want to go ...... I can't get them to go and see a counsellor'* (non HSSc L 4).

In relation to classroom activities, lecturers identified their own classroom practices and experiences as being very diverse, acknowledging very varied groups of students in terms of ethnicity but also academic needs. They could not identify WP students *per se* in a classroom setting, but could identify sets of problems which may arise with having such diverse students which makes them think they then have WP students:

> '*I don't think that they are identifiable I sometimes think it is easier to identify people who have difficulties with English language and I would put them into specifically the widening participation'* (HSSc L 1).

This additionally exemplifies the perception of difficulty or deficit associated with WP, which, to paraphrase Haggis (2006), drives a perception of WP as identifying a problem that needs a cure, implying a 'technical fix' as opposed to an attitudinal change. Northedge (2003) associates the dominant perception of deficit diversity with the more disturbing perception of 'dumbing down' of education or pedagogy.

The focus group lecturers identified perceiving students as having trouble with communication skills as WP students. Language and use of it can convey a person's moral and ethical stance (Reay et al 2010). Language was expressed as related to social or cultural background and as such could be an issue in academic engagement. This may be an issue of students' own habitual use of language with one meaning but determined to be something else i.e. 'discriminatory' by the lecturer. This is an important issue within the health professions. This does raise questions not just of 'socialisation' into the HE environment, and its rituals and language, but also of moral and ethical (professional) perceptions and potential disconnection between them. Thus it begs the question of whether lecturers expect students to have the appropriate 'moral' stance before their studies or acquire it during their studies. Furthermore, what then is the role of universities in preparation for a vocational profession? This is clearly a programme team issue that language barriers extend beyond academic language to the professional and even the social.

The perceived gap in language and social skills between staff and students by lecturers was explored highlighting differences in family and cultural backgrounds as a block to students participating in a HE teaching and learning situation:

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'*they don't communicate [in their family] and there isn't any conversation about things about issues and so when they're placed in a situation where that's expected it's incredibly difficult and either they don't participate or they do and think that it's cringingly terrible*' (FG 1).

Expectations and the gap between these of students and university staff was evident. Students were unprepared for academic engagement lacking skills such as using a library or consulting a book which lecturers considered key to learning. This could be an issue of identity as a higher education student or poor social practices from secondary or former education experiences. This they conclude impeded their learning and progress. Furthermore, lecturers identified a gap between students' expectation of acceptable academic practice and the convention in HEI holding a confused understanding of what constituted plagiarism. The perceived gap in language and social skills highlighted differences in family and cultural backgrounds as a block to students participating in a HE teaching and learning situation:

'*some of our foundation students emm need further development in terms of social skills ummm they come to the university and they don't know when to speak and what sort of words to use*' (FG 2)

Lecturers also acknowledged a gap in language proficiency to engage in academic discourse both relating to programmes or HEI itself and as such failing to navigate HEI systems and structures. The source of this appeared to be the features of being a 'WP' student i.e. social background or poor prior academic attainment with the implication that 'catch-up' or correcting deficiencies were required. This is clearly an issue for Middlesex and relates to issues of roles and identities within HE with a discourse of deficiency, gaps and implicitly, barriers.

<u>'Typical students'</u>

When the students themselves were asked in the ETL questionnaire if they considered themselves a 'typical student' 52.3% of the nurses and 64.7% of the sports students stated they were. Interestingly all the sports students answered this questions whereas almost 20% of the nurses did not respond. This could be viewed as either an invasive question or challenging their perception of their emerging professional identity as 'nurses' instead of university students. These were year three students and about to graduate and embark on professional practice. The students were then asked to identify what the term 'typical student' meant. Common metaphors were used including: 'carefree', 'young', 'unburdened' and behaviours such as 'leaving things to

the last minute'. These were categorised into two main groups the real perception (i.e. themselves perhaps) and the idealised. These were subdivided into eight themes:

Reality:
- Financial position (impoverished or having to work).
- Attendance at university (fulltime).
- Responsibility status (no dependents).
- Attitude in general (carefree, dedicated, lazy, disorganised, stressed).
- Miscellaneous (competent, has fun).

Idealised:
- Age (18 - 24).
- Academic inclination (studies hard, enjoys studying).
- Social activities (in university settings i.e. bar, living in halls).
- Organised in studies and assignments.
- Positive attitude to studying (getting good grades) and dedicated.

The groups were quite different. The nurses referred to aspects such as academic approaches, young age, carefree and in fulltime education as typical, which does appear to be the opposite of their own position. Sports students did not refer to academic aspects (except in leaving things to the last minute) but more around social aspects. In many instances the students referred to themselves rather self deprecatingly as less able than 'others' academically. These were year three students and it is unclear if they entered university with this view or acquired it through the course of their studies, especially in light of the lecturers' comments explored above.

Students 'fitting in'.

When asked about their choice of course or programme, the students either made a conscious choice to come to Middlesex or it was a 'fall back' because they did not get the grades for the university (and course) they wanted. One sports student identified choosing Middlesex as a first choice because of the lure of a novel and practical course. Overwhelmingly the nursing students (n=3) were insistent that the profession and course they chose was the most important aspect not the university. For some, the decision was a difficult one and made with some personal sacrifice:

> *'I am a mature students, I'm 29 so it uh, I left school when I was very young so I never had any qualifications .... having been a care assistant for many years with a young family I decided that I always wanted to do this properly and now is the time with my kids growing up....' (S 1).*

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The nurse students were all on the diploma course and only one of those interviewed had 'A' levels and so choosing the course afforded an opportunity despite the lack of qualifications.   This does then raise the issue of feeling 'comfortable' or 'fitting in' which may be viewed as related to 'habitus' which was briefly outlined in chapter 2. Other students (sport) entered the university through the clearing scheme with one commenting on not achieving her 'A' level grades to go to the university she wanted. This appeared to leave her dissatisfied and impacted on her throughout her course making her 'different':

> '*I missed out on like the whole grouping session, and then the second year was when I joined a team and that's how I got like, and made friends and stuff, but even now I find like I don't get on as well with like a lot of people in the class.' (S4).*

The sense of difference was accentuated by being the only one of her social circle from home to go to university too thus emphasising being different:

> '*I'm kinda different 'cos I went to University, all my friends, they didn't bother they just went straight to work' (S4).*

This insight demonstrates how dissatisfaction and frustration can have a long term impact on students during their course and it is likely that this is not always recognised by lecturers unless they get to know students as individuals.

The reputation of the university (for the students) is also affected by the labels placed upon universities (post 92, Russell group etc) and eventually the status of the academic and social aspects. According to Bowl (2003), when making a choice for university participants who were mature, working class, black or Asian women consciously opted to go to less prestigious universities because they sensed they would feel more comfortable and less conspicuous there. For the nursing students it was not the university itself (though they held lower expectations in association with this) but the clinical areas which were crucial in their decision:

> '*if I had the choice would I go to a different university, y'know, I wouldn't have done however frustrated I can get ..I love the XXX hospital, no, I am really happy'* (S1).

Another factor which emerged with this particular student was that as a nurse, one did not get the 'full' university experience as so much time is spent in placement. This however, is a feature of nursing courses at all universities and not one I think the student was aware of. Bowl (2003) argues that for some students qualifications from some universities (less prestigious) were perceived as less highly valued in the job

market. For the students interviewed here, the professional qualification was valued and its provenance did not appear to be an issue. There is no real evidence that degrees from different establishments are less valued, especially professional qualifications due to strong control by professional bodies e.g. nursing.

'Doing' WP

There was also an issue of specific people who 'do' WP, but who this was remained unclear. This does beg the question then of who 'does' or what is meant by 'doing' widening participation if it is already happening. There are traditional roles the lecturers associated with WP i.e. marketing, admissions tutors or department, but also extending to the lecturing staff by virtue of going out into the community or schools or colleges to talk to people about careers. The passive and remote nature of some WP activities was acknowledged in the lack of awareness of a strategic plan or specific role of some lecturers in promoting WP : '*but I think that within the academic groups with us it's it's more making some sort of plan on how what we can do to supplement or augment that*' FG 2). If WP is 'done' then is the organisation addressing it is an issue.

Lecturers appeared to identify that they had to deal with the 'product' of WP i.e. the 'non-traditional' students.   Similarly it was acknowledged that WP students were a pool of potential students and as such WP was associated with recruitment. As student numbers were important this route of acquiring them was met with a sense of passive resignation.

Equal opportunities and diversity was acknowledged as not being the same as WP. In fact WP was quite different but had two distinct aspects. The 'widening' part was acknowledged as a greater breadth of students entering university but the participation part was an issue particularly for one lecturer (Not HSSc):

> '*widening participation means you've got to get everybody to participate..... it's not the same, diversity is talking about the widening and participation is getting people actively involved so it's different isn't it*' (non-HSSc L 4).

There were conflicting opinions about the perception of WP outside universities. One lecturer reported reading frequently about WP in the Times Higher paper (non - HSSc L6) whilst another reported:

> '*I don't think the general public itself appreciate what widening participation is I don't think people are very aware of it outside of maybe academia*' (non HSSc L 8).

In HSSc one lecturer stated it was a '*bit of a buzz word'* (HSSc L 1) at the moment but admitted their knowledge was limited. The complexity of WP is acknowledged in schools outside HSSc as one lecturer stated:

> *It's too huge isn't it that's part of the trouble er it means black white male female able disabled what is disabled it's so enormous and I think that's probably why it doesn't get dealt with how do you tick all those boxes* (non HSSc L 4)

This also was seen as fulfilling a community social responsibility and aligned with lecturers values: '*I like the idea of people from every walks of life having the opportunity to develop their skills'* (non-HSSc L 7).

There was a conflict in personal understanding of WP and the perceived stance taken by the university. One lecturer identified that WP was overall a positive position to be in:

> '*I'm very much for the idea of widening participation I think it's a good policy it's a good place for the University to be going sometimes I question the University's interpretation of what they mean by widening participation'* (non-HSSc L 7).

This does raise the question of how the lecturers understand WP in the wider context as well as within their own domain or role. Commitment to WP at a higher level, and structures to support and develop that belief, would influence the culture and consequently the work of lecturers in association with students. It is evident from this lecturer that there was a lack of clarity. This highlights a need for this and the desire to pursue the dialogue of WP. This is explored in chapter 6 with the other phase of this project which addressed 'Embedding and Mainstreaming WP' within the origination.

Social conscience, as a feature, was also a given in the former university WP strategy as WP was already being 'done' in the daily work: '*when we introduced the widening participation strategy I thought oo y'know we're already half way'* (FG 3). Though what the other half was is unclear.

The history of Middlesex as a former polytechnic, was perceived as a benefit in terms of recruiting local students and having students who are likely to benefit through links with local colleges. This supports the data presented in chapter 2 indicating a high proportion of local students in the student body. In some schools, links with Foundation Degrees was a particular positive feature and one lecturer highlighted good progression of students from this route to bachelors' degree. This route was a feature among several lecturers as a key WP initiative and would imply a source of 'WP

students' although rather cynically it was also referred to as another entry point and further contribution to diversity:

> '*I think y'know that if each school did that er we'd get a lot more widening participation students coming in...'.* (non-HSSc L10)*.*

In this instance WP was also seen as positive and a distinctive feature of Middlesex but also key to continuity. The sense of being part of the community as WP was clear:

> '*going out and going into the community … going to XXXX event which is nothing to do with anything academic but its just having the presence and being there… part of the community and that we're there and if they're interested they can come up and we're accessible they can talk to us and y'know see if we can do something for them*' (FG 3).

This human face of the university in the community was an issue for some thus extending the role of university to more than 'teaching' but with a social responsibility and thus integral to the community, supposedly with a role in contributing to improving that community.

More positively in some areas of the university it was reported that whilst WP issues were not perceived as embedded, nor widely discussed, across departments there was a willingness and desire for more lecturer and staff development in understanding WP:

> '*We need proper training [for WP] and if not training then proper discussion across the departments and then we do need someone at a higher level who has on their job description that they've got to see these things are in place cause it no-one really seems to hold responsibility for them*' (non-HSSc L 4).

This perceived need for support and training for lecturers is important and raises the question of type of staff development and the appropriateness of it. HEFCE (2009) identify that teaching is a highly skilled profession and as such professional development for enhanced teaching is one of their strategic aims (ibid: 15) and that this includes, as part of it, WP.

Roles and relationships between lecturers and students.

All the lecturers interviewed were Module Leaders [1] some were Programme Leaders [2] or even Directors of Programmes [3] reflecting a wide variety of experience and levels of

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[1] Module leaders manage the teaching delivery and assessment of a module which is a 'block' of learning.
[2] Programme leaders manage one specific programme of study e.g. BSc Biomedical sciences and ensure the quality and delivery of that programme.

daily interaction with students from face to face contact to more strategic dealings such as programme development and curriculum design. Many programmes within HSSc have a practical element to them and thus many of the lecturers in HSSc had experience of teaching in a classroom setting plus also in practical settings which impacted on their relationship with students. The majority of the lecturers from both HSSc and the other schools had taught in excess of 5 years and at levels ranging from level 0 (Foundation degree) to postgraduate. Thus with such a wealth of experience the range of practice was quite large.

There were various relationships with students cited from formal to informal or close to distant interaction. None of these lecturers engaged with distance learning. Some did teach very large classes which they felt limited their ability to get to know students personally. Some lecturers commented that it was not their role to get to know students and held firm views that teaching was imparting received knowledge:

> 'once the students get here, they're all students and the background that they have is not uppermost in my mind my objective is to, is to…try to get students to grasp a concept' (HSSc L3).

Some lecturers commented that they tried to make connections with students outside of the classroom: *'from talking to them during induction week when they first come in'* (HSSc L 2). This was also evident in other schools:

> 'if I do ever see them I will make sure I go and have a chat to them which is nice' 'cos its nice to see them progress' (non HSSc L 7).

Lecturers also reported that they recognise the pressures students face but hear this indirectly and retain a distance from them:

> 'some of them do seem to have quite chaotic lives outside of the university y'know you're always hearing about them being thrown out of their flats or involved in rows or y'know financial problems' (HSSc L5).

In referring to their own experiences, lecturers identified the emotional investment and frustration and helplessness when students did not take up learning support offered by the university acknowledging that WP is also about choice and independence:

> 'and you can always develop your knowledge of things like ELLS[4] and counselling services and all the sort of student support services but even if you offer them the student may not choose them and that again is part of letting them widen their participation in terms of what they want to opt into or opt out' (FG 4).

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[3] Directors of programmes manage several programmes or courses and are responsible for ensuring the quality and delivery of all the suite of programmes under their responsibility
[4] ELLS refers to the English Language Learning and Support Unit

This echoes Day et al (2006) assertion that lecturers' practices and identity are influenced by their feelings towards their students, but that university lecturers rarely get to know students' backgrounds and lives. It appears some do try to whilst others do not. This may be a consequence of internal structures creating barriers for lecturers getting to know their students, i.e. large classes, tight and rigid timetables, staff shortages etc. (Hockings, 2008) or lecturer choice. Evidently some lecturers are resistant to knowing them which I believe relates to their perception of their role as an academic and whether they are teacher centred or student centred. This poses issues for the underlying intentions in the Learning Framework (curriculum) changes within Middlesex. This strives for smaller class, more feedback and generally getting to know students on a more individual level an activity which may challenge the decidedly distant lecturers.

A further theme which emerged was of challenges in relation to conflict between student's family demands and university commitments. One student case example offered by a lecturer concerned an unnamed cultural group which was not supportive of a female student in higher education and placed demands on this student to undertake family commitments above university commitments. This lecturer (non HSSC L4) sympathised with the student and her varied commitments outside of university and yet felt helpless in supporting this student. This raises the question of how much we know of our students lives outside of university, and if we do, what do we do with this?

Ultimately this may affect our pedagogical practice but would this be to aid or hinder the student. The cultural issue was mentioned earlier in this chapter however cultural sensitivities are a strong theme for some and it is unclear if this would have any bearing on relationships with students. The diversity of the lecturers themselves was not explored nor their socio-cultural origins. There were more females than males interviewed and varied in age range. According to the University website in 2007 (table 5.7) 34.7% of staff were identified as being from an 'ethnic group' though further breakdown was not given. However, it appears far less diverse than the student data from the same period. In addition, lecturers tended to be considerably older than the students. As such these could have a bearing on perceptions and practices. If lecturers do not reflect on their own diversity and values then they may find it challenging to recognise the impact of their own values and epistemologies on students. WP and diversity insight by lecturers and the impact on others 'out there' then is a factor of consideration in approaching WP.

Table 5.7 Staff and student statistics at Middlesex University in 2007.

	Support staff	Academic staff	Senior managers	Students
Numbers	960	820	N/A	25,872
Male	34.7%	50.7%	N/A	42.3%
Female	65.3%	49.3%	30.6%	57.7%
Ethnic group	23.5%	34.7%	6.7	51.5%
Staff Age (under 45 years)	35.4%	56.4%	n/a	-
Student Age (under 20 years)	n/a	n/a	n/a	64.6%

Source: Middlesex University website (2009a, 2009b)

Interestingly very few of the lecturers (n=4) gave specific examples of students when explaining their points about WP. These lecturers did describe themselves as student centred and did discuss students as individuals as opposed to a homogeneous group. Also rather interestingly this was not specific to any school: two were from HSSc and two from non-HSSc. These lecturers appeared to present an appreciation of the pressures and frustrations experienced by some students. The lecturers also identified a sense of 'helplessness' at the limited adjustments and concessions made either by the university or the family to '*balance the differing demands*' (non HSSc L 4).

Some lecturers expressed empathy as a key quality in terms of their relationship with students. In some instances this arose from their experience of being a student or because of personal associations for example towards disabled persons:

> *I think that gives me the empathy that's needed I think for widening participation as well as somebody with disability'* (non-HSSc L 8).

There was a clear connection between disability and WP identified. Whilst adjustments for disability carry a statutory responsibility, any considerations for WP do not. Though whether this may be necessary or of value is another question. Several lecturers (not all) did indicate empathy, though not overtly and it implies that prior experiences do frame one's perception of one's role and also of identity. It would be interesting to explore which universities the lecturers had studied at as undergraduates and whether this contributed to their expressed empathy and potential sensitivity to student diversity and 'habitus' in the sense outlined in chapter 2.

The students held various perceptions of their relationships with lecturers. The students interviewed were from Sports and Exercise Science and Nursing courses, the latter having a personal development tutor (PDT) system due to professional body requirements. Engagement with lecturers was varied but none identified a 'personal' engagement; in fact it appeared they held opinions about lecturers' abilities and personalities referring to one or two (anonymously) very negatively. One student held a sense of progressing with or without help or 'in spite of' lecturers.

> *'I had one erm, one like lesson and I think the tutor was absolutely dreadful, I think she was shocking but I actually got a 6 or 7 [mark] for it but a lot of people were working as well and a lot failed and I think if you listened to the lecturer then you failed but if you went straight for the criteria then you ....passed'* (S3)

The way students perceive their relationship with lecturers and tutors is central to students' academic lives with small behaviours making a big impact '*you're on your own but I know my PDT [personal tutor] is there if I need her...*' (S1). In this research there were issues of power balances (at times perceived as unequal with lecturers holding the power to 'pass or fail') and confusion over expectations and tacit curriculum processes. In this case 'tacit' implies expectations of writing the 'right way' or knowing what behaviour to adopt in a class. The students also felt there was distancing by lecturers from their academic and personal concerns. As previously mentioned categorising and labelling students for example the 'access students' or the 'foundation students' or the 'mature students' can intensify students' sense of inadequacy. This did come across with the students also identifying themselves in these groups. It would appear from this research that holding such labels may reinforce difference or work to alienate students or bond them (succeeding 'in spite of'). By using these labels lecturers too may contribute either naively or subconsciously to exclusionary practice.

Conceptions of teaching and learning by lecturers and students.

In exploring lecturers' teaching approach, the data obtained suggests that lecturers perceived their teaching in a broad and diverse way. I categorised this under five main themes:
- student centeredness
- control and consistency,
- perception of student ability and engagement,
- content driven approach,
- reflexivity and challenges.

The group of lecturers in this project were not novices within the teaching field but regarded as experienced having taught for 3 or more years.   However, the long passage of time from undertaking a teaching qualification was reflected in the responses associated with questions of teaching philosophy or pedagogical approaches which were at times quite vague. Interestingly there were three Teaching Fellows within the interview participants (one from HSSc, two from other schools) and yet the reference to teaching practice or pedagogy was quite superficial. It was only in the focus group that pedagogy was overtly discussed.

Pedagogical approach.

None of the lecturers reported using any particular philosophy of teaching or approach. Some, however, mentioned learning outcomes and assessment indicating a working knowledge of a constructive alignment approach, i.e. learning outcomes linked to teaching and learning strategy and assessment. This is promoted in the internal Middlesex teaching (PGCHE) course and is a dominant approach internally to curriculum development which many of the lecturers may have had involvement with. Many of the lecturers interviewed did not undertake their teaching course at Middlesex, and several undertook theirs many years before with varying experiences both positive and negative but not necessarily influencing their current teaching approach.

Two lecturers recalled their experience of their post graduate certificate in higher education (PGCHE) highlighting that many new lecturers come into the teaching role very content driven and without a clear idea of what the role of the lecturer is. One lecturer did identify that the aim of the PGCHE is to challenge preconceptions but not to provide a 'toolbox':

> '[the] *role is to help students navigate their way around y'know particularly at level one and what um is necessary information and to be discriminatory'* (non-HSSc L 9).

Interestingly, some lecturers wanted a 'toolbox approach' to enhance their skills. One lecturer identified that they '*learned on the job*' finding the PGCHE a '*waste of time*' (HSSc L5) preferring to teach based on personal memorable experiences of charismatic lecturers. Two lecturers identified the role of lecturers (and HE) as: '*to inspire students*' (HSSc L 3) and '*to help them achieve*' (non-HSSc L 8). These indicate the varied perceptions of the role of the lecturer and thus of lecturer identities. Many lecturers cited the issue of their own professional body requirements and associated

teaching preparation as important. This was more evident in nursing and in biomedical science programmes. They appeared to perceive their role as to prepare students for a profession whilst also 'safeguarding' the profession. This could then lead to a teacher (or content) centred approach either for expediency or under the guise of student 'professional preparation' which lecturers may not be conscious of. A number of studies have shown that many educators claim to be putting student-centred learning into practice when in fact teacher-centred approaches still dominate (Lea et al. 2003, Hockings 2009). This may be due to professional rigour, local resourcing or institutional issues. The wider context is considered form the other phase of the project in chapter 6.

Lecturers in both HSSc and non HSSc schools reported tailoring their teaching to real life situations rather than to diverse student groups. This implied a responsive approach to students:

> '*knowing this group is diverse does not affect my teaching, we try well, at least I try, to give them as many real life examples and scenarios as I can so that they can apply everything in their learning to those situations*' (HSSc L 2)

> '*they get real case studies to make software whilst they're learning how to make the software'* (non HSSc L8).

It is evident that teaching approaches in some instances aim to promote learning 'by doing' but also link to an area of familiarity. Another lecturer identified using a strategy of teaching using case studies and current student experiences to create a rich contextualised learning situation for the students. This approach does appear to consider student diversity in the sense of relating to a wide range of student experiences implying teaching for learning and for potential future destinations.

For many of the lecturers, in both HSSc and the other schools, the issue of valuing students with more experience and skills, specifically mature or 'non-traditional' students was important. It appears this can be beneficial in peer learning situations utilising students' skills and experience to support peers in the classroom. These were not referred to as WP students specifically but 'diverse'. This was seen from either a resource point of view (computing science laboratory tasks) or from a more pragmatic view such as supporting students in simulating experiences from a placement which would otherwise not be possible (e.g. human resources area). However, some programmes did not have the benefit of mature students. It was noted by some that certain programmes attracted certain 'types' of students and this created a perceived homogeneity or controversially 'ghettoisation' rather than a cross fertilization of ideas

and experiences. This could be a challenge in terms of pedagogy but also of the wider 'university experience' for students.

When probed further about holding a philosophy of teaching, it was evident that some lecturers had never thought about this:

> '*you know there are those who are gonna that are most reflective and those who will embrace it others will just carry on blindly*' (non HSSc L9).

For some lecturers teaching appears to be a prescribed event with occasional spontaneity to liven up a session with teaching described as:

> '*beating a weary path down the prescribed thing that I thought that I was going to do in that session*' (HSSc L 5).

This did appear to be a weary response to teaching perceived disengaged students. Though not asked, one ought to question this staff member's support in their department or the environment or culture in which this attitude developed.

The complete opposite was indicated by another lecturer. This person appeared enthusiastic and positive. It may have been the subject area which lent itself to interactive approaches to engage students or the attitude of the individual lecturer:

> '*I do try to make teaching sessions enjoyable I mean that's one of my main objectives ..to make it enjoyable they will get engaged with the material and enjoy it and it inspires them*' (HSSc L 3).

This does imply intuitive and reflexive practice aimed to engage and connect with students which is not always overt and is an issue for the profession of teaching in HE. It would have been interesting to explore students' perceptions of these teaching approaches and whether this is explicit to students in action or assumed by lecturers.

Lecturers who taught on large modules with multiple seminar groups did not discuss teaching approaches, as this was considered an individual lecturers choice of approach and as such an issue of consistency. One lecturer (HSSc) stated that learning outcomes alone would engender a sense of consistency, trusting colleagues' pedagogical practices without question. Though they did not evaluate this:

> '*I guess the learning outcomes are quite clear and hopefully the learning outcomes manage to make sure we do things fairly*' (HSSc L 1).

Cotterill and Waterhouse (1998) identify that the increased depersonalisation of HE, and the perceived purposes of HE, is aligned with the increased numbers entering education without an increase in resources to support them. Technology has increasingly been seen to increase the student numbers and types of teaching and support taking place at low cost. This arguably further emphasises the disadvantage to students from 'non traditional' backgrounds that may need greater and more 'human' support. From the students responses it appears students value lecturer enthusiasm but also personal interactions which is at odds with the increasing use of technologies (i.e. web 2.0 technologies). However, this may not be the case if this is a complementary dimension as opposed to a replacement of pedagogical human interaction.

Once in HE, students face the difficulty of adjusting to its rules and norms which Bowl (2003) argues, are often tacit rather than explicit, although according to one student it is also confused (see comment of S2). Adjustments such as writing in a style and language appropriate to HE can become difficult and in an effort to compensate students sometimes adopt practices such as lifting paragraphs from textbooks or the internet inadvertently plagiarising. Furthermore, blame and labelling for such practices could lead to a sense of inadequacy and exclusion. Quality teaching was recognised as important but also there was apathy with, or distrust of, the academic system:

> *'Feedback is very difficult to get on this course, and positive feedback is just generic, yeah your work was good, good ideas, and then, but, you didn't get a [grade] 1 you think like OK I've got a 5 or a 6 or a 7 or 8, so there must have been something where I wasn't so good, but we never find out...'* (S5).

Students reported conflicting feelings and behaviours. For example, they want feedback on learning yet are reluctant to engage actively. At times there appeared to be a distrust and yet also a sense of self chastisement and embarrassment whilst accepting responsibility:

> '*y'know, if you don't do the work then you're going to get a bad mark, you can't blame the lecturers... we all kinda felt ashamed that we hadn't done anything y'know' (S2).*

Frustrations were also evident in feeling heard or valued, particularly in connection with evaluating teaching or modules. One student did link 'liking' a lecturer to being a 'good teacher'. As students value the human interaction this then perhaps ameliorated a sense of being an 'outsider'. However, what they determined as being a 'good teacher' was not clear.

There is a wide body of literature recommending a conceptual shift to a socio-cultural pedagogy or incorporating critical pedagogical approaches (Walker, 2008, Northedge, 2007; Thomas, 2006, Haggis, 2003). However, this is clearly not something that can be easily changed at the micro level of practice but is necessary at the wider institutional or departmental level. Seeing students as individuals is central to this pedagogy and elements of this were seen in the focus group when the notion of 'caring' arose but this was not widespread. The notion of 'caring' fits with humanism or a humanist pedagogical approach however, this was not a dominant theme within the interviews. Rogers (1988) as a humanist asserts that trustworthiness, genuineness, realness and congruence for 'being oneself with students' or 'caring' and these are linked with the notion of transformative learning. This is reflective of androgogy rather than pedagogy which is not a dominant force in HE, and more associated with adult learners. In my own experience as a nurse educator, androgogy was a powerful force and guided my own beliefs which are at times at odds with those of my colleagues.

'Caring' perceived as a unique quality of HSSc lecturers from the focus group possibly emerged due to the nature of vocational programmes in the school. This was highlighted with a sense of surprise at awareness of the shared perception which had clearly not been voiced in other dialogues before. It was important to note that the focus group were all female lecturers, from varied programme groups who did not know each other well nor each others' programmes. Their programmes however, all incorporated frontline client interface and, as such, 'caring' was core to their profession which may have impacted on their perceptions and maternalistic approach.

Kreber et al (2007) asserts that 'caring' in the HE sense is demonstrated in concrete behaviours such as giving feedback regularly and availability to students, this was identified by some lecturers, even following campus restructures and consequent availability restrictions. Using oneself in teaching or being 'genuine' was also a theme. It could be assumed that 'genuineness' (Rogers, 1988) and 'authenticity' (Kreber et al, 2007) in being a teacher or lecturer are linked. However it also raises the possibility of 'inauthenticity' which could be interpreted as pursing rewards (i.e. teaching fellowships) or outwardly focussing i.e. publishing in teaching arenas for teaching rather than focussing on the student experience and intrinsic satisfaction of helping students. Although there were three Middlesex Teaching Fellows the question of excellence in practice was not raised in the interviews. However, whilst there were examples of good practice discussed by the lecturers, these were not necessarily from the Teaching Fellows nor were they widely disseminated. This further illustrates what is valued by lecturers and the wider department. This is relevant to the WP discourse at

all levels and the literature is replete with aims of transforming learners' lives, more specifically diverse ones or 'WP'. This is reinforced in the professional standards for teaching produced by the Higher Education Academy (HEA, 2006) point 1. Respect for individual learners and point 4 commitment to encouraging participation, acknowledging diversity and promoting equality of opportunity. This then provides a firm platform to challenge pedagogy and teaching beliefs

Professional preparation and teaching.

The sense that the professional subject or practice area guided teaching approach was present. Prosser et al (2007) assert that lecturers' ways of knowing are influenced by subject epistemology and associated communities of practice and consequently their approach to pedagogy. This issue of disciplinary difference in pedagogy has been debated before and does appear to be an undercurrent or subconscious feature, as opposed to overt. Hence I assume the limited references to broad general pedagogical beliefs. This also demonstrates elements of professional bounded knowledge and the traditionalist reproductions of imparting that knowledge. However, I was conscious of the connection between practice and knowledge (and pedagogy) especially as the lecturers interviewed represented various vocational subject areas (assuming business as vocational). Shulman (2005: 18) asserts, '*in professional education, it is insufficient to learn for the sake of knowledge and understanding alone; one learns in order to engage in practice'* thus alluding to lecturers' development of professional or 'signature' pedagogy. This was a theme in several lecturers' narratives:

> '*it's a case of making things as real life as possible because at the end of the day most of them are going to go out and practice ..... erm so they are going to be in the real world and most of them don't go out to teach what we taught them so they've got to be able to survive in the real world'* (HSSc L2)

This 'skill building' pedagogical approach and making the classroom or laboratory reflect real life holds implications for wider environment and the employability agenda. This has implications for WP and its dialogue especially in how lecturers perceive their students, their profession and teaching and learning.

Northedge (2003) argues that academic disciplines are high status 'discourse communities' and the lecturers within them hold claims to 'expert knowledge'. This may contribute to exclusionary practices in HE without lecturers realising it for example in practices such as language used and praising skills which are difficult for students to adopt (i.e. writing in the `acceptable style'). This perception was an undercurrent especially in the interviews of lecturers from some of the hard science subjects in

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practices such as 'writing scientifically' or presenting numerical data. The lack of overt pedagogical beliefs and approaches, varied department approaches and small micro-level practice changes implies a narrow view and thus approach to WP and diversity. Within some universities this may be seen as a paradox of language to speak of inclusion and practices which at the same time exclude those who do not fit the standard university profile (socio-economic groups or other groups) through perceptions of not being 'able' or 'bright' (Thomas et al, 2006). There appears a link therefore with some tacit exclusionary practices and negative perceptions of WP. Exclusions are not confined to the classroom. Exclusions in HE structures at organisational level have reverberations within the classroom for lecturers e.g. timetabling. Issues such as debt and the stress this creates was not examined in this study but is a feature in the literature and may be relevant.

This highlights the diverse positions lecturers take in relation to students and the perceived status of some academic study routes. This is important as the way this is communicated to students may be via a hidden curriculum and teaching approaches which could also be potentially destructive as students try to make sense of it. This is an issue for the evolving Middlesex 'Student Experience' project working group which has been established during the period of this project and again indicates an initiative to support diversity. It is also a route to raise issues pertaining to it. As a member of this group I strive to maintain the dialogue in relation to WP, and this is being incorporated into the policy on Academic Support. This is a significant contribution to the university wide dialogue on WP and the role of lecturers in relation to diverse student groups.

Reflecting back on their experiences, students surveyed reported no regrets in their course choice. They appeared to identify with their professions and could see themselves as part of their profession '*I love being in the healthcare area and the clinical stuff ..it's scary too.*' (S6). However, the students were critical of their modules, and did not always see the connection between them and their course, suggesting more suitable ones which would help them in practice. This was similar for both programme groups; the modules selected for criticism were the more intellectual skills building modules i.e. key skills or research methods, rather than the pragmatic ones. It appears then that the students had little insight into their skills of abstraction of knowledge and metacognition, and perceived their learning as about 'practical' or 'useful' skills for employment. Paradoxically, they also saw learning as more than being on their academic course but also about lifelong learning and continuous professional development and keeping abreast in their profession:

' *It's good to learn 'cos there's always going to be someone especially if they're going to do like this degree, or whatever you're doing someone is going to be there to ask you questions so if you don't know you're going to be a bit stupid so obviously if you're constantly learning you can be the best in the world in what you're going to do'* (S4).

Tribal approach to teaching?

Several of the lecturers were from professions which had a 'co-terminus' exit point. That means the students achieved an academic qualification but also a professional qualification enabling them to practice in their field. This was reflected in some of the responses in terms of knowledge and skills for practice but also behaviours and attitudes for practice in the profession. There was a sense of nurturing and developing but also of upholding professional standards (professional integrity) which emerged as an issue when students were considered to be weak or possess deficits in some form. One lecturer identified that professional programmes are demanding and thus students who are not able are put onto programmes for the 'less able' in a filtering-type process. For example those not 'able' for biomedical sciences were put onto biological sciences. This implies a difference in undergraduate academic study (and levels) as opposed to behaviour or attitude mismatches for professions. This 'gatekeeper' role was not evident often in the interviews but with one or two lecturers was a strong undercurrent. However, the power balance demonstrated in the gatekeeper role illustrates the alienation, or block, to perceived weak students to the academic or the professional world. This does also highlight an 'elitism' amongst some professions which is also an impediment. This is a contentious point and an ethical issue. The language used by lecturers in this instance infers that WP i.e. weak students, may be filtered or excluded from professions which contradicts the philosophy of social advancement of WP or capacity building and enabling.

The lecturers comments did in some instances resonate with Becher and Trowler's (2001) 'tribal' communities. There was a sense of a specific approach to teaching knowledge and practices reflecting the epistemologies of the profession rather than considering a scholarly approach to teaching. This may be reflective of Bechler and Trowler's (2001) taxonomy of `hard' or `soft', pure or applied subjects and the consequent disciplinary community. This they describe as divergent (schismatic and ideologically fragmented) or convergent (collectivity and mutual identity) to explain epistemological and sociological aspects. For this research study, I believe these aspects can explain the approaches and attitudes of some of the staff in question. The

lecturers interviewed were from three of the schools within the university from programmes and subject areas ranging from nursing (arbitrarily designated soft and applied), Sport (same), Biomedical science (hard and applied), computing science (hard and applied), business (soft and applied) and education (soft and applied). Bechler and Trowler[5] (2001) further include disciplinary constructs of 'convergence' (defined tightly knit boundaries) and 'divergence' (ill-defined boundaries).

Some disciplines appear to enjoy a high level of convergence: nursing for example in terms of collegiality, mutuality of interests, a shared intellectual style, diversity of client groups and needs. There is a consensus of understanding the nature of care and of practice and 'being' a professional. Others such as Biomedical science were more rigid, prescribed and less collegial. Webster (2006) maintains that this professional tribal 'silo' and professional bounded knowledge (and pedagogical approach) impedes academic discourse and challenges professional boundaries and thus knowledge. Lecturers from certain disciplines in this research did demonstrate a closed or exclusive attitude displaying the aforementioned 'gatekeeper' role to the profession. This was evident in comments of 'weak students' not being 'able' for it indicating and exclusionary mentality. Northedge (2003) maintains that lecturers' and students' understanding of academic (and disciplinary) discourses are necessary to frame a pedagogical approach to diverse student groups. These discourses acknowledge differing identities in terms of academics (or professionals) and students and the positions held by both. This highlights the complexity of disciplines and pedagogy for diversity and the need for more dialogue in relation to WP between disciplines and universities.

Student centredness and control.

The repositioning of teaching to make the students take control was also identified especially in aiding students to forge more independence. This was perceived as especially important for the 'weaker' WP students:

> '[it's about] *lecturers liberating themselves from always having to be the vocal point so it's about having the students do more in seminars and that helps in widening participation y'know because you've got students' marks creeping up because there is more potential for them to practice in the class and get immediate feedback'* (non HSSc L9).

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[5] Bechler and Trowler (2001) in their work on disciplinary differences and academic communities use a taxonomy which identifies cognitive difference in metaphors of 'hard/soft' or 'pure/applied' and social difference as the metaphors 'convergence/divergence' or 'rural/urban'.

There were several paradoxes which emerged: the need to be content driven versus incorporating real life elements, the desire to be student centred but the ease of adopting a teacher centred approach; the perception that some students would perform the same regardless of teaching approach and amount of help and support offered. The struggle with discipline-specific approaches and the 'behaviours' and 'thinking' as professionals does appear to drive pedagogical approaches. However, this is compounded by perceptions of WP as weak students and thus the need to 'dumb' down the teaching level. This is also linked with expectations from the viewpoint of students but also lecturers.

Students' perceptions of teaching and learning were varied with several holding a very traditional and conservative view. This was predominantly evident within the sports students. For some these did reflect secondary experiences such as wanting exams to 'make them learn' (ST 3 Sports) or having more 'content' with a view that learning was about 'hammering it in'. This was something they had not done and felt the need to be 'forced to learn more' (ST 3 Sports) with several examples of 'cramming' and one could say learning at a superficial level. This reproduction of prior experiences does imply a limited development of critical thought and 'transformation' by HE and is in stark contrast to the curriculum and pedagogical changes in the institution. It may be a feature of their apprehension of their perceptions of readiness to enter the workplace, as these were year 3 students at the end of their programmes, voicing concerns at being 'out there' in the real world.

The nursing students on the other hand were very self deprecating. They identified themselves as having poor study skills and perceived their poor results being due to their own lack of focus or effort. However, they acknowledged adult learning philosophy at university accepting their role within that. For the nursing students, learning concerned social interaction and dialogue with peers to clarify topics and issues between themselves. There were references to perceived 'poor' teaching practices which appeared to revolve around students perceptions of lecturers' knowledge base. This is a point supported by Hockings (2008), which is important if students place their belief in lecturers as 'knowledge authorities' with a role of knowledge transmission. The response was one of endurance and perseverance and 'passing the module despite the lecturer' (S1). It is not clear if this illustrates powerlessness in the authority of the lecturers, or a social reference to the students' emancipation and struggle with HE, or holding onto their social identity. This could also be transference of blame and not taking responsibility. The student quoted above (like several others interviewed) was a

first generation student at university which may have had an effect. The question is how lecturers can use this information.

Student voice and feedback is important (Lipsett, 2008). Furthermore, stressing the two way nature of feedback process is necessary but not always considered so. Students interviewed did not feel their evaluation was listened to or valued. It ought to be that staff take feedback earlier and visibly act on it to indicate responsiveness or enter into discussion regarding it. This is happening to some extent in the learning framework changes and other processes (Boards of Studies) which occurred during the course of this project, highlighting that the issues are being raised and attended to. The question remains as to why students believe it is not valued and does this relate to the perceived attitude of staff.

Student experiences of teaching and learning.

The questionnaire which addressed Experiences Teaching and Learning was distributed to 160 nursing students and 35 sports and exercise science students yielding a 68% and 49% return rate respectively (nurses n=109, sports student n=17) giving an overall response rate of 64.6%. The questionnaire revealed some interesting relationships. As mentioned in chapter 3 there were several subscales to this questionnaire elicited from grouping specific questions. The subscales included Approach to learning (deep or surface), Staff enthusiasm and Assessment for learning (see table 5.8 for data). The subscales were then correlated for relationships using Pearson's correlation co-efficient (via SPSS v 15) meanwhile recognising this was not a random sample and as such could only give an indication of connection between subscales. The nursing students indicated that staff enthusiasm was a strong factor in terms of teaching and learning. All students agreed strongly with 'interest' and 'knowledge achieved'. The results from Sports and Exercise science students were more mixed. This was on the whole less positive than the nursing students with only 'support from other students' and 'learning achieved (knowledge)' being more strongly agreed with.

Table 5.8 Approaches to learning and studying results from students' questionnaire.

Subscales of variables Ranked for Nurses:	Nurses Agree	Subscales of variables Ranked for Sport:	Sports Agree
Learning achieved (Knowledge)	86.8%	Learning achieved (Knowledge)	73.3%
Learning achieved (Communication and organising)	86.8%	Support from other students	73.3%
Interest, enjoyment and relevance	85.2%	Interest, enjoyment and relevance	60%
Assessment for understanding	79.6%	Learning achieved (Communication and organising)	53.3%
Support from other students	72.6%	Clarity and Feedback about assessment	33.3%
Encouraging high quality learning	70.8%	Assessment for understanding	33.3%
Alignment of learning objectives	68.6%	Alignment of learning objectives	33.3%
Clarity and Feedback about assessment	66.4%	Deep Approach	28.6%
Deep Approach	60.4%	Surface Approach	26.7%
Staff enthusiasm	58.1%	Staff enthusiasm	26.7%
Surface Approach	25.7%	Encouraging high quality learning	20%

(Source: Responses to ETL Questionnaire. Nurses n=109, Sports n=17)

In terms of correlations, the subscale 'staff enthusiasm' was a key issue and impacted on 'interest and learning processes' (table 5.9). However, this was not indicated as a strong factor in 'deep learning' (0.397). Conversely, 'staff enthusiasm' did not correlate strongly with 'learning achieved in terms of knowledge' gained and this does appear at odds with 'encouraging high quality learning'. This may reflect the nature of the profession (vocational) or the value placed on skills acquisition, or even the anxiety in terms of readiness for imminent employment. However, it may also be a feature of the perceived pedagogical approaches taken by the lecturers.

Students indicated 'deep learning' did occur. This correlated most strongly with 'encouraging high quality learning' and 'communication and organising'. There were strong links with 'clarity of feedback' and 'assessment for learning' and 'alignment of learning objectives' which does reflect the curriculum changes (termed the Learning Framework) and emphasis on feedback on and constructive alignment of assessment with objectives. The key strong relationships for students learning experiences revolved around staff enthusiasm and feedback.   Conversely, whilst students in the interviews valued peer support and discussing topics to enable them to learn, the questionnaire data suggests that this was a weak relationship for deep learning. This

would imply that there are some issues with learning in peer situations though what the students actually understood by student support was unclear. In the interviews students gave further examples of issues they had in relation to relationships with staff (lecturers and support staff) and acknowledge the impact of the physical presence of lecturers (and staff) in aiding learning, highlighting the importance of peers but more importantly of lecturer support.

Table 5.9 Correlations of Approaches to Teaching and Leaning subscale variables.

Subscales of variables	Subscales of variables	Correlation coefficient (Pearson's)
Staff enthusiasm	Alignment of learning	0.651
	Interest, enjoyment and relevance	0.602
	Encouraging high quality learning	0.543
	Learning achieved (knowledge)	0.301
Deep learning	High quality learning	0.481
	Communication and organising	0.404
	Student (peer) support	0.238
Assessment for learning	Clarity of feedback	0.519
Alignment of learning objectives	Assessment for learning	0.581
Student (peer) support	Encouraging high quality learning	0.790

(Source: Student ETL Questionnaire. Nurses n= 109, Sports n=17)

When asked to identify what they learned from their course, all the students agreed with the items listed for them on the questionnaire: knowledge, problem solving, practical skills etc. However, when asked to identify additional aspects this elicited a poor response from the students; the nurses (n=12) identified aspects such as confidence, reflection, team working, tolerance and prioritising. This raises the question of if we as lecturers are aware and how we actively contribute to this. One could argue that some of these are graduate skills which ought to be embedded in an undergraduate programme. However not all programmes end with a degree qualification (i.e. nursing) and these aspects may be indicative of students developing maturity or professional competency. This did emerge in the focus group of lecturers as a sign of student 'success' in particular highlighting confidence, communication, developing opinions and 'growing'. Only one sports student (n=1) added an additional aspect: "people skills". Both courses involve working with people and it was interesting

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the insight exhibited by the nurses. They were the larger group and a response rate of 11% is still small thus cannot be generalised to all students.

Interestingly, the students who were later interviewed did not appear unhappy and as such the responses in the questionnaire are surprising. The intention was not to compare the two groups but to explore students as diverse student groups to provide another dimension to the lecturers' perceptions. As representatives of a group of 'WP students' the above data does indicate that the students' experiences (if considered WP students) cannot be generalised and that they do not represent a homogeneous group. The factors influencing their responses are evidently complex and as such support and pedagogical approaches may not be so simply prescribed or catered for. This is central to our understanding of our role as lecturers if we wish develop best and appropriate practice in teaching and learning for diverse students.

Students' frustrations with teaching and learning.

Students did demonstrate frustrations with teaching and learning and the perceived applicability of the topics studied with their perception of what is necessary for their profession:

> '*I get frustrated by it and wish it was more about disease than caring about patients and clinical skills than actually about study skills' (S2)*

> '*we do need more anatomy after all that is what sport is about movement not some of the other nonsense we do...'(S5).*

There were frustrations reported in relation to knowing what ought to be done and what they actually did. Students acknowledged they had a learning style but that they did not maximise this information and just saw determining it as a vacuous exercise.

The most positive experiences cited by both groups of students revolved around two areas: applied clinical experiences and social interactions. The nursing and sports students both had clinical elements and this aspect of learning appeared to be more highly valued and enjoyed. The discourse presented by students appears to be one of emerging professional identity contrasted with variable student identities. The sense of professional identity and satisfaction counterbalanced the frustrations and difficulties encountered with academic elements.

James and Beckett (2002) described a connection between teaching, research and student experience. They argue that students holding high levels of dissatisfaction with

teaching eventually recognise some of the constraints under which lecturers worked and their dissatisfaction dissipated over time. There may also be a consequent lowered expectation of teaching as they become absorbed into the culture of the university. One might counter argue in that it may also be in part due to student apathy or powerlessness rather than becoming part of the culture.

Perceptions of academic challenges.

As previously mentioned, it was evident that WP students were perceived as possessing 'deficits'. This was manifested in a number of ways such as unrealistic expectations, challenges of prior experience and role and identity. The challenge for lecturers therefore was to address student deficits which reinforced the pathology of WP. Students with specific needs were perceived by lecturers as 'WP students' thus needs, problems or struggling was synonymous with WP. As such the response was to simplify everything. This paradoxically was also the solution to 'other struggling students' who were not 'WP students' though who they were, was not clear:

> '*I think the other key thing I tend to do for WP students is to try to simplify concepts as much as possible erm...that has, that would help those er the able as well as those students who are less able*' (HSSc L 3).

This does appear to emphasise the notion of WP students as having specific learning needs and other conditions making them 'weaker'. Overall they appear to be part of a defined group of 'struggling students' and may be labelled WP if they also possess other attributes such as a disability. Disability is identified by HEFCE (2009b) as one of the student groups targeted for attention under WP.

Several lecturers identified being sensitive to differing needs of students, highlighting a desire to not single out struggling students. This was evident in responses from both HSSc and non HSSc lecturers. In the main, this was an issue in reference to disabilities especially students with covert problems such as dyslexia. There were examples of understanding learning issues and strategies to support dyslexic students. These included use of handouts on coloured paper and extra time in exams. Both these examples were cited to acknowledge difference (and diversity) and strategies to redress that difference. However, their 'difference' had a cause and label (dyslexia etc) and could be addressed. For lecturers the 'label' enabled a clear prescribed means to address a problem but lecturers highlighted some struggling students were not so straight forward or 'explainable' and needing some sort of explanation which magnified the challenge and frustrations and confused perception of 'need' or 'problem'.

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> *'I've tried really tried to get students to go to the able [Disability] centre ...... it's just that English isn't their first language and that's a huge barrier to get them to believe that it's not remedial yeah so the students have that barrier...'* (non HSSc L4).

Another academic challenge, identified by a few lecturers, was achieving consistency across modules with multiple lecturers and monitoring this, though this was more an issue with year 1 modules. This seemed to imply it compromised their attempts to be student-centred. Large classes and fewer classroom contact hours were mentioned as a constraint in getting to know students. Only a few lecturers expressed a desire to 'know students'. For some others (n=3) entry might be diverse but once in university students were an almost homogeneous group:

> '*I might recognise students that I know have come through different tracks but most of the time well I'd say all of the time they don't appear to have at this stage different needs to any other student'* (non HSSc L8).

Key skills and student performance.

Lecturers had difficulties understanding why their students at times had such variable academic performance citing poor basic secondary education implying this was an issue in society in general and WP in particular. For one course, students were perceived as performing either very well or very badly in a 'bimodal' pattern, the reasons remained unclear and appear to be put down to poor core skills: '*y'know basic English and maths problems. ..'* (HSSc L5). There was an expectation of core functional skills of literacy and numeracy however no acknowledgment of how these linked to the perceived literacy and numeracy skills required for their programmes of study in HE. Another lecturer identified poor transfer of key skills across other modules or even from year 1 to year 2 as an issue. However, this is more to do with organisational aspects such as time and personal management rather than ability such as writing skills:

> *'even after the 1111 [key skills module] we still get students that still don't write it in the correct format because they rushed it at the last minute ....we do that throughout all the modules in the first year and again even in the second year'* (HSSc L 2).

For this lecturer, the desire to explore this issue perceived in students was not evident. This lecturer appeared to adopt a passive position with no sense of agency to change or challenge it. This was not a common feature but does represent lecturers' perceived role and identity in terms of active or passive engagement with student experiences. This implies the lecturers perceived the year one key skills module which was in place at the time, was ineffective or had limited impact.

The first year 'Key and Transferable Skills' or 'Level One Transferable Skills' (LOTs) module that was in place at the time of this project. This was intended to equip first year students with study skills and learning awareness in response to the Dearing recommendations (NCHIE, 1997). During the course of this research project the key skills module changed form. It was no longer a discrete module but the content (and skills) were distributed across other modules in year 1 of their programme. The value of this module and change has been evaluated elsewhere and is not included here. During the course of this research project, as part of a suite of changes under the 'Learning Framework' students had major curriculum changes including to the aforementioned key skills module. This enormous change to the curriculum was intended, among other work, to improve the student experience, promote engagement with students and forge student cohort identities. This does appear to be more appropriate and connects the skills to theoretical or practical components of the programmes. However, it must be noted that the students participating in this research project were from the former curriculum. In any event the issues of pedagogy and support for WP remain relevant.

The LOTs module was taught as a distinct entity by lecturers from the same discipline as the students. This was not a popular (i.e. enjoyable) module amongst students and this was explored in the questionnaire and interviews. Students were required to think about learning and learning styles (using the Honey and Mumford inventory) to improve their metacognitive processes. Whilst there are several competing theories and criticisms of the concept of learning styles this was the approach in use at the time of this project. The scepticism was also evident from the students. When asked to identify their preferred learning style only 61% (n=67) of nurses and 59% (n=10) of sports students responded. Of these, 40% of the nurses and 70% of the sports students exhibited confusion about their learning style (table 5.10). Of those that did recall a learning style 16 nurses identified themselves as reflective (14%) whilst three sports and exercise science students identified themselves as 'active' (17%). This may be more to do with their programme type or current modules being undertaken (i.e. nurses were studying Reflective Practice at the same time). There was also a discrepancy in the perceptions of how helpful the module was. The majority of nurses considered it helpful (n= 88, 89%) compared with sports students (n= 3, 25%). There were considerable number of missing responses to this question (nurses n= 10, 9%, sports n= 5, 29%). Reflection is a core activity and skill in nursing and is linked with experiential learning which could explain the discrepancy in the results. This does

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highlight the mixed perceptions of the benefits and value of the module among the students.

Table 5.10 Student Perceptions of LOTS module (key skills).

Component	Nursing Students (n=109)	Sport students (n=17)
Taken LOTS module	97 (89%)	15 (87%)
Confused recognition of Learning style	27 (40%)*	7 (70%)*
Learning style HAD changed since year 1	48 (57%)*	2 (17%)*
Learning style had NOT changed since year 1	35 (42%)*	10 (83%)*
Identified module as helpful	88 (89%)*	3 (25%)*

NB. * Percentages are for valid responses excluding missing responses.
(Source: Student ETL Questionnaire. Nurses n= 109, Sports n=17)

The students were also asked in what way they found the key skills (LOTS) module helpful, 65% (n= 82) of all the students responded. This was an open question and the responses were text based and categorised as perceived to be helpful or unhelpful. The responses commented on aspects the presented below:

1. Helpful in terms of developing:
   - Communication skills (n=5, 6%)
   - Practical skills (i.e. being reflective or time management) (n = 14, 17%)
   - Reading and writing skills (n=4, 4.8%)
   - Approach to study and confidence (n=16, 19.5%)
   - Cognitive skills (n=12, 14.6%)
   - Professional development (n=7, 8.5%)
   - Information technology skills n=4, 4.8%

2. Unhelpful
   - Negative effects (waste of time, too basic, already knew the topics) (n= 10, 12.4%)

Professional development as a category emerged under helpful perceptions of the LOTs module. This included phrases such as 'helpful with placements', 'preparing me for my career' and comments on 'reflection for learning', were interesting as clearly students early on engage with their future identity (nurse etc) and preparation for that. Overall students expressed mixed opinions of the usefulness of this module and the

skills it aimed to develop. This may be a feature of the way it was taught or the perceived value of it either by the lecturers, the students or both. This module is now no longer in place. From this data the perceived usefulness and longitudinal effect of this support is questioned.

Expectations.

Lecturers and students both reported expectations of their experiences and their role in HE. Most of the lecturers felt unprepared for the diverse student groups encountered as evident in the perceptions of problems, struggles and weakness. The increasing diversity in the student population and the political pressures to widen and diversify further calls into question lecturer preparation, training and support. Some institutions are already highly diverse in terms of student population and this alone is perceived as WP. This represents a mismatch between students' and lecturers' (or even university) expectations and how to accommodate diversity (or WP) and develop a clarity in what is meant by WP. The issue therefore for lecturers is of awareness of what diversity and WP is and discriminating between these. More or ongoing professional development is needed not for lecturers' discipline area, but in recognising and being alert to specific issues which impact on students and their learning and the extent to which these can be addressed or catered for.

One of the lecturers in HSSc commented that students find it hard to engage in academic discourse as they found it extremely challenging. Furthermore, practical or interactive classes which related to the programme of study (mainly vocational courses) engaged students more, as they could see the relevance of them. This was true for nursing programmes and sport programmes, and was a theme certainly in the other schools too. One lecturer identified behaviours she saw students adopt which indicated lack of engagement and of her sense of frustration at this:

> '*it's really difficult to draw them in and to engage them when they're sat there with their arms folded and y'know in some cases asleep in your seminars it's hard to help students like that*' (HSSc L 5).

If the behaviour is a block then the lecturer responses to these behaviours could also be a block. This may be a signal of student difficulty and not knowing how to communicate this. However, the lecturer's response to these behaviours was a perception of students making the wrong course choice and this was their way of expressing this. The expectation is eager and industrious students and behaviours to the contrary are a 'student problem'. As lecturers perhaps we are not attuned to

student diversity, diverse means of engagement or diverse calls for support. This has implications for our understanding of our students and the approaches for effective teaching and learning.

Achievement expectations

One (non HSSc) lecturer identified an issue with assessment and achievement expectations. This lecturer indicated that diverse or WP students often emanate from a school curriculum or FE culture or practice whereby several attempts to take an assessment may be required and is expected. This prolonged achievement expectation was considered a challenge, but a culture which may prevail in other education institutions:

> '*providing resit opportunities helps a bit because some people especially for the first year they come in they don't realise it actually matters they've been in a culture where you resit everything anyway*' (Non HSSc L 4).

Thus giving an understanding that a student may have an expectation of always resitting and eventually passing contrasts against the harsh reality of one reassessment attempt at university:

> '*the student said...at college they always said they were going to fail me but they never did…. I think a lot come in with that expectation*' (non HSSc L4).

Lecturers acknowledged the range of help available for struggling students. The most frequently reported source from all lecturers was English Language Learning and Support (ELLS). However, the process of referring was not clear. In the main, the students were 'told where help is' but this was not followed up. One lecturer identified that support services, other than academic support, are taken up more readily and was surprised when students were reluctant to seek support for academic problems:

> '*we've got all manner of support for them if they've got financial difficulties and again we try and steer them into those services too and actually I think they make better use of those than they do of the academic help weirdly*' (HSSc L 5).

This same lecturer also identified frustration if students chose to not seek help and their academic performance showed no noticeable change and put this down to apathy:

> '*to be honest no emm you can tell them until you're blue in the face what support there is available and you can give them tutorials but they don't seem to just do the work ......[*support is *] thrown at them all the time with no effect*' (HSSc L 5).

This latter comment was in reference to first year students but the perception that students who did not actively take up the help were not 'worthy' to continue appears implicit. Frustration was evident in all lecturers at not making 'inroads' with some students and feeling helpless when encouraging students to seek support but who would not. This contrasts with the focus group perception of WP as 'choice' to seek or use help. One lecturer identified that monitoring was a good idea but felt that a more personal approach was important, highlighting a close connection with students at an individual level:

> '*I'm closely monitoring a student .... and I think attending to students with those sorts of things going on in their lives is more significant than mapping or tracking students'* (Non HSSc L7).

At the same time student support was available for all students and acted as a safety net for the WP students '*there're a lotta support systems out there and that's for all students because that becomes an issue for everyone doesn't it'* (FG 2).

Overall early signposting of difficulty and referral was not consistent for lecturers, with some identifying that problems were only encountered several weeks into the programme. Moreover, this is evident in the attrition of students particularly in the first year. Aspects of this have been recognised and addressed through the learning framework curriculum changes and other staff changes i.e. monitoring of student attendance and the introduction of student achievement advisors to advise and offer practical help to students. Academic changes such as smaller class sizes, programme changes, promotion of formative work and feedback etc, have also been introduced to address this. This does indicate that the issues are being explored and changes are ongoing. The question is how all these initiatives are joined together and what the impact is for WP. This is addressed somewhat in phase 3 of this project which was developing during the changes and as such is reflective of the changing environment and the need to maintain a dialogue and perspective of WP.

Students' lives.

The realisation that students have demands and work out of university is also important. One lecturer cited a local internal survey which indicated that students worked on average 17 hours a week in paid employment making it a huge commitment in addition to studies. This lecturer expressed sensitivity to these demands but also acknowledged limited or no change in the curricular structures to take this into account. Callendar and Jackson (2005) indicate that financial burdens are a very real stress and

can lead to exclusion with students having to pay fees, incur debts and perhaps work to support themselves (and dependants). However, as identified before, the 'playing field' of higher education is unfair and exclusionary as demonstrated through structures, practices and timetabling etc. This may also be magnified in the attitudes by some staff or lecturers who do not know, or have insight into, lives of diverse students.

Lecturers reported that student misperceptions of university persisted throughout year 1 of university. Few of the lecturers interviewed had experiences with participating in WP outreach activities (e.g. In Taster days, Master Classes etc). The few that did identified an altered perception of students' lives before university and proposed that all lecturers should have a taste of such outreach activities as it would give them an insight into what students think university is like:

> '*It would definitely be good for people ….to see at 15 16 what they think about university cos what they think of university is nothing as to what it's like'* (HSSc L 2).

This in turn impacted on their own conceptions of diversity, WP and student expectations. Outreach activities made one lecturer think about the information that is out there about careers, and the expectation gap from a socio-cultural perspective.

> '*I mean a lot of them even haven't got animals especially around some difficult parts of London, they don't tend to have animals, and obviously where I have grown up.........its out in the country and everybody, you now everybody seems to have pets it's a different life so that's made me think you know,'* (HSSc L6)

This lecturer realised that her students' lives were very different to her own and this proved an alarming shock to her own role perception. This has been a powerful factor influencing her own conception of her relationship with students and pedagogical approaches.

There does appear to be a relationship between a lecturers' approach to teaching and their relationship to and connection with diverse or WP students. This could be described as two continua: teaching approach and sense of responsibility. In reflecting on this, the more student centred approach that is evident, the more of a humanist pedagogy and personal connection that is made with students with lecturers positioning themselves as more involved and directly interacting with students. In this research there is evidence of a disciplinary influence on teaching and learning probably arising from discipline epistemologies. However, lecturers identified a complex set of relationships and roles in relation to diverse students. This is an evolving concept, and

very broad stemming from personal and professional reflections on scholarly approach to teaching and dialogue with peers and colleagues. This is illustrated in figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1 Concept map of the lecturers' perceptions of WP and their approach to teaching.

	Take responsibility ⟶	Shift responsibility to others
Human face: Engage and relate to student on human level. Direct help.		**Referrer:** Refer to other helping sources.
Borderline cruising: Disregard those not causing trouble or challenging. Only helping those in desperate need.		**Blinkered:** Ignore the situation, out of sight, students problem
Old fashioned : Achieve or perish. Weak and unable.		**Martyr:** Long suffering, putting up with students who should not be in University, deficits are too great thus disappear.

Student centred (top) — **Teaching Approach** (vertical axis) — *Content driven* (bottom)

Conceptions of student success.

Lecturers' perceptions of what constituted student success was varied: as an objective measure, a sense of values and also as a consequence to the student journey.   One lecturer did acknowledge individual student performance as an important measure but preferred to look at group data i.e. module or programme pass rate, as a key measure of student success. This was qualified by citing the university benchmark of 80% pass rate in any individual module (HSSc). This was linked to progression and retention, and it was significant that this particular comment was made by a Director of Programmes (DoP) reflecting their role in relation to student achievement. In reflecting why some modules do not fare so well, this lecturer indicated that this was a fault of the students recruited to the programmes, and their abilities or attitudes but not that of the

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lecturers: '*types they recruit to the programme in terms of attitude and maturity'* (HSSc L 3).

Student success was an important issue for the focus group. This varied from progression to completion as well as a scale of `student self satisfaction':

> '*they've got the job that they wanted or that they have actually finished a programme something like that which they may have failed at all through their lives or something they have found really difficult seeing them succeed*' (FG 4).

Other benefits such as confidence, communication, developing opinions and 'growing' were identified as equally important as successful completion of their course. The lecturers also identified making a connection with the students, investing in them and having a sense of pride at students' completion in a paternalistic way: '*It's like your children isn't it..*' (FG 3) '*because it's about investing yourself in that student …*' (FG 4).

Another key student success criterion was the acquisition of academic literacy, progressing and then attaining a product, such as a degree or professional qualification e.g. Nursing. Skills development and progress in written and class work were seen as indications that students were learning and demonstrating academic literacy in a cumulative way. The 'rehearsal' element viewed as important for acquiring the specific skills, in this instance learning is perceived as being evidenced in written work eventually:

> '*you can look at the grades across the three pieces of coursework and they generally improve so we can certainly see that they are learning*' (HSSc L 2).

Lecturers also identified students' development of independence as success though represented as attached to their label:

> '*I think that the widening participation students themselves coming in feel as though they've achieved they've come in maybe as a foundation student and then have achieved enough to now study as a first year*' (non HSSc L 8).

Personal development was also seen as important such as confidence in communication, intrinsic motivation and the ability to offer opinions and questions:

> '*some element of self development …. they need to pass actually they need to pass for themselves… more than that they need to learn to be happy at university and to enjoy the whole thing'* (non HSSc L 4).

Success also included critical thinking development with students applying this to practice or practical situations. Taking pride in their achievements and investing in the

wider community such as when applying for jobs was also considered a success criterion:

> '*success is the fact that they had they felt confident not to brag about what they had done in the second year and third year but to show what they had done for somebody other than themselves.*.' (non HSSc L 8).

The development or transformation of students is evident in some responses. These moved beyond skills and knowledge to wider issues of development beyond university to incorporate the community and society. Lecturers identified seeing students develop their own values or '*bringing society into it*' (non HSSC L11). This does emphasise lecturer recognition of the breadth and expanse of change which HE can effect in students and consider this a success criterion. How some lecturers contribute to this goes beyond focussed skill or disciplinary teaching.

A few lecturers (n= 3) did not comment directly on perceptions of student success but focussed more on students' academic or skills ability. End of module evaluation or feedback was seen to be instrumental in determining if students were successful, in the limited sense of just passing the module. It was also recognised that end of module evaluation was an outlet if students were disgruntled, or had issues which were not directly focussed on issues of teaching and learning. One lecturer remarked that a group of students may indicate dissatisfaction with a module or class however this would be judged under using 'professional judgement' for merit or 'truth' before contemplating any ensuing changes thus perversely de-valuing the evaluation:

> '[you] *use your professional judgement where you think you agree with the students or not'* (HSSc L3).

This does resonate with one student's comments previously mentioned about their evaluations being valued. This clearly is a cause for concern and raises the question of the purpose of evaluations if a perception is of a paper exercise with a right or wrong answer.

Students' own perceptions of success

Students' own perceptions of success were equally as varied. When asked in the Experiences of Teaching and Learning questionnaire how they rated success on their course 32% (n= 34) of nurses and 29% (n= 5) of sports students did not respond. This was an open question and several students chose to use their own numerical score (0 to 100) to demonstrate their success with several (n=10) indicating 60 - 100%.

Students also used qualitative comments, of which, some were positive and some negative (see table 5.11)

Table 5.11 Students qualitative comments on their success at university from the ETL questionnaire

Total students responses (n= 85) *(Quotes italicised)*

Positive experiences (n= 52):
- 'Good to excellent' (n=19)
- '*I can only make my own success'* (n=1, S 123)
- *'I found it good you get out of it what you put in*' (n=1,S 60)
- '*pride in enduring the course'* (n=1, S 55),

Negative (n = 9)
- know less than at the beginning of course (n=2)
- not satisfied with progress (n=2)

Incredulous (n=5):
- surprise at progress and sense of luck despite some experiences managed to progress not having to resit (n=1)
- '*very good in comparison to others'* (n=1, S 62)

Skill development (n=6)
- Improvement in critical thinking,
- Improved caring skills
- Learning itself as success,

Frustrations (n=3):
- '*Sometimes I find it difficult to be enthusiastic and find it hard going*' (n=1, S 31)
- '*I feel I have gained knowledge but fear that the only way the knowledge is identified is through assignments and I feel more practical knowledge and skills should be included*' (n=1, S 90)
- '*I found aspects of the course unnecessary and that we should have pursued various other modules e.g. Anatomy further'* (n=1, S 118)

The range of responses indicates a broad perception of success and probably reflects students own personal aims in taking the course. One student identified the discrepancy with assessment type and success in relation to their programme or discipline especially since they fared poorly in written assessments. They perceived written assignments as a poor indicator of ability especially their practical clinical ability and so of little relevance in their course. Haggis (2006) identifies that evaluations of ability contain implicit expectations by lecturers that students know what is being evaluated and it seems evident that this is not clear. The applicability of assignment tasks and expectation of how to undertake or succeed in these was evidently not clear in some instances. Students did not identify completing a degree or diploma as a

success criterion this may have been subsumed into the comments of staying and progressing through the course.

This of course does raise the issue of the purpose of HE, its use of knowledge and role of lecturers which may be bound in the academic or disciplinary confines of epistemologies and practices. It has also highlighted the challenges and barriers which impact on, and impede, individual changes and the agency to effect personal and wider change.

Lecturers' perceptions of their wider academic department approach or position in relation to WP.

This was very varied. A few lecturers (n= 3) commented on 'sensitivity' in their departments to WP, meaning a desire to do more but in the face of other pressures, did not. In addition, the dialogue in relation to WP, if happening at all, was not a priority. Several lecturers commented on their colleagues' lack of awareness of WP. There were those who acknowledged it existed but could not articulate what it is or what WP students would look like. The support for the WP students was considered as "someone's' job" and this was perceived by some as the "retention officer" (also called the student achievement advisor (SAA) the official nomenclature in HSSc under the Learning Framework changes outlined in chapter 2) but not a direct responsibility of them as lecturers. The perceived deficiencies of WP students identified in earlier in this chapter then appear to be perceived to permeate through their department and devolved as a job to identified person(s) or areas (i.e. ELLS or dyslexia support). As mentioned in chapters 2 and 4 the learning framework changes were occurring at this time and embraced some of these issues. However, the perception of WP and link to pedagogical approaches by lecturers including accountability for WP remain unclear.

The lecturers' perception of their departmental strategic approach to WP was also not clear, though it was acknowledged to be 'probably' in relation to key areas such as admissions, open days and responsibility to equal opportunities. The perception of the changes within the university (curriculum and student support, bridging materials etc) was perceived as a 'catch all' for weak students which included WP students too. All new programmes and curricula reviews (within HSSc) go through a Validations and Approvals (V&A) group as a prelude to the validation procedure. As a member of this group I see the issue of diversity highlighted on all key documents, thus emphasising the issue for programme teams to address. This is significant in ensuring the

embedding of diversity which then begs the question of how this is translated into pedagogical approach and teaching. For a few of the lecturers disability was linked with WP together with the responsibilities which went with that in terms of support, awareness and resources on this basis it could be identified that some departments are described as '*good at WP initiatives*' (non HSSc L8). However, this was not always described as following through to the rest of the student journey. Lecturers did not refer to a strategic plan for WP, an approach towards WP students or awareness of WP and diversity for staff development. Overall, it appears department approaches were varied and piecemeal, dependant on a few staff with interests in that area. This aspect was only explored with a small number of lecturers and, as such, gives a very brief snapshot of their perceptions but not of all of the departments or Schools. The wider influence and position of the institution in relation to WP is explored in chapter 6.

There were constraints perceived within departments in relation to WP. In some departments there were a few people with a keen interest in WP performing activities such as outreach work. This was perceived as raising awareness within the department, but did not attract support from colleagues. It was viewed as an 'add-on' to their role with limited recognition and provided a very narrow view of WP. Whilst lecturers recognised the need for all students (including WP) to possess key skills to engage with academic literacy they were reticent to teach this and did not see it as their role. It appears that 'traditional' students with in-built key skills continue to define the norm in regards to undergraduate students. WP students then, as 'non-traditional' possessing 'deficits' are a challenge and are continually compared with the elusive 'traditional' students.

Fanghanel (2007) proposed a model for understanding the operational level of teaching and its impact on learning. This provides a useful lens to explore WP issues in relation to teaching and learning. Fanghanel (2007: 10) found seven 'filters' to teaching practice operating at different levels of practice (macro-, meso- and micro-) with a degree of overlap. The term filter was preferred to 'factor' or 'theme' to emphasise the subtle influences on practice.

At the macro level of practice there were four filters:
- the institution
- external factors
- academic labour and
- the research-teaching nexus.

At the meso level there were two:

- Academic or subject department
- Discipline

Finally at the micro- level one filter:

- Lecturer pedagogical beliefs.

There are parallels with what has been explored so far in this project. The micro and to an extent the meso level filters have been explored indicating a variety of diverse discourses in relation to WP. Lecturers position themselves in a variety of ways towards diverse students and their approaches to teaching are equally varied from engaging to avoidance. The variable insight into students' experiences is also enlightening especially as personal engagement and enthusiasm is indicated as important by students (see table 5.8). Silver (2003) asserts that institutional practices could potentially lead to a culture or sub-cultures, of tension or conflict impacting on teaching staff. The next chapter will discuss the macro level of practice and how this contextualises the lecturers' perceptions. This will explore the institution's position in relation to WP and focus on the findings from the third part of this study: an exploration into how embedded and mainstreamed WP is in the University.

Chapter 6:   DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS: Institutional commitment to WP.

This chapter will consider the findings of the last element of this research project: embedding and mainstreaming of WP across the university (Action on Access national project) in an attempt to contextualise the findings from the lecturers. It will also address the extent to which the project objectives have been achieved and relate the findings to pertinent theories and literature. Insights from an insider-researcher perspective will also be presented followed by consideration of the limitations of this part of the project.

Following the earlier two phases of this project and a series of changes (internally and externally both politically and from HEFCE) outlined in chapter 1 I was keen to explore the influence of institutional culture, policy and practice in relation to WP. More especially, *how it might impact upon lecturers' perception of and approaches to WP.* It was fortuitous that the national project from Action on Access arose and I managed to align this to my project as mentioned in chapter 4. It afforded the opportunity for the further exploration providing an over arching perspective in understanding the practices, dialogues and institutional identity in relation to WP. This section summarises this national project from my own institution only as a single case and focuses on the reflections of processes, findings and analysis to contextualise lecturer perceptions and practices.

This part of my research highlights some of the paradoxes of current WP policy and institutional practice in regards WP. It also highlights the complexity of WP and differing understandings emanating from the various levels of the organisation. The sense of 'we all know what we mean' but all meaning different things was quite florid with variable levels of connections and 'joined-upness' in relation to WP. The perceived deficiencies of WP, pragmatic approaches to address these, a sense of 'disconnect' in processes and between departments all contributed to the complex picture of WP. This ultimately reinforced the confusion and problems of disparate understanding and immeasurable progress.

As previously mentioned, the political policy documents emanating from government over the last ten years or so indicate a firm political commitment to WP.   HEFCE asserted that

> *'[while] there is evidence of real progress in embedding WP as part of the core mission of all higher education institutions (HEIs) ... this commitment should be carefully reinforced and nurtured…'* (HEFCE, 2006c:3).

HEFCE (2009a) later highlighted again that WP ought to be embedded and incorporated into policies and practice emphasising the importance of 'skilled teaching'. Lack of certainty in universities explicit commitment to WP without a WP Strategy resulted in a request for universities to feedback on their commitment to WP. During this period Universities were required to indicate areas of specific activity in a Strategic Assessment document. This required institutions to identify the place of widening participation in its forward planning, admissions processes and explained how the institution intended to measure the success of WP. Currently, a key measure for HEFCE of student success (and of success for WP) is fair entry and retention. There is a wide array of diverse activities under this and in general they are poorly evaluated and monitored for impact (HEFCE, 2006b). Quinn et al (2005) argue that this is a narrow view of success. This is further reinforced by data collection and funding schemes which do not recognise attendance other than the conventional three year full time programme and annual progression to the subsequent year. Interruptions or partial patterns of participation or delayed completion therefore are not recognised as 'success'. The strategic assessment report to HECFE appears to ostensibly force organisations to account for, and commit funds to, WP. The underlying motivation may be one of confirming institutions commitment of their social obligation in light of perceived 'stalling' of activity in relation to WP (HEFCE, 2009b). The issue of consequences to institutions not clearly indicating this is not clear and may potentially be a concern.

Middlesex changed dramatically over the five years since commencing my research (as mentioned in chapter 4) overall aiming to improve the student experience. The changes were varied, numerous and expansive. However, how they cater for WP specifically is unclear. With no WP strategy the question of how WP is specifically addressed strategically and evident at practice level is also unclear. As such the strategic review process and reflection on WP in light of organisational changes was timely.

As outlined in chapter 4, I led a team which was successful in participating in an Action on Access (AoA) project to explore how mainstreamed and embedded WP was in my institution. This opportunity to be supported by an external body provided a reference point (for current WP research and national policy) as well as a 'critical friend' to challenge and support a strategic and coherent approach. As the lead on this project this placed my role as increasingly important to the development of the strategic assessment report. It was unclear who to report WP issues to internally as it appeared

this fell under two members of senior staff with differing executive responsibilities in Middlesex. It was unclear who would take responsibility for the HEFCE Strategic Assessment report. This also contributed to the confusion of where WP 'lies' and the communication routes for it. From the HEFCE (2009a) perspective WP is referred to in relation to specific groups it indicates are under-represented in higher education: lower socio-economic groups, low participation neighbourhoods and those with disabilities. Mature or ethnic groups were also WP but reported through a different channel. This part of the report (and research) does not include the Strategic Assessment document itself as this was being compiled at the time of writing this critical report. I was required to produce a policy discussion document (Appendix 7) for AoA as the major output from participating in their project. This policy discussion document was to be a 'live' evolving document reflecting the key WP areas of consideration for Middlesex and how these are to be addressed. The document was the culmination of engaging departments in critical discussions of WP, an exploration of WP as it impacted on departments and issues or areas where practice was considered 'good' or in need of development. The AoA project period was 12 months. As this formed part of my own research project I managed to incorporate my interview and questionnaire data in discussions and explorations. This element fit with my epistemology with emphasis son collaboration and participation. Interestingly, this was also seen as an opportunity by AoA to analyse how differing institutions interpreted WP in policy and how they translated this in practice (Personal Communication, L. Thomas, July 2009).

It is interesting to note that the commitment to WP in many universities is such that specific WP personnel exist and even whole departments have a specific remit towards WP either alone or combined with Admissions or Marketing departments. This however contributes to the wider confusion in understanding of WP and how this is translated in practice. Fundamentally WP is a reality in the HE and FE sectors and as such to lecturers, support staff and students entering university. Silver (2003: 159) cites Barnett (2000) in arguing that universities have evolved into a 'conglomerate of knowledge factions, interests and activities' this alludes to professions and departments as territorial and fractious. Added to this is Gorard's (2006) damning assertion of little evidence of teaching adaptations to diverse students. It could be concluded that there is a gap between WP commitment, policy development and practice in HE. This sector wide view appears negative. However, the local context may be different and in this section I will offer an insight into Middlesex and attempt to contextualise comments from the lecturers' interviews.

How embedded and mainstreamed is WP across the institution?

I led a team to explore this as there was no overall picture of this across the university. The core team consisted of five individuals: the Director for Learning Development (Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement), a Learning Development Researcher, two Student Achievement Advisors (SAAs) from different schools and me. As a core team we used a collaborative process by engaging a wider working group of colleagues from across the university in all service areas, teaching staff, students and anyone interested in WP. The collaborative process and work based process fitted with the transformative theoretical framework of my mixed methods approach and the data collection fit with the embedded model outlined in chapter 3. We believed that it was essential to ensure representation from all service areas and have their support in exploring how mainstreamed or embedded WP was.   This was meant as a commitment to WP and the results and statements were published on the national website and as such are open to public scrutiny.

The HEFCE Strategic Assessments (for WP) which were asked for during this period are also significant in that they are mandatory and are a further opportunity to nationally commit to WP and the investment given to it. The key stakeholders were considered to be represented within the working party reflecting the internal sectors (including students) and external partners (AimHigher and outreach colleagues at Middlesex). The Director for Learning Development was a senior figure and influential in decisions at higher levels more expansively than me. I had influence but in a more restricted way in my own school. As the project progressed, the question of where the power and influence lay within the organisation became more acute.

The review of WP resulted in dialogue across the working party, dissemination of findings and invoked dialogue at a wider level. The review process and the aims were in three main stages:

      a. Assessing the current situation
      b. Planning to mainstream and sustain WP
      c. Review process and planning for the future

The product was a snapshot of WP within the organisation and a policy statement for discussion more widely. The outcomes of this internal review were widely explored by the working party and senior staff. It also encompasses a wider range of staff and the environment they operate in and ultimately the impact on the student experience of higher education.

Perceptions of the current situation.

A SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis of WP within the institution provided an initial step in providing a view of the position during early 2008. This emanated from the core working team and the wider working party. This was explored with consideration of Fanghanel's (2007: 10) 'filters' or factors operating at different levels of practice (macro-, meso- and micro-). It was acknowledged that whilst this referred to teaching it could guide the exploration of WP and ultimately student learning as it relates to teaching. There would be a degree of overlap of these factors however it was beneficial to position these factors according to the level of practice i.e. micro (individual or local), meso (department) and macro (whole institution). This was refined and is summarised in table 6.1. A fuller version SWOT can be found in appendix 8.

Table 6.1   WP SWOT analysis.

(Internal) Strengths	Weaknesses
Macro level Mission and vision of diversity culture Global campus and international experience Teaching and learning policies and strategies which embrace diversity Disability service and range of provision **Meso Level** Accredited academic courses, professional status Ethnic mix – exceed national benchmarks **Micro level** Committed staff and practitioners WP students are not distinguishable.	**Macro level** Fragmented communication channels Ultimate responsibility unclear Gaps in data to identify some WP categories (HEFCE categories i.e. first generation, socio-economic level, parental occupation etc) **Meso level** No monitoring of WP Lack of utilisation of data at local level (UCAS scores, ethnicity, other) Poor Learning support data for services **Micro level** WP considered deficit model rather than enabling. Diverse understanding and philosophy or practices associated with WP
(External) Opportunities	**Threats**
Macro level Government policy and targets set for ethnic groups/socio-economic groups etc Opportunity to follow WP and indicate impact – **Meso level** Accessible data: ethnicity, age and originating school/college to inform services and curriculum	**Macro level** Government benchmarking met but continual monitoring resource intensive Reporting mechanisms do not reflect local need and prioritisation. Publicising deficiencies and not the 'value' of the university to individuals.

Micro level	Micro level
Review of WP approaches and increase internal dialogue and debate	Insufficient data and analyses to drive key resources.

The overall key strengths are evident at the macro and meso level of the university, such as, the mission for diversity and student numbers exceeding HEFCE benchmarks. Some colleagues referred to the university as having experience with diverse student groups and a good 'reputation' for diversity. The resonated with comments from the lecturers implying a widespread belief of this. This was identified as evidenced in the array of courses to suit a variety of needs such as part-time and short courses as well as work-based study routes. There were also expanding and important services such as the Disability Service and ELLS service. The number of weaknesses when arranged in terms of macro-, meso- and micro level is larger. Key weaknesses identified included the negative outlook towards WP (especially in terms of cost-benefit ratio), WP as resource intensive and limited organisational use of data such as progression and completion of students on the basis of WP categories. Whilst WP students were not highlighted as recipients for specific services or support they were included in all those 'needing help'. It appeared that the benefits were in a wider context (policies, open support of diversity) but that all the challenges and difficulties were at the interface with students and in how this should be monitored and measured. This resonates with the Action on Access (2000) report indicating in general the HE sector suffered from poor linkage to institutional policies and lack of clarity over monitoring. Allen (2005) argues further that there are practice consequences of staff not signed up to the WP aspirational agenda especially if removed position from strategic policy making.

Perceptions and integration of WP across the University services**.**

Following on from the SWOT analysis, the working party concluded that there were a range of dialogues at different levels of the organisation. More particularly this necessitated a further understanding of where WP was placed in the organisation, what WP meant to the various services and the communication processes about issues of WP. Thus four short open questions were developed and refined by the working group as outlined in chapter 3. These questions were:

1.   What do you think 'Widening Participation' is?
2.   How does Widening Participation impact/relate to your role?

3. Who is responsible for Widening Participation in your area and to whom do they report?

4. What in your view are the main benefits and problems of Widening Participation in HE?

A total of twenty two e-mail requests were sent out to areas. The areas reflected as many services within the university as possible. In total eleven (n=11) responses were received. Some responses were from individuals or team leaders others were from a Head of Service which may include a range of support areas i.e. Academic Registry covers diverse areas such as disability, student services etc.   The written responses were in some cases rather lengthy and quite varied despite being just eleven in total. The questions were open and as such the responses were textual (qualitative) and for ease of understanding were categorised into themes by myself and the working group (using the QDA process outlined in chapter 3) and evaluated by the originators and team for fairness and representativeness. This gave an indication of the wider understanding and associated practices. The responses from the service areas asking for their understanding of WP unsurprisingly reflected the departments' interests and work orientation i.e. work-based learning or admissions department. In the main the responses reflected the prevailing political ideology of WP. There were three themes pertaining to understanding of WP: demographics, process and outcomes. These are outlined in table 6.2. Demographics referred to categories of students, in particular social and ethnic grouping identifying targeting of specific student groups. Process focussed on the work orientation of the differing departments including student achievements with actions to formalise and recognise learning and the diverse form it takes. This did not specifically identify any point on the student lifecycle (i.e. the pre or during university periods) but was more generic indicating a wide perception of 'learners'. Finally, outcomes referred to 'products' of WP such as qualifications and levels which were not just at first degree level but also included employment.

When asked how WP related to their role, service areas reported that WP was either a core element of their function or was peripheral. Some areas exist for 'WP work' (i.e. Outreach team, AimHigher) and for some this is a related element but not core to their role (i.e. admissions department). For other areas WP was seen as increasingly an issue for their function e.g. learning support (ELLS) as they increasingly responded to students' learning needs and which they perceived as due to increasing WP student numbers.

Table 6.2 Collated responses to 'What do you think WP is?'

> 1. <u>Demographics</u>
> - Need for understanding of diverse social landscape and encouraging academic attainment for progression to HE
> - Equal access to education
> - Disadvantaged groups i.e. social, economic or ethnic backgrounds or social exclusions
> - Targeting students
> - Removing barriers
>
> 2. <u>Process</u>
> - Expansive views of learning i.e. learning from the workplace through APEL,
> - Raise expectations and achievement level
> - Courses adapted to the needs of students from diverse demographics
>
> 3. <u>Outcome</u>
> - Accreditation of training programmes (workplace learning and HE learning equivalent)
> - May be small aspects (accreditation of training courses) to bigger whole programmes or part thereof.
> - Varied levels of awards i.e. undergraduate, post graduate and Doctoral.
> - Professional outcomes (work promotion, job routes or development)

All service areas recognised that WP was an element in their work in some proportion but they did not or could not define that proportion. They clearly acknowledged that it was an issue for the university, and therefore also themselves. WP was also identified as accruing financial support to support diverse 'under represented' learners. Though it was not clear what this meant in daily practice and identified that funds for support services inevitably supported 'all' learners including WP students. Interestingly in some areas such as the Marketing department and Communications department, WP was not considered central to the work role but integrated and diffuse. This linked to how the university relates to other institutions and the community and as such an outward facing commitment to this was implied (table 6.3).

Table 6.3 Perception of the impact of WP on services and departments role and function.

> 1. <u>Core</u>
> - Outreach role (raising awareness, attainment and aspirations).
> - Enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment.
> - Improvement of student success at university.
> - Third stream agenda and professional development.
> - Fee structures payments methods or arrangements .
> - Provision and management of student services (disability, money and welfare, counselling and careers).
> - Access to key funds (Access to Learning) and fee bursaries.
> - Accreditation of programmes/training and APEL.
>
> 2. <u>Peripheral</u>

- Reflect the university accurately and positively.
- Commitment to WP externally (celebrate achievements, demographics).
- Recognition of diverse students and needs.

The third question asked to whom issues or work of WP were communicated and who, if anyone, takes responsibility for it. This evoked two main groups of responses. Either the service areas responded that they knew exactly who to report to and who was responsible or they did not. The departments were split on this. Those that identified they did not know who to report to indicated that WP was subsumed into their work processes and thus was not overtly reported on but included within the usual reporting mechanisms. The only department with a clear remit for WP and which had funding specifically for it (and targets of students groups to meet) was the Outreach department. However, whilst there was a reporting mechanism upwards (Head of Department) there was no communication across departments i.e. between outreach and admissions department or outreach and the Centre for Learning Development (teaching and learning centrally). This 'assumed in usual reporting mechanisms' response indicated a disconnect between departments and services resulting in isolation in regards to WP even if they were working to the same institution policies (and mission). Thus, as there was no obvious connection across services and departments in the wider view of WP, factors or issues effecting WP students throughout their engagement with the university (before during and after) and would appear to be fragmented.

There were examples of some services working in a cohesive way. This was often where the role and work of the department was wide reaching i.e. Academic Registry and Student Services (finances, admissions). A key weakness appeared to the lack of an overarching strategy which clearly outlines WP and how the services and departments contribute to it. This does not help the mainstreaming of WP. Similarly the lack of a reporting route to key senior persons with responsibility and accountability also weakens the mainstreaming or embedding. There are therefore too many diffuse areas with variable and potentially conflicting connections to WP. The working group had the authority (as project leaders) to ask critical questions of WP and this evoked communication across services highlighting the need for a more enduring process, which could fit into existing structures.

Respondents extensively offered their perception of the benefits and limitations of WP for HEIs. Overall the number of problems put forward was considerably larger than the benefits (table 6.4). The differing departments and services offered a wide array of responses, some reflecting the uniqueness of the specific department. For example, in

the Centre for Excellence for Work based Learning (CEWBL) the diverse approach to learning and building individual capability with subsequent benefits for the workplace. These examples provide a positive view in approaching WP and reframing it as a strength rather than a limitation.

Table 6.4   Responses to question asking service areas their perceptions of the benefits or limitations of WP in HE.

Benefits: Internal	- Diversified student population thus more social, ethnic and cultural groups represented. - Traditional students experience society through their educational environment. - Encouraging individuals to achieve their potential. - Students perform varied levels of student identity. - Value the learning opportunity - a valued commodity. - Opportunity e.g. to retrain and learn about topics of interest rather than prescribed. - Challenges to be aware of non-traditional entrants and alternative ways and times of learning. - HEIs recognise what is important for learners.
Benefits: External	- Public relations. - Embeds WP works activity with the local community. - Corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategy. - Benefits society and the economy. - Changes perceptions of role of HE in society emphasising the non-exclusive nature of higher learning.
Problems: Internal	- Issues of readiness to learn, learning skills, academic conventions. - Alienation of students. - Lack of perceived relevance to needs and employment. - Risk of declining academic standards. - Teaching methods, approaches and assessment practices. - Funding issue: students not eligible for disabled students allowance yet require additional support to complete studies. - Emphasis on entry to university. - Recognising points of vulnerability for non-traditional students. - Perceived to be the responsibility of a few people. - Students lack recognition of their role. - Morally good but difficult.
Problems: External	- Resourcing for varied student support for non-traditional unprepared students. - Broader society perceptions of lowered standards. - Not a 'selling point' for students and WP universities. - Suffer in league tables as such students more likely to not complete their studies. - Impact of WP measures difficult to measure.

The majority of the positive comments (benefits) came from senior colleagues and this probably represents their view of WP from an executive or management perspective. The responses did indicate the benefits of WP to individuals and the institution and reflected the external face of the organisation to the community. The 'problems' identified were more prevalent from colleagues in 'student facing' services who have direct contact with students that is learning support and student services. However, the responses did tend to problematise WP and revolved around limitations, such as resources, demand and reduced ability of students. At the same time respondents acknowledged WP as a `good thing'.

WP was portrayed as a broad picture of activities, approaches and moral views but was difficult to monitor and thus promote. This was combined with the negative view of a substandard experience indicative of a wider sense of declining standards. Overall it was acknowledged that WP is 'good' and 'altruistic', yet the cost of it is heavy and in a sense it appears to be perceived as diminishing returns on investment. This also echoed lecturers' sentiments generally from the individual interviews where WP students were identified as needing more support and the cost this incurs.

The departments and services participating reflected the pre and within university periods in terms of the 'student life cycle'. It was also evident during discussions and from the responses that departments and services were predominantly concerned with their own niche further demonstrating a fragmented or 'silo' picture. One of the purposes of the working group meetings was for the various departments and services to discuss their own areas and work in collaboration with each other. In many instances this was one of many other forums in which they met. However, in these forums WP was not discussed in its own right but subsumed into other areas such as Induction or Progression and Achievement. Thus it was already a part of the other work activity within the institution but noticeably this was not explicit. It was also apparent that the Outreach Department worked on WP activities in a strategic way involving academic or other departments by working with interested individuals and not strategically across whole Schools. This too was reflected in the lecturer responses whereby some had such experiences and this had an impact on their approach to their practice or they identified it was 'done' by some only. This does illustrate that the student journey is not clearly viewed as a cohesive journey with involvement from various departments at different stages this will undoubtedly have an effect on the student experience in some way.

One key outcome from this project was the need to communicate across departments but also to clarify the reporting mechanism within the organisation. In addition departments need insight into other areas for a cohesive approach to WP. Reporting on WP is important as this is a priority area for HEFCE. However, more importantly as Middlesex states it is committed to WP at the institutional level (mission) and hosts a diverse student body which does exceed the HEFCE benchmarks it must make this more overt in all areas of practice including teaching and all areas which impact on the student experience. The commitment to WP and the student experience ought to be reflected throughout all levels and it does require a more cohesive communication and monitoring system. This is evident within some of the departments but also with lecturers, as identified in the earlier part of my research. Student entry is not an issue, progression and achievement may be and this also holds potential problems for Middlesex in terms of funding, and as such is also an issue of sustainability.

Policy statements and commitment to WP.

The commitment to WP was perceived as embedded in many Middlesex policy and strategy documents. However, as part of the AoA exploration the working party considered that these documents needed examining to determine how explicitly they refer to WP and thus how embedded it is. There was no overarching document which clearly joined all elements of WP, which was evident since the demise of the former WP Strategy document (2001-04). This was an issue and 'gap', which could more effectively address all aspects of the WP 'student lifecycle' and not just potentially fragment individual points on the student journey.

A good policy translates intentions into action, by focussing on what is important, inform decision making and the need to change (DCS, 2009). A good policy therefore needs to be transparent, intelligible, open to improvement, be ethical, enacted, concise and rigorous and align the goals of the organisation and departments. In other words, reflect the purpose of the organisation and to fulfil the mission and vision. The selection of policies for analysis was outlined in chapter 3. They were analysed for reference to WP and relationship to the University Mission. Key terms which reflect WP were selected including: diversity, inclusive, inclusivity, widening participation, equality and potential (synonyms determined from the body of literature on WP).   The main focus was on the student lifecycle (before during and following) university. The policies were freely available on the intranet site. All policies concerning students were considered, others pertinent to the functioning of the organisation i.e. human resource policies were excluded. In total eight documents were selected (see appendix 9).

The key policies which have cross linkages and with specific relevance to WP and Diversity (or inclusion) were identified as: APS7: Admissions, APS8: Bursaries and Scholarships, Equality and Diversity Strategy, APS11: Academic Quality and Standards and the Enhancement of Learning Teaching and Assessment Strategy (ELTA) (2007-12). One of the key strengths is that they explicitly address the issues of diversity and inclusion and use this in the sense of WP (see table 6.5, fuller table in appendix 10). Admissions, ETLA and Equality and Diversity were the most reflective of WP and inclusive practice. However, the language used does imply diversity and inclusion is a problem to be addressed. This does reinforce the 'problem' of WP reflected in micro–level (teaching) practice. Furthermore no overarching policy document is evident to address how the policies fit together in terms of the student experience. These all address different stages of the student experience. In fact the Student Experience task group, of which I am also part, is looking specifically at developing policies aimed to clarify academics' role in relation to student diversity.

From my own local department in HSSc, the Departmental Strategy reflects the key policies and WP is a specific item. Similarly the Departmental Programme Marketing Strategy and Admission Processes do include the issues of WP with consideration of data sets of current student groups (age, ethnicity, residency, mode of study) but not interestingly first generation to university or socio-economic status. This, however, has been the subject of debates within the Department, with the question of what information is pertinent to student groups for admission processes and what information is needed for accepted students i.e. different profiles of students at different stages of their journey and how this could be used to improve the student experience. Thus my own department is engaging with WP and embedding this. However, this may is not known in other departments and as identified in lecturers' interviews generally unclear. This point resonated in the interviews as one lecturer (non HSSc) exhorted '*we just....admit them then support them*' (L 7).

Table 6.5 Middlesex University Policy analysis.

Category:	APS 5	APS 7	APS 8	APS 11	APS 19	APS 20	E&D	ELTA
Purpose statement links to diversity, widening participation or potential of students	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	Partial	YES.	YES
Inclusion of positive key words/terms such as diversity, inclusion, widening participation, student potential, capability	YES	YES	YES	Partial	NO	No	YES	YES
Applicability to diversity, widening participation or potential of students	NO	YES	YES	Partial	YES	YES	YES.	YES
Clear lines of responsibility and reporting	Health & safety area	YES	YES	YES	YES	Partial	YES	YES
Currency and review of policy, link to other existing polices and quality monitoring	Due for review 2014	Due for review 2013	None

No review date | Intended to guide staff work with students as recipients | Due review 2011 | Not linked to other polices overtly
Due for review March 2009 | Embed in all policies, procedures & practices. For review (2007) | Link to corporate plan (current 2007-12) |
Clear definitions of terms used – relating to diversity, widening participation or student potential	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO	NO	Partial	NO
Practicable and measurable impact on diversity, widening participation or student potential	NO	YES	NO	Partial	Partial	NO	YES	YES
Issues:		Unclear what are University WP benchmarks	Not who/how to apply, criteria or how many	Cross referenced to academic regulations,		Integration of career staff, students, alumni	Generic competences in Equality and Diversity unclear	Student achievement and grades Employer needs

KEY: APS5: Sustainability
       APS7: Admissions
       APS8: Bursaries and Scholarships
       APS11: Academic Policy Statement
       APS19: Teaching Observations
       APS 20: Student Employability
       Equality and Diversity Strategy (E&D)
       Enhancing Learning, Teaching and Assessment (ELTA) Strategy (2007-12)
       (Source: Middlesex University Intranet site 2009)

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<u>Is there a need for a WP strategy?</u>

The review of the policies indicated consideration of WP and reflected the University mission. There was no cohesive overarching policy unifying the strands of WP and the question whether this would be of benefit arises. The former WP strategy (2001-2004) provided a strategic plan to address the differing dimensions of WP in the context of WP at that time. From this each School prepared a local strategy reflecting the overarching institutional one and I addressed this task for HSSc. I was best placed to write this strategy due to my position and work with WP and the strategy was intended to be an annexe to the School Progression and Retention Strategy. This could be viewed as placing WP as an issue of student achievement but also potentially implying a problem to be addressed.

The former HSSc WP strategy was more expansive and addressed a variety of aspects of the student lifecycle and student experience (appendix 11). This included the level and format of programme delivery, outreach work, progression and compact agreements (entry), financial bursaries, learning support, evaluating learning (personal development portfolios), disability and cultural resources, and a range of partners (e.g. FE colleges, AimHigher etc). The document set up the commitment of the School to WP and reporting mechanisms and was endorsed by the School management team. It was expansive and its strengths were it 'joined up' several of the services and departments and provided a structure to WP. This strategy document ceased to be needed when HEFCE withdrew its institutional requirement. However, the issues remain in the face of major recent political and economic changes. The HSSc strategy identified lines of responsibility and accountability. However, in the intervening years with the distributed and subsumed approach to WP, organisation restructures, change in job roles and titles, the lines of communication became indistinct. It could be concluded that WP lost its prominence and by being subsumed it was assumed to be addressed. The prime aim of the former strategy was to assert commitment and identify lines of communication and accountability in a joined up approach. WP had a higher profile and was seemingly more integrated.

The external support from AoA during the period of this project included the provision of data summaries. The former WP strategy summarises the diversity prevalent in the institution at that time thus providing a benchmark by which to identify if the institution has become more diverse or not. The data summary was from HESA statistics (see table 6.6) does indicate an increasing level of diversity. It would seem that there are increasing number from ethnic minority groups, increased students from lower socio-

economic groups and an increase in the student body from the local area. This increase in diversity also reflects WP category groups. This is still an issue. The institution commitment to WP is evident in its mission and policy yet the dialogue at meso- and micro level of practice emerges as one of deficits and problems. Thus the issue of WP has not changed and there is still, seemingly, a need to focus on critically analysing the approach to WP.

Table 6.6 Student demographics at Middlesex University

Category	2000/01 (WP Strategy) Number/percentages	2007/08 (HESA data) Number/percentages
Total student number	22,500	21,625
Ethnic minorities	48%	65%
Local boroughs	51%	78%
From London	26%	37%
Mature Low Participation Neighbourhood (LPN)	12%	60% *
Social class IIIm, IV, & V	36%	39% **
Overseas	21%	18%
Women	58%	57%
Disability (Known)	959	951

Source (Middlesex WP strategy 2001-04 and HESA statistics provided by AoA 2008)

* Mature students over age 21 but LPN not known

** This figure 39.1% is from the 50% most deprived areas, with only 8% from the least deprived areas. The classification of deprived areas, low participation neighbourhoods and social class index changed between the data sets recorded and thus direct comparison is difficult.

Embedding WP in the institution.

Encouraging dialogue and producing a snapshot of WP raises awareness of WP and issues but does not necessarily embed it across services or departments. Dialogue however is a useful mechanism. Shaw et al (2007) maintain that embedding is a concept that is often assumed but is invariably often ill-defined. The 'assumed' part was evident within lecturer comments of '*we're doing it already*' (FG 2) but without recognition of the wider strategic approach. In this instance embedding was interpreted as integrated at all levels for the student experience. Thomas et al (2006) propose a number of factors which contribute to an integrated approach to WP: leadership, valuing diversity in the mission, adopting a student lifecycle approach to student needs,

an inclusive learning and teaching strategy approach and an integrated programme of measures to support a diverse groups of learners, as well as attracting core funding to sustain these beyond the short term. In addition to this, one could add a culture of support and belief of staff at all levels, which may involve a conceptual shift (table 6.7). The commitment at higher levels is in the University Mission statement:

> *Middlesex is an international university with roots in London. The University is committed to meeting the needs and ambitions of a culturally and internationally diverse range of students by providing challenging academic programmes underpinned by innovative research, scholarship and professional practice* (Middlesex University 2010)

The responses from the service areas, particularly the Heads of Service together with the commitment in policy documents to diversity reinforces the level of commitment to WP. In working with various working parties I see the engagement with issues of diversity and WP in groups such as HSSc V&A committee or Progression and Achievement committee. This does reinforce the support at the meso- level of working. However, it remains that whilst WP is a key issue in some areas, its full embedding and mainstreaming is affected by aspects which need improvement, namely communication between departments and variable perceptions of, and support for, WP amongst lecturers and support staff.

Table 6.7 Analysis of Middlesex University's position in relation to Integrated Approach to WP categories suggested by Thomas et al (2006).

Integrated approach to WP	
Factor:	**Institution position:**
Leadership	Executive commitment to WP Unclear who is responsible senior manager
Valuing diversity in the mission	Clearly stated in mission statement
Student lifecycle approach to student needs	Internal policies imply student lifecycle approach but not integrated.
Inclusive learning and teaching strategy	Clear inclusive Enhancing Learning, Teaching and Assessment (ELTA) Strategy
Integrated programme of measure to support diverse learners	Expansive support but appears lacking in cohesion or integration
Core funding to sustain support	No funds explicitly for diverse learners implied in the Teaching and Learning and Retention funding.
Inclusive culture	Diffuse perception of WP. Student diversity acknowledged as a key strength.

Dissemination mechanisms.

This part of the project was collaborative and it was particularly important to explore, evaluate and disseminate the findings. This also enabled a process of raising the profile of WP and embedding it further across the institution. Awareness of WP was addressed across the institution via a number of avenues and through my roles and position in HSSc and as lead for the AoA project. I ensured the message of WP and the findings and progress was widely communicated in a number of routes through written and interactive means and through conference presentations. These are discussed below:

    a. <u>Embedding WP in existing working groups</u>

The key areas of communication in the university are through the regular publications: the university circular newsletter, more local school newsletters and also through global e-mails. As a result of this project work diversity and WP is now a standing item in several working groups and as a consequence is referred to in minutes and outputs from these groups. My connections and position within HSSc Learning Development Unit has enabled me to utilise colleagues on key committees to disseminate WP and diversity issues. For example, through the AoA project working group colleagues such as Learning and Teaching Strategy leaders (LTSLs) the issue of Diversity and WP has become a standing item on the HSSc Progression and Achievement committee. This is significant as this committee is concerned with student experiences. Thus experience from diverse students then has a forum to explore and debate interventions including teaching and learning as it impacts on them.

The dissemination routes provided an opportunity to also seek opinions and perceptions and the findings have resulted in a development plan to address the key issues perceived as pertinent to WP (appendix 12). There were four key objectives to the development plan: commitment to WP across the institution, communication and cohesion across departments, funding clarification and sustaining WP alongside other competing priorities. This development plan also informed the final AoA policy discussion document and as such reflects the current position and the wider University commitment and approach to WP. This too, is work in progress and can be viewed as a forerunner of the strategic assessment and as such was also disseminated to the senior managers for inclusion in the strategic assessment (see appendix 7).

The findings and key issues have also been presented to School Director of Programme meetings and as such the debates of diversity persist and will be incorporated into curriculum developments. There were a number of other dissemination approaches which utilised existing committee structures and processes with the aim of embedding diversity and WP into the working processes. By utilising groups such as School V & A, Progression and Achievement this will ensure a longer term and more sustained approach. I felt it was also important to maintain the dialogue of WP in all areas and as such I believe it is being adopted and considered in programme and teaching developments and new programmes planning (e.g. new 2011 nursing curriculum development group). The process and products of this part of my project have been presented to the Deputy Vice Chancellor in an attempt to highlight the significance of WP and gain Executive support. WP is an issue. The question is where it ought to be positioned to ensure it remains significant and this may be within the Student Experience task groups or the Employability group. These are core cross University groups providing an ideal route towards an attitudinal and cultural shift towards diversity and WP without additional 'changes'. The question of lines of accountability remains and at the point of writing is still under discussion alongside the other organisational changes and structures.

b. Interactive workshop – critical role of Action on Access:

A workshop was planned and prepared to engage staff interactively generating more information but also disseminating findings to date. The workshop mentioned above was intended to be key to engage colleagues and was hosted by an external advisor supporting the AoA process: Professor John Storan (from Action on Access, see appendix 13). As an external reference group the AoA acted more specifically in the role critical friend in this part of the project. As a co-ordinating organisation (of the national project) AoA committed an interest and expertise to institutions (Middlesex in this instance) to support the project process. The critical element addressed the strategic approach to this project but more importantly was supportive and challenging. Whilst this is more frequently associated with research and development approaches such as Appreciative Inquiry to validate claims (McNiff, (2002) it was pertinent here as this was a collaborative process and grounded in work based research and practice. In addition the transformative theory was the guiding theory underpinning the initial research project and an external reference group provides the objective view to challenge claims. AoA also supplied data and information, posed challenging and provocative questions of our findings and forward planning intentions and ultimately

advocated for the success of the endeavours to evaluate embedding and mainstreaming WP.

The workshop mentioned above coincided with publication of the National Audit Office (NAO) report Widening Participation in Higher Education (NAO, 2008). This thus provided other focal point for WP. The half day event (June 2008) had a wide agenda of dissemination of information gathered up to that point and engagement in the wider context. It was reasonably well attended (20 people) which ensured a wide range of involvement in addition to the working party – critically this ensured a wider engagement and thus active dialogue around WP and the services and experiences within the university. Participants represented a wide range of services including student union, student support services and teaching staff. A summary of the workshop and the issues which emerged were communicated to the senior managers (appendix 14). The event was evaluated positively especially the chance to discuss WP as it concerned colleagues individually in their work role and the wider political agenda.

Professor Storan asked participants to critically explore WP issues pertinent to them and areas which could be changed and the ease with which this could be done. This elicited wider perceptions beyond that already gleaned yet revealed a discourse similar to that of the working group. The key issues were communication, flow of information and reporting mechanisms as well as resources (or lack of). Key challenges in reference to WP were around targeting groups of students (as WP), clarity on who or what is meant by WP, structure and amount of student support or use of data in association with this. Furthermore, the dialogue whilst positive still indicated a group of colleagues who had difficulty conceptualising WP and also held a deficit attitude towards WP, especially in reference to student ability and consequent resources and support.

c. Middlesex Annual Teaching and Learning conference 2009.

The annual teaching and learning conference was also an opportunity to engage with colleagues. The theme in 2009 was Diversity and the key note speaker, Professor Liz Thomas, was a key lead in the AoA project nationally and acted in a critical friend capacity. This conference was a route to disseminate the findings from the working party. This conference (and key note presentation) placed WP firmly within the heart of the teaching and learning debate and use of the project group findings was intended to invoke responses of a wider body of colleagues including student support and other service areas. This did reveal the strength of feeling among a wide range of staff with

some vigorous protection by staff of their own services work areas. This almost seemed 'tribal' with several service areas insisting defensively that they 'did it already'. This further reinforces the sensitivity required with work based research and the issues of power and vulnerability among staff. When asked: 'What needs to change at Middlesex and What would your priorities be' a vigorous discussion ensued. For each group (or service) their perception of what needed changing and their priorities were different from that developed in the working group (table 6.8). This again reflected the differing approaches of some service areas and the benefit of wider discussion and debate giving a wider view than the Service Heads alone. For some individuals there was evidence of 'passing off' WP as a concern for some groups or work areas only (i.e. as an academic issue or a support issue etc). This was apparently without acknowledgment of their contribution to diverse students and the student experience. Tensions did rise somewhat but the energetic debate was essential, clearly highlighting the limited opportunities to consider diversity, WP and its connection across services.

Table 6.8 AoA Working Group Suggested Changes for WP at Middlesex University

1. Establish and clarify understanding of the philosophy and practice of widening participation
2. Ensuring commitment to WP at all levels within the organisation
3. Improve communication about WP practice and issues
4. Involve all services and areas throughout the student journey
5. Determine WP measures of success
6. Use data to evaluate impact of WP on target groups
7. Disseminate effective WP practices

Source: Middlesex University Working Group 'Mainstreaming and Embedding WP'

Implications of this project.

The original aims of this part of the project were to explore and identify to what extent Widening Participation is embedded in practices across the institution. These involved three key questions: What is meant by embedded and how is this manifest in policy and practice across the institution? What are the shared understandings, if any, of Widening Participation across the institution? Are there promoters or barriers to actively embedding and sustaining Widening Participation? The questions were addressed giving a mixed picture of WP with key areas which needed addressing namely: communication channels, lines of accountability and responsibility for WP and resources. Since the former WP strategy was no longer required different elements of WP were managed in a disparate way through differing departments (i.e. teaching and

learning or admissions). Central to this is the diffuse understanding and a vague

definition of WP. The differences in understanding and functions of WP produced

different discourses each with a very different character (Northedge, 2003). This may

not be very helpful as it also has differing meanings to each university. However, each

university then ought to clarify its understanding to direct policy and practices (Layer,

2005).

Addressing diversity is not simply complying with anti-discrimination and equality

legislation. Whilst this does include the right of access to education and a duty to

promote positive attitudes to equality (Shaw et al, 2007) changing beliefs and attitudes

is not easily legislated for and as evident in this phase of the research, nor achieved.

Government policy promoting WP and diversity also promotes greater institutional

variation, competition for students and potential barriers to change. Paradoxically

government policy and practice on the one hand introduces measures to facilitate the

access of students from under-represented groups to Higher Education, and on the

other hand introduces factors likely to have contrary effects (such as the top-up fees).

Several authors highlight the language of WP as couched in deficit terms i.e. some

groups are constructed as 'lacking' aspirations (Archer *et al.* 2003, HEFCE, 2006)

which impacts on lecturers' narratives of WP. This does pose challenges for HEIs,

especially recruiting type institutions (i.e. some post 92 institutions), which then start to

address the issues with a negative focus which permeates the culture and practices.

Influence of this project.

Power within organisations is mobile and there is no easy distinction between those

with and those without it, but there is always space to operate micro politically since

there is competing discourses and resistance (Blythman and Orr, 2002). This has

been addressed critically within the process of this project and from asking the difficult

and critical questions it emerged that WP was subsumed into many areas and the

unpicking of this was rather difficult. As identified in the previous WP strategy there

was a clear direction and lines of communication. However, only some aspects were

monitored: student demographics and retention figures. Whilst important, WP is wider

than that and hence the difficulty with monitoring. It appears that WP has a presence

in policies, strategies and commitment in the University mission statement. Difficulties

appear to be embedding this within daily practice. It may be an issue of lecturer identity

and a divergence of beliefs around WP. Tensions lie at all levels. Whilst the official

culture is one of widening access and opportunity, the unofficial management culture is

one of financial pressure and conflict of additional resources to bridge perceived

student deficits. There could be said to be a competing and contradictory culture and at practitioner level of 'diversity tolerance' (Silver, 2003) or 'putting up' with it. Furthermore, the student voice is increasingly important and could be a further avenue to enact change (Lipsett, 2009). This could drive cultural change if one perceives students in the position of 'consumers' of education or 'critics' of HE experiences. Thus the National Student Union Survey may be a force for universities to reflect on their commitments and how this impacts their reputation and market position.

Real power within an organisation lies within committees and structures (Coughlan and Brannick, 2005). The working group, however, had no real power within the organisation, similar to the former WP strategy group but it did have influence. The key was to access groups with power to affect an awareness of the issues and impact of the work for WP. As mentioned through my roles, and participation within working groups in my school, I have disseminated and influenced these working areas, though this is slow and still evolving.   As a Teaching Fellow I use this influence to promote my interest in WP and associated teaching practices. These 'showcases' do have influence on existing colleagues and also newer lecturers, though how much is difficult to determine.

Mentors to students on the PGCHE course influence newer lecturers on an individual level. Thomas (2006) proposes that WP and success for WP students is an attitude and awareness evolving into practice and, as such, attitudes take a long time to change. In the face of making small changes these result in more permanent attitudinal changes will have a greater impact on practice. There is a limitation with effecting and monitoring change, especially in a project such as this, due to the finite period of the project and limited indicators of success i.e. retention statistics. This is compounded by varied visibility of support at all levels of the University. In analysing the position of organisations, Shaw et al (2007) maintains that there are three main approaches and consequent drivers to WP: academic, differential provision and transformative (see table 6.9). As an organisation one could argue the Middlesex falls under the category of differential in that there is a sense of compensation towards WP or appearing to have 'bolt-on' approaches. The enormous organisational and curriculum changes have attempted to focus on the student experience and focus on student identity and development. The changes over the last five years were strategic and reflect a transformative approach however this was not evident in the findings from lecturers or other staff so the impact at practitioner level remains to be seen. The changes include WP but do not distinguish it in any particular way.

Table 6.9 Categories of different approaches to WP.

Academic	Differential Provision	Transformative
Assimilation Group-focused (targeting) Peripheral and operational Externally driven	Separation or compensation Group-focused (targeting) Peripheral and operational (bolt-on) Pragmatic	Mainstream adaptation Individual focused Central and strategic Externally and internally driven

Source: Wilson & Iles (1996); Jones and Thomas (2005)

This research involved an interplay between the 'me' (my own experience and behaviour), 'us' (my immediate peers) and 'them' (the wider organisation) in the workplace by practitioner (me) to effect change in practice. Reason & Bradbury (2006) refer to the three broad research strategies as first-, second-, and third-person inquiry practices, but that these are mutually interacting. The differing components of this project do reflect the three perspectives though perhaps in a small way. The second person strategy revolved around the interviews and the focus group. One could also argue the AoA project reflected a third or even second person practice. Drawing together the views of large groups of people and creating a wider community of inquiry, or a 'network' of smaller critical inquiry groups ultimately impacted on the large scale dialogue and whole system.

Exploring and analysing the extent to which WP was embedded and mainstreamed highlighted that the differing services like the lecturers from the differing departments worked disparately. Lecturers do not exist in a vacuum and do wield power in their own domain. This was evident in their descriptions of practice and perceptions of WP students and their needs. While the lecturers may have felt limited in influencing macro-level policies, they did create environments that effect educational outcomes for their students. Interestingly the findings from all the stages of the project indicate an aspirational quality in regards to WP compounded by a belief of these students as possessing problems or needs and being deficient. The literature cites the transformative power of pedagogical approaches such as critical pedagogy however this was not identified nor any other pedagogical practice or scholarly approach. In place of this was an intuitive approach by some or a signature approach determined by their profession or prior experiences. Social institutions such as Middlesex then, are the site of many different, often competing, discourses and discursive fields (Kenway, 1995 cited in Walker 2001). Walker (2001) compares Universities to 'fragile settlements' lying between and within competing discourses, which are subjugated yet dominant, resistant and competing yet still receptive to challenge and change thus

seeking meaning and 'truth'. Barnett's (1997: 1) proposes a concept of '*criticality*', which requires critical persons able 'to engage with the world, with themselves as well as with knowledge'. It could be argued that Universities such Middlesex deal with 'knowledge' as opposed to supporting students to engage critically with the world and self, and perhaps mistaking this for vocational or professional education or in a response to perceptions of the role of Universities. When one interrogates practice and its contexts (i.e. pedagogy) and question the conditions that enable critical thinking and thinking in new ways one then transforms the individual and arguably the lecturer too. In short this project raises further questions which at this point are still not addressed: what daily everyday type work might build a sense of community, inclusion and criticality, for us as lecturers and staff serving our diverse students?

Some Limitations.

This research was a snapshot of one period in time and exploration of a concept which impacts on practice and an opportunity to further influence perceptions and practice. There is the potential of the 'illusion of inclusion' with rhetoric and practical action not improving but rather reinforcing the status quo. The key 'transformation' was developing discourse and dialogue, especially with those in leadership positions or in positions of 'power' to influence practice and achieve changes which whilst difficult to measure could be incorporated as a long term goal with other changes (i.e. student experience practices, Teaching and Learning strategy). Transformative approaches intend to revisit, reflect then change and monitor changes and influences over time (Bryman, 2008). In this instance revisiting changes is desirable. However the changes or impacts on practice which ensued could not be clearly identified or ascribed solely to the inquiry especially in face of the range of other changes happening in the organisation**.** Effort was made to raise awareness and impacts on practice. This did create tension but did stimulate dialogue. The awareness building (transformative approach) was necessary to maximise self and peer reflection, learning and critical consciousness. Reflection itself is considered to be embedded in practice as praxis and this research process was intended to contribute to that. This is an issue not only for the weak and powerless but also for those in influential positions who may themselves be trapped (possibly oppressed) in received versions of their own situation. The major limitation was the short timeframe of this part of the project and the ongoing ramifications which cannot be identified, explored or reported. The key strength is that this is still ongoing.

Insider researcher.

As a worker and researcher in the same organisation there is a duality which can be complementary but also provide challenges. A significant challenge for insider researchers is to combine advocacy with inquiry. That is to present their own inferences, attributions, opinions and viewpoints as open to testing and critique (Argyris et al 1985). As a worker, I posses valuable knowledge of the organisation's academic culture, internal structures and functioning. I already had a prior understanding of my own and my profession's explicit and tacit knowledge. In a work situation one works with a variety of people with a network of differing and complex relationships which will impact on the process, truth and also consequences of the research. Thus immersed within the organisation in this project I acquired a better understanding of its role in society and my own role within the organisation.

In planning this methodology I was aware of a key challenge of being part of the organisation's culture and finding it difficult to stand back from it to assess and critique it. The use of external reference groups provided an opportunity to ensure a level of criticality and externality which could have been lost in the process of me as a researcher. There was a possibility of being distracted by a determination of where the issues lay and the complexity surrounding them (local politics etc), but also the frustrations engendered in advocating change. This project did take a number of turns in light of organisational changes however the mixed-methods approach was flexible enough to accommodate these and the findings fed into some of the changes.

My position as a worker-researcher central in the whole process necessitated the identification of my personal values, assumptions and biases at the beginning. The researcher's contribution is intended to be positive but also recognised as influencing the process. My own personal perceptions of teaching and higher education have been influenced by my prior experiences as a nurse, then a nurse teacher then a university lecturer. My personal journey as a lecturer, a student and a health professional enhanced my awareness, knowledge and sensitivity to many of the issues and challenges encountered by lecturers and to an extent, students. My personal experiences do bring certain biases to this research project and it is acknowledged that these biases shape the way I view and understand the information I collect, the interpretation and conclusions made.

I am in a position of influence but not necessarily authority. There are senior colleagues with whom the relationship and mere presence of such research has been deemed

intrusive and a challenge to their position. This is an issue for making any significant changes beyond my sphere of influence hence necessitated using existing structures and mechanisms to support recommendations and key influential people such as those who are particularly sensitive to WP or are accountable to HEFCE for WP reporting mechanisms.

Chapter 7:   CONLCUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

This research project aimed to explore lecturers' perception of widening participation (WP) and the influence on their practice in one University in North London. It also developed into an exploration of WP as an embedded concept in the University as a whole. The main findings of this project indicate that this is complex concept with lecturers holding varied and broad understandings of WP and reporting a variety of approaches to WP or diverse students. As an institution Middlesex University has a clear commitment to diversity as evidenced in the mission statement but there appears to be complex dialogues around WP and diversity permeating through the organisation to the micro level of practice. This chapter will address the project objectives and present the main conclusions which emerged from the findings outlined in chapters 5 and 6. It will also present a series of recommendations arising from the findings but also suggest recommendations based on professional conclusions drawn from reflections on the research.

This was an expansive project presented in three concurrent phases which were conducted in an overlapping fashion. The discourses in this sense refer to the debates revolving around the elements which comprise WP. The discourses, whilst different, have similar but disconnected elements. Nationally and institutionally WP is framed as a discourse of social inclusion and social 'change'. Diversifying higher education and providing opportunities for 'under-represented' groups was the key political aim to achieve this under the former government. However this has presented a number of challenges for HE such as identifying and achieving benchmarks of 'under-represented' groups and providing learning experiences which are positive and inclusive of their diverse groups. Hockings (2010) and Warren (2005) indicate that inclusive pedagogy further categorises groups instead of embracing differences and focussing on individual learning. The prevailing perception is that inclusion is by increasing the numbers from under-represented groups at university and increasing educational opportunities (above level 2). This could be viewed as increase in student numbers resulting in an increase in diversity which does not always follow. Ultimately this constrained by lack a clear understanding of who is under-represented (Gorard, 2008). The purpose of my project was to look at perceptions of WP but also pedagogical practice and the context within which this is practiced. Practice here is taken to refer to the activities and behaviours engaged within roles as teachers in HE.

Summary of findings.

The commitment to WP and the student experience ought to be reflected throughout all levels and requires a more cohesive communication and monitoring system. This is evident within some of the departments but also with lecturers, as identified in the earlier part of my research. Student entry is not an issue, progression and achievement may be and this also holds potential problems for Middlesex in terms of funding, student experience, success and institutional sustainability. The conclusions which emerged arise from the research performed and from my own professional experience and will now be addressed.

Research conclusions:

As mentioned above, this was an expansive project. It commenced with an extensive exploration of the literature around WP, teaching and learning and provided a grounding to base the methodological strategy. It also provided a comparison with which to base the findings from this project. The key conclusions which emerged from my own research do have parallels with much of the research and literature surrounding WP. The body of evidence in relation to WP is growing rapidly and there are few examples of how to approach it or embed it within organisations. Jones and Thomas (2005) identify that the dominant discourses of WP place emphasis on individual attitudes and embed deficit constructions of individuals. WP discourse is inextricably tied to the politics of identity (particularly staff and student) and inequalities of class, ethnicity, gender and race (Burke, 2009). Thus the action is to correct the inequalities which then reinforce the 'separating out' of WP students and further inequality. The conclusions in relation to the research questions now follow.

    a. <u>Lecturers understanding and engagement with Widening Participation initiatives or activities.</u>

The focus group and individual lecturer interviews were the vehicle used to explore lecturers' understanding of WP, perceptions of their departments' understanding and the wider services across the university. One key finding was that WP seemed to be understood simultaneously as an ideology, a process and a type of student. In addition it was an issue for admissions and pre-admissions, involving a wider body of staff and

stakeholders reflecting the whole of the student lifecycle. There was some evidence that lecturers' understanding of WP or diversity was linked to the institutional context (i.e. post 1992 institutions) which reflects Shaw et al's (2007) comment that some institutions feel themselves more 'WP' though not without necessarily being really clear on what it (WP) means. This was evident in this research from lecturer comments such as '*but we're already doing it*' (FG 3) and '*we are a WP institution so it's not an issue for us*' (FG 4). The prevailing perception appeared to be one of social altruism, conferring benefits (to students, community and institutions) but often referred to in deficit terms. The deficits revolved around students' academic or social abilities, preparedness and habitus (socio-economic or other). The focus then was to address the needs or deficits ostensibly 'plugging the gap'.   WP students were benchmarked against ethereal 'traditional' students and the language used to describe WP involved labelling and grouping which did appear to point them out as different and in need of remedial support. This was not a uniform perception amongst all lecturers however. Equally key though was the opinion that students were 'all the same' when they get to university in a manner implying students were viewed as a homogeneous group and not individuals. There were no other specific perceptions in any particular area (discipline or school) and it is acknowledged that the research at this point represents a snapshot of the opinions of a small fraction of the entire university staff. While this multiplicity of definitions is not necessarily a negative, it does have the potential to cause confusion (particularly in communication); to hamper the embedding of WP and hinder a shared approach at all levels. The findings indicate a multitude of meanings but no clear shared definition of WP emerged. This remained ambiguous. There was however some evidence of shared perceptions of WP as typologies, deficits and being resource intensive.

b. <u>To identify groups of 'diverse' students representing WP and explore their experiences of teaching and learning in HSSc.</u>

I surveyed students representing diverse groups for their experiences of teaching and learning and a small number were interviewed to add depth to their responses. This was intended to triangulate the inquiry of lecturers but also was valuable in phase 3 which explored WP across the institution. Students did not see themselves as a 'diverse group' rather they described themselves as 'typical' with varied perceptions of what that was. They valued personal interactions with lecturers though lecturers did not always express

insights into students' lives and experiences. However, the students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds identified several factors which made them feel excluded and struggling i.e. unprepared for the workload and study demands, balancing life demands and also language (English or academic). Furthermore the in-class reference to 'A'- Levels which many students had not done imbued a sense of inferiority. This does raise the question of how do lecturers, even with insight, build students capacity or capability and think of WP as other than 'plugging holes' of deficits. I did not explore the difference between the lecturers' espoused practice and their actual practice. This issue emanated from their version of their approach to WP and on reflection it would have been richer to observe practice rather than simply talking about it. However, this would also create some ethical problems should I have observed questionable practice, as well as the issue of my own value laden interpretation of practice. In considering the current curriculum changes and efforts to build student capacity or capability in a seemingly pervading culture, or atmosphere, of deficit beliefs there would appear to be limited or immeasurable progress to addressing diversity. As such it is the culture or attitude I would wish to change or modify.

   c. <u>The perceived benefits of 'support' given to WP students for their personal and academic achievements.</u>

Lecturers' and students' perceptions of support was investigated including the benefit of the core key skills (LOTs) module which was intended to assist students in developing skills to navigate HE. This was not a popular module amongst students, of those that responded, 40.2% (n=27) were nurse and 70% (n=7) sports students respectively. The development of metacognition and identification of learning style was not an important feature for students indeed they could not identify it nor any benefit it conferred. This module ceased during the course of this project as a result of curriculum changes (the Learning Framework) and the consequences remain to be determined.   Lecturers too expressed concern at this intervention in particular. Lecturers cited deficiencies in students to highlight the issue of 'WP type' students. Students in this study did indicate feelings of exclusion (living locale etc) and friendship groups which impacted on their identity but also their perceived 'limited' progress and achievement. The students' responses in the ETL questionnaire indicated a correlation between lecturers' enthusiasm

and learning achieved. This highlighted valuing personal interactions with lecturers and learning achievement.

In the curriculum subjects and professions such as health, some lecturers build on students' everyday understanding and experience of the world in an inclusive way thus linking understanding to a theoretical underpinning. This exemplified good supportive practice but this at times was more by accident than design highlighting the variable approaches.

d. <u>To identify how mainstreamed and embedded WP is within HSSc and the University</u>.

As mentioned in chapters 4 and 5, during the course of this project this objective was modified and refined. This was supported by the strength of the selected research approach but also highlighted the changing nature of work and challenges researching work and the need to be reflexive and responsive. This part of the project involved a wider group and was highly participative. In 2004/5 Middlesex like many HEIs were no longer required to produce a WP Policy and Strategy for HEFCE. From then WP was subsumed into many policies and areas and this part of the project focussed on identifying where exactly WP was placed in terms of commitment and practice. There were several strands to this phase of the project which focussed around the national Action on Access initiative to focus institutions internally on addressing mainstreaming and embedding of WP. The findings f indicated that WP had a variable prominence but was acknowledged as an issue and impacting on work with varying degrees in all service areas. Several strengths were evident at the macro and meso level of the university, such as, the mission for diversity and student numbers exceeding HEFCE benchmarks. Some colleagues referred to the university as having experience with diverse student groups and a good 'reputation' for diversity. Support structures (disability and learning support) too were highlighted as a positive strength. There was a clear commitment to WP at the senior executive level articulated in the mission and aims of the University. Thus, the discourse at the higher levels is one of support and celebration of a culture of diversity. There were several weaknesses and these appeared to be principally at the student interface or micro-level of practice. Analysis of policies and strategies relating to student interaction or experience indicated that they varied in addressing issues of diversity or WP but the key area of weakness was no overarching strategy or policy to link them together to provide a

cohesive approach to WP. As funds for WP were subsumed into Teaching and Learning (TQEF) funds the emphasis was on improving retention and progression which was perceived as the key issue relating to WP students further emphasising deficits. The service areas indicated they perceived WP is a lowering of standards with remedial costly interventions providing a narrow view of WP. The routes and lines of communication around WP, both across and down through, departments was unclear and lacked cohesion reflecting the poor linkage of policies and lack of prominence of WP. University wide initiatives to address the student experience subsume the needs of WP students but do not mention WP specifically, and it is unclear whether WP ought to be a separate aspect or entity. The prevailing environment then is of commitment but lack of linkage of policies around the student lifecycle and WP impact on the micro-level of practice and prevailing perceptions of deficits among lecturers. However, in various stages of this research conversations with senior staff did reveal sympathy towards WP and in reality it is likely, as mentioned before, the discourse lost its prominence with a lack of reporting or monitoring of practices on WP.

A policy discussion document was produced from this phase of the project (appendix 7). This was intended to be a 'live' document composed of the findings and conclusions of the project and an action plan to guide decisions and achieve rational outcomes in relation to WP. In addressing this objective, my contribution to the AoA project provided a useful vehicle to raise the profile of WP. A further finding was that there were several working groups and committees within which WP could be embedded in the institution and this too was identified in the action plan of policy discussion document.

e. <u>Aspects of teaching and learning which contribute to success for widening participation students.</u>

In interviewing the lecturers it emerged that their pedagogical approach evolved gradually in response to increasing student diversity and to their own experiences, in an intuitive rather than formulaic manner. Lecturers who indicated an empathy to or sensitivity towards diverse students indicated a personal connection and humanistic pedagogical approach. Lecturers generally could not articulate a pedagogical approach, even those who were rewarded for teaching excellence (Teaching Fellows). Descriptions of teaching

experiences generally indicated social constructivist approach linking students' wider experiences to the learning situation. Some lecturers also indicated using students' experiences explicitly within their teaching recognising life and other experiences as contributing to the learning encounter. The active social and informal interactions with students were also more evidently associated with those lecturers who were working from an intuitive sense. This appeared to indicate an inclusive approach to teaching without being articulated as such. There were some lecturers working in an opposite style reflecting a more traditionalist teacher centred approach rather than emancipatory student centred approach. There was evidence of a discipline effect on teaching approaches and this appeared linked specifically with disciplinary knowledge and control of membership to disciplines acting in a 'gatekeeper' role. In this way they elected to impart an 'identity' as a professional in their discipline, rather than adopt a scholarly approach to teaching. Professional knowledge added to the perceived reductionist and 'silo' approach and could be understood as creating and enforcing professional knowledge. For some lecturers, WP and diversity was to be endured and all students were perceived the same with lecturers' acknowledging little insight into their lives or needs. There were varied perceptions of academic identity and position which was also evident in comments by the students. This does bring to mind Kuhn's notion of power constructed by knowledge and wielded by those holding that knowledge.

Summary of findings linked to project objectives.

This project addressed one institution and the teaching practices within it. The new understandings which emerged from this project are specifically related to this institution. It is clear that WP is understood in differing ways by colleagues and the commitment at high level is not obviously filtered down to micro-level of practice. Inclusive teaching is not consciously planned nor consistently evident and lecturers do not actively analyse their own teaching approaches for inclusive or exclusive practices. In addition there are few advocates for WP and best practice or inclusive practice for WP is not clearly articulated in HSSc (or Middlesex). There is limited critique of programme or curriculum design to embrace diversity or WP and whether curricula are 'fit for purpose' in an era of increasingly diverse student groups. The specific findings in relation to the objectives are outlined in table 7.1 below.

Table 7.1 Specific conclusions from research findings in relation to the project objectives

Lecturers understanding and engagement with Widening Participation

1. WP is often viewed as a lowering of standards and remedial costly interventions providing a narrow view of WP. This also evident in unconscious attitudinal and exclusionary pedagogical practices.
2. WP students remain an unclear entity and fuels comparison with 'traditional' students and the negative stereotype of 'non-traditional'. Furthermore students in general are not homogeneous, thus challenging the notion of 'traditional'.
3. University wide initiatives to address the student experience do subsume the needs of WP students but do not mention WP specifically. It is unclear whether WP ought to be a separate aspect or entity. This is compounded by evidence for funding bodies to demonstrate practical commitment to WP.

Aspects of teaching and learning which contribute to success for widening participation students

4. There is evidence of sensitive and intuitive inclusive approaches by lecturers to enhance the student experience for diverse students
5. Good practice is not widely disseminated and remains in 'pockets'

The perceived benefits of 'support' given to WP students for their personal and academic achievements.

6. Students do not see themselves as diverse and value personal connections with lecturers. Though lecturers do not generally have insight into students' lives and experiences.

To identify how mainstreamed and embedded WP is within HSSc and the University

7. There is commitment to WP highly evident at the senior level and this is articulated in the mission and aims of the university.
8. Differing discourses appear to exist on WP at various levels within the university.
9. The routes and lines of communication in regards to WP both across and down though departments is unclear lacking cohesion in approach and confusion

The varied discourses of WP evidenced in this project present a pluralism of 'truth' in that the perceptions of lecturers, students and management are true to them yet not necessarily converging. The term 'WP' is not necessarily helpful as it was linked with labels probably emanating from government targets to improve under-representation. The deficit belief in relation to WP was an underlying theme and implied a need to be corrected or redressed. Lecturers did refer to students with labels such as 'the access student' or 'non-traditional' or a particular ethnic grouping or disability. Thus the language of WP has evolved, probably unintentionally, into a deficit belief in comparison with the concept of a 'traditional' university student. Students in post-1992 universities have emerged from a varied route and, as seen in the data presented in chapter 5, vary in age, ethnicity and life experiences and are not necessarily straight from school.   As such, it would be of greater use to rephrase WP as 'student diversity or individuality' and teaching and learning as 'capability' or 'capacity building'. This would then imply a need for lecturers to be responsive and institutions to build individual capacity appropriate to diversity, individuals and WP.

Professional conclusions.

My own experience of androgogic approaches (humanisms etc.) mirrored some of the narratives of lecturers' teaching experiences. This lack of insight does not imply lecturers' ought to have a more pastoral role but rather have a recognition of students as individuals, adopting a more 'differentiated' approach. Students expressed increased satisfaction with lecturers who engaged with them on a personal level and took an interest in them as individuals. As Egbo (2005) argues that one of the challenges that face lecturers in diversified societies is the adoption of inclusive pedagogical practices that are sensitive to the cultural, linguistic and differential learning styles of the various student groups and this was variable.

As well as deficiencies this also highlighted inclusionary or exclusionary practices of lecturers. Professionally I maintain from my own from personal insights and knowledge of the lecturers interviewed, the practice they described was quite different from reality however this was difficult to capture in their narratives. It may well be that they perceived their practice in one way and I perceived it in another which could be a source of exclusion subconsciously. This is difficult to address out of context and more appropriate as a process of critical reflection and peer critique.

Bowl (2003) identified that the other aspect of curriculum which could be construed as exclusionary is the relationship with what is taught and the way it is assessed. The separation of the process of teaching from that of assessment could manifest in a perception by students of teaching staff reluctant to guide and comment on efforts to complete assessed work. For some students formative work was unworthy unless it led directly to summative marks or grades. The form of formative work also reinforced the perception of trial and error and giving students enough trials so they would eventually get it right as opposed to development of skills. This reinforces the deficiency and remedial approaches which could be exclusionary. Language remained another exclusion not just professional or subject language but the language of 'academia' such as that used in assignment outlines or module handbooks with which WP students may not be familiar. This further emphasises their difference socially as well as intellectually.   There appeared to be individuals, groups and policies at work to promote inclusion practices but these were not always evident in practice in an equitable manner. Bourdieu (1971) indicates that HE could be viewed as reservoirs of cultural capital reinforcing a hierarchical society through norms and assumptions of type of student, their motivation and use of traditional pedagogies including assessment to 'prove worthiness' or achievement.

Resources, support and suggested approaches to inclusion are available but perhaps not widely disseminated and this did not appear to be recognised by lecturers when interviewed nor colleagues in the Embedding phase of the project. For example, the Inclusive Teaching website (Open University and HEFCE, 2006) exists although clearly this is not widely known by lecturers in my own institution and hence not utilised. Whilst the materials and advice are beneficial they do focus on labels such as disability. This does suggest to me of a 'bolt-on' approach rather than flexibility in approach which may further highlight the perception of diverse learners and reinforce difference.

Student engagement is an evolving theme linked to student retention and 'success' in terms of persistence at HE (Pike and Kuh, 2005, HEA, 2010). This is reflected internally with a Student Engagement task group and as such highlights the applicability and relevance of the findings of this research project.

As part of this, whilst the issues of WP were always present, the discussions and dialogue had renewed energy allowing a wider range of perspectives and a broader working group to effect changes locally and individually. There was resistance and tensions within the

working group which emphasised the differences in perceptions, priorities and roles of the individuals.

<u>What pedagogical approaches are appropriate in Teaching for Social Transformation?</u>

The key question is whether our (or my) teaching reinforces the established order or transforms, and if so in what ways. Thus the role of teachers as 'professionals', could place students in a situation of relative incompetence. Teaching is seen as the exclusive domain of the lecturers although until relatively recently in HE, teaching was something which evolved or 'appeared' with practice as opposed to being scholarly or professionalised in its own right. This professionalisation increases the quality of teaching which in turn improves the student experience (Ramsden, 2008). Prior to this being an expert in one's own field was sufficient and in some cases evidence indicates some lecturers' prize subject knowledge over pedagogical knowledge. The perpetuation of these perceptions is neither helpful nor transformative.

A re-evaluating of role, community and purpose (and identity) on both the part of the lecturers and that of the university is required to reframe positions and make approaches more inclusive and then lead to developing teaching and learning for transformation. Of course, this requires a perceptual and attitudinal shift and embracing the theoretical concepts which enable understanding of diversity, WP and inclusivity. Key to this is the relationship between the commitment of the university, support at all levels and a relationship between the students and the lecturers on more equal terms. There was evidence of high level commitment and the key is how to ensure this is present at all levels. Walker (2008) asserts that not only pedagogy but also curricula overhaul is required to position diverse students in an environment to widening capability not merely participation. At Middlesex we have had a curriculum overhaul and yet some lecturers still view WP and diversity as a 'weakness'. This is where Freire's (1977) critical pedagogy, where teachers engage students in a process of 'conscientization' or developing 'criticality' (Barnet, 1997) would be a valuable adoption. These approaches raise potential problematic issues of whether students are able to develop their own understanding of social reality, critical reflection for capability and the influence of lecturers' pre-formulated assertions and positions.

<u>Dissemination of findings with the wider community of HE practitioners (lecturers, support staff, department heads etc).</u>

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The key epistemological approach in this project attempted to be 'transformative' by raising awareness, challenging preconceptions and current practices. This was grounded in work and practice and aimed to develop knowledge from it to further inform practice. The findings and products which have emanated from this project focus on one institution but do contribute to the wider dialogue of WP and higher education. Engaging lecturers in discussing WP as well as encouraging several working groups to adopt and incorporate WP into their work, will eventually effect a change, although the extent and endurance of this is difficult to measure. The key is to maintain the focus and dialogue of WP to ensure it is overt.

The findings from lecturers' beliefs and perceptions of WP and the associated pedagogy, in relation to diversity could be considered as important to lecturers' continuing professional development and also new lecturer development. The key dissemination outputs from this project were:

- Written dissemination though School newsletters, wider cross university 'Middlesex World' circular, and the Teaching Fellows open access wiki site.
- Inclusion in the annual university Teaching and Learning Conference (July 2009, via Prof Thomas presentation, appendix 16).
- Workshop to aid staff awareness, critically challenge development and engagement with WP (June 2009, appendix 13).
- Incorporation of WP into key existing committees (i.e. V&A and Progression and Achievement, Student Experience task group)
- A Policy Discussion document outlining WP commitment and areas for attention in Middlesex university (December 2008, appendix 7).

There have been, and are planned, some external conference presentations,
   - Improving University Teaching (International Conference 2009)
   - Open University (Centre for Widening Participation forthcoming 2010)
   - Academic Identities Conference, University of Strathclyde June 2010 (abstracts, appendix 17).

There are ethical issues which are inherent in discussing WP and challenging work practices. I am committed to WP and there is evidence that Middlesex as an organisation

is. However, how does one address colleagues who do not hold the same level of commitment? More importantly the issue of capability is also important. If colleagues or staff do not embrace and incorporate diversity in the sense of WP, how is this broached. Perhaps what is also required are more fundamental structural processes such as staff support and development but the issue of demonstrating 'WP awareness' is difficult. If students are 'consumers' then their opinion of staff is essential. Differentiating reality from attitudes of disgruntled students, and limited capabilities of staff is fraught and often with limited resolution.

Recommendations.

Research on widening participation points to the value of integrated models and capacity or capability as a core element tailored to individual needs (Bamber and Tett, 2001; Comfort et al, 2002) with additional support when required (Comfort et al, 2002). This therefore requires a reframing of teaching to develop capability on an individual level which many lecturers appear to be doing intuitively but this does need wider discussion and consideration.

The new understandings from the project findings were outlined above these relate to the suggestions for future practice. The support of the Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement (CLQE) is critical to implementing recommendations. As a central service with responsibility for teaching and learning across the University and with links to other departments servicing all aspects of the 'student lifecycle' they can ensure a cohesive and co-ordinated approach. The key stakeholders who need addressing the recommendations to in relation to this research are: funding bodies and government, University, lecturing staff, support staff and students. This does involve employers and disciplines however these were not an overt component of this research.

i.   Funding bodies and government:

The picture of the position of WP in the institution is one of multiple understandings which are translated into varied yet disparate practices associated with WP. The key recommendation is to promote dialogue of WP attempt to achieve a clarity on what is meant by it and make it a more prominent discourse at all levels. This research initiated a series of dialogues across the University ado this. The overt commitment and plans for WP do need to be presented to HEFCE and as such the ongoing dialogue will address the

needs of this stakeholder. It is anticipated the future annual WP Strategic Assessment will fulfil this and the recommendation is that the working part continues across the University to contribute to this and inform on inclusive teaching and support practices alongside other forms of monitoring (admissions, retention, ethnicity etc).

ii. University.

The means and processes to filter the commitment to WP down to all levels to affect practice with students. The WP Strategic Assessment might achieve this but an overarching policy to link all elements of WP approaches to the student lifecycle is considered a more effective route. This is an example of an essential conversation that needs to happen to affect any cohesive and engaged response. This would also effect a cultural change towards diversity and capability. The institution is supportive of diversity and WP in its policies programmes and services yet there is still work to be done to affect a wider culture shift in terms of attitudes, values and practices within departments and lecturing staff. To engage colleagues at all levels in challenging their own beliefs and to position themselves in relation to their own diversity would enhance a conceptual shift from WP as a deficit concept. The current acceptance of pedagogy, and even coherent transformative strategies such as Biggs' (1999) constructive alignment, still positions students as 'receivers' within HE. A conceptual shift towards androgogy would reinforce a teaching philosophy of capability and this could be addressed in continuous professional development or within teaching courses. This is especially significant in achieving teaching competence outlined in the UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching which acknowledges diversity.

The Action on Access working group within the university brought together committed individuals and facilitated communication across the services. This group has ceased but members of the party have shown interest in the Student Experience task groups and as such will commit to the dialogue of diversity within this area. The connections made with the advisors at AoA continue to be a resources and support and there is a possibility of future research projects with them (personal communication, Prof Liz Thomas). This would be a strong link to pursue and embed WP. This could be through another established working group e.g. the Middlesex Student Experience project group. This would then satisfy the HECFE (2009b) strategic approach to WP if institutions demonstrate an overall approach to improve the student experience.

Institutions' policies to raise aspirations and to prioritise WP are located at the peripheries of universities and have 'little or no impact on institutional structure and culture' (Jones and Thomas 2005: 617). Similarly, a utilitarian approach focuses on attitudinal factors, including again the notion of 'low aspirations' and is embedded in a deficit understanding of WP.   The 'transformative' approach is key, however, this does need an institutional culture shift which is difficult if it is already embedded in a deficit belief.

iii. Staff.

The current system of staff development is disparate and dependant on desire to develop a skill or knowledge as opposed to one based on need. A more responsive system of continuous professional development (CPD) which does link with rewards (intrinsic or extrinsic i.e. such as teaching fellowships or promotions) would be ideal, but that is too large a change at present. The long term recommendations are to effect smaller changes based on existing processes and developments which will have a small but cumulative effect and be more acceptable. The key is to encourage a culture of critical reflection on one's own, and others', diversity and the impact this has on engagements (with students and with each other). This is a difficult objective but may be enabled through structured staff development based around professional standards (for HE teaching) and emphasising the role of the scholarship of teaching as well as disciplines.

A culture of valuing all learners equally is necessary by addressing excellence through equity and recognising that equity is broader than labels i.e. disability, ethnicity, access students etc. May and Fan (2009) suggest that for cultural change to inclusive practice there are certain institutional pre-requisites: a shared vision, leadership for inclusion, a sense of holism and pro-activeness, building of an evidence base, and a shared dialogue amongst all stakeholders. This is relevant here and the vision of this happening can be obtained through engaging existing work processes and groups with small sustained changes, impacting both at institutional and individual levels.

A repositioning of lecturers' and students' identity may be necessary to create more effective pedagogy. Several authors propose such a conceptual shift (Northedge, 2003, Haggis, 2006, Walker, 2008) to effectively address diverse students and they rely on critical reflection and reflexivity. Thomas (2006) and Egbo (2000) propose self reflective questions which enable a critical self reflection by lecturers to promote a critical approach to pedagogy and thereby empowering and developing their students. Lecturers ought to be

aware of social interaction and the impact this has on students. This was highlighted as important to students and highlighted as an issue in the recent HEA briefing (HEA, 2010) regarding students sense of 'fit' in an institution. Successful critical pedagogy requires that teachers become culturally literate in the sense of understanding where students 'come from' not just ethnically but also in a social sense. This is best engineered through discussions on classroom diversity and pedagogical approaches and critical reflections of teaching observations with a 'critical friend'. The key really is how often a lecturer reflects on their own practice, more probing questions would explore their approaches to diversity and inclusivity (key to embedding WP) (see table 7.2).

Table 7.2: Proposed self reflective questions for lecturers (based on Thomas 2006, Egbo, 2000)

- How often do I reflect on my own practice?

- What are my personal presuppositions of other groups in society particularly those that are different from mine?

- In what ways do my personal history and worldviews affect my teaching practices?

- How do I relate to people that are different to me especially amongst my students?

- In what ways am I contributing to the silencing of the voices of some groups in society especially those that are represented by my students?

- In what ways do I affirm or devalue the identities of my students?

- Do I acknowledge the wider responsibilities of my students and challenges to 'fitting in' and hence learning readiness?

- To what extent do I question and engage curricular materials? Am I aware of the university stand to diversity and WP?

- What kinds of resources do I use in my everyday practice? How relevant are they to the lived experiences of all my students? Do I try to include all my students?

- Am I meeting the instructional needs and learning styles of all my students?

- How often do I engage in pre- and post- session analysis of my teaching?

- How often do I change my approach in response to analysis of my teaching?

- What are my expectations for my students and how committed am I to the success of all?

- How current am I with research on critical pedagogy and education in diverse societies more generally?

Egbo (2005) argues that for all the rhetoric of fairness, inclusion, diversity and WP, lecturers and teachers continue to adhere to traditional pedagogical practices, unperturbed or unchallenged by pedagogical research and emergent paradigms that provide alternative frameworks for improving experiences and outcomes. Positive educational experiences and success for students, particularly those from non traditional or diverse backgrounds does depend on the level of lecturers' awareness of, sensitivity to and commitment to inclusivity and practices that embrace and value difference. Authentic learning approaches rather than transmission of knowledge enables student construction of knowledge which can build capability in diverse students.

Burke (2009) asserts that reflexivity is necessary for this change and to be effective, it must move beyond individual practitioners' approaches to institutional practices that are fully integrated into the ethos, principles and values of the institution itself. Reflexivity as inclusive practice requires that the initial preparation and training, as well as continuing professional development, of academics and other HE professionals, place issues of equality and inclusion and capability at the centre of the curriculum. It appears then to me that economic concerns are not irrelevant and I fully accept that institutions must keep economic considerations in mind. However, economic considerations should not be the main and foremost driver of education and the distribution of educational opportunities.

The specific suggestions are summarised in table 7.3.

Table 7.3 Summary of conclusions in short term for key stakeholders.

Key Stakeholder	Issue	Recommendation
University		To embed WP and diversity issues with the existing programme development committee working group structures (Validations and Approvals, Progression and Achievement, Student Experience task groups) and to extend this further to programme review and annual reporting structures.
CLQE		PGCHE programme - to engage future lecturers with the issues of WP and appropriate pedagogy such as critical pedagogy or Universal Design for Learning.

		To clarify what 'diversity' means in relation to the Enhanced Teaching and Learning and Assessment Strategy – it is a key component yet is narrowly defined in relation to disability, ethnicity and gender (i.e. individual capability and capacity) initially at HSSc school level by the annual review 2010/11. Utilise current developments in assessment practices to promote constructivist approach to learning and a language of transformation, not just knowledge construction.
Schools and departments	School management and staff developers	WP and diversity as an entity distinct from equal opportunities at department and curriculum meetings revolving around 'the student experience'. Review student documentation for exclusionary language and open up this discourse in departments and discipline areas.
Lecturers	Influence new lecturer preparation	Providing resources and examples of good practice in diversity and WP. Contribute to review of teaching observation to include diversity or WP exploring how this is recognised and addressed pedagogically
	Existing staff (advocacy and critical analysis of practice and curricula)	Utilise the teaching fellowship showcases and other showcases of practice to disseminate examples of good practice for WP promoting inclusive approaches. Identify and work with 'champions' or advocates internally (and externally) to promote issues and encourage provision of support (materials, guidance, evidence and research focus). Promote critical self reflection of diversity on practice and own student journey through diversity awareness staff development workshops, utilising Teaching Fellowship showcases and critical self reflective questions (table 7.2).
Support staff		Promote critical self reflection of diversity on practice and own student journey through diversity awareness staff development workshops, utilising Teaching Fellowship showcases and critical self reflective questions (table 7.2).

The long term recommendations aim to focus on dialogue and challenge the nature of diversity and inclusivity for this institution. This project did not clarify WP but indicated a need to discuss it more widely and remove the barriers and deficits mentality associated with it. Open dialogue aims to develop a deeper understanding of diversity and WP for practice and not just rhetoric or 'skills' to deal with WP. Accordingly it is recommended for the University to:

a) Engage further in conversations with senior management though project working groups such as Student Experience task groups or academic initiatives to locate the 'home', for WP and establish communication and accountability responsibilities.

b) Expand the conversations of WP at the meso level core policy and working groups to raise its prominence and encourage cross school department dialogue and sharing of practice (teaching observation processes, validation processes, ETLA and programme and student review processes).

c) Engage with HSSc School Associate Dean for Learning and Quality Enhancement (LQE) and the LQE team in relation to staff development needs and how to strategically improve diversity awareness of the staff within the existing staff development menu (promoting critical reflective practice e.g. using the format in table 7.1) and perhaps build this into the process of teaching appraisal.

The evaluation of this is a consideration and the usual reporting mechanisms ought to address WP as an entity within them such as Student Achievement or Validations of programmes. This is done in at present in a fragmented way to satisfy funding bodies i.e. ethnic minority achievement or disability tracking however does need to be more comprehensive and inclusive reflecting the commitment to WP.

What pedagogical approaches then would be appropriate for WP and diversity?

University lecturers have been subject to a number of pressures market oriented policies, league tables and financial constraints. Student numbers have steadily increased, as have class sizes and thus the burden of assessment processes and other quality indicators (Hockings, 2009). It has been argued that to all intents and purposes the separation of research and teaching functions in HE have resulted in down grading of teaching creating a distance between students and their lecturers. This of course is espoused in the literature but ostensibly many institutions particularly post 1992 do not have the privilege of

large grant or research streams and the schism between research and teaching is not such an issue. However, the issue of league tables persists creating ever more stress and continual changes and developments to comply with societal and political benchmarks as opposed to focussing on specific needs.

Berthiaume (2009) concludes that really good pedagogy requires more than identifying content difficulty. In order to approach a particular task of teaching an awareness of self in the process of teaching is important and areas where difficulties may arise in a subject. Moreover, that lecturers become learners in the teaching situation and ought to develop a sense of empathy and connectedness with students in the learning situation (Cowan, 2006). With the plethora of research out there it is unclear how much is used or even explored in impacting on university lecturers' approach to pedagogy. This was not asked explicitly in this study as the focus was on inclusion and widening participation. It is implicit in lecturers' perceptions of their role and the power exerted in student learning facilitation. The quality of the student experience is dominated by the ways in which the students are exposed to the subject matter they study, and hence the need for an inclusive pedagogy to embrace students as individuals and value them creating a positive student experience. In summary it does appear that lecturers' pedagogical approaches in some instances did lack certain elements. These relate to students' backgrounds, important relationships, significant influences, their sense of self, educational experiences and ways of knowing and thus trajectories of learning and participation (Hockings, 2009).

This research project has enabled me to critically reflect on own personal belief structures and practice. This has been a revelation for me especially as I always thought I was on a learning journey which enabled me to improve my practice by taking the position of learner. However the position of learner was not necessarily a critical one and criticality was necessary to develop my beliefs and challenge accepted practice. I have gained a deeper understanding of my impact on students and colleagues but more importantly can now re-evaluate my role more critically and all its components with the renewed lens of WP and diversity.

Chapter 8:   REFLECTIVE AND REFLEXIVE ACCOUNT OF MY PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL JOURNEY.

This Project has been expansive and bigger than intended. I recognise that the findings and conclusions presented in the previous three chapters emerged from the research findings and also from my own professional experience and opinions. These were differentiated and both have contributed to the knowledge gained but also my personal and professional learning. The findings are critical in reviewing and analysing practice however I contend that professional experience and opinion is important in providing the insider perspective. I am an experienced lecturer who has gained a deeper understanding of my impact on students and colleagues and can re-evaluate my role and practice more critically.

<u>Why do this project?</u>

My personal motivation for undertaking this programme and project revolved around my experiences with WP outreach and being acutely aware of the confusion and negative perceptions of this area by my colleagues. I have been, and continue to be, involved in outreach work for many years this has been my main driver both firing my passion and determination to ensure a good quality and equitable university experience for all students. The challenge for us as academics is recognising we have a role and responsibility to all and especially diverse students in our every day practice not just 'events' or projects. However, often we do not know who 'WP' students are and what their experiences at university are. I have always engaged with scholarly activity in relation to teaching and learning and student experiences for example the ISLER project (see chapter 4) and the issue of transition and retention this amongst others led me to look at WP further. I realised that this too was an aspect shared by WP students but not solely a problem of WP students. I related personally to many of the key findings from that particular project which provided the awareness of my own personal values, origins and empathy. Critically reflecting on my own journey from professional preparation (nursing), further academic studies and personal growth I have eventually unearthed how my own values impact on my practice and the personal and professional knowledge I use and make in my practice. This too does enlighten some of the frustrations I encounter in my work with a variety of communities of practice. In researching WP I have also been an advocate for it. This project also provided me with a 'legitimate' platform to question this aspect of practice and found supportive colleagues I believed this raised an awareness of our students diversity and the issue of WP and a critical appraisal of our practices in relation to WP. Thus it was beneficial and

worthwhile doing as it will impact on practice in some way so we are not 'unconsciously exclusive' but 'consciously inclusive'.

This project also arose from my position within HSSc as a WP co-ordinator leading outreach activities with a variety of stakeholder groups (AimHigher, The Advice Clinic etc) as outlined in my Review of Learning (appendix 1). I was the school representative on the University WP Steering and Monitoring Group and I prepared the HSSc WP Strategy which was agreed at School Management and the WP Steering and Monitoring level. I found I had positioned myself to be an ambassador for WP but also to impact on practice through these job roles and projects. This was more than an occupation or job for me. I put much of myself into what I do and as such this is guided by my value base and ideology. This Project was important to practice and to me personally. The progression of the Project was not linear which I expected. At the same time I did expect to measure or evidence some change in practice as a result of this however this has proven more difficult and there are aspects I would change in hind sight.

Assumptions and values.

Reflecting on my own, and others' practice and my relationships with staff and students highlighted my own unbounded professional tacit knowledge. My intuitive practice has evolved from my background, values and my perception of reality. It has been shaped by my experiences with the wide range of partners across London with whom I have participated in WP activities. I do realise that personal characteristics and motivations are also a factor. As a WP student myself some years ago, I can recognise elements evident within the literature which guided my decision making and my progression as a student, a lecturer and more recently as a worker-researcher. My goal now is to continue to raise the issue of WP and pursue a scholarly approach to pedagogy to enhance teaching and learning for diverse groups.

In my attempt to be 'inclusive' rather than 'exclusive', I focused on interviewing a sample of lecturers whom I perceived had varied life and work experiences. The lecturers I interviewed were open and responsive. However it must be acknowledged that some of these came forward due to an intrinsic interest in WP or, due to my position in the school felt an obligation when approached.

As a researcher, I viewed my knowledge of and collegiality with the lecturers as an advantage rather than a disadvantage. An interview is a direct social interaction, a mutual relationship, and there is potential for bias especially if the relationship is not perceived as equal. Both the

researcher and the interviewee hold positions of 'power' in the interview process. I was acutely aware of this as I initiated the research topic, controlled who and what the flow of information was but also in interpreting the dialogue of interviews etc into a transcript. I did seek external support and advice to enable me to maintain focus on this and found the second half of my project (university wide part) a more sociable and reflexive period as I had a larger team with whom to discuss issues. This, for me, reinforced my and a large number of other colleagues' commitment to inclusivity and WP.

I was aware of the extent to which an interviewee asserts their 'power' in choosing how to respond and may give a 'socially desirable' answer – this I feel may have been an issue as I am known for outreach WP work and advocating WP in my various roles. In a sense, the moment one becomes a researcher in their own institution, they also become an outsider – and may potentially be treated with some suspicion and distrust, though I personally did not experience this. It was not difficult to draw boundaries around my roles I have a remit concerning WP and also I am a lecturer and have a number of roles of influence e.g. in working groups, curriculum development groups, V&A etc. I did recognise when some lecturers exhibited anxiety (not suspicion) wielding their power by identifying what was 'on' the record and what is 'off' the record implying that some opinions may be subversive. I came to realise that lecturer and other colleagues perceived some of the questions and discussions as controversial and challenging to their own beliefs and roles or domains. The tribal or territorial concept was evident in departments and job roles (i.e. 'us' and 'them' 'academics' versus' 'student support').

I intended to commence this research project with the view that WP is a broad area and a key political agenda which provides challenges and opportunities for HE. It is positioned in various ways in HE and has implications for lecturers' engagement with students. I had enormous expectations of this research project: to identify lecturers' perceptions of WP, to discover how this is translated in their work with students, to determine how WP can be more widely discussed and determine if, or how, a culture of WP or diversity can be developed and embedded.

Effectiveness of the chosen methodology.

The initial intention was to use an action research approach and I explored the various practices under this genre. Epistemologically, a transformative approach was required and I leaned

towards a reflective and continually evaluative process. However, as I explored work based or organisation based research I realised the epistemology provided a guiding framework but there was flexibility in the methodological processes to obtain data. I elected for a mixed methods methodology which was enormously flexible and inclusive and suited the work situation. As the project progressed in the face of the local and national changes the project had to be modified and I found that whilst I could maintain an epistemological frame I had to modify the data collection process which was possible with the approach chosen still with the a view of making them about informing and transforming. The mixed methods approach then was a logical and appealing choice and they complemented the transformative approach giving a wider view of WP. I am satisfied that this still enabled both the exploration and dialogue of informing and improving practice. I could have added another dimension by using peer observations of teaching. However this would be fraught with bias and ethical considerations and does make me question perceptions of reality. If I were to plan this again I would follow up on the individual lecturer interviews to enquire if any there was a changed awareness and how this manifested in their work. This is critical to establish efficacy however as indicated in the timeline changes occur constantly and as such the trigger would be difficult to establish.

In retrospect, I could not have planned for the national project element which replaced my local strategy embedding objective. The issue of embedding locally is still important, but without a strategy, this is difficult. I have extended the project to make better use of local working groups such as Validations and Approvals (for validating new programmes or reviewing existing programmes), Retention and Progression groups and student feedback groups such as Boards of Studies to establish the effectiveness of this. In conclusion I believe that the aims and objectives were met and the research question answered and as with all research, more questions arose. Since I have been involved in national groups (Healthcare Sciences and Practice Inclusivity Special Interest Group) I have had similar conversations with colleagues from other universities regarding WP. Local issues do focus on the specific organisation however the challenge of raising the dialogue on WP and Inclusive Practice is nationwide and the challenges with this are similar. Practice was central to my Project and the impact on this remains an ongoing enquiry.

My professional learning.

My research is about my own, my students' and my colleagues' practices and was conducted through exploring these practices. It was intended to add to local knowledge of practice, the

theories that guide or emanate from them. This benefits practice and our thinking about it which emerged as the research was conducted indicating little evidence of critical reflection on practice. This is more elegantly phrased by Schwandt (2000, p.190),

> "*social inquiry is a distinctive praxis, a kind of activity (like teaching) that in the doing transforms the very theory that aims to guide it…in sum, acting and thinking, practice and theory are linked in a continuous process of critical reflection*".

My learning journey has been challenging. It has not been linear as there have been many changes along the way which impacted on my research progression. These include external changes (e.g. reduced need for WP strategy, now a need for a WP strategic assessment by HEFCE) and internal changes (e.g. campus changes, curriculum changes) and as such I have had to be flexible and fluid in my approach. I have felt at times rather a 'lone voice' and do at times see myself being labelled as the one who 'does WP'. I am still not sure if that is positive or dismissive. If I was to do this study again with the knowledge I have now, I would aim for an even greater presence across the university drawing some of the smaller pieces of work together to more fully reflect the issues and inquiry into WP. In the interviews one lecturer spoke of someone undertaking an MSc study into students' origins (school or FE college) and their progression and another project looking at exit interviews with students dropping out. I do think I have not been as cohesive as I could have been. I did start the project very reticent and a little timid and have grown in confidence and persuasiveness which ideally would have emerged earlier. Engaging in dialogue locally and on a national platform has also enabled my growth and confidence but also in engaging with senior personnel I recognised various political and ideological agendas and where power lies. I did learn to engage with all colleagues sensitively as I was not challenging their position or role but practice and the ways to improve this for diverse students. WP is an ongoing issue with the current economic climate not conducive to the WP agenda and government targets (50% of those aged 18-30 to experience university) which remain unmet. There are more diverse groups of people going to university and there is still the need to consider pedagogical approaches. This still has an implication for myself, student support colleagues, lecturers and students and ultimately the student experience.

Being familiar with the local culture and customs and having already established a relationship provided the opportunity for myself as a worker (and as a researcher) to gain access to participants easily and to be privy to 'insider' information. Yet being known also has its shortcomings. Prior knowledge, underlying personal bias and preconceived ideas can render disadvantages to this intimate 'insider research'. This did, at times, pose challenges for me and

especially when I perceived a divergence in lecturers' espoused and actual practice. On reflection I realised this was frustrating and a question of my perception and interpretation and value.

I had not really recognised multiple realities for students and staff to the extent that I do now. So much that when I was asked for my perspective and opinions for revisions to the school Teaching and Learning strategy in respect of diversity I was acutely aware from the results of my own research, of a polarised view towards statutory duty (equal opportunities etc) with limited reference (in my opinion) to the broader engagement with, and culture of, diversity. I have benefitted from exploring and defining WP and my final stand point is rather different to the one I originally had, which I now believe was not a fully considered and formed one. Having engaged with the debates of pedagogy, identities and habitus I have found that there are bounded realities where I now realise, I position my epistemology.

Intuitively, in my opinion, one can see disciplinary differences in a tribal form, with not only different ways of working but also different approaches to knowledge, utilisation of knowledge and thus relationships with students. As a nurse myself, with a biological science degree, teaching physiology to a variety of undergraduate students in a variety of professional courses, I have acutely felt 'ill-fitting' in daily engagement and interaction with colleagues. I am neither a hard science nor vocational professional, yet I work across the two. Looking through the lens of 'signature pedagogies ' or 'academic tribes' one can appreciate the apparent paradoxes and the challenge of lecturers forming their own academic identity with the forces of professions, local and national political pressures, workplace and HE institutional constraints. The sense of 'agency' or of independence and power to influence practice is then curtailed by competing forces.

Implication of Project.

This project enabled me to support and encourage to colleagues to critically reflect on their own work and teaching. This was assisted by my position within the HSSc Learning Development Unit. I have seen how influence is not only through position but also reputation. I have been involved in a number of smaller projects before this which I believe peers viewed my approach as scholarly and constructive (e.g. on teaching). However, I am biased in the favour of students and more specifically diverse groups of students or WP and recognise the impact of my own history and value base on this. This programme then has afforded an opportunity and also the

credibility to challenge colleagues and practice and promote dialogue on WP. As a DProf project, this has carried more weight as 'research informing working practices' and a scholarly approach yielding new insights into the university staff perceptions of, and practice in relation to, WP. This also gave a validity to the approach and thus acceptance by staff and colleagues.

As a Principal Lecturer I am expected to contribute and lead academic development which I do in curriculum development changes and other working groups within the school and university. I do this from a commitment to teaching and learning with evidence from this project plus also a commitment to inclusivity. As a Teaching Fellow I champion the WP cause which in itself can provide leadership and influence. I believe I have managed to influence colleagues and found myself exhibiting a leadership linked not necessarily by job title but by 'doing' or 'being' in an authentic way, which I have learned is critically important (Astin & Astin, 2000). I contend that as an insider-researcher within my position as lecturer, I hold credibility and by challenging the realities and practice I will empower lecturers to critically self reflect. The question remains whether they can then act on this individually and also at a more strategic or curriculum level.

I did not set out to explore what 'effective' teaching is and then pass on a checklist of findings to others though developing a series of resources and examples did emerge thought this research investigation. Instead the purpose was to explore the issue of WP (and its synonyms: inclusivity and diversity) and develop a critical dialogue of pedagogical beliefs and approaches for this group of students. In the later phase of the project the purpose evolved to establish a community (albeit a small one) of colleagues concerned to work collaboratively in analysing and researching their own practice in relation to WP, and in supporting and challenging each other through a shared critical dialogue, evaluating the cohesiveness and embedding of WP in our organisation. Central to this has been our meetings for engagement with each other, and the motivation and enthusiasm that comes with developing connections and exploring our knowledge with, and improvements around, WP in higher education. Equally evident in our work have been the contradictions and complexities in endeavouring to do things differently under constrained circumstances. In essence the 'critical thinking' or 'transformation' which is evolving is presented through the narratives which are outlined from the interviews and reflective analysis. Although in face of an already huge amount of change (locally and more widely) it is by no means certain what the outcomes of these actions and processes will be. This critical and research approach to practice has resulted in knowledge of practice locally (Middlesex) but not necessarily applicable elsewhere. However, it has emphasised that practice is not static and

champions and critics can influence practice which has been the ultimate outcome for this work based research. The opportunity to network and engage in critical debate about topics such as WP is a powerful outcome and the legacy to this work. Communities of practice exist to support WP and inclusive practice and have emerged in recent years and need champions for the production, sharing, transfer of knowledge and embedding of practice.

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APPENDIX 1

Middlesex University

National Centre for Workbased Learning Partnerships

Masters/Doctorate in professional Studies

Module: DPS 4520: Review of Learning

Student: Sheila M Cunningham

Student No. 9539548

Date: January 1st 2004

CHRONOLOGY:

Introduction:

This paper will be a reflective review of my learning throughout my professional and personal experiences to date culminating in the proposed project area I wish to develop for the DProf award. The format will be in two parts: a chronological commentary describing the different elements of my professional journey to date and major learning elements associated with this period. Following this a reflection of the relevant learning and skills gained along the journey, which will inform my approach and capability for the proposed project.

I have attempted to develop a matrix (table 1) incorporating the areas of learning aligned to professional experiences and how these are relevant to the DProf intentions and context. It is apparent from reflection that learning occurs in discrete entities with no major events, crisis or revelations occurring however the gradual development of my career has equipped me with some significant skills and capabilities together with my current position I have the support and influence to make significant contributions to my organisation. The illumination and elaboration of the precise learning within a professional context is difficult, thus the matrix and review can only address significant professional periods elucidating elements that are relevant.

Professional Training - RGN 1980 – 1984):

I commenced this vocational course immediately upon leaving school partly from volition and partly from parental pressure. From the beginning this path felt right even with the early exposure to human traumas and frailties. It equipped me with strength and a raft of coping strategies to withstand traumas and grow personally and professionally.

From an educational perspective the choice of nursing appeared diametrically opposed to further education, at least from my school perspective. Thus my 'A' levels were almost passing time until the training.   Nurse training was intense with requisite preparation in the traditional topics: anatomy, pathophysiology, pharmacology, communication, documentation, health promotion, ethical and moral issues, ward management and many others. In addition there was also the clinical skills, preparation to work as a team, recognition of learning situations, negotiation skills used for benefits such as work patterns and opportunities to observe and participate in activities. As each unit of learning/experience was 8 weeks in duration with two weeks theory and exams and course work it was imperative to make time provision for academic and 'working life' as well as social life. The preparation was broad equipping me with the knowledge ands skills to be a competent practitioner and thus be a responsible professional.

Clinical Work – January 1984 – September 1992)

On completing my professional training I commenced work as a staff nurse. It was a commonly held belief that following training nurses should gain a broad experience as possible before specialising. Thus I held a series of staff nurse posts in a variety of areas and hospitals (see curriculum vitae for details). Each post was challenging and I realised that I enjoyed working in intense situations often with critically ill patients

where the situation was often unpredictable and communication and decision making skills were crucial. I also enjoyed my first post caring for cancer patients and thus undertook a specialist course within cancer nursing, my optional clinical experiences being in the acute and critical areas. Whilst learning about many aspects of different cancers and approaches to treatment or care of the dying I also engaged in managing ward environments and staff. This was invaluable for my next post as a junior ward sister on a haematology ward specialising in blood cancers and bone marrow transplant therapy. This post was challenging as the ward was a private ward. Most of the patients were from distant countries and were acutely ill seeking such aggressive therapy which was offered in only a small number of sites (in the U.K and America).
Managing and supporting staff in such an acute area posed its own challenges though my senior colleagues and junior staff worked effectively as a team.

At this point I enjoyed my work, I was pursing many activities within my personal life which stimulated my 'making a difference' aspiration as well as offering me the opportunity develop planning, fund raising, budgeting and organisational skills. This work with the registered charity 'Young Disabled Holidays' I was fortunate enough to lead the developments of several specific respite holidays for young disabled people to a variety of destinations eg. Jersey, Majorca, Madeira and Venice. The manipulations of wheelchairs in some of these destinations were creatively surmounted. In addition I took the lead in developing the support and training sessions for the nursing and helper group ensuring safe practical caring skills whilst supporting disabled people on the holidays. The experience of nursing, ward management and interest in teaching were invaluable in developing this role. This active role continued from 1986 until 1992 having to make way for other family commitments (birth of eldest child).

I was determined to become a nurse tutor and realised the need for more academic preparation and clinical consolidation at a more senior level. Following advice, I embarked on an undergraduate degree. This degree and my nursing qualification were influential in my next post as Clinical Research Sister working on clinical drug trials with cancer and leukaemia patients groups. This senior post involved a small multidisciplinary team co-ordinating and recruiting patients to clinical trials. This role involved much communication with a variety of groups: patients, ward staff, laboratory scientists, pharmaceutical company contacts and other colleagues. The work was case (drug) specific and working independently and to certain targets was necessary. In addition grant proposals and updates on progress to sponsoring companies was essential. Presentations at meetings and to senior team members occurred regularly. One publication ensued from my work (see C.V appendix 3) at this time following successful trials and marketing of the specific drug.

This role also involved co-ordinating the outpatient clinic for Bone Marrow Transplant patients both pre and post transplant and for donors. This tri-weekly clinic was mostly nurse led, by a team of three nurses including myself with responsibilities for supporting patients, referrals to other members of the multidisciplinary team, evaluating progress also performing advanced technical skills and procedures. This clinic also acted as an assessment unit for critically ill post-transplant patients and those requiring multidisciplinary emergency interventions or admission. The skills of observation, analysis of information and decision making were critical to the effective care of the clients and development of this role.

Undergraduate Degree (1988-1991)

I was advised to study a subject I liked rather than one I 'should' study. This was so powerful – I chose Life Sciences (Physiology) I felt I understood the application to the human situation ('know how') and I needed to understand more about how people and biological systems worked (the 'know why' of Benner 1982). This preparation with development of critical thinking skills, analysis and synthesis was critical to teaching and more senior work in healthcare.

Teaching in Higher Education (1993 to date):

My long-term career goal was to become a nurse teacher. My portfolio of experiences supported secondment to undertake the teaching course (Post Graduate Diploma in Education) at the Institute for Advanced Nursing Education (IANE). Due to the financial constraints within Schools of Nursing jobs were not guaranteed at the end of the course. This was apparent at the end of the course whereby two of the three of us who were sponsored were offered jobs, this however worked to my favour as one of the jobs was for a nurse teacher in applied physiology.

From becoming a nurse teacher in 1993 there have been enormous changes within the preparation and education of nurses. The main changes include: increased academic demands, move into the University and smaller intakes and teaching groups replaced with significantly larger groups.

There have been a series of organisational changes eg to School/faculty structure as well as middle and senior management roles. These have not really concluded. In addition, other changes have been continuous eg teaching delivery such as facilitating of learning directly and indirectly such as virtual learning environments, curriculum and subject developments. This has inevitably had an impact upon monitoring of progression and development of students. In addition the past ten years have seen a student nurse cultural shift with significantly less of the traditional very young females. These events illustrate the unsettled a varying nature of higher education for which a fortitude and flexible approach is necessary.

In the mid 1990's I undertook an MSc in Research Methods for personal and professional development. This was initially preparation for further research however personal circumstances impeded, the birth of my youngest child. The MSc was valuable in preparing for the rigours of further research which I became involved in later. Additionally the deeper understanding and appreciation of the application and theoretical and philosophical underpinnings enabled me to teach aspects of research methodology to final year undergraduates and support undergraduate research projects. I was fortunate enough to teach a Research Methods module in Mauritius on the BSc Nursing and have supported undergraduate research projects from there too.

In addition as a senior lecturer I am expected to make a 'positive contribution to the research contribution of the School and the development of the curriculum' (Job description, p.1, appendix 4). Whilst my research contribution is not strong I have endeavoured to be closely involved in the curriculum of a variety of programmes. This has been achieved through participation in curriculum design and validation for both professional and non professional programmes. In managing a professional and non professional programme (BSc Nursing Topup and BSc Human Biology) I have endeavoured to develop the quality of the programme and experience by evaluation

mechanisms (student, module and programme) and general management of programmes and monitoring and evaluating student progression.

As part of the Cancer and Palliative Care Research Group I have lead a small research project exploring the perceptions of student nurses to initial cancer care experiences. A successful bid for a small research grant enabled me to fund a research assistant to assist with quantitative analysis of the data and transcribing interview data. This project has been disseminated at two conferences thus far, one an international cancer conference. I have had several interested queries from international colleagues regarding the research tool and implications of the work.

There are two significant points in my recent career which have placed me within my current position of influence and authority. The first was being appointed to take the lead in Placement Learning (non nursing programmes.) within the Learning Development Unit (LDU). Secondly, representing the School of HSSc in a HEFCE Widening Participation health thematic group. The latter position was initially temporary but has been subsumed into my LDU role due to my expressed commitment and enthusiasm. These positions have afforded me the opportunity to contribute to projects which were quite significant and innovative and linked through government directives and policies. In addition these projects and roles were new to the School of HSSc and are challenging and exciting in their scope for development and interpretation. These have impact upon other areas within the School such as recruitment and marketing , thus I have been invited to join working groups within these areas opening communication and dialogue regarding issues, practices and plans.

RELEVANCE OF PAST LEARNING TO DPROF PROGRAMME:

Academic courses:

Undergraduate degree: Having had no family history of higher education, parents who had limited education themselves, and no encouragement from school I was unprepared for the impact it would have on me. In addition as a 'mature' student I found many of my lecturers were similar in age. I recall the first month being quite surreal until I managed to make friends when I eventually discovered who was on my particular course. This has provided an interesting reflection when I analyse my enthusiasm for widening participation as I feel I have been on both sides of the higher education experiences and the perceived lack of support is one aspect of the project I wish to carry out.

The first year of my degree provided a broad foundation of subjects directly and indirectly related to human physiology. At this point I understood that whilst benefits are not always immediate the underpinning knowledge which seemed arduous and fatuous would have benefit eventually. Thus subjects I found difficult were endured and given attention to ensure success. I developed a self discipline in my approach to studying I wanted to enjoy the process not just the product, which I did. This was easier to accomplish when studying fulltime. However when I reached my second year, I was unfortunate enough to lose my local education authority grant due to getting married thus I was then required to take up a bank staff nurse position in a local hospital at

weekends and holidays. Through this I had to balance academic self discipline with work.

My experiences with exam technique assisted me enormously in end of year exams. I found subjects I thoroughly enjoyed, I could see the relevance of, felt intrinsically motivated and at which I excelled. My degree programme also introduced 'broadening' modules which were not compulsory these ranged from History of Medicine or Science to Transferable Skills (presentation, time management, etc). This grounding in knowledge and critical thinking skills as well as nursing and caring skills and my personal attributes have been extremely influential in my teaching and professional development within higher education and my drive and enthusiasm for projects I undertake especially this proposed one.

Undergraduate and post graduate studies have provided breadth and depth of knowledge, combined with skills and attitudes, which have been extremely beneficial and transferable to my role within higher education. My post graduate studies have given me the confidence to approach aspects of research which I previously would not have. I am far from proficient and recognise that research skills require practice and development however I have the confidence to admit this and seek avenues to develop this.

My MSc touched on a great many aspects of research however, several aspects were not addressed. In particular, Action Research was not explored and from my exploration this seems to be an ideal approach towards my proposed project. The spiral approach to assessing the problem/issue, planning interventions or changes, implementing these and evaluating the effects is dynamic and complementary to the progressive changes and activities and evaluation of them envisaged within the project. This seems complementary to the cyclical nursing process, which has been heavily influential in my problem solving, and decision making processes. The experience of preparing detailed methodological and operational analysis for my dissertation shaped my critical approach and has permeated many aspects of my work and development for which I wish to make a RAL claim at level 4 (appendix 2)

Professional Nursing experience:

This early experience was intense and I feel, I held a privileged position in peoples lives. It afforded me maturity and caring nurturing skills. As I became more senior I also became more pragmatic in my approach. During the last year of my nurse training an unfortunate experience occurred. I failed a final state examination thus I did not qualify with my peers. Through the support and determination of my tutor who guided me through a pragmatic approach to exam technique, I passed. There were many aspects of this experience that guided my career choices, one of which being the powerful influence of my tutor and how she inspired me. I was devastated by the fail yet found the strength and resilience and support to get through. This lady has been a role model for me and well after this event gave me the belief that I could control my career and choices and anything was possible.

My professional work is not driven by products, although one could say that a successful patient 'journey' is a product or that achieving a degree, or a successful programme validation is a product. I feel the majority of my work is about the 'value added' or intangible element. This aspect is heavily reliant on flexibility, enthusiasm,

positive and open interpersonal skills. Professionally, communication and valuing others is critical to 'extracting' or drawing upon the best performance of other people. I have found I have been able to utilise these skills in many instances one which is prominent is the development and co-ordination of the nurse led BMT clinic. Successful running of this clinic involved interacting with multidisciplinary colleagues and gaining support. In general this clinic could not be described as predictable due to the nature of the patients, though the 'triage' or assessment of patients with urgent needs facilitated the process for other patients. More recently, by enthusing colleagues with developments in Widening Participation occurring within the School.

Teaching and learning development in HE:

My career progression has had a tangential move. Having achieved my long term career goal the social and political situation changed thus I found myself in higher education. This was exciting and terrifying moving from the known to the unknown yet utilising the known skills in the unknown situation has enabled survival and the realisation of different opportunities for development.

Although in my current role I am increasingly involved in interprofessional learning, for many years my primary focus has been the learning of nurses. This student group comprises a significant population within my organisation. The demands from the healthcare service, decreased staff retention and increased targets for qualified nurses (DoH, 2000) means increased demands on higher education to prepare these nurses. In addition, the demands of academic rigour to a profession previously not prepared at diploma level has resulted in pressures on students to achieve both practically and academically. The cultural shift of the student body has been evident. No longer are student nurses from the previous traditional groups but increasingly more are mature with personal demands and roles all competing for their time and concentration. This too has created another level of complexity in that with no personal history of higher education and often poor effective empathetic support systems for higher education, many students struggle and feel isolated.

This situation is not unique to nursing. During my experiences of managing the BSc Human Biology programme many similar scenarios were evident. This particular programme was not vocational however its structure and content whilst science based also attempted to address the Dearing (1997) recommendations in addressing the key skills for employability. It was proposed that undergraduates were exposed to and potentially prepared for employment, in this instance, scientific or health related careers or studies. The programme suffered from recruitment difficulties and invariably many of the students were acquired via the clearing system. The student body therefore then represented a diverse group, many from the local community invariably a wide diverse range of cultural backgrounds, variable academic achievements and ill prepared on many counts for study at University. It appears that on reflection many were from the groups which are identified with 'widening participation' (low participation group) categories. Anecdotally colleagues would comment on a certain group being 'weak academically'. This was not true for all the students many excelled towards year three. On reflection this may have been as a consequence of limited awareness of the pressures and expectations of higher education or unrealistic own expectations. Admission via clearing may also have yielded students who were not familiar with this institution or who opted for any course rather than an appropriate one. Such issues as these often emerge when students discuss career options in year three. Interestingly from my last

group of students, there were four females from similar devoutly religious backgrounds who felt emancipated by their education and they are now doing teacher training.

Thus, my experiences educating health professionals and non-health from diverse backgrounds I have gained an awareness of the different expectations, needs and abilities and skills one needs to meet these. In addition I have been a student on a range of courses. During my own post graduate teaching course the main educational approach focussed on concepts of androgogy. This was heavily compared with pedagogy and propounded as the most appropriate approach to instil the professional standards and cognitive and practical abilities for nursing as a profession. The focus was also on research evidence (evidenced based practice) and on theoretical concepts (eg. philosophy of nursing and models) and the process of enquiry such as Bruner's discovery learning concept. On reflection, this was somewhat idealistic however androgogy is still appropriate within certain areas, particularly I feel post-registration students or mature students. It seems that many of the students have preconceived ideas and experiences of what education is about and the way we should be guiding them through the experience.

These experiences have been hugely influential in my own learning, in recognising no 'one size fits all' approach. This challenges ones assumptions and level of flexibility with the constraints of the programme and organisation. In some validations I have been involved in these issues are prevalent including the current planning for the new BSc/Diploma in Nursing programme due to be validated 2004 where I am leading the recruitment, retention and widening access subgroup.

One of my responsibilities in teaching nurses is that I liase and support clinical colleagues within a designated area who are responsible for teaching/learning of students during placement. Whilst responsibilities for this role have been developed the effective relationship between the university staff member and the clinical colleague is crucial to a conducive learning environment. Invariably members from either side of the 'student' are diametrically opposed, they are integral in student learning, this has the potential to create tensions and the theoretical 'gap' between theory and practice.

My own particular placement areas (three) are very different in approach and staff skill mix and at times present a challenge to communication and development approaches. What is often considered a simple 'University teaching session' by clinical staff may present weeks of co-ordination of the logistical issues of preparation and ensuring a level of participation without conflicting with other clinical demands. Early meetings with senior clinical colleagues with attempts to mutually agree obligations and responsibilities for the student learning experience were difficult. It is essential that the individual clinical areas address learning experiences which are congruent with the programme, clinical assessment and professional body requirements. It has been invaluable to establish strategic partnerships and one, which is beneficial to the relationships with the clinical areas, is with the Clinical Facilitator. This person is employed by the NHS Trust with responsibility for student placement and staff mentoring preparation. However, successful teamwork within organisations is still often a challenge. The potential interference within and organisation of, outside influences, challenges the locus of control eroding responsibility and decision making and discourages effective teamworking (Watson, 1997).

An informal survey of staff on my wards to try and ascertain their views on mentorship and level of support required was performed. This had some interesting outcomes more importantly showing interest and valuing their opinions. This information has also provided some insight to my strategic alliance with the clinical facilitator and overall contributed to a positive working relationship. This is one example of how survey processes have assisted my work and for which I wish to make a claim at level 4 (appendix 1)

This has taught me the value of identifying support structures within and outside of the work environment and additionally seeking to be proactive and participating in change.

Programme development.

The mechanisms of programme creation and processes of validation provided a platform for a steep learning curve. This clearly involved moving from a familiar area to one whereby I was unsure of my role and the mechanisms involved. The significant issues encountered were of team working and variable group dynamics and compounded by a relatively new team. I realised that whilst I cared about the subject area (biological sciences specifically physiology) I had preconceived ideas about how the programme should be structured. These ideas were based upon my positive learning experiences as an undergraduate and my pride in the excellence I obtained with my achievements. This process of programme development also included others with their own preconceived ideas too. Several erudite discussions ensued on the nature and types of knowledge and skills, which were envisioned, and the potential destinations for students of this area of study. The subsequent programme was sound and comprised of contributions of most of the team and was a valuable experience in compromise and nurturing fragile colleagues within the team setting.

As part of this endeavour I managed to utilise skills gained from my MSc – surveying and access of official statistics to generate date on the subjects and choices and destinations which would inform the validity for developing this course. I found this extremely valuable and 'real world' (RAL claim appendix 1). Not only was knowledge imparted but higher order thinking skills and involving critical appraisal and awareness of the processes and significance in creating new theory and ideas.

Clear articulation of knowledge in all its forms is difficult the most difficult being tacit or intuitive knowledge alongside personal knowledge it was hoped that somehow this could be addressed within this programme development. I am grateful for my exploration of this during my nursing preparation and teaching preparation studying theoretical notions such as Carper (1972). I also believe it has shaped my practice and the transformed my learning in my work.

Personally, the programme did not reflect what I had envisaged. I felt somewhat saddened that some of the topic areas were ones I felt an aversion to and hence avoided during my studies, however the pragmatic approach was to utilise resources and skills within the institution. I learned that people management is crucial to a successful outcome and also that introspection is necessary to challenge preconceived ideas, their origin and the consequences of them. I developed an awareness of my own strengths and weaknesses but also how to tolerate those of others. I also learned that clear communication skills and a friendly demeanour will accomplish much. It cannot be

underestimated that a sense of identity and 'camaraderie' is a valuable bind in such an endeavour.

Learning Development Role:

My current role placed within the Learning Development Unit (LDU) appeals to me because I can utilise many of the skills and experiences I have had to lead the development of placement learning. As part of the LDU team my role is to contribute to promoting excellence within teaching, learning and assessing and to embed these practices throughout the school provision, contributing to student centred learning. I envisage this as being by evaluating the provision of placement experiences within the School of Health and Social Sciences with a view to identifying examples of good practice whilst establishing consistency and standardisation of placement processes reflective of the QAA code of Practice. The main aims are to establish how students are prepared for placements and their perception of readiness to practice in a placement. This would necessitate looking at assessment of practice, guidelines for the learning opportunities within the placement experience and how these are integrated. This would also necessitate taking into account professional requirements and supervision/mentorship arrangements.

This role is new and whilst nursing placement areas has evolved and developed for some time there have been varying practices with other programmes. The range and number of issues are still emerging however initial meetings of placement learning team members are proving lively and interesting.

Applying for this role was a significant deviation within my professional career. Prior to this I have contributed to teaching on many programmes as well as my own professional programme (nursing). I feel I have developed over the years a flexibility for working in different environments and contexts. I have gained an insight into the differing cultures within the programmes. The variations extend from the types of student groups (and lecturers), the expectations of the programmes (practitioners or theoretical). I feel this is a progressive step for me as I have the opportunity to utilise my skills and in some ways consolidate my contributions within a wide area of academic provision across the School. I see this as an opportunity to work with colleagues from other disciplines and ultimately practice areas to develop, explore and make quality learning deeper and more meaningful for students and supervisors alike. There some areas of innovative and exemplary practice and through this project I hope this shared and disseminated more widely. From experience students feel they learn the most whilst in practice, which the Dearing Report (1997) advocated widely. There is thus the potential to explore 'good' versus 'bad' placement experiences and elements of learning which could be maximised, this is surely a point where dialogue with workbased learning experts would be beneficial.

Another role I have within the LDU emerged almost by accident rather than design. I originally represented a colleague on a Steering Group which was funded by HEFCE to explore widening participation in healthcare professions. I managed to remain on this group as I was quite enthused by the work meeting colleagues from different organisations with a similar interest. This HEFCE funded thematic group has since increased its membership and is now pan London with associations in most education authorities linking with schools and further education colleges. I have been fortunate in

working on some larger projects with this group and have been enthused and motivated by the aims and goals of the strategy. This has proven to be closely associated with my role in developing placement learning having origins in the same central government documents. It has been influential meeting and sharing ideas with the widening participation group located in the Academic Registry, this critical link and community has the expertise in broad WP activities and thus far has been strategic in developing alliances and contacts within the local community

Professional Development:

Professional standing as a teacher within higher education has been recognised by appointment as an external examiner to University College Chester on the BSc/Diploma Nursing Studies programmes. This has given me insight into the problems and issues and how they are resolved or addressed in a comparable programme to that at my own institution. Interestingly, closer association with the programme has indicated that the issues and problems are similar and often useful erudite dialogues ensue espousing the nature of knowledge and the nature of learning and assessment. The main drawback to this position is that as the student groups are large I receive an extraordinary number of scripts to review for quality purposes. The often arrive at the same time as my own internal workload requiring meticulous time management and organisation.

I have been commissioned by nursing journals to produce articles on subjects which would broaden and deepen professional learning within the nursing community. In addition I have written a few book reviews too. This has been interesting and whilst I have only produced a few (see CV for details) I have taken the opportunity to use the experience to broaden my knowledge and updating too. The rigours of writing to prescribed criteria and within an often very short time frame has at times been a challenge but I have always had the determination and flexibility to achieve this with careful management of my personal and family commitments. I have learned about the precarious nature of publishing too. After being approached to assist in editing an anatomy and physiology text, I relished the opportunity to do this. After putting much effort into the work I then found that it would not published.

Eighteen months ago I engaged in a small scale research project: exploring student nurses' experiences of initial contact with cancer patients. I volunteered to be the lead investigator not really sure what this was about. However I soon found that it meant co-ordination of the project: applying for a small scale grant, delegation of tasks to the small team and planning of the phases of data creation and analysis, it was no small feat. On reflection there were several limitations one of the most significant being not achieving the interview target number. A sample of subjects who claimed their experiences were 'positive' or 'not positive' or 'mixed (ie both)' were invited to interview. Of the anticipated 6 from each group only 3 of the 'not positive' group were interviewed. The data obtained has revealed some interesting themes which develop on the information requested in the initial survey. The most influential aspect of this project was the support with data inputting and transcribing courtesy of the small grant money. This has been enlightening on developing up to date knowledge of the changes within cancer care and importantly the issues facing students who go onto wards to care for patients with highly charged and emotive diagnoses such as cancer or are terminal from cancer progression.   I have presenting this paper to two conferences thus far, the most daunting being at the International Cancer Nursing Conference. It was gratifying

to have so much interest in the paper especially from some distant lands, especially as I felt the results were specific to my own organisation and NHS trusts.

The whole process was very unlike my MSc research dissertation and whilst there was an experienced researcher on the team for this project it did not reflect the methodological approach I was taught. This was frustrating and at times not terribly enjoyable. I utilised skills from my survey methods module in developing the questionnaire and coding the responses. The official statistics also informing the context of the work and the issues involved (RAL, appendix 1)

Doctoral Project:

It is my intention to focus my doctoral project around my role within Widening Participation (WP) in my school. This project will involve establishing and developing a school Widening Participation Forum, which will act as a driver and support group within this School for the various WP activities. The existing disparate activities will be ascertained and evaluated in addition to developing new activities and approaches. In addition the aim will be to establish new and also develop existing links within the local community. Stakeholders in this include secondary schools, further education colleges, career services, WP activities and initiatives such as Gifted and Talented co-ordinators, Aim Higher co-ordinators, health authority workforce planners and current university students. From my work with other multidisciplinary groups I realise it is imperative to open dialogue early as regular communication and involvement as a team is critical to development.

This project is reflective of the aims of HEFCE (Widening participation) and the Department for Education and Skills White paper on the Future of Education (DfES Skills for Life 2003, Dearing reports 1997, employability etc). My role within the HEFCE funded Health Professions thematic group lead by the Royal Veterinary College has spurred much of the level of activity and the feasibility of the projects which can and have been undertaken. The overarching aims of this was to increase awareness of health and social care professions and courses, build aspirations for those who have no history or association with higher education and raise attainment for routes into University education. It is hoped that groups from a varied background who may have the potential to benefit from higher education have the information and opportunity to do so.

Once established, this group would develop subject specific participation and dissemination of activities within the School. This would result in recognition for contributions as well as (hopefully) improving the quality of our prospective students. The end product is hoped to be a strategic approach to WP within the school of Health and Social Sciences and a committed programme of approaches and events for social groups before and during undergraduate studies. Ultimately broadening and deepening access to University has implications for retention and progression and should be reflected in support for students in all programmes. My recent experiences in curriculum planning and validation has indicated such recognition with a subgroup dealing with these issues.

My role within WP has been recognised as significant and is supported by School senior management team. As previously mentioned the significance of this project is recognised by invitations to contribute to varying committees and groups within the

School. This project is also seen as a n important element in future funding may dependant upon active contributions to WP (DfES, 2003).

Mechanisms to evaluate the projects and the efficacy upon the student groups will need to be developed. It will also be necessary to identify activities which are particularly successful, increase the range of staff involved, the profile of the contributions and dissemination of the activities.

My interest within Widening Participation (WP) has evolved over a period of time, from numerous experiences and exposures to student groups and from personal experiences of being one of the 'social groups' identified for targeting as previously mentioned. The experiences from both sides of the higher education system will be highly influential in informing my project, as will my personal activities outside of work, such as my recent sojourn into school governorship and diocesan (church) activities, in which I strive to contribute to the community and maximise potential where possible.

Conclusion:

I envisage my learning, reflection and experiences to date will inform my workbased learning doctoral project. In this paper as far as possible, I have tried to identify major challenges and events in my career though as stated before the process of growth has been gradual rather than revelation. My work, professional identity and post graduate education have given me the breadth and depth of knowledge and experience in research, project management and interdisciplinary working. These, I feel illustrate my professional capability and influence. Whilst many of my activities underpin my personal motivation and enthusiasm, they are also a product of my personal qualities many of which I have become aware of and endeavoured to develop during my professional journey to date. Ultimately I see my capability as being from professional knowledge working beyond competent towards expert (after Benner, 1984) and personal qualities. To summarise; I have the opportunity and resources, organisational support and motivation to succeed.

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APPENDIX 3

Informed Consent Form for Project Participants

Project Title: *An exploration of the awareness and understanding of lecturers in higher education of widening participation and how they incorporate this understanding within their work.*

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I agree to take part in the above Middlesex University research project. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the Explanatory Statement, which I may keep for my records. I understand that agreeing to take part means that I am willing to:-

- be interviewed/participate in focus groups by the researcher
- allow the interview to be audiotaped
- complete questionnaires asking me about widening participation.
- make myself available for a further interview should that be required

Data Protection

This information will be held and processed by the project leader (Sheila Cunningham), it will be kept in a secure location accessed only the project leader. Following completion of the project the tapes and raw data will be destroyed.

I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published. The identifiable data will not be shared with any other organisation.

I understand that should I want it I will be given a transcript of data concerning me for my approval before it is included in the write up of the research. I understand I can make this known to the project leader.

I consent to the use of sections of the audiotape transcripts in publications.

I agree to the interviewer, Sheila Cunningham of Middlesex University recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) set out in this statement and my consent is conditional on the University complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998.

Withdrawal from study

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

Participant Name: ....(please print)

Signature: ....………Date: ....

E-mail or other contact details:……………………………………………………

Researcher Name:…………………………………………………………(please print)
Signature………………………………………………… Date:………………………..

Appendix 4: Student Experiences of Teaching & Learning Questionnaire

(design based on ETL Project www.ed.ac.uk/etl)

Introduction to the Project

Thank you for agreeing to answer these questions. Our overall findings (but none of your individual answers) will be fed back to staff help inform programme development and curriculum design.

Data Protection Act

In accordance with the Data Protection Act, we have to ask you to sign the following declaration. You can be quite sure that all the information we collect will be used only for the purposes of research and kept confidential to the research team itself: it will not be released to anybody else.
I agree to allow the university to provide the research team with my name, contact details, grades and other information about my course of study. I also agree that this information, and the data collected from me, may be held and processed by the team for the purposes of research.

Signature: _____ Print name:_____ Date:_____

Please indicate if you a re happy to be contacted for a more indepth interview: YES / NO

Contact e-mail: _____ Telephone:_____

Please Turn the page over and answer the questions.

Part 1: About You

Background Information

Overall programme of study:_____ Student Number: _____

Male / Female (please circle)   Age _____   Year of study: _____

Did any of your family go to University; YES / NO If YES, indicate who:_____

Mother's/Guardian's Profession/job:_____ _____

Father's/Guardians profession/job: _____

Reflect back on your First Year Experiences:

1. Did you take module HSS 1111 (Developing Transferable Skills : YES / NO (*Please circle answer*)

2. What was your preferred learning style (as indicated on the above module):_____

3. Do you think your learning style has changed: **YES** / **NO** (*Please circle answer*)

4.   a.   Did you find this module helpful? **YES** / **NO** (*Please circle answer*)

    b.   Please elaborate how: _____

5.   Would you describe yourself as a 'typical student'   **YES** / **NO**   (*Please circle answer*)

6.   'Typical' to you means: _____

Now please answer the following questions (this should take no longer than 15 minutes)

Part 2: About Your course:

A. Approaches to learning and studying

Please give your immediate reaction to **every** comment, indicating how you really feel about studying.

Put a cross in the box to indicate how strongly you agree with **each** of the following statements. We would also like to know about your experiences of teaching and learning whilst at Middlesex. Please rate every comment, using the same scale as in the previous section. Please give a rating for **every** comment.

SA = Strongly Agree   A = Agree   U = Unsure   D = Disagree   SD = Strongly

		SA	A	U	D	SD
1	I've often had trouble making sense of things I've read					
2	I've been over the work I've done to check my reasoning and see that it makes sense.					
3	I have usually set out to understand for myself the meaning of what we had to learn					
4	I have generally put a lot of effort into my studying.					
5	Much of what I've learned seems no more than lots of unrelated bits and pieces in my mind.					
6	In making sense of new ideas, I have often related them to practical or real life contexts					
7	On the whole, I've been quite systematic and organised in my studying					
8	Ideas I've come across in my academic reading often set me off on long chains of thought					
9	I've looked at evidence carefully to reach my own conclusion about what I'm studying					
10	When I've been communicating ideas, I've thought over how well I've got my points across					
11	I've organised my study time carefully to make the best use of it.					
12	It has been important for me to follow the argument, or to see the reasons behind things.					
13	I've tended to take what we've been taught at face value without questioning it much.					
14	I've tried to find better ways of tracking down relevant information in this subject					
15	Concentration has not usually been a problem for me, unless I've been really tired					
16	In doing background reading, I've tried to find out for myself exactly what the author means					
17	I've just been going through the motions of studying without seeing where I'm going.					
18	If I've not understood things well enough when studying, I've tried a different approach.					

B Experiences of teaching and learning

We would also like to know about your experiences of teaching and learning whilst at Middlesex. Please rate every comment, using the same scale as in the previous section. Please give a rating for **every** comment.

Organisation and structure

		SA	A	U	D	SD
1	It was clear to me what I was supposed to learn in this course unit.					
2	The topics seemed to follow each other in a way that made sense to me					
3	I felt I was given a good deal of choice over how I went about learning					
4	We were allowed some choice over what aspects of the subject to concentrate on					
5	What we were taught seemed to match what we were supposed to learn					

6	I was taught in a way that suited my learning style					
7	We were encouraged to look for links between modules in the programme					
8	I felt the teaching made links to my previous experiences					
9	The handouts and other materials we were given helped me to understand the unit.					
10	On this unit, I was prompted to think about how well I was learning and how I might improve.					
11	1 could see the relevance of most of what we were taught in this programme					
12	We weren't just given information; staff explained how knowledge is developed in this subject.					
13	The teaching encouraged me to rethink my understanding of some aspects of the subject					
14	The different types of teaching (lectures, tutorials, labs, etc.) supported each other well.					
15	Plenty of examples and illustrations were given to help us to grasp things better					
16	The teaching in this unit helped me to think about the evidence underpinning different views.					
17	My experience of teaching on this programme seemed to fit in well with what I felt I was supposed to learn.					
18	My course has encouraged me to relate what I learned to issues in the wider world.					
19	The web pages and WebCT information provided by staff helped me to understand the topics better.					

Students and teachers

20	Students supported each other and tried to give help when it was needed.					
21	1 found most of what I learned in this course unit really interesting					
22	Staff tried to share their enthusiasm about the subject with us.					
23	Talking with other students helped me to develop my understanding.					
24	Staff were patient in explaining things which seemed difficult to grasp.					
25	Students' views were valued in this course unit					
26	Staff helped us to see how you are supposed to think and reach conclusions in this subject.					
27	The lecturers on this course unit provided plenty of opportunities for me to discuss important ideas.					

Assessments and other set work

28	Generally i was clear to me what was expected in the assessed work for this course.					
29	1 could see how the assessed work fitted in with what we were supposed to learn.					
30	You had really to understand the subject to get good marks in this course.					
31	The feedback given on my work helped me to improve my ways of learning and studying.					
32	To do well in this course unit, you had to think critically about the topics.					
33	The set work helped me to make connections to my existing knowledge or experience.					
34	Staff gave me the support I needed to help me complete the set work for this course unit.					
35	I believe success is in learning more than passing the assessed work.					

C   Demands made by the course

In this section, please tell us how easy or difficult you found different aspects of your course. **Use the following rating:**

VE = very easy   FE = fairly easy   U = unsure/not applicable   FD = fairly difficult   VD = very difficult

		VE	FE	U	FD	VD
1	What 1 was expected to know to begin with.					
2	The ideas and problems 1 had to deal with.					
3	The amount of work 1 was expected to do.					
4	Working with other students					
5	Organising and being responsible for my own learning.					
6	Communicating knowledge and ideas effectively					
7	Information technology/computing skills (e.g. WWW, email, word processing).					
8	The skills or technical procedures needed in this subject.					

Other demands (please be specific)

D What you learned from your course

Finally we would like to know what you feel you learned from studying this programme

Use the following rating:

√√ = A lot   √ = Some   ? = Not sure   X = Not much   XX = Very little

		√√	√	?	X	XX
1	Knowledge and understanding about the topics covered.					
2	Ability to think about ideas or to solve problems					
3	Practical skills/technical skills related to the subject					
4	Ability to work with other students					
5	Organising and being responsible for my own learning					
6	Being able to communicate knowledge and ideas effectively					
7	Information technology (IT skills/e-mail, word processing etc)					

Other aspects learned (be specific):

Finally how do you rate your success on your course?:

Thank you very much for answering this questionnaire.

Appendix 5: Interview Schedules and Prompts.

Focus Group Questions:

Quiet room
Digital voice recorder
Consent & letter
Confidentiality & data protection

- Who are the lecturers involved within education of widening participation?

- Why is it these people?

- Are any other stakeholders involved if so to what extent?

- Who benefits and why?

- What constitutes 'engagement' with initiatives and activities and how can this be measured?

- Are lecturing and other staff sensitive to needs and knowledgeable of the resources available to support students from non traditional backgrounds?

- What are the differing views of Widening Participation from other schools through either textual or documentary evidence?

- What is meant by student success and how is it measured?

- To what extent can widening participation students be identified?

- Have the developments of teaching and learning (i.e. LOTS modules and key skills threaded through the curriculum) addressed the needs of Widening Participation students?

Individual lecturer Interview Questions:

Quiet room
Digital voice recorder
Consent & letter
Confidentiality & data protection

- Introduction – role and position in the University – what do you do?

- Tell me a little about your teaching – what is your subject and your approach.

• What are your student groups like, how would you describe them? (Probe – student characteristics impact on teaching?)
• What is success for these students – how do you determine success (*measures, means, examples, definitions*).
• What do you understand by WP? Has this effected your work in any way? (Probe – *how, what give eg.s Aware of university position?*)
• Do you think you could identify widening participation students? If so what are they look like?
• Department position on WP? (Probe if Outreach work or any other work for WP mentioned?)
• *IF issues of support – probe what used/know of/how determine if students take this up/outcomes*
• Are lecturing and other staff sensitive to needs and knowledgeable of the resources available to support students from non traditional backgrounds?
• Enquire about preparation for teaching (ie PGCE etc). • Preferred approach and philosophy? (Probe – same for all student groups – examples)
• Have the developments of teaching and learning (i.e. LOTS modules and key skills threaded through the curriculum) addressed the needs of Widening Participation students?
• Look out for key phrases: • *Diversity, Inclusivity, Equality follow them up.*

Student Interviews: Cue questions: **Quiet room** **Digital voice recorder** **Consent & letter** **Confidentiality & data protection**

Intro: Confidential
                Study purpose
                Voluntary
                Signed consent form

You are on a nursing course, why did you choose this course?
How do you feel about this course?   *Highlights/ Difficulties*
What did you do before coming onto this course?

Preparation for HE? (*Probe – if issues of Transition on this course*).
Would you describe yourself as a typical student? (*Why do you say that?*)
Was University as you expected it? (*What did you expect?)*
Tell me about the teaching you have experienced? What do you like best and why?
Did the module HSS 1112 have any impact on your perception of learning?
Do you think you have been successful on this course? *What do you mean by that?*
What do you plan to go on and do after this course, career plans?

APPENDIX 6: Detailed Themes from Interviews (Lecturers).

Table Appendix 1 <u>Interview data themes</u>

HSSc	
Perceptions of WP	
Symbols	Ethnicity, language and academic needs Non traditional students Entry issues and qualifications People who 'do' WP
Constraints:	Cost of WP Deficit model approach WP issues not embedded No training for lecturers
Practices:	Own institution extent of diversity is large Supportive of but integral to particular course types Recruitment due to history of organisation
Benefits of WP:	Mature students life experiences
Role and relation to students	
Varied positions:	Lecturing roles, curriculum leader, admissions tutors, personal tutor system
Strategy:	Quality monitoring and consistency across programmes modules with multiple teachers
Scope in practice:	Don't think about WP – the same as other students
Description of student groups	
Typology	Diverse age and experience backgrounds Backgrounds are irrelevant to being a student Homogenous group Particular characteristics of students in certain programmes Two kinds of student performance either very good or very poor not average Young students NVQ qualification versus traditional qualifications
Location and environment	New campus better for student integration Bad prior experiences
Constraints:	Disinterested or Disengagement with work and then disappear Teaching approach conciliatory have another try Conflicting demands of all areas (Uni & work) Dyslexia mentioned though also uncommon and varying learning styles as potential challenges Diversity not discussed Different student understanding of English from spoken to written
Connections with students	Try to understand and learn about them and where they have come from Active response – 'I will do something…' Individuals develop own strategies in classroom Not my concern my job is to teach Talking to them in first week gives evidence of weaknesses

	Life experiences as learning material
	Students forced to accept responsibility
Seeking help	Previous experiences may impact on approaches to study at HE. Bad experiences and not asking for help
	Different problems faced by mature students
	Intervention - *Throw help at them*
	Barrier is choosing not to opting in to help
Other wider/organisational aspects:	Connect with students and evaluate yet do not use information more widely
	Diversity not discussed
Teaching approach:	
Control& influence	Faith in colleagues to interpret learning outcomes the same
	Tell them where help is
	Frustration when not go for help
Perception of student ability and engagement	Academic discussion is more challenging to engage students
	Academic modules are challenging for students
	Behavioural signs of disinterest and disengagement
	Independent learning in placement powerful for reflective learning
	Spontaneous elements most effective
	Linking student groups to comprehensive school in terms of range of abilities
Student centred	Flexible individual level assessment
	Value students with more experience & skills, peer support
	Incorporate skills to reach different level students but not highlight them as different.
	Recognition of different speeds of learning
	Sensitivity to differing needs and not wanting to single them out.
Remote/teacher centred, content driven	Teach as was taught by memorable people
	Teaching students for professional preparation
	Issue with newer lecturers
Reflexive attitude and approach/humanistic, constructivist	Does not tailor teaching to diversity but to real life
	Insights from diverse teaching experiences shape current approach
	Teaching approach guided by own experiences of learning and practice
	Role of lecturer to help students achieve
	Encourage teaching by peer approach
	Teaching as using self
	Unspoken elements to teaching
Challenges:	Students perceived to not understand examples not from their own culture
	Considers PGCE ineffective
	No insight into teaching styles
	Interventions do not help
	Student perform the same regardless
	Perform very well or very badly
Own experience examples details	
Contradictions	Students written work different to performance
	Strength of feeling for WP and disability but Need for resources and

	increase staff awareness to support students
	Early signposting of difficulty and referral not consistent
	Students aware they need help but are reluctant to go for it.
	Sense of stigmatising seeking help seen by students as remedial
Focus and purpose	Professional programme integrity and challenges.
	Able FOR programme or moved
	Students as change agents in a professional field
	Concern with after university and credibility of profession
Impact of WP:	Student misperception of university persist into year 1 Possibly cause problems for them
	Internally WP Piecemeal approach acknowledged
	Acknowledge other benefits than qualifications from course
Realisations and awareness	Outreach made lecturer think about the information that is out there about careers
	Frustration with not making inroads with students
	Helpless cannot make students go for help but suggest and encourage
Success perceptions	
Symbols:	Success as objective measurable outcomes
	Retention and progression as guide to success
	Personal development.
	Group pass rate
Values:	Success as liking teacher or parts of course
	Students responsible if do not pass
	Cannot see relevance of year 1 module to programme
	frustrations exist with more able students
Consequences:	End of module feedback to change approach for next group
	Student feedback may not effect change in teaching
Experience with WP	
Outreach/other	Experiences with WP outreach important and valued by self
	Not all participate in outreach
Awareness of it remotely	Not associated personally but aware of it through media
Value:	Needs of colleagues to gain insight into WP groups and experiences and perceptions of HE
	Recruitment issue
Wider department approach/perception	
Openness	Openness hindered by other demands
	Awareness of support through retention officer - someone else's job
	All students WP students
Strategic approach	Current overall University changes as catch all for WP too
	Entrance qualifications as indicator of student performance
	Some programmes more WP than others
Constraints:	Not all colleagues engage
	Recognise gap between before and Uni not real solution
	Department good at WP initiatives
	Key people with interest will raise awareness but too few

Action on Access: Mainstreaming and Sustaining Widening Participation in Institutions

Middlesex University, The Burroughs. Hendon London NW4 4BT

1. **Introduction**

Middlesex University is a global university committed to meeting the needs and ambitions of a culturally and internationally diverse range of students by providing challenging academic programmes underpinned by innovative research and scholarship and professional practice. Moreover a future significant goal is to champion a socially inclusive approach to participation in higher education. Recently, considerable changes were undertaken to the institution's academic provision driven by five key themes including diversity and inclusion. The aim to enhance the student experience, motivate and engage students, enhance academic and personal achievement and to recognise and meet the needs of a culturally and socially diverse student population is a key prioroty for the university. Government drivers have added widening participation as a priority by setting the target of 50% of 18-30 year olds studying in higher education by 2010. Although this is not directly linked to funding at this stage it is considered that the change from the separately funded Teaching Qaulity Enhacement Fund (TQEF) to the embedded funding, Teaching Enhancement and Student Satisfaction (TESS) will shape this commitment in the future.

2. Institutional context

A post 1992 institution, Middlesex University has considerable diversity within its student body. As a large university of over 25,000 students, 75% are studying at undergraduate level with 55% of the student population studying at a full time basis. The gender breakdown is fairly equal with 58% female, although there are considerable variations among the different discipline areas.   The university has demonstrated a 3% increase in its student numbers from its previous year of 2005/6, in line with sector trends.   The cultural diversity of students studying within this institution is demonstrated by its demographics, with 78.1% of full time students based from within the UK (also known as home students) with 5.9% from European Union countries and 15.9% from outside of the EU (also known as international students).   Furthermore 52% of 'home' students are from ethnic minority backgrounds, although these too are unequally represented among Schools and faculties. With the great mix of cultures and diversity come issues concerning widening participation, retention and progression.

This institution is committed to enhancing the student experience and has recently revised its academic framework to provide greater support for students, increased formative assessment and feedback, greater flexibility and enhanced peer cohort identity. Furthermore, e-learning is seen as a way of complementing, enhancing and supporting existing learning and teaching practice. In addition, the expansion of the Hendon campus provides an opportunity to explore and develop faciltes important to, and which may which may impact on, the diverse student needs.

Key strengths at Middlesex include: the recent academic restructure, ongoing review and implementation of key policies and continuous evaluation of internal processes, all driven by the need to enhance students' experiences. A further strength is the socially inclusive approach; recognising and addressing students with individual needs and goals. The institutions diversity is a strong feature resulting from our geographical location, links with local communities and AimHigher and varied outreach activities. Established networks with local further education colleges and schools work to explore issues of transition and progression. Significant departments at Middlesex embody this commitment too. One example includes The Centre of Excellence in Workbased Learning is successfully bridging the gap between employment and higher education for many people, further exemplifying commitment to participation in learning for the wider society. Furthermore the expansion and growth of one of the main campuses enables an opportunity to explore and develop faciltes important to and which may which may impact on the diverse student needs.

Widening participation is addressed within the institution in a variety of ways through various institutional policies (Admissions, Enhanced Learning, Teaching and Assessment, Progression and

Achievement, Literacy and Numeracy) with the approach to enhance the student experience for all, rather than singling out particular groups or categories of students. Widening participation is represented in various deparmental strategy documents with the same purpose. This policy discussion paper attempts to highlight widening participation activities and needs more explicitly thereby providing a holistic approach unifying and drawing together all the pertient policies.

Established success within widening participation activities is demonstrated through Outreach work and other work with AimHigher. The activities at other points in the student journey are all either established or developing and this is a key strength in the opportunity to embed complementarity and cohesion further.

3. Drivers/external

This document draws upon an number of national and local policy and stragey documents namely: the Dearing Report (1997), Office for Fair Access (2004), the HEFCE Strategic Plan 2006-11 (2006), HEFCE Report *Review of widening participation research: addressing the barriers to participation in higher education (2006)* NOA Widening Participation in higher Education (2008), All policies are informed by, and compliant with, other broader policies and legislative documents namely the Disability Discrimination Act and Race Relations Legislation.

To enact its mission and vision the University's intention is to make an active and realistic contribution to the national initiatives on widening participation through partnership working with key bodies nationally and regionally and more locally namely Action on Access and AimHigher and through institutional initiatives including strategies focussed around the entire student life cycle and experience.

Nationally criticism is aimed at higher education institution indicating the extent and nature of widening participation practice highlighting the limited evidence base (what works and why) and the drive to improve this (HEFCE 2006). In addition HEFCE also point out that whilst commitment is evident at institutional level this was more fragile at department or faculty level (HEFCE, 2006:4) with often an unbalanced emphasis on widening access and entry points as opposed to other aspects of the student higher education experience. This policy discussion paper aims to address the extent to which widening participation address different stages of the student engagement with higher education more specifically Middlesex University, and that the commitment needs deeper and wider dialogue institutionally to enable it to be made more explicit rather than being subsumed into a suite of policies.

4. Institutional dialogue

A key challenge to Middlesex University is the difficulty in identifying widening participation students as a distinct group due to the make up of its student demographics. However, this is not seen as a major problem as issues which impact upon those under-represented groups, such as lower socio-economic, low participation areas, disabled learners, etc, are also issues for our wider student body. We acknowledge students' routes into higher education are varied and with this brings implications for transition, approaches to learning and teaching and the wider student experience. Challenges from Government policy and related economic issues impact on all, combined locally with measures to unify institutional polices at the practical level. The demands from national government and local organisations and partners does demonstrate a constantly shifting lanscape for Universities demanding a responsive and flexible approach to all students and especially to those with particular needs who fall under the widening participation category. This further emphasises the need for open and evolving dialogue around issues of widening participation.

In order to progress dialogue and achieve clarification and commitment to widening participation throughout the institution the following areas will be considered:

a. Mechanism for interaction of key departments and determination of contribution to widening participation
b. Communication channels for widening participation efforts
c. Continuing participation in external initiatives such as AimHigher

5. Priorities and targets

The university has a timely opportunity to ensure that diversity and social inclusion is firmly embedded and maintained. Whilst internally academic programme teams are required to demonstrate how they support diversity, this needs to be evaluated and articulated both within policy documents and at a practical level. The opportunity to work with experts in this area to provide support and critical questioning and advice will ensure firm embedding and enable a period of self reflection and evaluation which can be maintained. This is reinforced by the commitment to the programme of the team members and the University. The external viewpoint afforded by the Actionon Access support enables development of a critical and objective view to the processes and also provide an important cue to benchmarking or self evaluation.

Key areas of focus for Middlesex include:
1. Establishing and clarifying understanding of the philosophy and practice of widening participation
2. Ensuring commitment to widening participation at all levels within the organisation
3. Identify and enhance communication channels and processes across the institution concerning widening participation practices and issues
4. Ensure all services and areas involved at the stages of the student involvement with the university are cognisant of widening participation and the continuum throughout the student journey (pre-entry to post graduation and employment)
5. Evaluation and dissemination of widening participation practices and determination of 'success measures'
6. Make more effective use of data sets to establish evaluation of funding and measures of impact upon widening participation groups

APPENDIX 8

WP SWOT analysis

(Internal): Strengths:	Weaknesses:
Macro level:	**Macro level:**
Good reputation as an institution	Communication channels for issues of diversity or WP practices – rather fragmented and not unified
Locality and recent consolidation in sites	Should WP be different?
Academic framework change and programme review	ELLs overstretched and with finite funding (TQEF)
Mission and vision of university engrained within diversity culture	Teaching and learning policy and strategy is not directed at WP issue but indirect – is it the same as diversity?
Global campus and international experience – cater for diversity	Lack of usual data to identify some WP categories (HEFCE categories ie first generation at Uni, socio-economic level, parental occupation etc)
Bursaries for students. Scholarships	
Teaching and learning policies and strategies which embrace diversity and individual potential	**Meso level:**
Quality processes and rigour at exploring issues with progression	No monitoring of WP in school and comparison across schools
Disability service and range of provision	Can they (WP students) be tracked and issues of experience be applied specifically to them?
Student experience project and genuine interest in students.	Withdrawal process – retention issue and reasons (interviews) full picture not available
Core working groups: ie. Induction, achievement and progression etc.	
	Micro level:
Meso Level:	WP considered deficit model rather than enabling – 'pulling down' of University
Accredited academic courses, professional status	
Ethnic mix – varied in programmes but overall meet	Questionable commitment of staff at all levels unclear

national benchmarks	how this is translated at the class level (deficits)
Flexibility in provision	Diverse understanding and philosophy or practices associated with WP
Progression and achievement strategies at core of framework changes	Champions quiet and practices not widely disseminated
ELLS service – integration into some programmes	Perception of 'outreach' work only when in Uni students are all alike
Student achievement advisors and student services to assist and direct students	Poor ELLs data on students numbers, session numbers linked to programmes or departments also impact on studies
Range of stakeholder involvement	
Established links with local FE colleges (CoVEs, FdScs)	Poor data on who is referred and if this service is taken up and impact (?invisible students – leave? Succeed?)
	Similar picture with disability but better data as funding specifically attached.
Micro level:	Proactive practices by staff for supporting WP students difficult if we do not know who they are
Committed staff and practitioners	
Champions to WP with examples of good practice throughout the University	Lack of understanding of referring students to the correct student support service areas
Cohort identify regardless of background	Lack of utilisation of data at local level (UCAS scores, ethnicity, other)
Informal and anecdotal evidence of who are	
WP students are but not distinguished – all benefit from services.	

(External) Opportunities:	Threats:
Macro level:	**Macro level:**
Government policy and targets set for ethnic groups/socio-economic groups etc – former reached latter unclear	Govt benchmarking met, monitoring but resource intensive and impact on progression and achievements unclear no direct link with funding allocated to it – penalties associated with this in future?
TQEF funding to key services (local decision)	Reporting mechanisms do not reflect local need and prioritisation
Topup funds for outreach – impact difficult to discern	
Now TESS to follow WP and indicate impact –	Publicising deficiencies and not 'value' of organisation to individual

opportunity to address who and what needs are Contribution to national dialogue and support from AoA	Negative impact on league table position (no real WP league table) HEFCE evaluation – punitive measures?
Meso level: Ethnicity, age and originating school/college data accessible	**Micro level:** May be insufficient to drive key resources if data is not there.
Micro level: Review of WP approaches and increase internal dialogue and debate	

APPENDIX 10: Middlesex University Analysis of Selected Policies (students and teaching):

APS5: Sustainability
APS7: Admissions
APS8: Bursaries and Scholarships
APS11: Academic Policy Statement
APS19: Teaching Observations
APS 20: Student Employability
Equality and Diversity Strategy (E&D)
Enhancing Learning, Teaching and Assessment (ELTA) Strategy (2007-12)

Category:	APS 5	APS 7	APS 8	APS 11	APS 19	APS 20	E&D	ELTA
Purpose statement links to diversity, widening participation or potential of students	Meeting needs and future development social conscience	Clear – diverse students widen and deepen access. Local & overseas, outreach activities & progression routes.	Ability to benefit, excellence in sporting etc performance	Safeguarding of standards at all stages in lifecycle	Linked to teaching quality and staff development	Indirectly concerns employability and student vocational needs	Linking policies and action for E&D. Position Uni as champion in field of diversity.	1.3 Student success
Inclusion of positive key words/terms such as diversity, inclusion, widening participation, student potential, capability	Promote social inclusion	APL, motivation & capability identified as issues – diversity in rationale	Not used	Not used inclusion of term: *student experience* thus implicit	Not addressed specifically	Not addressed specifically	Examples of diversity (ethnic origins, gender & disability)	Widely
Applicability to diversity, widening participation or potential of students	In considering sustainable issues (all students)	Admissions staff trained to appraise guidance	In terms of needs or excellence	In terms of recruitment and admissions, progression, pastoral support etc in general	Highly applicable 'changing needs of students' identified in rationale	Highly applicable, employability and a future beyond HE prepared for in HE identified	In terms of staff and students.	Diverse, enhancement, inclusive,
Clear lines of responsibility and reporting	Health & safety area not individuals	Admissions staff, Academic board	Clear to Chair of Std Financial Cttee	Programme delivery and institutional oversight	Clear, Deans, HoDs	No clear Mentions HoDs as having training	Indicate Deans & Heads of Service include E&D	Schools, ADs, & LTSL level report to Teaching & Learning

						implying this is guiding route to integration in programme	in operational plans. E&D manager & reporting annually.	committee
Currency and review of policy, link to other existing polices and quality monitoring	Due for review 2014 – under Health and Safety area temporarily	Due for review 2013	None No review date	Intended to guide staff work with students as recipients	Due review 2011	Not linked to other polices overtly Due for review March 2009	Embed in all policies, procedures & practices. For review (2007)	Link to corporate plan (current 2007-12)
Clear definitions of terms used – relating to diversity, widening participation or student potential	No	Uni WP benchmarks are met	Clarity: bursary = financial needs, Scholarship = excellence	None – as above student experience	Not clearly defined Policy terms defined ie what is teaching observation	Not clearly defined	Race, gender, culture, disability all included but not defined.	No definitions but ample reference to potential
Practicable and measurable impact on diversity, widening participation or student potential	No – social inclusion not clear	Benchmark attainment, monitoring of programme numbers	Not clearly articulated – implied in supporting deficit (ie money)	Implicit in student experience reference	In staff devt terms Impact on students implied.	Career guidance Data of recent graduate Careers department involved	Annual monitoring – but	3.7.3 Staff development for inclusivity
Issues:		What are Uni WP benchmarks (i.e. HEFCE benchmarks)	Not who/how to apply, criteria or how many	Cross referenced to academic regulations, teaching and learning procedures		Level 1 key skills now no longer in use. Integration of career staff, students, alumni and graduates to emphasise progress onwards with support.	Generic competences in E&D? Core values – *'Think about needs of colleagues & students'*	Student success linked to completion. Student success, improve staff working, reduce operating costs achievement & grades Employer needs

Middlesex University

Widening Participation in Higher Education: Strategic Plan 2001-2004

INTRODUCTION

Middlesex University: Leading the way to wider participation

Middlesex University has, since its foundation as Middlesex Polytechnic 1973,

maintained
a commitment to the involvement of diverse groups of students in higher education. In addition to supporting the traditional school-leaver entrant, Middlesex has pioneered many developments which are now central to other universities' strategies for widening participation in higher education. Included in these were the establishment of a modular degree programme which welcomed mature students with no formal qualifications and the
development of a wide range of access and progression agreements with local colleges and schools. The latter development led to a network of Associate Colleges and, more recently, Associate Sixth Form Colleges. The Higher Education and Training Partnership (HETP) between the University and four neighbouring FE Colleges was established to reflect the close working relationship of these institutions. This is now a HEFCE recognised funding consortium with a wide range of mostly sub-degree provision.

The National Centre for Work Based Learning Partnerships has successfully bridged the gap between employment and higher education for mature people in full time work and now delivers a full range of certificated learning from Certificate to Doctoral level. The principles and experience of crediting learning through doing is now being extended and applied to the accreditation of Voluntary and Community Service Learning, both for our existing students working in the voluntary sector (for example, mentoring in schools) and for many people outside the University who are committing themselves to this important and expanding sector.

The Centre for Learning Development is leading a full reappraisal of learning and teaching across the University (appendix 1), and, through emphasis on the learner, is enabling the delivery of the curriculum to be responsive to varying student needs. This is of particular importance in improving the retention and academic progress of students with a less 'developed formal educational background, and thus preventing waste of both human and financial resources. The development of learner centred pedagogy in all Schools of the University is an integral part of the University's service to all students, and of its Widening Participation Strategy.

The University has an excellent reputation for welcoming and providing for students from many backgrounds. Our inclusive but selective admissions policy leads to a rich learning environment from which all students gain. The University has a substantial population of international and EU students from over 100 countries and a significant number of students from many UK minority ethnic groups reflecting the diverse character of the population of North London. Our dedicated support for students with disability has enabled many students with sensory or physical impairment to continue their studies, and our existing policy of extending access enables many students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds to realise their potential.

During academic year 2000/2001 the University had a total of 25500 students.

Of those reporting ethnic origin, approximately 48% were from minority ethnic groups.
Students from the constituent boroughs, Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Haringey and Islington made up 26% of the total, and over half of the student body originated from Greater London. Just over 21% of the University's students came from overseas and from the EU. Around 58% of the student population were women. During 2000-2001, the number of students with known disability increased to 959 from 689 the previous year.

This comprehensive approach is reflected in the University's Mission, Vision and Strategic Objectives (appendix 3). Widening Participation is firmly established both in the formal documents and structures of the University and in the learning culture it espouses.

The Widening Participation Strategy in this document spells out the key features and new initiatives to which the University is committed in pursuance of its objectives.

1. Continuity in learning
1. The University has a framework which facilitates Lifelong Learning, In addition to full and part time study on degree and postgraduate qualifications, we offer credit based learning opportunities through work-based learning, through work and action in the community and voluntary sectors, through internships, through a large and successful Summer School and through our many partnerships with colleges and other learning providers.

2. In addition, we are developing a number of qualifications available by alternative modes of delivery including part-time study and distance learning to enable students to learn and gain qualifications at a pace and in a manner best suited to their particular and possibly changing circumstances. Most of the University's Programmes may now be taken by part time study. We are using the pedagogic methods and delivery techniques of learner-centred learning to, extend the range of ways in which all students may manage their learning. This is of particular importance to those groups of students (for example, students with disability, parents with young children) for whom traditional study patterns are inappropriate.

2. **Raising awareness**
1 The University has a long-established Education Liaison programme through which outreach work with local schools and colleges takes place. Included in these activities are sixth form Subject Conferences, an Aiming for a College Education (ACE) week attended by around eight hundred 14-16 year old students from local schools, talks on various aspects of higher education given to students and to their parents at over seventy schools and colleges all over North London, and stimulating sample lectures given by Professors and Lecturers to sixth form groups and other students considering HE entry.

2. In addition, the Widening Participation Project, funded as a Special Initiative, has extended the awareness task to earlier age groups in partnership with local schools.
Current research indicates that for many school students, years 7 and 8 and 9 are decisive in the transition to considering entry to higher education. For many school students who have no awareness of the HE sector or its

opportunities, exposure through student mentor led project work, University Campus visits and individual support can open their eyes to a different future. Such activity can impact upon the
earning culture of the whole school, especially when the partnership is seen as active supportive. The Project's University for All week attracted over 200 students aged 13 to mature from five colleges and eight schools.

3. Middlesex University is a partner in the Excellence Challenge Strand 1 bids made by the following local authorities: Haringey, Camden, Newham and Tower Hamlets. We offer a range of support services to schools and colleges which are participating in Excellence Challenge activities (appendix 4).

3. Recognising ability and talent

1. Recognition of the ability to succeed in higher education is a crucial part of our strategy. It is the aim of the University to maintain the high proportion from Widening Participation Target group recruited each year. In 2000-2001, approximately 36% of entry were undergraduate full-time young student entrants from social classes IIIM, IV and V, around 12% were mature students from low participation neighbourhoods and disadvantaged part-time undergraduates were just over 3% of total intake. In doing so the University will work more closely with schools and colleges to ensure that the students who do enter the University are those who are genuinely likely to benefit from and succeed at university education. The University is working with school and college partners to identify those students with potential and motivation but who, for any of a number of reasons, under-perform in the qualifications needed for University entry. In addition, the University recognises the need to raise the aspirations of students who have the ability, but may not see for themselves the opportunities offered by higher education.

2. With our General Progression Agreements, the University agrees to accept students from selected schools and colleges who are identified as likely to succeed at higher education. For mature students and those who have left school without formal qualifications, the usual route is for the student to take an Access course. Middlesex accepts students from Access courses taken at partner colleges, and works with those colleges to maintain standards and support able students

3. For other students taking Advanced General or Vocational qualifications, the University will accept students with sufficient UCAS tariff points accumulated from a range of contributory examinations, provided our liaison with the school or college identifies the student as one with HE potential.

4. In addition to the General Progression Agreement, the University offers Compact Progression Agreements to individual students in selected local partner schools and colleges. Students with identified educational disadvantage are given support both by their own teachers and by student mentors from the University to prepare a portfolio
by which their potential for higher education may be identified. The portfolio is assessed by their own teacher and moderated by a link teacher from the University with a view not just to judge qualification for entry, but also to identify the most appropriate field of study and to counsel the student accordingly. Within the portfolio,
the student has the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to operate at higher

level through activities that relate to their circumstances, as well as their formal studies. Thus credit is given to demonstrable skills and knowledge acquired, perhaps, in helping to run a family business from an early age, or in assisting in community activity within a marginalised ethnic group. Although the Compact works through a partnership between the school/college and University, the Compact is owned by the student as an agreement between themselves and the University, setting individual targets and planning their future development .

4. Supporting the learner

1. The University is aware that the retention and progression of students is an important aspect of Widening Participation. Although both local and national research indicates that financial problems are a major factor for the decreasing retention of students, for those from the WP target groups, many other factors are also involved. Thus while the University may be able to offer financial support, through Opportunity Bursaries, the Student Hardship Fund and fee waivers, and by giving students financial advice and guidance, we recognise that it is also important to provide appropriate learning support to those students who find the transition to higher education more taxing.

2. The University is providing support in two ways. Firstly, we have developed the traditional student support network of student advisers, welfare support, learning resource centres, including study skills and language support, to a high level. In every QAA subject evaluation for the past three years, the University has achieved maximum scores for this aspect of our work.

3. But more importantly, the University is committed to an examination of learning, teaching and the curriculum across the whole University. This is Led by the Centre for Learning Development as part of the Learning and Teaching Strategy, with Coordinators in each School to take forward best practice in pedagogy and in the use of learning technologies. The aim is to enable and develop learner centred learning for all students, but in particular to develop, in all subjects, responsive learning and teaching approaches which can support those students without highly developed study skills, and thus improve the retention and progression rates of these students. In addition, all undergraduate students undertake advanced study skills training during their first semester through modules developed by each School to support the transition to higher levels of study. Increasing emphasis will be placed on students completing and maintaining personal development plans. This will be in place for all students by 2004/5.

4. This activity is mirrored through the work of the Higher Education and Training Partnership networking group for Learning and Teaching which seeks to share best practice across partner institutions and stimulate review and development of learning and teaching strategies in partner colleges responsible for delivering HE programmes.

5. Research has also shown that the quality of provision is a key determinant in student, retention. Thus the University's quality assurance strategy is focused on maintaining high quality provision and programme delivery across the University and in its collaborative partners.

5. Welcoming diversity and meeting specific needs

1. As a large metropolitan University, with a wide portfolio of study opportunities, a large International intake, and a highly varied student body, the University recognises the varied needs of its student body and responds accordingly. Led by a senior manager as Equal Opportunities Officer, the University actively promotes equality of opportunity in all areas of its work, and will take account of special needs as they arise to enhance the opportunity of those who may otherwise be unable to realise their full potential.

2. For students with disability, the pioneering and well resourced Able Access Centre provides a total support service for students, working both with the student but also with their carers and other support agencies (Disability Policy). Special mention should be made of the external activities of the Centre across North London, providing a signing service and making disability assessments.

3. The varied cultural needs of students, which may include access to particular diet, living conditions, access to a place of worship and to necessary facilities to prepare for worship, are met as far as is possible within the support provision of each campus of the University. In addition to the provision for specific cultural needs provided by the Director for Students and the Campus Deans, the Welfare and Counselling Service frequently identify additional needs which are met locally.

6. Learning in partnership

1. The University is committed in its strategic objectives (appendix 3) to a wide range of partnerships with other institutions, local, regional and international. In support of our objective to widen participation we continue to work closely with:

- Our HETP partners (Barnet College, The College of North East London, Harlow College and Waltham Forest College) on a number of initiatives including progression agreements and developing Foundation Degrees
- A network of 9 Associate (FE) Colleges with which we share Progression and Compact Agreements and a number of other activities including those supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds
- A new initiative will offer Associate status to selected Sixth Form Colleges. This has recently been awarded to Sir George Monoux Sixth Form College, Waltham Forest
- 14 local schools and 10 FE colleges (in addition to HETP and Associate partners) currently working in partnership with Progression and Progression Compact agreements
- The Tottenham Partnership (SRB funded) to establish a Haringey-wide Mentoring Network as part of Voluntary and Community Based Learning actions providing mentoring in 5 Tottenham secondary schools
- Enfield Education Business Partnership providing mentoring and after-school clubs in selected secondary schools
- 16 schools and colleges in the Widening Participation Project-North London
- Four local authorities in Excellence Challenge (Strand 1) Partnerships
- The Open Learning Partnership

7. **Management, monitoring and implementation of Widening Participation**

1. Executive responsibility for the Widening Participation Strategy of the University lies jointly with the Deputy Vice Chancellor and the Assistant Vice Chancellor and Director of Corporate Services. Overall operational responsibility lies with the Deputy Academic Registrar (Recruitment, European and Collaborative Programmes) in whose management resides Central Admissions, UK recruitment and Education Liaison, including Progression and Progression Compacts, and operational oversight of the HEFCE funded Widening Participation Project - North London.

2. Retention, progression and achievement are now monitored by a new sub-committee of Academic Board, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor. The sub-committee will also identify and disseminate best practice aimed at improving retention, progression and achievement outcomes.

3. All aspects of the student's progress from initial recruitment to post graduation is monitored by the Student Lifecycle Group, chaired by the Assistant Vice-Chancellor.

4. Specific responsibility for ensuring that student needs are met lies with the Director ' for Students and the Campus Deans of Students, through the Welfare Service, the Able Centre and other support services

5. Admissions Policy is managed by the Deputy Academic Registrar and implemented by the Head of Admissions. It is monitored by the Recruitment and Admissions Operations Group, chaired by the Assistant Vice-Chancellor.

6. Responsibility for monitoring outputs and outcomes of the Strategy lies with the Head of the Planning and Development Service.

7. Implementation of the strategy is the responsibility of the Deputy Academic Registrar, in liaison with the Director for Students, the Head of Quality Assurance, the Directors of Curriculum, Learning and Quality for each of the seven Schools of the University, and the Director of the Higher Education and Training Partnership.

8. Implementation of the closely allied Learning and Teaching Strategy lies with the Head of the Centre for Learning Development, working with coordinators in each of the Schools.

9. It is intended that all concerned in the management, monitoring and implementation of the Strategy will meet twice yearly in a new WP Monitoring Group.

SUMMARY
Middlesex University is, through its Mission and Strategic Objectives, wholly committed to wider access to higher education. In its internal management, its course delivery, its support services, its learning resource provision and above all in its recruitment and admissions, the University will recognise the potential for learning at higher levels in its students and make provision appropriate to the needs of a diverse student body. In addition, the University will work with schools, colleges, other learning providers, local authorities and other agencies to

reach out into the community both to help and encourage the identification of and support for talent and ability to facilitate entry of able students into the University, but also, where appropriate, to take the University and higher learning to the workplace, to the charitable, voluntary and community sectors, to partner educational institutions and into the home.

This Strategy for Widening Participation commits the University to maintain support for these objectives, and indicates the means by which they will be achieved.

Annexe 1 School of Health and Social Sciences Widening Participation Strategy

Introduction
This document describes the School of Health and Social Sciences Strategy for developing Widening Participation within the school for the period 2004 – 2006. The purpose of the strategy is to guide the process of assessing, planning and implementing a culture of widening participation across the School in relation to Middlesex Universities key strategic aims and objectives. These revolve around diversity in a student-centred university , as set out in the Corporate Plan by improving access to the University and enabling and encouraging the broadest participation in academic activities.

This document:

1. Outlines the context in which the strategy has been developed
2. Draws on and is congruent with several University strategy documents namely:
   a. Middlesex University and the School of Health and Social Sciences, Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategies 2002-2005
   b. Middlesex University Retention Strategy (November 2000) and the School of Health and Social Science Retention and Progression Strategy 2002- 2005

   c. Middlesex University Widening Participation Strategy 2001-2004
   d. Higher Education Funding Council Widening Participation Strategy 2001
3. Reflects the diverse nature of the student group within the North London region, the student body and the diverse nature of the academic provision within the School.

Context:

Middlesex University has maintained a commitment to diversity and flexibility within studies engendering a culture of lifelong learning. The National Inquiry into Higher Education (Dearing Report, 1997) reported that British HE was still systematically failing to recruit sizeable groups of the population, particularly those from lower socio-economic groups. In response the Green Paper on Lifelong Learning, The Learning Age (1998), argued the case for widening participation on the grounds of economic competitiveness and social inclusion. Middlesex University has performed well in many of the areas identified eg. 14% (nationally 13%) from low participation neighbourhoods and 37% social class IIIm, IV and V (nationally 26%). This is also evident within the School of Health and Social Science. The development of the Widening Participation Forum within the School of Health and Social Sciences has driven a review and centralisation of the many activities and approaches which are currently being practised within the school and lack recognition. *The strategy also fulfils the University Widening Participation Steering Group and University Executive review of the University WP priorities.*

Government targets for Higher Education:

- 50% aged 18-30 should benefit from HE by 2010 while maintaining standards

- Widening Participation in HE, in the sense of a more representative social mix

- significant year-on-year progress towards fair access for all social groups to all institutions, as measured by HEFCE Performance Indicators

- lower rates of non-completion

The School of Health and Social Sciences Position Statement on Widening Participation

There is a long history of commitment to widening participation both in the current school and in the former schools of Social Sciences and Health, Biological and Environmental Sciences. This is evidenced through a variety of activities such as taster days and career talks on one hand and through the contribution made by the former schools to the HEFEC funded pan London Health Thematic Group. The schools strategy for widening participation has previously been articulated as part of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2002-2005 and the School retention and Progression Strategy 2002-2005.

The development of this document now provides an opportunity to articulate the Schools aims with greater clarity and purpose. In order to provide a coherent framework for the strategy the headings used in the Middlesex University Widening Participation Strategy and Action Plan have been used.

To ensure integration of the WP Strategy with recruitment and admission processes to maximise the continuing diversity of the Schools student intake.

Outcomes
1. School structures and processes will demonstrate that admissions tutors and admissions staffs are aware of the diversity of needs of WP students.

2. The current status of progression agreements including how they impact potential students are articulated to all staff.

3. Admissions tutors attend central university activities designed to address o issues and needs pertinent to WP students (eg. financial, welfare and learning support)

4. Marketing materials reflect and address widening participation issues.

To raise awareness, aspirations and attainment in relation to accessing HE in the areas of Health and Social Sciences of potential students:

1. Encourage a developmental approach to activities to ensure a complete picture of higher education and opportunities are clear to school, FE and other potential students.
2. Participate within the range of activities offered centrally by the University with a focus on Health and Social Sciences:
   a. Year 11 Summer school
   b. ACE days
   c. Maintain visits to schools and colleges with talks focussing on HE and employability skills to parents/families and teachers
   d. Develop HE 'taster' sessions to reflect the broad range of vocational and academic opportunities within HSSc
   e. Participate in Open days and Career information days within schools from North London boroughs.

3. Curriculum development:
   a. Curriculum design and delivery will be informed by research-based understanding of how students learn and how teachers contribute most effectively in a diverse learner centred environment
   b. Each curriculum area to develop activities especially focussed around their subject area to inform and raise aspirations and guide attainment level for HE studies

To continue to build and develop partnerships and collaborations

1. Develop and maintain contacts with Aim higher co-ordinators for the North London boroughs, North Central London Workforce Development Confederation careers co-ordinator and other employers and stakeholders
2. Maintain and develop the activities and contribution within HEFCE thematic groups eg. The Advice Clinic
3. Liase and work with the Institute for Community Development and Learning to build up and develop Student Ambassador contributions from the School of HSSc

Continue developing learner skills and learning support to improve retention, progression and achievement in relation to needs from widening participation:
1. Liase with the Teaching learning and assessment strategy co-ordinators regarding needs of students from WP categories.
2. Disseminate WP issues to all academic and support staff within the School especially with regards to review and referral of weaker students to learning support services.

To provide for diversity:
1. Liase with the Able centre in providing support for students diverse needs.
2. Ensure the services of the Able Centre are prominent in programme and module documentation
3. Assist and advise with developments in LTSL student mentoring scheme
4. To work effectively with ELLS in supporting WP students??
5. Ensure availability and accessibility of support for WP students is clear and visible and communicated to staff for students who may not readily come forward for assistance (eg. First generation at University).

To manage and monitor wider participation within the School of Health and Social Sciences:

1. Provide guidance and advice to curriculum areas on activity and project developments and monitor the range, number and success of activities.
2. Evaluate all activities, identifying which are successful and developing these.
3. Liase with the WP Steering group on the range and extent of involvement with WP in the School
4. Ensure the Widening Participation Forum and colleagues within the School are appraised of the activities, partnerships and recommendations from the Steering group including student monitoring schemes.

It is proposed that monitoring and evaluation of the above categories will be developed. It is anticipated that monitoring will include a variety of criteria including the following:

- Feedback from activity and project groups facilitators and participants
- Enrolment profiles
- Annual Monitoring Reports
- Review of LOTS modules in association with the Learning Development Unit
- Evaluations form employers, schools and collaborative partners

APPENDIX 11

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Outcomes
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2. The current status of progression agreements including how they impact potential students are articulated to all staff.

3. Admissions tutors attend central university activities designed to address o issues and needs pertinent to WP students (eg. financial, welfare and learning support)

4. Marketing materials reflect and address widening participation issues.

To raise awareness, aspirations and attainment in relation to accessing HE in the areas of Health and Social Sciences of potential students:

1. Encourage a developmental approach to activities to ensure a complete picture of higher education and opportunities are clear to school, FE and other potential students.
2. Participate within the range of activities offered centrally by the University with a focus on Health and Social Sciences:
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b. ACE days
c. Maintain visits to schools and colleges with talks focussing on HE and employability skills to parents/families and teachers
d. Develop HE 'taster' sessions to reflect the broad range of vocational and academic opportunities within HSSc
e. Participate in Open days and Career information days within schools from North London boroughs.

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   a. Curriculum design and delivery will be informed by research-based understanding of how students learn and how teachers contribute most effectively in a diverse learner centred environment
   b. Each curriculum area to develop activities especially focussed around their subject area to inform and raise aspirations and guide attainment level for HE studies

To continue to build and develop partnerships and collaborations

1. Develop and maintain contacts with Aim higher co-ordinators for the North London boroughs, North Central London Workforce Development Confederation careers co-ordinator and other employers and stakeholders
2. Maintain and develop the activities and contribution within HEFCE thematic groups eg. The Advice Clinic
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2. Disseminate WP issues to all academic and support staff within the School especially with regards to review and referral of weaker students to learning support services.

To provide for diversity:
1. Liase with the Able centre in providing support for students diverse needs.
2. Ensure the services of the Able Centre are prominent in programme and module documentation
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4. To work effectively with ELLS in supporting WP students??
5. Ensure availability and accessibility of support for WP students is clear and visible and communicated to staff for students who may not readily come forward for assistance (eg. First generation at University).

To manage and monitor wider participation within the School of Health and Social Sciences:

1. Provide guidance and advice to curriculum areas on activity and project developments and monitor the range, number and success of activities.

2.	Evaluate all activities, identifying which are successful and developing these.
3.	Liase with the WP Steering group on the range and extent of involvement with WP in the School
4.	Ensure the Widening Participation Forum and colleagues within the School are appraised of the activities, partnerships and recommendations from the Steering group including student monitoring schemes.

It is proposed that monitoring and evaluation of the above categories will be developed. It is anticipated that monitoring will include a variety of criteria including the following:

- Feedback from activity and project groups facilitators and participants
- Enrolment profiles
- Annual Monitoring Reports
- Review of LOTS modules in association with the Learning Development Unit
- Evaluations form employers, schools and collaborative partners

APPENDIX 12

Widening Participation Development Plan:

Objective:	Area of Focus:	Who/responsibility	Goal	Review
1. Commitment to Widening Participation across the Institution. • How • Where	Explore departments inclusion of Widening Participation principles: • Policy documents • Working groups • Department and service approaches to work • Mission and corporate vision Explore the engagement with students regarding views and issues of widening participation.	Executive (who) to guide University cohesion in regards WP Department and service heads to ensure staff and students are reassured this is a key focus and important to the University	Establish awareness of principles of WP and pockets of good but disparate practice to enhance commitment. Build upon the contact and relationships with student representatives and MUSU to explore student understanding and needs in regards to WP.	In regular review process of policy documents, working groups and Student Experience reporting mechanism
2. Communication and cohesion across departments and areas of university in approaches to Widening Participation	Establish evidence of diversity and inclusivity through data sets. Where is it to be found and who uses this and to what purpose.	Executive endorsement of WP as key area Working groups in Student Experience	Linking all activities and approaches to WP making the implicit explicit.	In regular review process of policy documents, working groups and Student Experience reporting mechanism
3. Funding and investment in Widening	Establish what WP means for the University and	Budget holders within services and departments	Clarity of costs and funding streams .	In annual monitoring processes.

Participation	what key areas are t be focussed on. Establish what funding routes are open to these areas of focus and how they will be evaluated and monitored.	Explore TESS division of funds and how this will impact on support services/areas of pereceived WP need	Transparency with how money is spent and accountability processes.	
4. Sustaining and mainstreaming WP in the alongside other competing and equally pressing priorities	Identifying area of key practice which reflect WP principles and approaches Making WP key agenda item and inclusion criteria in main policy and working documents	Ascending feedback mechanism, head of service and departments and so on.	To embed widening participation as a theme in all major policy areas and make it overt rather than covert. Implicit in Progression and Achievement and Enhancing Learning Teaching and Assessment. (ELTA). In addition to be distinct and distinguishable from Diversity	University cycle of monitoring and evaluating developments (ELTA action plan, Progression and Achievement etc)

APPENDIX 13

**Mainstreaming and Sustaining Widening Participation
Exploration and Update**

**Monday 30th June 2008
13.00 – 16.00 hrs**

**Hendon Campus, Graduate Building
Rooms: G237A & G237B**

13.0 - 13.05	Welcome and Introduction. Coffee
13.05 – 14.00	Guest Speaker: Professor John Storan (Action on Access) National context of Widening participation and the future of widening participation – what will be it look like or be. What is a widening participation student are they identifiable?
14.00 – 15.00	**Workshop INTERACTIVE**– on above themes: What is WP student and how do we identify and track them or is it possible? What is the future of WP locally and reflect on national issues? Who are stakeholders locally and what needs are there?
	Flip charts & pens provided
15.00	Coffee
15.00 – 15.30	Plenary & collation of responses.
15.30	Home

Guest Profile:
Professor John Storan is the co-Director of Action on Access and also Regional Adviser for the South West and Northern Ireland. John is currently the Director of Continuum, the Centre for Widening Participation Policy Studies at the University of East London, and was previously Director of Continuing Education and Development at South Bank University, London and Founding Chair of the Forum for the Advancement of Continuing Education (FACE). In 2001 he was made a Professorial Fellow at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST).

APPENDIX 14: Results from Workshop with John Storan (AoA)

What does WP mean:-

1. Student support:
    a. Disparity among schools
    b. Roles ie SENCO - good will, voluntary, disability support
    c. ELLS/Disability – money & welfare, counselling
    d. Flow of information – broad of support needed (?)
    e. Availability of support (resource limit)
    f. HSSC anecdotal data disabled student better grades with support.
2. Accessibility:
    a. Referral and 'pointing out' towards support
    b. Study skills vs WP
3. Flexibility
4. Targeted support
    i. Programme
    ii. Service
    iii. ESOL – (2nd generation – poorly prepared for University)
5. Promotion
6. Transparency
7. Acknowledge the political nature of WP

What does WP mean in relation to:

1. No clarity on what WP is (local, international)
2. Collection and use of data
    a. Availability
    b. Tracking – time, resources, admin & money
    c. Attitude towards collection of data
    d. Sensitivity
    e. Suspicion
    f. Relevance
    g. Not to duplicate collections of data
    h. Timing of data

Areas and Issues:

Easiest:	*Hardest:*
Challenging resources represented groups	Targeting under-represented groups or not
Student support	Structure & amount of student support
Increase ELLS support	Data – who is meant by WP?

Mainstreaming and Sustaining Widening Participation in Institutions (Update 29th Feb 2008)

Learning Development Unit (HSSc) in conjunction with Centre for Learning and Quality Enhancement (CLQE) and the Student Achievement Advisors in Schools have been successful in a bid from Action on Access to review our Widening Participation practice and are one of 17 universities selected.

This programme was developed to assist institutions to reflect upon and develop their future approaches to widening participation (access, disability, student transition, retention and achievement) especially within the first ye\r of the student life cycle. The programme is being co-ordinated and delivered by Action on Access with funding form HEFCE. Recently HEFCE (HEFCE, 2008) announced a series of research projects designed to gain deeper understanding of the practices and impacts of widening participation activities and processes. Therefore the need for institutions to be more reflective and analytical regarding their approaches is timely. The outcome of this particular programme includes producing a working policy paper (required by Action on Access) reflecting upon the future of WP within the institution. This review is to be undertaken during this year, to be completed by 31st December 2008.

The core of the programme input form Action on Access comprises a series of works shops to support institutions to focus on the internal situation and promote dialogue about developing, integrating and sustaining WP in the institution and how this is also to be developed in other institutions. To date we have attended 2 out of 5 meetings with Action on Access and the other Universities partners involved. We have been encouraged to work with other universities to foster a 'critical friend' approach. It has been enlightening to work with and discuss experiences with University of Birmingham and also Staffordshire University all of whom have issues like ourselves and are striving to address all aspects of the student life cycle implementing and evaluating strategies such as Induction processes, Student advisors or achievement roles and also pastoral approaches. To date we have attempted to produce a SWOT analysis and Log frame to guide our approach in a critical way, we have attempted to raise the profile of WP in a number of areas which address student experiences (ELLS, Disability, Induction, Admissions, Outreach, Student achievement and Advice centres). One of the main activities at present is to raise the issue of WP at all main meetings including Progression and Achievement, LTSL etc. It is hoped that the main output as well as a strategy document will also be to bring all key groups together to: consider the needs of WP groups, consider all processes and strategies for inclusion, identify key linchpins to these groups and services (eg. SAAs). Furthermore it is hoped that this process will enable a clarification of what WP means to Middlesex and also to self evaluate our own daily practices to cater for WP groups on a pragmatic level.

Key focus areas at present include:
1. Communication channels – horizontally and vertically across the whole institution.
2. Identifying and communicating across the organisation, the ultimate responsibility within Executive for WP
3. Clarify/identify people with responsibilities ownership. Put into place across university and school level
4. Champion across university /projects (in each School)
5. Establish wider working groups/stakeholders & approaches to review input and effect.

Possible: Actions
1. Tool kit support & guidance materials/activities on practical level/day to day
2. Produce self evaluation/audit grid to assist all stakeholders (lecturers, support staff etc)
3. Inclusive approach – life cycle of student to reflect in all approaches & documentation
4. Create awareness & impact on organisation culture (questioning in action research type approach) culture
5. Relook at previous support information and usefulness in light of changes (LF etc) eg Parent/partner guide
6. Identify/targeting/ promote Student Ambassadors as a source of Champions

Developing a socially inclusive university

Professor Liz Thomas

Appendix 16

Overview

What is a socially inclusive university?

What needs to change?

How can we implement change?

Middlesex context

"The mission and aim of Middlesex University is to be a global university committed to meeting the needs and ambitions of a culturally and internationally diverse range of students by providing challenging academic programmes underpinned by innovative research and scholarship and professional practice. Moreover a future significant goal is to champion a socially inclusive approach to participation in higher education."

What is a socially inclusive university?

Briefly discuss this question with a person near you. (2 minutes)

Student diversity…

Middlesex

25,000 students

75% are studying at undergraduate level

55% studying full time.

58% are women (with significant variation by discipline).

78.1% of full time students are from within the UK

5.9% of full time students are from the European Union

15.9% of full time students are international

52% of 'home' students are from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Institutional responsibility

'Higher education must accept that the implications of offering access to non-traditional students do not end, but rather begin, at the point of entry' (Bamber and Tett 2001, p.15)

Official definitions of WP

… helping more people from under-represented groups, particularly low socio-economic groups, to participate successfully in higher education. (DfES 2006)

… raise aspirations and educational attainment among people from under-represented communities to prepare them for higher education, ensure success on their programme of study, improve their employment prospects and open possibilities for postgraduate study, and give them opportunities to return to learning throughout their lives.
(HEFCE http://www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/)

Alternative approaches to WP

1. Academic approach: aspiration raising for the gifted and talented
2. Utilitarian approach: aspiration raising and academic preparation, "bolted-on" to existing provision
3. Transformative participation: valuing diversity and changing structures, cultures, decision making and knowledge production and transfer processes.
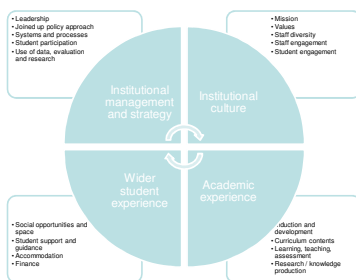
Jones and Thomas 2005

Transformative approach

…a transformative approach to access must stress the idea that HE should be changed to permit it to both gauge and meet the needs of under-represented groups. Rather than being predicated on deficit models of potential entrants and positioning students as lacking aspirations, information or academic preparation, transformation requires serious and far-reaching structural change, which is to be informed by under-represented groups… Furthermore, it perceives diversity as a definite strength. Nor is the focus upon creating change via short-term, marginal projects undertaken by a few committed practitioners.

Jones and Thomas, 2005, p619

Socially inclusive university

- Leadership
- Joined up policy approach
- Systems and processes
- Student participation
- Use of data, evaluation and research

- Mission
- Values
- Staff diversity
- Staff engagement
- Student engagement

Institutional management and strategy

Institutional culture

Wider student experience

Academic experience

- Social opportunities and space
- Student support and guidance
- Accommodation
- Finance

- Induction and development
- Curriculum contents
- Learning, teaching, assessment
- Research / knowledge production

What needs to change?

Action on Access Mainstreaming and sustaining WP programme

- Develop future institutional approach to WP at the strategic level to mainstream and embed.
- Involve institutional teams, including senior managers.
- 5 events and an institutional visit.
- Aim: to promote reflection and dialogue about institutional approach to mainstreaming WP.
- Output: reflective policy papers and resources.
- Outcomes: strategic developments.

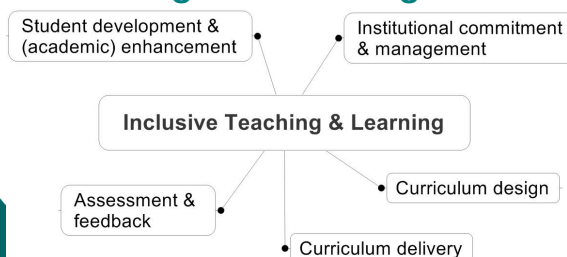## Mainstreaming and sustaining widening participation

Reflective checklist

1. Institution-wide understanding and ownership of WP
2. Visible commitment to WP which influences strategic decision making
3. Effective processes and structures to avoid reliance on committed individuals
4. Inclusive culture reflecting staff engagement across the institution/student lifecycle.

Mainstreaming and sustaining widening participation

5. Inclusive learning, teaching, assessment and curriculum approaches.
6. Integrated outreach and admission processes.
7. Use of data, monitoring, evaluation and research to improve practice and inform decision making.
8. Effective funding for widening participation.

Conditions for Inclusive Learning and Teaching

Student development & (academic) enhancement

Institutional commitment & management

Inclusive Teaching & Learning

Curriculum design

Assessment & feedback

Curriculum delivery

What needs to change at Middlesex University?

1. Briefly discuss this question with a person near you. You can refer to the Reflective Checklist if you find it helpful.
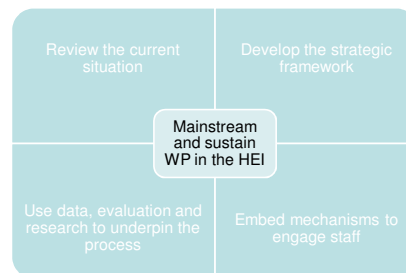
2. What would your priorities be?

(5 – 10 mins)

Suggested changes at Middlesex University

1. Establish and clarify understanding of the philosophy and practice of widening participation
2. Ensuring commitment to WP at all levels within the organisation
3. Improve communication about WP practice and issues
4. Involve all services and areas through out the student journey
5. Determine WP measures of success
6. Use data to evaluate impact of WP on target groups
7. Disseminate effective WP practices

Any comments?

How can we implement change?

Review the current situation

Develop the strategic framework

Mainstream and sustain WP in the HEI

Use data, evaluation and research to underpin the process

Embed mechanisms to engage staff

Action on Access, Thomas 2009

Case study: Russell Group1

Understanding the current situation: wider vision and definition of WP and student diversity.

Strategy development: revised and new strategic documents to comprise strands of a broader WP strategy (outreach strategy, retention and progression action framework, learning and teaching strategy, equality and diversity frameworks, gender equality, race equality, disability equality and fairness and diversity policy). All were consulted on and approved through the relevant management and governance routes.

Embedding mechanisms:
- Developmental dialogue across the institution based on institutional and reflective checklists to promote engagement.
- On-going action plan.
- Cross-institutional project group manages the work with leads from Outreach, retention and progression (academic and non academic) and student equality and diversity.
- Leadership from Pro-vice Chancellor and senior academic managers from faculties.

Data and evaluation:
- Assembled data set re WP and student diversity. Each faculty will have an annual data set for review and QA processes will ensure it informs decision making.
  External data used to benchmark performance against other similar HEIs and make case for WP.

Case study: New University 1

Institutional dialogue: one day event for heads of departments and senior managers informed much of the developmental work.

Understanding the current situation: Policy analysis, SWOT analysis and institutional research, including funding allocation and retention and withdrawal. Event explored understanding of WP and link with institutional mission.

Strategy development: Event identified staff perceptions about key drivers to shape WP policy and practice.

Detailed recommendations submitted to the Senior Management Team and University Executive.

Embedding mechanisms:
Event identified long list of factors that could most enable ownership of WP aims and objectives across the University, including payment of staff time and changes to HR policy. Subsequently more departments have been involved in WP outreach activity.
Full-time induction manager appointed to work with academic departments and embed pre- and post-induction

Data and evaluation:
Institutional research used to engage colleagues.
Recommendation to embed consistent use of management data and other indicators for target-setting, measuring and internal reporting on performance at institutional and Faculty level in relation to WP.

HE Academy: Embedding inclusive policy and practice

- To facilitate and support HEIs to develop and embed inclusive policies and/or practices.
- Institutional teams working together and with other HEIs.
- Four events, including a residential.
- Aim: to implement a change initiative.
- Outputs: institutional – varied; overall report (May and Bridger, forthcoming 2009).
- Outcomes: institutional change.

Creating change

To maximise impact and create sustainable inclusive policy and practice, participating HEIs found they needed to instigate changes at both:

► **Institutional level-** policy, structures, processes, environmental.
► **Individual level** - attitudes, behaviour and practice.

May 2009

Process for Managing Change
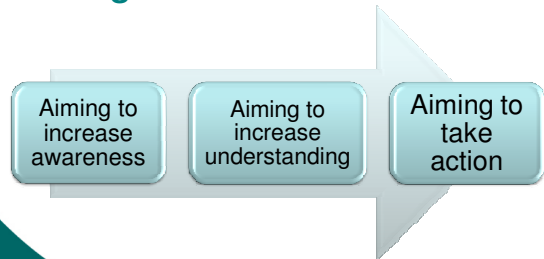
Institutional change

➢ Dealt with as a project management task.
➢ Defined scope, aims/objectives, target areas/ stakeholders, timescales, impact.

Individual change

➢ Process of winning 'hearts and minds'.
➢ More challenging to plan for and measure.
➢ Requires a strategic, ongoing process; an embedded approach and acknowledgement that responsibility is shared.

May 2009

Supporting individual level change

| Aiming to increase awareness | Aiming to increase understanding | Aiming to take action |

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Methods of Achieving Change

Institutional Level

- Embed into policies, systems and processes.
- Strategy review or development.
- Link into management processes (e.g. quality, performance, validation).
- 'Piggybacking' onto existing HEI developments/change.
- Encourage partnership or inter-departmental working.

Individual Level

- Continuing staff development (e.g. event, debate, training, self-assessment).
- Identify and work with champions/advocates.
- Provide materials and resources (e.g. guidance, website).
- Advisory /working groups.
- Research.

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Levers for change

1. Operate at a range of levels (institution, department and individual).
2. Identify where formal and informal *power* lies at different levels.
3. Link change to dominant discourses
   - Policy levers: institutional mission, WPSA, Equality and Diversity legislation, QAA.
   - Institutional concerns: recruitment, retention, satisfaction (NSS), international students, cost (cheaper to retain than recruit new students)
4. Couch changes in the language of the powerful.
5. Build and tailor an evidence base.
6. Identify and engage advocates and supporters.

Conclusions and implications for creating a socially inclusive uni

Achievements

Commitment to being a socially inclusive university

Diverse student cohort

Review of the current situation and identification of priorities

Further dialogue to develop thinking

Future actions

Involve more colleagues from across the university

Engage students in the process

Refine and agree priorities

Identify approaches to change

Develop and implement an action plan

Thank you for listening and participating

Please feel free to contact me: liz.thomas@edgehill.ac.uk

6

The challenge of diversity: teaching, support and student learning.
National University of Ireland, Galway

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Title:

Themes:
-   The support needs of academic staff in relation to learning teaching and assessment in the context of an increasingly diverse student body
-   The development of diverse and discipline-specific methods to support the retention and successful participation of non traditional learners.

Abstract:

The increased participation in outreach work (i.e. AimHigher and Pathfinder projects) to ever more diverse groups has highlighted the necessity to explore the next stage of the student life cycle and this may have bearing on the students continued success (lifelong learning) during and following university. Preliminary data from a study of lecturers perceptions of widening participation and how this impacts upon their teaching practices and philosophy indicates a diverse of understanding of the issues and the support required by an increasingly varied student body. Several themes are emerging namely the question of dissonance between teaching and learning styles and also the perception of what constitutes student success. Unsurprisingly, those lecturers who have been actively involved in outreach widening participation work are more aware of the needs of diverse students and of the learning environments they may have come from. Moreover, these have the power to influence student satisfaction and ultimately success.   Exemplars from professional disciplines highlight the strategies and approaches which have been developed to support diverse student bodies however these also highlight challenges namely type of and level of resources needed.

This paper examines two main themes: teaching and learning dissonance and perceptions of student success, thus challenging the accepted notion of pedagogy within higher education. In addition it also presents exemplars of professional teaching practice which support the student through out the learning journey and highlights the implications of student retention and successful participation.

Academic Identities Conference.
University of Strathclyde June 2010.

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Title: Widening participation as a challenge to academic identity

Keywords: pedagogical challenges**,** academic identity, teaching and capability

Themes: Academic Identity

Abstract:

Widening participation (WP) to higher education is an area of political, social and economic importance for the 21st century and is likely to persist. The massification of higher education has had an impact in all universities but the increased level of diversity still remains and is most profound within the post 1992 institutions. Alongside increased widening of access to higher education of students from non-traditional backgrounds comes increasing demands to support the diverse student body with finite resources. This raises questions about the nature of higher education and challenges the perceptions of identity for both academics and students alike. In a research study exploring lecturers perceptions of widening participation and the impact of this on their teaching practices it appears that not only is there a diverse understanding of the issues but it has challenges academics beliefs of their own professional academic identity. Several early themes are emerging namely the negative challenges posed by WP eroding traditional beliefs of academic identity (teacher, scholar and researcher) to a positive reinforcement of the transformative capacity of academics. Academic staff cite pragmatic issues related to WP which create tension such as expansion of work responsibilities, increasing demands from less able students, perceptions of decreasing standards and increasing student support needs and the need to provide more with diminishing resources as well as the remedial responsibilities towards students being imposed on academic staff. Academics with a more favourable view of WP tended to be more positive in their own position viewing WP as building student capability and being transformative. Furthermore these individual academics felt teaching was a particular priority for them and diversity challenged them positivity but this perception was not always shared in their own departments and professions and as such they could feel isolated.

This paper focuses on the issue of student diversity and widening participation and examines two main themes: academic identity in relation to increasing diverse student groups and how perceptions of WP can unify or isolate individuals in communities of practice.

References:

Fung. D. 2006 <u>Telling tales: a fresh look at student experience and learning in higher education</u> Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, University of Warwick, 6-9 September

Powdthavee, N., & Vignoles, A. F. (2007). *Succeeding in Higher Education: a Widening Participation Issue* : Research funded by the ESRC Teaching and Learning Research Programme

Stratta, E., & MacDonald, C. (2001). From Access to Widening Participation: Responses to the Changing Population in Higher Education in the UK *Journal of Further and Higher Education 25* (2), 249-258.

Universities UK . (2005). *From the Margins to the Mainstream: Embedding Widening Participation in Higher Education.* Paper presented at the Standing Conference of Principals of Colleges and Institutes of Higher Education, London

Parker, S., Naylor, P., & Warmington, P. (2005). Widening Participation in Higher Education: What Can We Learn from the Ideologies and Practices of Committed Practitioners? *Journal of Access Policy and Practice, 2* (2), 140-160.

Learning and teaching are inseparable. Individuals bring a huge variety of skills, needs, and interests to learning. We have a wide range of students with differing needs and experiences all of which impacts on learning. This guidance document aims to stimulate your reflection of your own diversity and practice and what impacts student learning experiences. This checklist does not offer solutions to teaching a subject or profession but rather an approach to teaching in a way which helps all students to learn or become experts in learning to achieve the module and programme aims. This is a support and guide to assist you to reflect on and approach teaching in an inclusive way – take from it as much or a little as you wish.

This document has been produced with reference to a number of documents:
- Middlesex University Learning Teaching and Assessment Strategy
- School of Health & Social Sciences Learning Teaching and Assessment Strategy and Action Plan
- Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2009)
- The UK Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education (HEA, 2006).

1. Teaching in context.

	Yes/No	*Evidence or Action*
Are students aware of the aims, learning objectives, syllabus and assessment of the module/programme?		
Do students know how the module/programme connects together all the elements mentioned above?		
Do students know how the module/programme relates to their profession or future career?		
Do students have written guidance on where to go to seek help with learning or assessment for your module/programme?		
Are the students aware of the key members of your teaching team and what their specific roles are?		

2. Preparation for teaching.

	Yes/No	*Evidence or Action*
Do you know the extent of the diversity of my student group?		
Have you re-evaluated curriculum/module material to link to a diverse student audience?		
How relevant is your teaching resources to the lived experiences of my students?		
Have you analysed your teaching and the applicability to students?		
Have you undertaken peer review and asked for feedback on perceived inclusive or exclusive approaches?		
Do you try to learn student names or even use their names in class activities to promote a sense of them as 'individuals'?		

3. Teaching methods.

	Yes/No	Evidence or Action
Approaching the 'what' of learning.		
Do you use a range of sensory approaches (visual, auditory and kinaesthetic) to the lesson/module?		
Do learners have the option of sensory methods? Can they be tailored to their needs (i.e. font or colour)?		
Can learners clarify terminology or symbols used in the lesson?		
Can learners with English as a second language access keys/glossaries or means to clarify language and text used? E.g. illustrations or multimedia to enhance meanings.		
Does the lesson link to prior knowledge and is this evident to ALL learners (ie how is this addressed e.g. advance organisers, bridging concepts)		
Do learners have opportunities to process information and navigate through it (i.e. link concepts, solve problems etc)		
Do you build in opportunities to build knowledge base and memory transfer i.e. quizzes, concept building, revisit key ideas etc).		
Approaching the 'how' of learning.		
Can learners express what they learn in different ways i.e presentation, video or written?		
Can learners access different support to demonstrate learning ie. Feedback, mentors, tutorials, peer learning		
Do you provide the option of assistive technology (overlays, font change etc) if needed?		
Is the formative or practice assignment/projects linked to summative or professional skills or practice to build learning?		
Is feedback built in regularly and varied to suit all sensory styles of learning?		
Is feedback designed to feed-forward (to improve work/learning)?		
Are students provided with opportunities to take control of their learning and plan their own goals and outputs (i.e own deadlines, negotiate formative deadlines/goals, monitor own progress etc).		
Approaching the 'why' of learning.		
Do you build in options for learners to optimise their connection with, value and relevance of material (e.g. sensitivity to race, culture social or age differences, active participation, self reflection and personal response)?		
Is the classroom a safe supportive environment? Have you considered threats and distractions and acted on these (i.e. transition to university, didactic		

approach, passive learning processes, language challenges etc)?		
Is learning 'scaffolded' to promote self regulations and motivation to learn? Can students recognise their own learning and see their own progress towards a larger module/course goal?		

4. Evaluation of teaching.

	Yes/No	*Evidence or Action*
Do you ask students to evaluate your teaching?		
Do you ask students to evaluate their own learning?		
Do you seek peer evaluation of your teaching regularly?		
Do you seek ideas for teaching and improving student learning?		

5. Action Plan:

Key areas identified:	Key actions to address these areas:	How will I evaluate these: