Embedding widening participation and promoting student diversity

What can be learned from a business case approach?

Jenny Shaw
Kevin Brain
Kath Bridger
Judith Foreman
Ivan Reid

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Executive Summary

This report provides the findings from a Higher Education Academy commissioned research project into the drivers, benefits and costs of embedding widening participation (WP) and student diversity that might be used as elements of a business case approach. The funding councils and the Academy, have been working with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to establish WP as a key theme in strategic and corporate policies and to embed WP and student diversity in organisational practices. This focus on embedding WP and student diversity is, however, taking place in the context of fewer external funding policy levers to stimulate and promote change. Thus the institutional-level 'business case' argument resting on internal drivers for change assumes a greater importance.

The study encompassed both an exploration and analysis of the extant literature and new research evidence in order to provide examples of how WP and diversity policy and practice was constructed, understood and implemented by different internal HEI stakeholders. Primary research was carried out using a case study methodology based on a theoretical sampling of eight HEIs across the UK representing the diversity of institutions within the sector.

The concept of a business case for diversity is built on recognising a distinction between an externally driven 'equal opportunities paradigm' and a 'diversity paradigm' that recognises business benefits as well as moral and ethical arguments. However much of the literature is concerned with diversity among staff within an organisation rather than customers, thus there was no opportunity for a simple transfer of practice from other sectors to HE. Many HEIs do use the language of 'diversity' in their employee policies, some linking this to a business case for change. However, the focus of this research – the business benefits to be derived from learner (customer) diversity – is not well developed either in discourse or practice.

A number of potential benefits to HEIs of widening participation and increasing the diversity of the student body were identified from the literature review and are summarised in the table below:

Summary of drivers for and benefit of WP and student diversity drawn from literature review

Driver	Potential benefits
Increasing student numbers	Financial viability of individual courses or whole institution
Tapping the pool of talent	Attracting a larger pool of highly qualified/talented applicants – enhancement to reputation and maintenance of high academic standards
Improving teaching and learning	Improved learning outcomes for all students Improved social experience for all students
Providing access to funding streams	Additional support for institutional strategic aims or to ensure financial viability
Generating new roles and markets	Reduced reliance on Funding Council grants
Complying with anti-discrimination and equality legislation	Avoidance of litigation
Corporate social responsibility	Demonstrated commitment to institutional mission and value statements

However, it was clear that these were not experienced as equally important by HEIs. Drawing on some of the WP literature and considering this alongside literature on diversity, three different WP paradigms emerged:

Academic: which represents a model of assimilation – finding the 'brightest and best', and supporting potential entrants to acquire the characteristics (especially academic preparedness and entry qualifications) of the existing student body.

Differential provision: which is broadly based on putting on alternative types or modes of provision for under-represented groups, sometimes in different locations. This may increase the overall diversity of the student body, but some parts of the institution will remain unaffected.

Transformative: in which mainstream provision and services is examined and changed where necessary in order to support the success of a diverse range of students. Diversity and difference are viewed positively as assets.

The three paradigms are loosely linked to market position, but an HEI may encompass more than one. The dominant paradigm, along with market position and other contextual factors, significantly affect the importance attached to different drivers for and benefits of WP and student diversity. This is important in attempting to articulate a business case, as a business case can be made from within each paradigm, though the results are likely to differ.

The primary research underlined the importance of contextual factors such as location, mission, history, market position and institutional self-identity in how WP and diversity were approached at organisational level. As in most areas of social and educational practice, 'recipe knowledge' cannot be assumed and practice cannot simply be transferred from one context to another uncritically.

There is no agreed definition of WP and this was apparent from the primary research. The definitions of WP held by research participants differed in two ways:

● between a focus on pre-admissions and admissions and a focus on the whole of the student lifecycle
● between a definition that rested on specific targeted groups and one that did not target but sought to be inclusive more generally.

WP can be understood simultaneously as an outcome, a process, or a type of student. There was also variation in how the term 'diversity' was understood, and it was often linked to issues of ethnicity.

Institutional structures were found to have a bearing on the ability to embed WP and to embrace student diversity. The way in which WP was managed had the potential to cause structural barriers to embedding. The extent to which WP and diversity was championed at the most senior level had an impact on how they were perceived and valued within the institution, and therefore how embedded they were in the minds of the staff. However 'embedding' was found to be a problematic term as definitions of embedding varied in the extent to which WP and student diversity were seen to be relevant to all or just some parts of the institution's operations. For example, some research participants appeared to view embedding of WP only in terms of the recruitment and admissions processes.

As anticipated, the rationales put forward for engaging with WP and student diversity differed between institutions, as did the benefits that were thought to result. However some broad categories emerged and can be summarised as per the table below. This builds on the drivers and benefits derived from the literature review.

Summary of drivers for and benefits of WP and student diversity drawn from the primary research

Driver	Potential benefits
Social justice – 'doing the right thing'	Providing equal opportunities Better 'social mix'; breaks down barriers.
Corporate responsibility	Contributing to social and economic development Enhanced reputation with stakeholders Become identified as leader in WP and diversity (enhanced reputation)
Response to government policy and legislation	Meet Office for Fair Access (OFFA) Access Agreement targets Compliance with requirements of anti-discrimination and equality legislation
Belief that a diverse student population enriches learning experience	Enriched social, learning and teaching experience for students and staff Add to knowledge base
Opportunity for recruiting students: recruitment	Sustain/expand student numbers Meet professional body targets for WP and diversity
Opportunity for recruiting students: tapping the pool of talent	Maximise opportunities; maintain high academic standards Survival of departments Alignment with professional bodies
Opportunities for business development	New products and diversification of business; new income streams Diversification of income New student markets New partnerships

Participants across all the case study HEIs recognised the barriers and issues of cost faced in trying to embed WP and diversity throughout an institution. At all case study HEIs, costs expressed as 'risk' emerged strongly as a theme, highlighting incidences in which extending or embedding WP had had a negative impact on the institution. Participants tended to refer to costs in very broad terms rather than using the language of a cost-benefit analysis, and there was a feeling that costs, along with the funding to support these costs, are not easily identified within an institution.

Cost was identified as a potential barrier in respect to providing appropriate student support in terms of learning and teaching. Further, low retention

was experienced by two of the case study HEIs which regarded themselves as 'WP institutions', and the financial impacts were seen as substantial. Costs were also identified in relation to the development of new provision, or modification of existing provision, better to serve a 'WP market'.

Concern about a threat to academic standards emerged as a potential risk associated with embedding WP and student diversity. Concerns were also expressed that engagement in WP activity makes specific demands on resources that could adversely affect other elements of core business such as research, or that there would be an adverse effect on the existing student body.

There were notable 'stakeholder' differences in the way WP and student diversity were perceived. For example, senior managers tended to take more of a broad, society-level view whereas academic staff were more concerned with teaching, learning and assessment implications, both positive and negative. The students and representatives that were interviewed expressed two main views about WP and diversity. On the one hand they tended to be passionately concerned about diversity, while on the other hand they hinted at concern about the effect that a diverse mix of students might have on the academic student experience.

It was found that among the case study HEIs market position had a strong bearing on how WP and diversity were perceived in terms of benefits and drivers, and there was some correlation between market position and the paradigm adopted in relation to WP, as had been suggested by the literature review.

A number of cross-cutting themes emerged from the research:

- the understanding of the term 'diversity' was patchy and often confined to issues of ethnic diversity
- widening participation is a problematic term and was being used in different ways
- the evidence for a link between student diversity and positive teaching and learning outcomes is still limited and remains under-researched
- the HE sector is partially marketised and the resultant stratification may perpetuate the different 'WP paradigms' that limit the scope for promoting student diversity right across the sector
- HE in FE was outside of the scope of this study, but is likely to provide some important evidence and practice examples, especially through HE-FE partnerships.

Overall, there was a lack of understanding of the concept of a 'business case' for WP and student diversity among the case study HEIs. At the same

time the findings suggest that a viable and useful business case could be constructed. Given the highly contingent nature of the drivers for WP and student diversity and how they are perceived and acted upon throughout the sector, together with the wide diversity of practice, approach and structure within the sector, a 'one size fits all' business case model would not be appropriate. Instead, a series of key strategic questions is posed in Section 5, together with 'stakeholder tools' to guide institutions and their staff through the process of gathering evidence towards the development of their own business case for WP and student diversity. These are likely to be developed further through the continued work of the Academy.

About the authors

Jenny Shaw is Director of Yorkshire and the Humber East Lifelong Learning Network, based at the University of Hull, and has previously worked as Aimhigher Co-ordinator for North Yorkshire and Director of Middlesex University Professional CPD Unit. She is the author of Guide to Bidding and co-author of Guide to Managing Grant Funded Projects (Middlesex University Press), though more recent writing has focused on widening participation and HE policy. She originally studied Mathematics and Anthropology at the University of Durham.

Kevin Brain is currently a part time Senior Lecturer at Trinity and All Saints College, Leeds and part time freelance consultant/researcher. He has formerly been a research fellow at the Universities of Bradford, Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan. His research and writing focuses on policy evaluation, social exclusion and education.

Kath Bridger is currently a freelance consultant. She has previously worked as the Director of Access and Widening Participation at the University of Bradford and Regional Manager for Aimhigher in Yorkshire and Humber. She has worked extensively as a consultant across the public, private and voluntary sectors supporting organisations to develop inclusive policy and business practice. This has included review and evaluation of equality and diversity policy and practice, and for some clients developing more inclusive approaches to learning and access to learning.

Judith Foreman is Director of Higher Education at Wakefield College. After completing research for a PhD, followed by two years teaching at the University of Bath, her career has been mostly teaching and managing higher education in the further education sector. She left teaching in 2005 to become part of the management team of the Higher York Lifelong Learning Network before joining Wakefield College. As a social scientist, Judith has undertaken consultancy and published on gender inequality in education and in the private sector, organisational analysis, managing organisational change, and teaching and learning in business and management education. She has extensive experience of external examining and has worked for the QAAHE as a reviewer for many years.

Ivan Reid is Professor of Sociology of Education at the University of Bradford. Trained as a secondary school teacher, his career has been mostly in teacher education, though he sees himself as a social scientist rather than an educator. He has published extensively on British social inequalities and educational opportunity, the sociology of education, teacher education and

conducted evaluations of education policy initiatives. He has had consultancy and external examining experience in some ten countries overseas, is Vice President of ICET, and the Executive Editor of Research in Education and a founder Executive Editor of British Journal of Sociology of Education.

Steering group membership

Sue Hatt* – Aimhigher Southwest (Chair)
Helen May – Higher Education Academy
Jane Johns – Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)
Linda McLeod – Scottish Funding Council (SFC)
Kevin Whitston – Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)
John Storan – Action on Access
Kath Bridger – Bradford Consortium/University of Bradford
Jenny Shaw – Bradford Consortium/York St John University
Sofijia Opacic – National Union of Students (NUS)
Wilma Fee – Association of University Administrators (AUA/DELNI)
Erica Halvorsen – Equality Challenge Unit (ECU)

Thanks also go to Yvonne Dickinson

*Also sitting in capacity as secondee to the Higher Education Academy

Acknowledgements

1. Introduction and rationale

1.1 The research remit

This report provides the findings from a Higher Education Academy commissioned research project examining the business case for embedding widening participation and promoting greater student diversity. Specifically the study was commissioned to assist the Academy and the sector as a whole gain a better understanding of the benefits to different stakeholders within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) of embracing greater student diversity and embedding widening participation (WP) and to balance this with an understanding of the costs and barriers. Funding for the project of £40k ran from July 2006 until February 2007. It was required to be a UK-wide project covering the range of HEIs that incorporated both secondary and primary (qualitative) research, with the purpose of building upon rather than replicating previous research conducted across the HE sector

The outcome of the study was to be a research report that would, potentially, include a model of 'business' benefits to the higher education (HE) sector of embedding WP and embracing a greater student diversity.

1.2 Rationale

Widening Participation in higher education is a key policy commitment of the UK Government. While there has been a long standing concern to widen access/participation in HE, it is only since the election of the New Labour government in 1997 that WP has become a well established policy discourse, with WP moving from 'the margins to the mainstream'. Currently WP is one of the core strategic aims of the funding councils and investment in widening participation is significant. While there are differences in policy and practice across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland there are common elements to the current WP policy. As noted in the report *From the Margins to the Mainstream*, these include:

> *an emphasis on partnership and collaboration between higher education institutions and other sectors (especially in England, Wales and Scotland), payments to institutions to support the retention of students from under-represented groups, and recognition of the need to improve vocational routes into and through higher education* (Thomas et al, 2005:10)

The funding councils and the Academy have been working with HEIs to establish WP as a key theme in strategic and corporate policies and to embed WP and student diversity in organisational practices. The recent review of WP practice by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) (2006a) acknowledges what it sees as the progress made over the past five years in winning the consent and support of English HEIs to WP. It also identifies the need to find ways to develop and nurture the commitment that has begun to take shape. In order to do this HEFCE sees 'cultural change and the organisation, management, and leadership changes that go with it' (HEFCE, 2006a:82) as critical. However the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) has noted that:

> *Institutions have to behave rationally within their mission, their market and finances. These determine the extent to which institutions have a 'business case' to contribute to widening participation.* (SFEFC/SHEFC, 2004:25)

The focus on embedding WP and student diversity is, however, taking place in the context of fewer external funding policy levers to stimulate and promote change. HEIs are no longer required to produce WP strategies and action plans as a condition of their grant. The requirement that HEIs in England draw up Access Agreements to support and safeguard fair access in the context of rising tuition fees is not accompanied by penalties for those institutions which do not meet their own targets. In addition, in England and Wales funding for WP is now recurrent, linked to the proportion of 'WP students' attending the institution, and is provided as part of the institution's block grant. As HEFCE states in its review of widening participation the consequence of this is that 'the institution is free to allocate that funding largely as it sees fit' (HEFCE, 2006a:17), though HEFCW states that it 'expects the premium payment to be used to support the activity for which it has been awarded' (HEFCW, 2005a:4).

Notwithstanding changes to funding arrangements HEIs are, of course, required to comply with the requirements of anti-discrimination and equality legislation designed to protect and uphold the rights of social groups, including the right to gain access to education. The legislation now includes a duty to be proactive in promoting positive attitudes to equality. However, legislating to change beliefs and attitudes is problematic and finding ways to maintain the momentum of change and achieve the cultural and systemic changes needed to move WP and student diversity 'from the margins to the mainstream' is challenging.

To make matters more complex, while Government policy promotes WP and diversity across the sector, and collaboration to achieve this, it also promotes greater institutional variation and competition for students. It could be argued that this creates barriers to change.

The current government and the funding councils have over many years promoted the macroeconomic and social benefits of WP in terms of improved human capital. In its Strategic Plan 2003-2008, for example, HEFCE stated:

> *Widening access and improving participation in higher education are a crucial part of our mission. Participation in HE will equip our citizens to operate productively within the global knowledge economy.* (HEFCE, 2003:11)

A strong case for individuals investing in their education has also been promoted, demonstrating the additional earnings, health and wellbeing that graduates enjoy compared to those who do not go on to higher education. However, little attempt has yet been made to establish the benefits for individual HEIs that may result through engaging in WP activities. If such a case were to be demonstrated it could be argued this may provide a powerful lever for change in the search for ways to embed WP in HEIs' policy and practices.

'Business case' arguments have become increasingly dominant in attempts to persuade organisations in the private and not for profit sectors to be proactive in relation to tackling employment disadvantages and develop a positive approach to supporting and valuing diversity of employees and customers. Such arguments identify the benefits to organisations of tackling inequalities and changing organisational practices to support diversity.

It may be that in such a context understanding the costs and benefits to individual HEIs of embedding WP and promoting greater student diversity will be critical to the future development of policy. In short, developing a business case may be a means of supporting HEIs in engaging in the cultural change required to achieve Government aims for WP and, in part, to achieve their own legislative requirements under the Equality Act 2006.

This study, therefore, draws together existing evidence on the drivers for – and benefits of – WP and student diversity, balanced against evidence of the costs and barriers that might be involved. It explores the perception of these issues among staff in eight case study institutions, seeking additional evidence that would support the development of a business case model and a policy language for WP and student diversity across the sector.

2. Methodology

2.1 Overview

The research commissioned and funded by the Academy was intended to identify the drivers, benefits and costs of WP and student diversity that form the elements of a business case approach to WP and diversity.

The research sought to explore:

- the rationale and drivers for HEIs engaging in WP and student diversity
- the key stakeholders involved in developing, promoting and implementing WP and diversity policy and practice
- the models underpinning WP and diversity practice and the critiques, strengths and weaknesses of these
- the extent to which WP diversity practice was embedded in policy and practice across the student lifecycle, from outreach work, through to transition on graduation
- the ways in which the costs and benefits of WP and diversity were understood, evidenced and articulated by different HEI stakeholders
- the costs and benefits of WP and diversity to the HEI, as perceived by different stakeholders.

The broad focus of the research required both an exploration and analysis of the extant literature and new research evidence in order to provide examples of how WP and diversity policy and practice was constructed, understood and implemented by different internal HEI stakeholders. This was particularly important because the literature in this area has tended not to focus on the specific benefits to HEIs of embedding WP or diversity practice, nor on exploring specific stakeholder perspectives.

The secondary and primary research conducted, consisted of:

- a 'light touch' literature review, which drew on both published and 'grey' literature
- in-depth case studies of eight HEIs, which drew on documentary analysis of the case study institutions' policy and strategy documents and in-depth interviews conducted with key stakeholders. This aspect was intended to build on the existing research literature.

It was decided by the team at a very early stage that a quantitative/survey methodology would not meet the research remit. As Cohen et al point out, case studies 'can penetrate situations in ways that are not always susceptible

to numerical analysis' (Cohen et al, 2007:253). A case study approach was selected as the appropriate method to achieve an understanding of complex issues and to enable contextual analysis. Case study research method has been defined as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context (Yin, 1984:23). The present research sought to gain in-depth knowledge of the WP and diversity policy and practice of a range of HEIs, operatiing in different national, regional and local contexts. A particular focus of the case studies was on exploring and illuminating stakeholder perspectives. Case studies have been identified as a useful method for conducting holistic, in-depth investigation that provides multiple perspectives (Feagin, Orum & Sjoberg, 1991). Furthermore case studies can 'develop a theory which can help researchers to understand other similar cases, phenomena or situations' (Robson, 2002:183). A key focus of this approach was to generate *understanding* that would help to support future policy interventions across the sector, including professional and organisational development. Hence case study methodology commended itself as the most appropriate approach with which to achieve the remit of the research, and this was fully supported by the Steering Group.

A detailed account of how each strand of the research was designed, conducted and analysed is presented below. The methodology section concludes with a reflection on the limitations of the research.

2.2 Literature review

The literature review had two purposes. First to provide an overview of what was already known, or could be inferred from the extant literature, in relation to:

- the principles of building a business case for diversity
- the history and development of business case arguments and whether or not such arguments were used in the HE sector
- the stakeholders involved in developing and implementing policies aimed at promoting student diversity, and the stakeholders affected by these policies (where this differs)
- the WP and diversity policy context across the UK
- approaches to WP and diversity and the assumptions which underpin different approaches
- the rationales and drivers identified as underpinning WP and diversity policy and practice
- evidence of the costs and benefits for HEIs of embedding WP and diversity in policy and practice
- areas in which a business case for WP and diversity might usefully be

developed by institutions, and approaches that are likely to be of interest to different stakeholder groups.

Each of these themes could be the sole subject of a literature review. Hence, the review could provide only an overview and indicative analysis. The approach adopted was to filter the literature search findings into the following analytical sections for the report:

- origins of the business case argument and its application to the HE context. This was considered important by the research team because the research brief (and the accepted proposal) was, in part, aimed at developing a business case model. It is difficult to identify which policies, practices and outcomes might underpin a business case for WP and diversity unless it is known what a business case is and whether or not such a case is easily applicable to the HE context
- HE sector context – this included an overview of WP and diversity policy, rationales for the policy; the wider economic and political context in which HE institutions operate, and models of WP policy and practice
- key themes that might underpin a business case argument – including identifying rationales and drivers for engaging in WP and diversity and the potential benefits and costs of WP and diversity practice.

The second purpose of the literature review was to help inform the design of the case study research and analysis. In particular, the literature review was found to be especially useful in identifying:

- the themes that might underpin a business case argument
- the benefits and costs of particular aspects of WP and diversity
- the kinds of evidence used (or not used) for assessing costs and benefits of WP and diversity
- issues around the impact of WP and diversity policy and practice on core HEI activities such as: recruitment and retention, teaching and learning, income generation, new course development and new roles for HEIs.

These themes were explored in the in-depth interviews and used to structure the analysis of case study institutions' policy and strategy documents.

2.2.1 The conduct of the literature search

Articles, reports and policy documents on WP and student diversity published in the past 10 years were searched, with a specific focus in constructing search terms on:

- rationales and drivers
- policy approaches and models

- mainstreaming/embedding
- costs and benefits
- business case arguments.

Indicative sources used in the literature review were:

- educational and social science databases (e.g the *British Education Index, Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts, Academic Search Elite, Swetswise* and *Ingenta*)
- website publications of key bodies, for examples: the Academy; the Higher Education Funding Councils for England and Wales, Scottish Funding Council and Department of Education and Learning Northern Ireland; Universities UK; Action on Access and the Department for Education and Skills
- an Endnote database of over 1,200 articles and reports on widening participation, compiled for the Higher Education Funding Council for England as part of an earlier study conducted by Gorard et al (2006).

The literature review was regularly revisited during the research to enable the case study findings to feed back into the review. However the time and resource constraints of the research placed considerable limits on the breadth and depth of the search and analysis conducted.

2.2.2 Analysis of 40 HEI website documents

In addition to the literature search, a content analysis of 40 HEIs' publicly available corporate strategies/plans, widening participation, teaching and learning and equalities policies was conducted. Part of the rationale for this was to assist in the selection process for case study institutions (see 2.3.2 below), but it had a secondary purpose in allowing the team to 'orient' themselves in terms of current policy and practice within the HE sector. As a process, therefore, it was invaluable and provided many key insights that informed later decisions about the research process, such as the importance of market position on WP and diversity approaches.

The analysis of available policy and strategy documents focused on:

- whether or not WP and diversity were identified as key strategic aims of the HEI
- the HEI's overall approach towards diversity, particularly student diversity
- whether or not an explicit link was made between WP and student diversity
- whether or not WP and matters of diversity was linked to, or embedded in, key policy documents such as teaching and learning strategies
- what, if any, rationale was offered to justify why WP and increased

student diversity was an important strategic aim of the HEI.

A basic proforma was designed for coding the content analysis along the above themes and for analysing the results. The content analysis was carried out by two members of the research team and reviewed by the research team to check both for consistency in coding and to secure inter-rater reliability.

Included in the website analysis were HEIs from:

- Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland
- the range of institutional types in the HE sector: e.g. Russell Group institutions, 1994 Group institutions, Post 92 universities and SCOP Colleges and newly created universities
- rural and urban settings.

The website documentary analysis was intended mainly to aid preparation for the case studies, by developing the research team's understanding of how WP and diversity were presented and justified in policy and strategy documents. Hence it does not figure here as a distinct section in the presentation of findings.

However, the analysis did support two of the arguments presented in the literature review:

- WP and student diversity have become common in policy discourse across the HE sector
- the justification for WP and student diversity is either taken as self-evident, or presented at the level of benefits to society, region and locality rather than the HEI.

2.3 The case studies

2.3.1 Case study overview

The primary research consisted of eight HEI case studies across the UK. The participating institutions each volunteered to take part. The case study institutions were provided with details of:

- the research brief and proposal
- the research funder
- the rationale for the research
- the intended outcomes of the research
- the background and experience of the research team.

For each case study HEI, an initial contact was established with the most senior

person in the institution with responsibility for WP and student diversity. In practice this was either a Pro-Vice Chancellor (with responsibility for learning and teaching) or a Head/Director of WP. This person acted as a key informant (and possibly gatekeeper) for the research team, helping to:

- identify, source and collate key policy and strategy documents
- identify and select stakeholder groups
- identify interviewees
- organise interview timetables and venues.

Each case study HEI was visited for between 1 and 3 days, depending on how interview timetables had been scheduled. The case study field research involved:

- site visits
- secondary source analysis of HEI strategy and policy documents. All HEIs provided corporate strategies/plans; institutional profiles (including data on student characteristics); teaching and learning/ learning support policies. These documents formed a common core of the documentary analysis strand of the case studies. Additionally, some institutions proved separate WP policy documents and student feedback/survey data.
- semi-structured, in-depth interviews, lasting between 1-2 hours, with representatives of key stakeholder groups, namely:
  - senior and corporate management
  - marketing and communications
  - admissions
  - academic
  - WP and outreach,
  - business and community, and research
  - student support
  - students and student representatives.

The case studies were conducted by the five core members of the research team, together with three additional fieldworkers (all of whom had social science research experience). The initial analysis of each case study, alongside the raw data, was shared among the core research team. A day was spent by the team discussing and reanalysing the case studies' findings to ensure commonality.

2.3.2 Case study selection

There are 166 HEIs in the UK (including the Open University) of which 130 are in England, 20 in Scotland, 12 in Wales and 4 in Northern Ireland. From this group 8 were selected as case study institutions. This selection was by the process of theoretical, not representative, sampling. Theoretical

sampling (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) is the standard process by which cases are selected for this type of research – cases are selected because they allow exploration of key research themes.

For this study, the research team had two main theoretical sampling criteria:

- case study institutions were to be selected that could be considered successful in WP and student diversity when judged in relation to their success in achieving Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) WP and student diversity performance indicators. The research team set a benchmark of being in the top 50%
- once this group had been identified, case study institutions were selected that represented the diversity of national, regional and local contexts and the range of types of HEIs.

The second criterion stemmed from the emphasis in the research brief that the case studies should reflect:

- the differing national contexts of Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland
- the diversity of the institutional types in the HE sector
- the London/provinces/regional divide
- rural and urban settings.

This was to ensure the relevance of the findings to the broadest range of institutions across the sector, taking into account the diversity that exists within the sector.

The decision to select, initially, the top 50% of HEIs (based on HESA WP&D performance indicators) was based on the rationale that such institutions were more likely to:

- be willing to discuss WP and diversity issues because of their relative position of strength in these areas
- have strong commitment to WP and diversity
- be successful in embedding WP and diversity
- provide the best settings for identifying benefits of WP and diversity, including critical success factors that could be shared across the sector.

HEIs were identified, ranked and short listed using HESA indicators and reviewed according to country and institutional type. One HEI was added because the literature review highlighted it as being a leader in the field of managing and articulating student diversity. A check was made to ensure that each national group and institutional type was represented on the short list, and that each included examples of rural and urban HEIs, and HEIs in the regions of England (possible because of the greater numbers of English HEIs).

From this basis a short list of 16 HEIs was compiled – eight from England, four from Scotland, two from Northern Ireland and two from Wales. The intention was to select the first eight institutions on the list and have eight as reserves in case first choice institutions could not take part. Because of the short timescale for the research two of the first eight institutions could not take part and were replaced. In the first case this was by another institution on the shortlist. In the second case an institution not on the shortlist was selected because it had a similar profile to the institution that had dropped out. This institution met the criteria outlined above, and the opinion of the Steering Group was sought about its suitability for inclusion.

Brief profiles of the eight institutions included in the research are presented in Table 2.1. These profiles are brief and general because confidentiality was guaranteed to participating HEIs – necessary both as a standard ethical practice and in ensuring that interviewees felt safe to talk freely and openly. However further information about each institution is presented in Section 4 in relation to the discussion of findings.

Table 2.1: The case study institutions

Institution A	A post-1992 university in England that is relatively high, and rising, in the league tables. It is situated in a small town close to a sparsely populated rural/coastal area
Institution B	A small, specialist and selecting University College in Northern Ireland that has only recently diversified its curriculum offer. Situated in a large urban centre though close to rural areas
Institution C	A large urban university in England affiliated to the Campaign for Mainstream Universities (CMU). Situated in a highly ethnically diverse inner-city area.
Institution D	A Russell Group university in Scotland situated in an urban area but close to very sparsely populated rural and coastal areas
Institution E	A Scottish university situated in an urban area but close to very sparsely populated rural and coastal areas
Institution F	A recently created and fast growing university in England, situated in an urban conurbation
Institution G	A high performing 1994-group English university situated in a small city
Institution H	A long established Welsh university situated in a small town

2.3.3 Identification and selection of stakeholder interviewees

The research team used two rationales in the identification of internal stakeholder groups:

- to ensure that the core university functions which related directly to the policy and practice of WP throughout the student lifecycle (HEFCE, 2001) were covered – outreach work, admissions, student progress to completion and transition on graduation
- to ensure that WP and diversity issues could be explored in the context of the strategic goals of HEIs – teaching and learning, research and third stream activity.

Discussion within the research team, building on members' experience of researching WP and student diversity issues and developing policy and practice, combined with consideration of the emerging findings from the literature review, led to the identification of the following functions or areas of practice as being important to developing and embedding WP and diversity:

- policy and strategy development
- teaching and learning
- student support
- marketing and recruitment
- business and community
- research
- widening participation practice
- employability and careers support
- student welfare and voice.

Given the time constraints of the research it was agreed by the team that 'transition to graduation', as represented by careers advisers, was outside the scope of this research. In part this was because a focus of the research was on embedding WP and student diversity into the core business of the institution, and it was considered that the status of careers advisers is currently somewhat marginal. However, it was agreed that issues of employability of graduates would be explored with relevant stakeholder groups.

These areas of practice were treated as stakeholder groups for the purposes of this research and translated into the following groups for selecting staff for interview:

- Senior Management/Corporate Services
- Widening Participation and Outreach
- Admissions
- Academic (teaching and learning)

- Marketing
- Students and Student Representatives
- Student Support
- Research, Business & Community and other.

These broad categories are not exclusive and could be further divided. For example, student support could include student welfare services, learning support and library/information services. Academics could be split by department, subject and grade/position. However, there were clear practical limitations as to how many stakeholder groups could be included. The research team accepted that some interviewees might be able to talk knowledgeably about a range of issues which cut across identified stakeholder groups, others might be quite limited.

For practical reasons it was also agreed to treat 'research' and 'business and community' as a single stakeholder group. This is not representative of the commonalities of their roles per se, though research and enterprise are often linked within institutions, but rather their commonality in respect to their indirect role within WP and student diversity. However, as section 4.5 reveals, a number of issues emerged from the business and community stakeholders that suggested they should be regarded as a distinct stakeholder group in their own right.

It was also recognised that differences in HEI structures could result in a complexity and differing number and type of job roles, related for example to HEIs' age, mission and which of the four countries they were situated in. In view of this discussions were held with the Heads/Directors of WP (or equivalent) in the case study HEIs to explain the rationale for identifying stakeholder groups and to check that each institution could identify interviewees for each of the stakeholder areas.

The case study institutions, not the research team, chose the individual interviewees. The research team sought to guide the choice by asking Heads/Directors of WP to identify a person in each area who could speak knowledgeably about both policy and practice for each stakeholder group. In practice, this led to a slightly uneven representation of stakeholders across the institutions, as is illustrated below in Table 2.2. This shows that 100 people were interviewed across the eight case study HEIs but it was not possible to secure interviews with representatives of all the groups in each. In each of the following stakeholder groups three institutions provided no respondents: student/student representatives, student support, marketing and research, business and community. One institution did not have an academic stakeholder available for interview and one did not have an admissions stakeholder. Other stakeholder interviewees in these institutions could speak on academic, marketing, admissions, student and research, business and community issues.

Table 2.2 Stakeholders interviewed in the case study institutions

Inst.	Senior Management/	Widening Participation	Admissions	Academic	Marketing	Students/ Student Reps	Student Support	Research,
A	1	9	2	2	0	2	4	2
B	3	3 (1 by phone)	1	*	*	2	2	1
C	1	2	1	3	2 (1 via email)	0	5	1
D	1	2	1	1	1	0	0	0
E	1	2	3	0	1	4	1	1
F	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1
G	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
H	2	1	1	1	0	15	0	0
Totals	**11**	**21**	**10**	**9**	**6**	**25**	**13**	**6**

* Some participants from Institution B appearing in other categories were also academics, and one had a marketing role

2.3.4 Interview design and conduct

Interviews were conducted using semi-structured, in-depth interview schedules. Each interview lasted 1-2 hours and took place on site. Most were tape recorded but 8 interviewees did not agree to be recorded. In these cases, interviewers made notes while the interview was being conducted. After each interview, interviewers wrote up a summary of the interview and their impressions of the key issues.

The vast majority (78) of the interviews were conducted on a one to one basis, but 21 were conducted with two or more participants. In one case, an interview was conducted by email and one by telephone. There were advantages and disadvantages of each of the methods of conducting

interviews. On the one hand one-to-one interviews allowed themes to be explored in depth and in a confidential setting, whereas on the other hand group interviews provided a jointly constructed discourse around the issues which supplemented the kind of data generated in individual interviews. However as the number and distribution of individual and group interviews were in part controlled by the key contact in the case study institutions this was done opportunistically rather than systematically.

The number of research participants from each institution and their distribution between stakeholder groups was affected significantly by practical considerations. For example Institution G was invited to participate in the research at a later stage than the others, due to the drop-out of a previously invited participating institution. This meant that only 4 interviews could be arranged and completed within the timescale. The researcher conducting the field research with Institution H was given the opportunity to interview two large groups of students and took this opportunity. It is acknowledged that these differences may have some effects on the findings, however care has been taken by the team to take this into account when making claims about case study institutions.

The interviews explored a common set of themes each of which were broken down into sub themes to ensure common issues were covered by interviewees. A full interview schedule is provided in Appendix 1. While the same core themes were explored with each stakeholder group involved in the policy and practice of WP and student diversity, interviewers were free to tailor the interview to be suitable for use with different stakeholder interviewees and situations.

A separate interview schedule was designed for students, see Appendix 2.

2.3.5 Case study interview and document analysis

A common thematic coding template was used for interview analysis. This was drawn from the interview schedule and the literature search. An outline is provided in Table 2.3. A thematic coding template was adopted for three reasons:

- to ensure a degree of consistency (reliability) in analysis of data. This was especially important because there were 8 researchers, each conducting one case study
- to ensure that key themes were always explored and analysed
- to facilitate comparisons across case study institutions.

The themes were deliberately broad to allow researchers to capture the

specific ways in which individual interviewees expressed the issues. The codes were also not intended to be definitive. They could be added to if issues emerged from analysis of interview transcripts, or rejected as being inappropriate. For one institution in particular, it was difficult to use the full coding frame because the institution was only just developing WP policy and practice.

The coding frame was also applied to the documentary analysis. The application here was intended to identify:

- the rationales/drivers given for WP and student diversity
- arguments around benefits that could be used to develop a business case model
- models of WP built into strategy and policy documents
- evidence of embedding WP and diversity through, for example, identifying WP and diversity as a goal across the student lifecycle.

Each case study was analysed and written up by the researcher who conducted the case study. Once initial analysis had been conducted, the findings were written up and circulated to the research team along with transcripts. Each case study summary was reviewed by the team members individually in order to check initial findings and analysis. Following this, a full day was set aside for the team to meet and discuss the findings of each case study. Each case study was reviewed and checked to ensure that the team consensually agreed the analysis and key themes identified. Disagreements over interpretation of findings were checked against transcriptions and a consensus secured on the key findings. Hence the case study analysis data is based on the consensually agreed analysis and interpretation of the research team.

Table 2.3: Coding frame for the analysis of interviews

THEME 1: RATIONALES FOR WP AND DIVERSITY (WP&D)

Broad typology
    CSR/Social Mission
    Market Survival
    External Policy Compliance

Sub themes and coding categories
    Income generation
    Student Recruitment
    Pool of talent
    Improving teaching and learning
    Diversification of provision
    Social inclusion
    Regional development

THEME 2: APPROACHES TO WP&D

Broad typology
    Academic
    Differential provision
    Transformative

Sub themes and coding categories
    Outreach work
    Raising aspirations
    Diversifying course provision
    Attracting new student groups

THEME 3: EMBEDDING WP&D

Broad typology
    Mainstreaming
    'Bolt on' provision
    Whole Student Lifecycle
    Focus on admissions

Sub themes and coding categories
    Embedded in range of policy/strategy documents
    Senior Management commitment
    Runs across: admissions; marketing; teaching and learning; student
    support, employability

THEME 4: IMPACT OF WP&D

Broad typology
 Benefits
 Costs

Sub themes and coding categories
Benefits/costs in relation to:
 Recruitment
 Retention
 Income generation
 Teaching and learning
 Course development
 Evidence in relation to above

THEME 5: BARRIERS TO WP&D

Broad typology
 Internal
 External

Sub themes and coding categories
Open themes coded from interview replies included:
 Funding
 Model of WP student in policy and practice
 Image of HEI
 Retention issues
 Focus on outreach/admissions only
 Institution culture
 Teaching and learning practice

THEME 6: WHAT WORKS IN RELATION TO WP

Sub themes and coding categories
 Some themes generated from interview transcripts:
 Don't know/no evidence
 Senior management commitment
 Funding long term
 Support through lifecycle
 Targeting groups
 Outreach work
 Raising aspirations

THEME 7: BUSINESS CASE FOR WP&D

Broad typology
  Internal
  External

Sub themes and coding categories
  Income generation
  Increases student numbers
  Enhances profile of HEI
  Improves teaching and learning
  Develops new markets

2.3.6 Analysing stakeholder views

There were several limitations and challenges in identifying and analysing stakeholder views:

- given that the primary method used was individual in-depth interviews, there is an obvious danger in assuming that individuals represent stakeholder groups
- individuals can, and do, talk from a number of positions at any one time. For example, a member of a WP team speaks as a member of the team, a HEI department or school, an academic or non-academic, an advocate (or not) of WP as practiced (or not) in their HEI and so on. These identities are, in turn, mediated through their socio-demographic characteristics and life history
- the very nature of interviewing invites varied responses from interviewees. There is a danger in assuming that responses to questions reflect different stakeholder views when they may simply be a reflection of different ways of interpreting and responding to the specific ways in which interviewers framed questions
- interviewees were selected by the case study institutions and could have been chosen to present positive and common views.

Allowance had to be made when analysing interviews for the fact that different stakeholder groups may justifiably have different levels of involvement with, and knowledge of, WP and diversity policy and practice. Also, issues around, for example, costs and benefits, might reasonably be expected to ellicit different responses, not because of any differences in stakeholder views, but because of levels of knowledge related to area of work. There is no reason to suppose that a marketing officer should have the same level of knowledge of teaching and learning benefits or costs as a member of academic staff.

The interview analysis coped with these difficulties by attempting to identify similarities, differences and consistencies in stakeholder views, (using the coding template identified in Table 2.3) in the following range of ways:

- searching for common issues and themes raised by stakeholder groups. For example, ascertaining whether or not there was a common set of issues and themes raised by senior management or academic (teaching and learning) stakeholders
- searching for consistent differences between stakeholder groups (even if the content of the differences varied across institutions). For example, that teaching and learning staff consistently differed in their analysis of costs and benefits of WP to, say, the image of the HEI
- searching for differences within each case study between stakeholder groups. For example WP practitioners may have had different views on the extent to which WP was embedded compared to senior management.

Sometimes there were differences expressed in relation to specific themes and issues, but these appeared to be related to the varying contexts of the HEIs in which the stakeholder groups worked. These have been reported in section 4.5.

2.4 General limitations of the research

All research has its limitations so this study is no exception. This was a short, intensive research study, based on a small sample of HEIs and a brief literature review. Consequently, when reading the report the following caveats should be borne in mind:

- The literature review is only indicative of the key themes that might underpin a business case model. As presented in the report it has a focus on defining business case models, explaining the HE context, exploring models of WP and student diversity and identifying key themes that might underpin a business case model. These are broad themes and presented at an overview level. Time and resources precluded a more detailed analysis of all the literature relating to the themes and the complex debates which exist
- The case study data is based on only eight institutions. Moreover, the key source of evidence is in-depth interviews. While these provide data on the way key stakeholders perceived issues around WP, such perceptions may not be indicative of stakeholder views, for reasons explored above. The research team have attempted to err on the side of caution in attributing views to specific groups. Analysis had to show that identification of difference reflected genuine stakeholder positions rather than, say, different interpretations to questions or different levels of knowledge about issues and themes
- No claims to institutional statistical representativeness can be made on behalf of participants selected, even within the case study institutions.

However, the data provides insights into the way in which key stakeholders construct issues around WP and student diversity in their day to day practice. They provide a cross section of views in terms of key areas of HEI operation, for example, teaching and learning, marketing and admissions

- The interviewee data has been analysed and presented to illustrate key themes and issues expressed within and across institutions. Consequently, the selection of quotes is based on their suitability for illustrating the key themes that emerged from the analysis. They are not intended to provide a detailed analysis of individual interviewee narratives

- Case study HEIs identified selected interviewees and arranged the timing and place of the interviews. One particular consequence was that the range of stakeholders interviewed varied between HEIs, reflecting both institutional variation and the availability of individuals. The result may have been to limit the identification and analysis of differing stakeholders' responses to questions. It is conceivable that interviewees were selected who would present a consistent message. The analysis of stakeholder interview data suggested that while some stakeholder differences could be tentatively identified the views of stakeholder groups interviewed were marked more by institutional consensus than difference. This raises an important question around whether or not HEIs have become sophisticated in presenting a public image, or corporate face, on issues of WP and student diversity reflecting an ability to tap into common policy discourses which are taken for granted

- It should be borne in mind that the identification of the costs and benefits of WP were made in very large measure by HEI staff who were involved directly in the delivery and/or support of WP. Their views need to be recognised as those of interested stakeholders. They may or may not reflect the opinions of those staff not so involved in WP (who were not interviewed)

- The case study interviews and documents cannot be read as a simple reflection of institutional reality. They provide a valuable insight into how issues are constructed and represented by different groups and corporately by the institution as a whole. However, they do not necessarily provide an insight into what happens in practice – accounts of practice are not the same thing as practice, and policy and strategy documents may be viewed as exercises in presentation. While the research team would argue that there is a relationship between what interviewees, policy and strategy documents say and practice in HEIs, this relationship is not simple and direct. Rather, the data presented provide a way of reading and understanding the issues and discourses which underpin practice and set its form and possibilities. One of the goals of the research is to help use the findings to provide policy and practice insights that can help those involved in promoting and implementing WP and student diversity in HEIs to develop their own policy and practice discourses and ways of thinking about WP and diversity, particularly in relation to developing evidence based cases that are institutionally focused.

3. Literature review

3.1 Origins of the business case for diversity

The terms 'business case' and 'diversity' are relatively recent additions to discourses around widening participation and access to higher education. In higher education, equal opportunities policies, in association with a variety of initiatives designed to remove barriers to access, have been the main tool used to tackle the problems associated with evidence of exclusion and discrimination. However, over the last fifteen years, a 'diversity discourse' has emerged in the USA (Thomas, 1990) and the UK (Kandola and Fullerton, 1994; Institute of Personnel and Development, 1996) which claims to recognise broader dimensions of inequality than those often recognised in the scope of organisational equal opportunities policies. In the UK Kandola and Fullerton (1994) have argued for a shift from equal opportunities to 'diversity' because the equal opportunities approach is insufficiently holistic in its attempts to eradicate discrimination. They claim that some under-represented groups are not covered by equal opportunities policies, and treating groups as homogeneous is not sufficiently sensitive to individual difference and the multivariate nature of disadvantage.

At the same time writers have also claimed that cultural and other aspects of diversity make a positive contribution to meeting organisational goals. Thomas writing in 1990 argued that the effective management of diversity makes 'business sense' and enables organisations which value diversity to gain competitive advantage over organisations that have poor or non-existent diversity practices (Thomas, 1990). More recently the Department for Trade and Industry in the UK published its interim report on the business benefits of diversity in the IT industry (DTI, 2005).

3.2 Understanding the terms 'diversity' and 'the business case'

The definitions of diversity are almost as diverse as the subject itself. In the UK, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, for example, defines diversity as 'valuing everyone as individuals – as employers, customers and clients' (CIPD, 2007). At the same time, within some individual organisational policies 'diversity' is more confined in scope and refers to particular dimensions of diversity such as age, race, disability, ethnicity, economic status, family/marital status, nationality, religious belief, sexual orientation, spent convictions, political affiliation, and gender reassignment. However defined, the intention in utilising

the concept in debates around organisational inequality is to highlight the heterogeneity and diversity of social groups in the belief that this assists in the task of recognising and understanding that discrimination and disadvantage are multifaceted. One consequence of this argument is the idea that organisational policies and practices for change and greater social inclusion will only be effective if they reflect such an understanding.

The concept of diversity is also associated with a particular organisational model for confronting inequality and managing organisational change. At the heart of the 'diversity discourse' is the idea that organisations should recognise differences and celebrate diversity (Kandola and Fullerton, 1994). There is a rejection of the idea that different groups should be assimilated to meet an organisational norm – a criticism often levelled at equal opportunities policies and initiatives. The organisation is expected to be committed to creating an environment which facilitates the inclusion of different social categories and enables everyone to contribute in their own way to organisational objectives (Webb, 1997).

In the USA and the UK the concept of diversity is often linked to the idea that organisations can benefit from valuing difference and managing diversity effectively. In the context of employment, for example, some writers see managing diversity as a way of 'capitalising on the different skills, qualities and viewpoints that a diverse workforce has to offer' (EOR, 1999: 14). Furthermore, it is suggested that whereas many organisations may adopt equal opportunities policies because of external pressures, such as legislative requirements, a diversity approach is *internally driven* and based on the idea that diversity will bring long-term business benefits to the organisation. As Kirton and Greene (2000) point out, within the 'business case' for equality and diversity, the question being asked is rather different from that of the 'social justice' arguments of the 1960s and 1970s which underpinned the development of many equal opportunities policies. Instead of asking what can be done to relieve the disadvantage disproportionately experienced by some social groups, the question centres on how an equality and diversity agenda can contribute to organisational aims and objectives. The cornerstone of the argument for equality is that inequality is inefficient and uneconomic.

Viewed in this way, the ability of an organisation to manage diversity becomes a key aspect of organisational strategy and consequent organisational practices to confront discrimination are seen as an investment (Littlefield, 1995). In the context of the strategic importance of 'diversity', issues of ownership are also highlighted – its value should be owned and internalised by all staff and translated into a working culture, rather than simply being the concern of a specialist department or group of staff (Kandola and Fullerton, 1994).

In their work comparing equality of opportunity with managing diversity approaches in employment, Wilson and Iles (1996; 1999) summarise the key differences between what they describe as the 'old paradigm' of equal opportunities and the 'new paradigm' of diversity. The differences include: the reasons for adopting equal opportunities or managing diversity; the extent to which there is an operational or strategic focus on implementing change; the perception of difference which underpins policy interventions and initiatives for change; the focus of the initiatives undertaken to achieve change; and finally the epistemological basis of change. These differences are summarised in Table 3.1 below. In developing their paradigmatic models Wilson and Iles (1996) suggest that managing diversity could be perceived as a 'paradigm shift' in the sense of describing a competitive or incommensurable world view. At the same time they also suggest that the models could be perceived as 'exemplars', showing researchers and practitioners by example how their job is to be done.

Table 3.1: A comparison of equal opportunities and diversity approaches

Equal Opportunities approach	Diversity approach
Externally driven • Rests on moral and legal arguments • Perceives EO as a cost	**Internally driven** • Rests on business case • Perceives MD (Managing Diversity) as investment
Operational • Concerned with process • Externally imposed on managers	**Strategic** • Concerned with outcomes • Internalised by managers and employees
Difference perceived as other/ problematical • Deficit model • Assimilation advocated	**Difference perceived as asset/ richness** • Model of plenty • Celebrates difference • Mainstream adaptation advocated
Focus on group discrimination • Group initiatives	**Focus on development for all individuals** • Universal initiatives • Individual development
Supported by narrow positivist knowledge base	Supported by wider pluralistic knowledge base

Adapted from Wilson and Iles (1996)

3.3 A critique of the diversity model

There is variety in the ways in which the diversity model of equal opportunity has been viewed. Not all of these are positive in the sense of seeing managing diversity as able to succeed where traditional equal opportunities approaches have failed. In their review of the field, Kirton and Green (2000) find it variously presented in the equalities and organisational change literature as: an evolutionary step from equal opportunities approaches; a sophistication of the equal opportunities approach; a repackaging of equal opportunities; more negatively as a sanitised, politically unthreatening and market-oriented notion; or a 'comfort-zone', allowing employers and organisational leaders to avoid actively fighting discrimination.

The claims made for a 'diversity' approach to equality in organisations are widely contested. The effectiveness of the diversity approach in reducing inequality and promoting social inclusion has been questioned (see, for example, Webb 1997; Overell, 1996). Questions have also been raised regarding the extent to which there is tangible evidence to support claims in relation to the organisational benefits derived from valuing diversity (see, for example, Kandola and Fullerton, 1994; Anderson and Metcalf, 2003). In addition, recent research has also started to identify the disadvantages and costs of implementing diversity policies. A report by the Department for Trade and Industry (DTI, 2005) on women in the IT industry identifies a variety of perceived benefits as well as costs as reported in their research with companies. The costs include recruitment costs, retention costs, absenteeism, legal costs, as well as business risk and opportunity costs. With regard to both costs and benefits, however, the report concludes:

> There is little evidence of systematic measurement of costs, benefits and intermediate outcomes in companies. (DTI, 2005: 50)

Finally, concern has been expressed relating to the 'contingent' nature of the business case for equality and diversity and that 'difference' is only valued as long as it contributes to profit, or to organisational objectives. In their research on employment in the public services, for example, Wilson and Iles (1999) warn that:

> Although the business case argument means that MD [(Managing Diversity)] can much more easily and justifiably be embodied into the corporate aims of the organisation, resting principally on this foundation makes the MD paradigm vulnerable to a change in perspective. Should it be perceived that a diverse workforce does not contribute to business benefits, then the MD paradigm may be built on a foundation of sand. (Wilson and Iles, 1999:6)

They further suggest that it would be mistaken to stress the business case for diversity if it implies the neglect of other justifications – moral, ethical and political – based on treating equal opportunity as a basic human right. Other writers have raised concerns about what would happen if there is no 'business case', or when cost-cutting becomes a key business imperative and threatens the positive initiatives that underpin diversity actions (see, for example, the review in Foreman, 2001).

Despite the controversy and uncertainties surrounding the 'diversity discourse', this has been widely applied to private and public sector organisations in the UK and business case arguments have been used extensively to exhort organisations to change their practices. For example, government departments such as Trade and Industry, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, campaigning groups such as Stonewall and the Employers' Forum on Disability, as well as the various equality commissions, use business case arguments in their published literature and web-sites to encourage organisations in the public and private sectors to pursue practices around equality.

3.4 Applying 'diversity' and the 'business case' in this research

Generally, much of the literature on the business case for 'diversity' focuses on the issue of employees in organisations rather than clients/customers and service delivery. Broadly speaking the 'business case' is an assertion that a diverse workforce will assist profitability through better recruitment, retention and promotion; more focussed marketing; and enhanced creativity and decision-making. Applied to the public sector, the focus has been on retaining and motivating good staff through enlightened employment policies, and better service delivery through having a diversity of employees with whom users could identify and who could provide better targeted services. Many HEIs now use the language of 'diversity' in their employee policies, some linking this to a business case for change. However, the focus of this research on the business benefits to be derived from learner (customer/ consumer) diversity is not well developed – neither in discourse, nor practice.

The business case approach was initially formulated in relation to the private sector. In so far as public sector services are not-for-profit enterprises it could be argued (see, for example, Wilson and Iles, 1999) that there are differences in the extent to which 'business case' arguments can be applied, as well as how they might be interpreted in this context. Analysis of HE corporate policy documentation, using the internet as well as an examination of published research, indicates a variety of drivers underpinning higher

education institutions' approaches and actions relating to diversity and widening participation. These include imperatives emanating from outside the organisations, such as legislative requirements, government policy agendas, statutory responsibility and doing the 'right thing' in terms of prevailing ideas of social justice, and more internally generated interests related to making the university more attractive to learners and other stakeholders. These drivers and imperatives reflect the different missions, market positions and imperatives of the sector as a whole, the diversity of stakeholders and the complex environments in which HEIs operate. The specific nature of the higher education context is discussed in more detail below in section 3.5.

This perspective moves away from a dichotomous view of 'business case' arguments on the one hand, and social justice arguments on the other, as the basis for embracing diversity and embedding WP. It presents instead a more complex view in which HEIs' obligations to behave in a socially responsible manner may sit alongside recognition of the institutional benefits to be derived from managing and embracing diversity. Most HEIs make explicit their commitment to contributing to wider social and economic development and acting in a socially responsible way – Corporate Social Responsibility. In so doing this moves beyond stakeholders such as employees, students and funding councils and includes wider social partners and organisations such as local communities and employers and wider responsibilities such as protecting the environment. This commitment, however, may not be incompatible with ideas of business opportunity and may be linked to 'bottom line' issues in a number of ways. For example, maintaining and developing a good reputation in the context of more public scrutiny and increased demands from statutory bodies, as well as the business development opportunities which may result through creating a distinct position in the marketplace, protecting the brand and building credibility and trust with current and potential 'customers'.

Finally, the 'diversity paradigm' as discussed above in Section 3.2 embodies a distinctive model of organisational change. If the purported business case benefits of widening participation and embracing diversity are to be fully realised, HEIs must be prepared to transform themselves and embed practices and cultures throughout their organisations which support student diversity. Peripheral changes associated with projects and initiatives directed at particular groups or issues, and aimed at enabling underrepresented groups to assimilate into the dominant culture and practices, will not bring about that transformation.

3.5 The WP discourse

There is no agreed definition of WP and the literature reflects this in the different ways in which the term is used. Further, a number of authors have pointed out that approaches to WP may differ markedly between institutions. They suggest different models, or a typology of approaches, that may operate at various levels from the individual to the UK-wide. For example Osborne (2003) constructs a threefold typology of Access interventions – out-reach, in-reach and flexibility – whereas Layer (2005) proposes a complex seven-fold typology of institutional approaches including 'join the club' (helping the prospective student fit the organisational norm) and 'different product' (new courses and/or sites that are specifically aimed at under-represented groups).

Moving away from an institutional approach, Jones and Thomas (2005) identify three distinct strands to recent Government 'Access' discourse:

- *Academic*: Differential rates of entry are due to attitudinal factors, such as 'lack of aspiration', and consequently there is a vast pool of under-utilised talent within 'under-represented' groups merely because they lack 'proper' aspiration to progress to HE. Therefore the focus must be on raising aspirations in order to attract these gifted and talented young people to the 'top' institutions.
- *Utilitarian*: HEIs and potential applicants both need to adapt to the realities of the economy which requires a more highly trained workforce. An expansion in higher level vocational provision will meet this economic need and at the same time widen access to HE for those groups currently under-represented.
- *Transformative*: The existing system is fundamentally unfair. Diversity is a strength and major structural change should take place within the higher education system informed by individuals from groups who are currently under-represented. The whole institution's activities should be informed by valuing learning from a diverse range of groups and perspectives.

Jones and Thomas suggest that recent Government policy will tend to drive HEIs down one of the first two approaches, rendering the third more or less untenable. Thus the more research-intensive institutions will tend to adopt the 'academic' model while on the other hand the less research-intensive institutions will tend to align themselves to the needs of the economy, responding primarily to employer need.

At the institutional level, the 'academic' discourse has many similarities to Layer's 'join the club' model which puts its focus on 'the student needing to fit the university rather than the university changing for different student needs'. (Layer 2005:79). Layer identifies that this model is often linked with higher performing HEIs such as those in the Russell Group. In this model, as in Jones

and Thomas's (2005) 'academic discourse', there is a clear defining of the under-represented group to be targeted and an emphasis on aspiration raising and early outreach, sometimes supplemented by specific preparation and training for the realities of the learning experiences typically found in selecting HEIs. Thus an approach can be identified that rests firmly on the academic discourse of WP and employs an assimilation model within its WP activity.

The 'transformative' discourse as proposed by Jones and Thomas (2005) is driven by ethical imperatives related to social justice. They suggest that if these values are genuinely held by the senior management of the HEI then it should be a discourse that shapes the operation of the entire organisation and, in this interpretation, it becomes an interesting and distinct organisational approach. This approach does not have any analogies elsewhere in the widening participation literature, though Jones and Thomas do suggest that it is closer to an adult education model and comparable analyses can be found in this domain.

Jones and Thomas's middle category, 'utilitarian', poses problems for this analysis as it does not represent a distinct organisational approach per se, but rather a set of drivers. However, one of its proposed distinguishing features, that of an expansion only in a particular type of provision, has similarities to Layer's 'different product' approach to institutional policy (Layer, 2005:80). The concept of a different type, or site, of provision that may play by different rules to that of an institution's mainstream provision is an interesting halfway house that may allow an institution to respond to certain drivers and yet to leave much of its existing provision unchanged. The potential for this approach in maintaining levels of quality and reputation while still being able to claim excellence in widening participation should be clear, and indeed it could be argued that it represents a certain kind of optimisation game in response to the many different and, arguably, contradictory pressures felt by British HEIs in the 21st Century. A defining feature of this approach is that a different kind of provision is offered to a more diverse group of potential students than is offered to a more traditional student body, enabling two (or more) distinct student bodies to be identified within the institution – one being more diverse than the other. However, although this is an outcome of a 'differential provision' model, the drivers for creating such a model may vary. For example, in sparsely populated areas a model of outreach provision may become necessary simply as a way of reaching all potential students.

Thus the research team proposed, based on secondary research, a threefold typology of organisational approaches to widening participation: academic, differential provision and transformative. This does not supersede or replace other typologies, but is proposed as a heuristic model to facilitate analysis in the context of this research and will be explored more fully in 3.7 below.

3.6 Evidence of the benefits of WP and student diversity to HEIs

3.6.1 Identifying institutional benefits

This section outlines a range of benefits to HEIs of WP and student diversity that are both asserted and/or evidenced in the literature. Three challenges have presented themselves in carrying out this analysis.

First, while the benefits of WP have been articulated in terms of social justice (DfES, 2003), national economic interest (DfES, 2003) and benefits to the individual (DfES, 2006), they are rarely articulated in terms of benefits to HEIs. Consequently, Layer et al have argued:

> 'The value and benefits of widening participation activities are not always recognised by those within and external to institutions'. (Layer et al, 2002:14)

Second, it is extremely difficult to estimate costs and benefits of WP and diversity (HEFCE, 2006a). Not all WP activities which a HEI might undertake are solely for the benefit of that institution. For example, initiatives aimed at raising aspirations are often intended to increase participation in HE generally, rather than increasing participation in a single HEI. Further, it may be the case that in some institutions the embedded nature of WP provision makes it difficult to cost out separately from other activities.

Third, there is no apparent agreement in the literature about which WP initiatives are most effective (Gorard et al, 2006), or whether specifically identified WP activities (particularly outreach activities) are effective at all in actually increasing the diversity of the student body. As HEFCE's recent evaluation of WP in England argued:

> Evidence for the impact of WP interventions on raising attainment and on access to institutions is weak… The difficulties are well known of establishing firm connections (let alone unambiguously causal connections) between WP interventions and the way learners subsequently develop and the choices they make. (HEFCE, 2006a:6)

However, an overview of the literature does provide some broad pointers to the benefits, together with the occasional piece of direct evidence of the benefits to institutions of WP and increased student diversity and, consequently, the drivers that may cause institutions to engage in WP and diversity. These could be used as the raw material for the development of a business case model that will enable institutions to assess the benefits and drivers that may apply within their own institutional contexts.

These drivers and benefits are summarised in table 3.2 below and are explored in more depth in the sections that follow. In particular the potential barriers and costs are also discussed where these are highlighted in the literature, together with any tensions that may arise between different internal stakeholders.

Table 3.2: The drivers and potential benefits of WP and student diversity

Driver	Potential benefits
Increasing student numbers	Financial viability of individual courses or whole institution
Tapping the pool of talent	Attracting a larger pool of highly qualified/ talented applicants – enhancement to reputation and maintenance of high academic standards
Improving teaching and learning	Improved learning outcomes for all students Improved social experience for all students
Providing access to funding streams	Additional support for institutional strategic aims or to ensure financial viability
Generating new roles and markets	Reduced reliance on Funding Council grants
Complying with anti-discrimination and equality legislation	Avoidance of litigation
Corporate social responsibility	Demonstrated commitment to institutional mission and value statements

These drivers can be further divided into those that are imposed from the outside and those that come from within the institution based on internal issues of institutional viability, growth and/or development. In creating this distinction it should be noted that the distinction between the two becomes blurred at times because, for example, it may be argued that the driver to increase student numbers is related to the external imposition of Funding Council grant models. However, in general the distinction holds and has the potential to be valuable in developing discussion around the three 'paradigmatic models' set out in Section 3.5.

Table 3.3: Internal and external drivers for WP and student diversity

Internal	External
Increasing student numbers	Complying with anti-discrimination and equality legislation
Tapping the pool of talent	Government WP policy
Improving teaching and learning	Corporate social responsibility
Providing access to funding streams	
Generating new roles and markets	

An exploration of the literature relating to each of these potential drivers is set out below, with an emphasis on gathering evidence of benefits and in exploring any potential organisational implications for different internal stakeholders.

3.6.2 Increasing student numbers

Perhaps the most obvious driver for embracing WP and diversity is to recruit students. This can be a straightforward drive to increase numbers and/or a drive to diversify the student base. It is likely to become a strong driver in an HE sector increasingly characterised by competition for students, which encourages a more business-like approach to running HEs (Ward and Steele, 1999; Morgan-Klein & Murphy, 2002).

It is in universities that predominantly 'recruit' rather than 'select' and those that have difficulty securing significant research funds (Osborne, 2003; Thomas et al, 2003) that increasing student numbers is most likely to underpin a business case for WP. Indeed, it is these universities that tend to embed WP and see it as part of their core mission, if only as a necessity of institutional survival. As has been argued:

> Where an HEI has a shortfall in demand for places it is likely to be more active in widening participation, and this is generally reflected in staff attitudes and awareness. (Higher Education Consultancy Group and the National Centre for Social Research, 2003:45).

Greenbank (2006) in a study of 16 HEIs has noted how economic rationales and business like motives were often advanced to underpin WP. For example, he notes how recruiting new students as the A level market reaches saturation point may be important in driving WP. However, he argues that economic rationales sit alongside political and social objectives (2006:203-5) It is, however, worth noting at this point that the financial costs of recruiting, supporting and retaining students from under-represented groups may limit or even outweigh the financial or other

benefits gained through the additional recruitment (see, for example, NAO, 2002: HEFCE, 2004; Greenbank, 2006).

The business case for using a WP approach to increase student numbers is not likely to impact on selecting universities in the same way. As Powney has succinctly argued in summarising the difference between selecting and recruiting institutions:

> *Widening participation is seen in some circles as making up for poor recruitment of "traditional" students. The policy does not have universal support or at least is not seen as necessary by all HEIs. Institutions that have no problem in recruiting target numbers have little financial incentive to widen or diversify the student intake.* (Powney, 2002:25)

Gorard et al (2006) note this potential for a highly differentiated interpretation of WP:

> *Arguing that the responsibility [for widening participation] lies with the whole sector could promote a stratified higher education system, with no change occurring in some institutions while others accommodate all the challenges of new student cohorts.* (Gorard et al, 2006:120)

However, even in 'selecting' universities there may be a drive to increase student numbers for specific schools and/or departments. Physics, mathematics, chemistry and engineering have all experienced recruitment difficulties in recent years and WP may be a useful strategy to help boost numbers. HEIs are complex institutions; schools and/or departments can operate with a considerable degree of autonomy in the recruitment and selection of students. Regardless of whether a HEI is considered to be 'selecting' or 'recruiting', its schools and departments may approach WP in very different ways and construct different business cases to justify this.

The different market positions of HEIs may make context an important factor in relation to the use of student recruitment as a driver for WP and increasing student diversity. There may be real advantages in terms of student recruitment for some universities, while for others WP might be perceived as detrimental to recruitment because of its assumed impact on elite reputation. There is evidence in the literature of some tensions centring on the function of the institution's broader marketing and how this fits with the concept of embedding widening participation. Foskett (2002), writing primarily about further education, suggests that although widening participation can be viewed as a 'marketing imperative', it nonetheless has profound cultural change implications for the whole institution. Similarly, Johnson argues that for HEIs this marketing imperative challenges 'comfortable assumptions' and therefore results in significant structural change (Johnson, 2001).

The way that the HEI positions itself in an increasingly competitive higher education market, and in an increasingly consumerist society, has profound implications for the way in which it is perceived by potential learners, as Ivy (2001) points out in the South African context. This may in turn result in a knock-on effect on the diversity of the student body, whether this was an intended or unintended outcome. Johnson argues that within the context of 'relationship marketing' it is the HEI itself, rather than its products, that is marketed: 'its functioning and its culture – and the people within the institution' (Johnson 2001:266). Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) go one step further and point out that, in contrast to other service industries, an institution of higher education's reputation may be inversely linked to its ability to provide a service to its clients:

> *A HE institution's high reputation is often linked to minimal "sales"… In this sense, a HE institution that tries to increase its image through new facilities [or courses?] is considered to be less attractive.* (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006:327)

In one sense this marketing of the whole institution may rely on the HEI building on the 'existing cultural capital' (*op cit*:270) of the recipient, or in other words creating marketing materials that appear culturally familiar to some groups while risking excluding others. On the other hand, they argue that a postmodernist view of marketing may suggest that it is possible for 'the HEI… to create [a reality] that is shared by the kind of student that it wants to recruit' (*op cit*:271). There would appear to be no contradiction between these two different views, indeed they seem to be two ways of saying that the way the HEI presents itself, in the broadest sense, tells the market what kind of student it is looking to recruit.

As suggested, the implications of this are far reaching. First, both these views of marketing are predicated to some degree on the existence of a single culture within the institution. The converse of this is that if, as may often be the case, several cultures are prevalent within different parts of the institution then it is likely that mixed messages are being presented, especially if the two parts of the institution concerned are both outward-facing. This may be compounded in larger or split-site institutions. A hypothetical (though believable) example is the Widening Access team which has a progressive and inclusive ethos and promotes the institution in this way through a series of project activities while at the same time the Marketing team continues to produce prospectuses, websites and other materials that contain language and images that reflect a largely middle-class and traditionally academic culture.

Second, each institution has scope to create its own market niche and to recruit students that reflect its own culture, and there is much evidence

that this is happening (for example Reay et al, 2001; Ball et al, 2002; Forsyth and Furlong, 2003). While these and other studies (for example Brooks, 2003; Pugsley, 1998) talk about the constraints on choice experienced by potential applicants to higher education and thus concern themselves primarily with the agency of these individuals, the marketing perspective highlighted by both Johnson and Foskett above throw the emphasis firmly on the institutions who, it may be suggested, in practice collude with the stratification of society in selecting their market niche. Where this becomes cause for concern is in relation to the perceived hierarchy both among higher education institutions and within society as a whole, and the tendency to correlate 'best' with 'whiteness' (Reay et al, 2001:869) and with 'middle-classness' (see Forsyth and Furlong, 2003). This suggestion may be challenged by an institution stating that they are looking for 'the brightest and the best' from all social and ethnic groups. However, if the institution's core marketing materials tell a different story then they may simply be recruiting 'the least disadvantaged of the most disadvantaged' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977:26, cited in Ball et al, 2002:54) – in other words those who are atypical of their social group and who will more readily fit in with the existing institutional culture or *habitus* (Thomas, 2001).

A fully embedded approach to widening participation in the context of marketing and student recruitment would therefore require a complete reworking of the institution's brand around issues of inclusion and diversity. All aspects of the public face of the institution would have to be informed by this branding, whether formal or informal, and existing cultural assumptions embedded in the marketing mix would have to be challenged in the context of the new brand. This scenario takes us close to Jones and Thomas' (2005) view of a 'transformative' institution.

The direct costs of such an exercise may compare favourably with the ongoing costs of peripheral widening access projects; so that, at first glance, it may appear that there could be a strong business case for a full embedding of widening participation in this way. However there are a number of other considerations. First, while it may be relatively easy to find funding for specific project-based activities (for example through Aimhigher, other grant funding such as ESF or as a result of Access Agreements and so on) it is unlikely that these same sources would be willing to invest in institutional rebranding even if the impacts of this were likely to be greater. Second, the indirect costs may be significantly more than the direct costs. For example, if an HEI were to adopt more of a relationship marketing approach in relation to their new brand identity (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006) then they may as a consequence invest *more* heavily in a range of outreach activities than even an institution that has a large amount of widening access type projects. But again, this refocused activity is unlikely

to be sufficiently output-driven to be fundable from grant-funding sources. Third, the wider effect of such a rebranding would depend on their existing market position. Those whose existing brand may be somewhat in opposition to a more open, diverse and inclusive one could suffer dire financial consequences as they risked making themselves unpalatable to their existing segment of the market. In other words, as Ivy (2001) suggests in the case of South African Universities, market position is paramount. Thus we may conclude at this stage that any business case for a greater student diversity is necessarily a contingent one, and furthermore that it is not possible to separate one individual driver for WP and diversity from the institutional context as a whole.

3.6.3 Tapping the pool of talent

The ability to continue to attract a large pool of highly talented (and/or qualified) applicants is likely to be important to those institutions who currently select their entrants. Basing an approach to WP and student diversity on the idea that 'talent' is to be found in all sections of society may be a powerful driver for reaching out to groups who are currently under-represented. Greenbank (2006) notes how the 'economic rationale' of tapping into new student markets to maintain recruitment of able students, especially in the context of the traditional A level student market being saturated, may appeal to some Russell Group universities. He gives an example (Greenbank, 2006:203) of one Russell Group university's WP strategy which specifically identifies the difficulties created by the saturation of the market for the traditional A level student and the impact of fee legislation creating more localised participation in HE. The strategy argues that WP activity must be mainstreamed to tap into good students who fall outside of the traditional A level market.

In a survey of 40 HEI websites conducted in preparation for this study the research team found an example of a similar argument being publicly articulated.. The University of Durham states on its website:

> *We need to ensure that individual skills are not wasted, embracing diversity will give us access to a wider pool of talent.* (University of Durham Website, 2006)

This has the potential to be an important driver not only for individual institutions, but also in the case of specific, high-status subjects as well. The importance of recruiting a more diverse student population in professions such as law and medicine has been highlighted as an issue of national public policy importance. From the Department of Constitutional Affairs to professional bodies such as the British Medical Association, concern

has been expressed about the lack of diversity in the professions. The Langlands' Report (2005) argued that there is a need for the traditional professions such as law and medicine to reflect the social and cultural populations they serve and that this means making efforts to widen participation. The Department of Health, for example, provided £3 million in 2003 for Aimhigher to fund pilot projects aimed at attracting a more representative group of students into the health care professions. More importantly, the broader Government agenda of the modernisation of public services is providing a strong incentive for professional bodies to call for a greater diversity in staff recruitment in law, health, education and social work. As Jones and Thomas (2005) argue:

> *If this impetus grows, universities with strong public sector links could be presented with further incentives to create more diverse student bodies, particularly in those departments with a public sector orientation* (e.g. health, education, social work, etc.) (Jones and Thomas, 2005:619)

 However, it is not clear that building on this particular driver for WP and diversity will result in a significant impact on widening participation. This is because there is a real danger that HEIs will engage in:

> *cherry picking outstanding students from disadvantaged groups or areas, rather than engaging more widely with such groups or areas* (SFEFC/ SHEFC, 2005:26).

In other words, the 'Pool of Talent' argument for widening participation may lead to a radically different interpretation of what WP is all about and what it should look like in practice from the interpretation found in institutions primarily driven by the need to recruit. Therefore to compare a WP strategy based on this driver with one based on, for example, a recruitment driver, is not likely to be comparing like with like.

3.6.4 Improving teaching and learning

Given the significance of teaching and learning in higher education, the impact of an increased commitment to WP and diversity on the effectiveness and quality of teaching and learning is crucial. A number of authors (for example Warren, 2002; 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).

Generally, the WP literature in relation to teaching and learning follows two inter-related lines. The first centres on arguments about which type of curriculum change may best accommodate the range of non-traditional students and the implications of this for institutional change. The second centres on the costs and consequences of widening participation. Underlying both these lines is a recurring argument about whether WP results in a widening of achievement, or in a decline in standards.

Advocates of WP are likely to argue that the changes to curriculum provision and learning, teaching and assessment, which have occurred alongside the transition from an elite to a mass participation HE sector, benefit all students and can have a positive impact on higher level and critical thinking skills (see, for example, Powney, 2002; Warren, 2002, JM Consulting 2004). The Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group argued:

> The presence of a range of experiences in the laboratory or the seminar room enriches the learning environment for all students. A diverse student community is likely to enhance all students' skills of critical reasoning, teamwork and communication and produce graduates better able to contribute to a diverse society. (Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group, 2004:6)

Gorard et al (2006) similarly note:

> Having a diverse student population could be of educational and social benefit to teaching and learning in higher education. Having a variety of educational, cultural, religious and family backgrounds can enrich the learning experience. The different perspectives and experiences students from different backgrounds bring to the learning context can be utilised to promote learning and teaching. (Gorard et al, 2006:115)

Some HEIs appear to value diversity as being important to the student experience and assert this benefit in their diversity strategies. For example, the University of Greenwich website states:

> Diversity enriches the educational experience: we learn from those whose experiences, beliefs and perspectives are different from our own and these lessons can be taught best in a richly diverse intellectual and social environment. (University of Greenwich Website, 2006)

Furthermore, there is some evidence to support these assertions. Gurin et al (2002), for example, found a positive correlation between informal interactions with ethnically diverse peers in higher education institutions, and learning outcomes, which included:

…self-rated aspirations for postgraduate education, the drive to achieve, intellectual self-confidence, and the importance placed on original writing and creating artistic works…self-rated academic ability, writing ability, and listening ability, as well as self-reported change in general knowledge, analytic and problem-solving skills, ability to think critically, writing skills, and foreign language skills. (Gurin et al, 2002:343)

And they concluded that:

A diverse student body is clearly a resource and a necessary condition for engagement with diverse peers that permits higher education to achieve its educational goals. (Gurin et al, 2002:353).

Critics of the impact of WP are far more likely to focus on the supposed deficiencies of non-traditional students, perhaps highlighted in high drop-out rates, and the need for students to improve motivation and study skills. Following this line of argument, the onus is upon the student to adapt and change while the institution remains the same (Thomas, 2002; Taylor and Bedford, 2004). What is more, there may be some hostility to the idea of 'support' as this challenges existing notions of academic merit. For example Riddell et al (2004) reported that many academics in pre-1992 institutions felt that additional support for students with disabilities 'contravened the fundamental values of the university' and that there were fears about the erosion of standards. The UUK/SCOP report on effective student services suggests that such thinking:

…engenders a view of non-traditional students as deficient and the perception that academic standards are at risk simply through widening the range of entrants to HE programmes. These attitudes are founded on the assumption that the vast majority of students progress from largely academic A-levels to study for three years on full-time undergraduate programmes whose curricula and teaching methods remain largely untouched by recent and planned changes in higher education. (UUK/SCOP, 2002:14 – see also Gorard et al, 2006:119)

A different perspective views all students as being somewhere along a continuum of preparedness for higher education study. However, this level of preparedness is not synonymous with merit, rather such students 'challenge the efficacy and wisdom of traditional teaching and assessment methods' (Powney, 2002:30). In other words, at least some of the onus is upon the institution to adapt to a changing student body. Within the literature there were many arguments asserted (Riddell et al, 2004; Warren 2002; Hall and Healey, 2004; Wilson, 1997) and furthermore some evidence provided (Powney, 2002; also Craig and Kernoff, 1995 and Ramsden, 1987 who are cited in Warren, 2002) that would suggest that certain institutional changes

along these lines may in fact benefit all students and can have a positive impact on the development of higher level and critical thinking skills.

In the broadest sense the adaptations to the curriculum that may be required to support a more diverse student body is the focus of much of the literature – how it is conceived of, what it contains, how it is delivered and assessed, and even who 'owns' it. The distinction between 'embedded', 'semi-embedded' and 'separate' approaches to learning development or academic development (sometimes called student support) is made by Warren (2002) who challenges the effectiveness of the separate model and offers evidence in support of an embedded or a semi-embedded model, concluding that 'embedding "academic development" in mainstream teaching and learning, is more likely to enhance student retention, progress and achievement.' (Warren, 2002:94). Powney et al put the learners at the heart of curriculum development in stating:

> *Identifying the characteristics of prospective learners is one of the first steps in course design. It is vital to understand the motivation and the existing skills and knowledge that students bring. This is a principle for all teaching but becomes foremost when working with a non-traditional group.* (Powney: 2002:22)

Parker et al (2005) distinguish between the 'official' and the 'unofficial' curriculum, finding that while the official curriculum may be less inclusive, practitioners routinely make adaptations and extend the curriculum to make it more accessible to a wider group of students. However, this relies largely on the goodwill of individuals and departmental funding where this practice does not accord with institutional strategy and creates tensions:

> *…extra effort…needs to be put into WP – not because of student deficiencies, but because institutional views of higher education may not be congruent with widening participation. Essentially [those committed to widening participation] have a cognitive map of their curriculum which differs from the institutional norm…* (Parker et al, 2005:156)

Further tensions may arise in the provision of a more inclusive curriculum as it tends to be resource intensive (JM Consulting, 2004; Layer et al, 2002) and may compete with other institutional priorities such as research (Powney, 2002). In turn, either of these may have an impact on overall quality, standards and performance indicators within the institution (Powney, 2002; Boxall et al, 2002). Again, the existing literature suggests that changes that may be made within institutions to embed WP and support a greater student diversity have far-reaching implications across many areas of an institution's business.

3.6.5 Providing access to funding streams

WP and diversity initiatives can be pursued purely as a means of gaining access to funding streams. As Powney notes:

> *Special initiatives proliferate in education at all levels. Usually they are endorsed by special funding or other inducements. Extra resources are certainly drivers for change* (Powney, 2002:26).

The importance of providing funding streams to ensure HEIs can engage with key policy initiatives has been widely commented on (Institute for Access Studies, 2002; Higher Education Consultancy Group and the National Centre for Social Research, 2003, HEFCE, 2006a). Greenbank (2006) suggests that a key influence on the way HEIs develop policy and strategy in relation to WP is the way the funding regime directs money and therefore policy, in particular areas of widening participation (Greenbank, 2006:203) and that this encourages 'homogeneity' in policy.

The propensity of many Welsh HEIs to 'take advantage of opportunities to lever in external funding for many of their activities' (HEFCW, 2005b:11) has been noted. Similarly, an analysis of the ESF funding secured by English HEIs shows that at least £182.5M was directly bid for during 2000-2006 (Source: HE-ESF Unit, personal correspondence 2006). ESF funding targets the most disadvantaged and usually requires its beneficiaries to study for and achieve some kind of accredited course. This suggests that the drive to diversify funding streams may be contributing to widening participation, though this may not show up in 'official' figures as beneficiaries may study for short-cycle qualifications, or single modules at Foundation Degree, Undergraduate or Masters level.

3.6.6 Generating new roles and markets

Reid and Brain (2003) have argued that Government policy has created a networked market in education. Essentially this consists of an attempt to harness market forces in education in combination with policy aimed at promoting networks of partnerships and collaboration to meet economic and social policy goals. Though this argument was based on analysis of policy in developments in primary and secondary education it can be applied readily to HE. Operating within such a market, the policy context combined with a HEIs market position and mission may provide powerful drivers for generating new roles and markets. The increasingly competitive market for students and funds faced by UK universities may necessitate following strategies that maximise economic self-interest as HEIs become more entrepreneurial and business like (Ball, 1997, Morgan-Klein and Murphy, 2002, Osborne, 2003). WP and diversity

may, of themselves, be a strategy for generating new markets and developing new roles. This arises for three reasons.

First, Government policy heavily promotes the role of HEIs in meeting the national employability agenda and developing a role in economic and social development. It is the assertion that large sections of the labour force require high level skills that links WP to the economic agenda. It is argued that HE has a crucial role to play in enhancing the skills of the workforce in relation to the current and, importantly, to the predicted future labour market demands. For example, six million of the estimated 12 million jobs which are likely to be created between 2004 and 2012 are estimated to be in occupations employing graduates (DfES, 2006:5). The Leitch review argues that by 2020 40% of jobs will require Level 4 qualifications (Leitch, 2006:45). This, as argued above, is opening up the HE sector to the demands of stakeholder groups such as employers, Sector Skills Councils, Regional Development Agencies and other groups and agencies. There are clear links with WP and diversity here. For example, the introduction of Foundation Degrees in England, Wales and Northern Ireland – a key vehicle for expanding participation in HE – simultaneously meets the goals of WP, pursuing the employability agenda and developing new markets for HEIs.

Second, individual HEIs may be able to reduce their reliance on Funding Council/ Government funding sources, leading to greater financial security and autonomy, if they tap into new market areas. The importance of this driver as a stimulus to developing new markets has been recognised by Nixon et al (2006) who note the potential of the workbased learning market for HEI income generation. This market was estimated to be worth around eight billion pounds, of which HEIs currently take about 2%. The Higher Education business and community survey in England (HEFCE 2006b) noted that English HEIs were currently generating over £75 million of income from Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and continuing education provision. HEIs are also tapping significantly into regeneration funding as noted above in 3.6.5.

Third, HEIs may be able to enhance their status and reputation by developing partnerships and embedding themselves in regional governance structures. The importance of such goals to HEIs can be an important driver of their strategy and policy (Institute for Access Studies, 2002; Higher Education Consultancy Group and the National Centre for Social Research, 2003; Nixon et al, 2006).

Both the employer engagement agenda and the developing role of HEIs in regional governance may offer important avenues for integrating WP with a diversification of role to meet broader institutional goals, and at the same time increasing the diversity of the student body. For example, Glasson (2003) describes how two new universities contribute to the local and regional economy and, through some of their activities such as continuing

education and accredited short course provision, also effectively widen participation. Layer (2005) identifies a model of WP built around HEI involvement in local and regional economic regeneration.

However, while a business case can be made linking WP and student diversity to diversifying HE provision, or developing a regional mission and role, it is equally true that both these goals can be met without meeting traditional WP goals and/or significantly increasing the diversity of the student body. For example, HEIs may play a crucial role in supporting business development through knowledge transfer and engage in CPD provision for a range of professional groups without engaging in WP activities. Moreover, it is not yet clear whether there is either a sufficient market demand to sustain HEIs' movement into areas such as work-based learning, or enough government funding to offset the costs and risks of developing provision in this field (Nixon et al, 2006).

3.6.7 Complying with anti-discrimination and equality legislation

Higher education institutions operate within a framework of laws designed to prevent unlawful discrimination against students and to promote greater equality. The legislation provides remedies for those who have been unlawfully treated, as well as sanctions against institutions found to be unfairly discriminating. The main legislation includes: the Race Relations Act (1976), the Sex Discrimination Act (1975), the Disability Discrimination Act (2005), the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (2003), the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations (2003), the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (2006), and the Equality Act (2006).

Together this legislation renders unlawful discrimination against students on the grounds of age, disability, gender, reassignment of gender, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation. The legislation applies to applicants and students at HE institutions who may claim discrimination in relation to recruitment and offers of places, access to benefits, facilities or services, exclusion and other forms of detriment as defined by the law. The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) also compels institutions to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate students with disabilities. In addition, the law places a duty upon public bodies to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment and to promote equality in relation to gender, race and disability. For the purposes of the legislation, HEIs are defined as public bodies and are therefore subject to these requirements. The duty to promote equality requires institutions to not only follow the letter of the law, but also to act positively and pro-actively in changing their procedures and cultures.

Such a legislative framework has important implications both for widening participation in higher education and for developing a business case for

widening participation. The framework provides opportunities for universities to assess and develop their anti-discrimination and equality policies. In this way they may enhance their reputation with stakeholders and become beacons of good practice in the sector. Other benefits have also been identified. For example, Davies has pointed out that adjustments made by HEIs in response to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2005 (SENDA) 'ha[ve] the capacity to encourage innovations in course design…to the advantage [also] of non-disabled students' (Davies, 2003:38). At the same time, failure to comply may lead to a variety of sanctions. These include the possibility that any perceived failure to prevent unfair discrimination, or make adjustments under the DDA, as well as positively promoting equality, will result in legal challenge. Recognising the costs of litigation, and the impact this may have on the reputation of the HEI may act as a driver for compliance (see HEFCE, 2006a).

3.6.8 Corporate social responsibility

For some HEIs, a sense of corporate social responsibility appears to be a genuine driver for, rather than merely an outcome of, WP. This is clearly demonstrated in the strong commitment to social inclusion within the mission statements of many of the HEIs on which a 'grey literature review' for this research was conducted. However, a complex question arises as to whether corporate social responsibility is concordant with institutional self-interest. While it was not possible within the limitations of this study to survey the literature on corporate social responsibility, it was clear that there are many different interpretations of the term (Garriga and Melé, 2004) and that there are potential tensions between institutional self-interest (the heart of the classic 'business case') and a wider social responsibility. As an illustration, the 'From the Margins to the Mainstream' report identifies tensions between a 'wider benefits' approach to widening participation that may be 'altruistic', and issues of student recruitment and sustainability (Thomas et al, 2005:172-173). In this situation a business case approach that is too narrow may suggest a limited involvement in WP, while considerations of corporate social responsibility may suggest extensive involvement. An explicit strategic and policy link between WP and diversity on the one hand, and corporate social responsibility on the other, has the potential to allow HEI policy makers to identify benefits of engaging in WP and student diversity such as those classically linked with corporate social responsibility. Examples of such would be an enhanced reputation, better fit between operations and institutional mission, or improved market intelligence. This may be underpinned further by the status of HEIs as publicly funded institutions driven by UK Government and the Funding Councils to act in a socially responsible way.

3.7 Integrating WP and diversity discourses

This section draws on the different traditions of the equality of opportunity and diversity discourses explored in 3.1-3.4 above, and the discourses and evidence explored in 3.5 and 3.6 relating to WP and student diversity. Its purpose is to draw parallels between these two traditions and to explore ways of integrating these in a manner that sheds further light on the issues of WP and student diversity at the institutional level.

Section 3.1. reviewed the work of Wilson and Iles (1999) on the development of the concept of 'managing diversity' and how this differs from the tradition of equal opportunities as a way of creating more inclusive organisations. They propose two paradigmatic models – one describing equal opportunities and the other describing managing diversity – and identify a number of key differences between them, including:

- the reasons for adopting equal opportunities/managing diversity policies and the forces for change which underpin these decisions
- the extent to which equality of opportunity is regarded as a strategic, or an operational issue, within organisations
- how social difference is perceived
- the focus and kinds of initiatives that are undertaken to achieve change
- the underlying epistemological basis of each approach.

The focus of Wilson and Iles (1999), and much of the other literature on managing diversity is *employment* diversity, rather than customer or client diversity, and one of the key aspects of the 'managing diversity' approach is the assertion that a diverse workforce assists profitability through better recruitment, retention and promotion, more focussed marketing, and enhanced creativity and decision making.

The review of typologies of widening participation action (Osborne, 2003; Layer, 2005) and discourses around 'access' (Jones and Thomas, 2005) outlined in Section 3.5 identified a range of institutional approaches and underlying institutional views related to social inclusion. Although firmly focussed on education and issues of student inclusion, these analyses and conceptualisations touch on some of the issues of organisation policy and practice identified by Wilson and Iles (1999). It is proposed that by integrating these various perspectives it may be possible to create an analytical framework with which to link current institutional approaches to WP, as well as discourses around WP, with the recent developments in conceptualising 'managing diversity'. In the model presented in Table 3.4, the key elements of difference between equal opportunities and managing diversity as proposed by Wilson and Iles (1999) are retained on the left hand axis. The elaboration of these differences is then integrated into the threefold typology of organisation approaches and practices around WP which build on the discussion in Section 3.5.

Table 3.4: Proposed framework of paradigmatic models for approaching WP and student diversity

	Academic	Differential provision	Transformative
Driving Force	Externally driven: • Rests on moral arguments; as well as response to policy agendas; compliance with legislative requirements. • Perceived as cost/risk (e.g. to reputation; standards)	Externally/internally driven: • Instrumental/pragmatic managerial response to potential business opportunities or geographical constraints, as well as external policy development and compliance with legislative requirements. • May be seen as cost and/or investment	Internally driven: • Rests on a range of arguments – moral, ethical, political and internalised 'business case' • Clearly articulates benefits to institution – holistic • Sees WP and diversity as an investment.
Operational or strategic focus	Operational focus: • Confined to pre-admissions and admissions • Project based • Low level of 'buy-in' by staff and students	Mainly operational focus: • Bolted on to, or alternative to existing provision • Initiative based • Buy-in optional dependent on location within organisation	Central/Strategic focus: • Strategically planned and resourced as part of the mainstream • Affects every aspect of the institution • Integrated into all planning processes. • Internalised by all staff and students
Perception of difference	Difference perceived as problematic: • Deficit model ('low aspirations') • Assimilation advocated – student must adapt to institution • Seeks 'the best' of all social groups • More of the same	Difference perceived as problematic: • May lead to deficit model ('low aspirations' and 'lack of academic qualifications') • "Compensatory" activities • More equals different	Difference perceived as asset: • Celebrates difference • Mainstream adaptation advocated, e.g. in services to students as well as curriculum and teaching and learning.
Focus of aion	Group focussed: • Identification and targeting of "non-traditional entrants" or "under-represented groups" • 'tapping the pool of talent'.	Mainly group focussed: • Often involves some kind of targeting • Working with local FE colleges • Establishing separate provision	Individual focused • Universal services – benefits for all • Individual development • Development of aligned strategies for learning, teaching and assessment, lifelong learning, quality enhancement, student support, etc

Excellence in WP may be claimed by HEIs operating any of these three models, though the result in terms of the actual diversity of the student body can be different depending on which model is followed. For example an HEI following the 'academic' approach may work with a group of high achieving young people from lower socio-economic groups to support their learning at GCSE and A-level, prepare them academically and socially for the realities of study in the institution, and finally admit them to highly selective courses in the institution based on their eventual achievement at A-levels. As shown in 3.6.3, the desire to 'tap the pool of talent', underpinned by a sense of social responsibility and responsiveness to Government policy, may act as a key driver to this approach, and within the context of the 'academic' discourse the strategy may be considered successful if the proportion of students from lower socio-economic groups increases as a result of these interventions.

However, in common with more traditional approaches to equal opportunities, this example is a model of assimilation. The diversity of the HEI will be approached with very particular boundaries in mind, and entry only available to those who are able to fit the prevailing norm (A-level achievement, preparation for a particular mode of study). In this example the social diversity of the resulting student body will not necessarily be celebrated, or used as a source of strength, while some of the concerns expressed in 3.6.4 may act as a counter-balancing force. For example, the finding reported by Riddell et al (2004) that making adjustments for students with disabilities to take account of their needs contravenes institutional values and may prevent a move away from a model of assimilation.

Hence the benefits to the HEI are the maintenance of standards and a plentiful supply of well-qualified applicants. However, as has been indicated above, those from under-represented groups are not valued for their difference but for their sameness – what they are likely to have in common with other students is a high intelligence and the ability to succeed in a highly academic environment and this is at the heart of the benefit.

Where a transformative approach dominates, a variety of drivers and forces for change may be evident, but these will include commitment to social justice, as well as the perceived opportunities for institutional development to be derived from diversity. The commitment to valuing student diversity is internalised by all staff and students and the benefits of diversity are widely interpreted in terms of its contribution to the effectiveness of the HEI. Full organisational transformation is required in order to manage diversity effectively.

As explained in Section 3.5 the middle category of 'differential provision' is partly influenced by Jones and Thomas's conceptualisation of a utilitarian discourse in higher education based on current Government agendas relating to higher level skills. Here, however, the category is used to

embody a model of organisational approach to WP which is driven by a variety of factors which may include response to particular aspects of the Government agenda. Importantly, the HEI recognises the need to change in order to adapt to the diverse needs of students (unlike the academic discourse), but these changes are not fully integrated throughout the whole of the institution (unlike the transformative discourse) resulting in 'differential provision'. This, as pointed out in Section 3.5, potentially subsumes a number of the categories in Layer's (2005) typology.

A number of imperatives may prompt such a response. For example, the need to recruit additional students, and/or to increase funding or diversify the institutional mission to meet changing demographic contexts and challenges presented by geography and poor transport infrastructure in rural and coastal areas. In this case new students may be admitted who are very different from the existing student body, but in a context in which they are separated in some way. This might result in minimising the impacts on the institution or might lead to different ways of working to accommodate these students without compromising the institution's reputation. This may be at the departmental level, for example those of continuing education and lifelong learning; the course level, for example foundation and extended degrees; and, in some cases, may lead to a separate structure such as the University of Southampton's 'New College', as outlined by Layer (2005: 80-81). Furthermore, as in Jones and Thomas's (2005) 'utilitarian discourse', the need for HEIs to adapt to the training needs of the workforce may be a factor. While this is a discourse at national level, for individual institutions it may translate into a drive to exploit new markets and new sources of funding based on their unique strengths and the quality of their relationships with external stakeholder groups. Again, a 'differential provision' model allows these new models to be exploited while leaving the rest of the institution relatively untouched. Interestingly, from an analytical point of view, some of the activities that fall under the heading of this approach may not be identified as WP at all, but be related to the 'business and the community' mission – for example CPD and workforce development activities. They are, however, important to this study where they serve to increase the diversity of the overall student body.

Participation can be widened and student diversity can be increased, therefore, in more than one way but the outcome will be different in each case in terms of the actual diversity of the student body in its many dimensions. Moreover, the lived experience of 'non traditional' students is likely to be different in each case depending on how diversity is approached and managed by the HEI (see Macdonald and Stratta, 2001; Thomas, 2002; Quinn, 2004). The differences between 'non-traditional' and 'traditional' students may be suppressed, or not addressed, celebrated as a source of strength, or managed in a context of separation, depending on the HEI's approach.

A summary of how drivers can be mapped, and benefits articulated, within each of the three models is provided in Table 3.5. The content of this table is revisited in Section 4.

Table 3.5: The drivers and benefits of WP mapped onto three paradigmatic WP models

Paradigmatic model	Dominant drivers	Perceived benefits
Academic	Complying with anti-discrimination and equality legislation Corporate social responsibility Tapping the pool of talent	Avoidance of litigation Social justice; social cohesion; Demonstrated commitment to institutional mission and values statement (and to widely-held ethical beliefs) Attracting a larger pool of highly qualified/talented applicants *Ability to gain the above benefits without risk to reputation or academic standards*
Differential provision	Generating new roles and markets Providing access to funding streams Increasing student numbers Corporate social responsibility	Reduced reliance on Funding Council grants; specific growth that does not compromise existing provision Additional support for institutional strategic aims or to ensure financial viability Financial viability or to support growth in specific areas Social justice; social cohesion
Transformative	Belief in enhancement to all areas of business, underpinned by strong social justice/corporate social responsibility ethic Corporate social responsibility	Improved learning outcomes for all students Improved social experience for all students Improved partnerships and relationships with other organisations leading to business benefits such as development of third-stream activities Social justice; social cohesion

3.8 Higher education and the business case for WP and diversity

Business case arguments for diversity have their origins outside the higher education sector and they focus on the internal business benefits of diversity, rather than on external factors, whether moral or legal. As public sector bodies, it may be argued that HEIs operate for the public good and therefore that a business case argument, in this sense, is not relevant. In the HE networked market (Reid and Brain, 2003), the sector is marketised, for example, through: allowing institutions to charge variable top up fees in competition for students (DfES, 2003), promoting greater institutional diversity and specialisation to support greater student choice (DfES, 2003), allowing more universities to be created, promoting the role of HEIs in serving the needs of business, and introducing private sector management techniques such as audit, benchmarking and performance indicators. If this argument is accepted, a business case approach then becomes relevant because institutional self-interest and market positioning assumes importance and defines the 'business' on which the case is built.

However, the marketisation of the sector is partial and HEIs remain publicly funded bodies. This places HEIs in a slightly anomalous position in regard to the use of a 'business case' argument to underpin WP and student diversity. On the one hand ethical, moral and public good arguments may act as important drivers for WP and diversity. On the other hand the need to support the internal business aims of the institution is equally important and a classic business case therefore becomes possible. Both are equally important to HEIs, and this links closely with the views of Wilson & Iles (1999) expressed above in Section 3.4 that a business case should not obscure the importance of ethical imperatives. There is potentially some interplay of these two aspects, for example the contribution of 'corporate social responsibility' to an institution's reputation. In developing a business case model that will be relevant across the sector and useful in practice, both aspects need to be fully recognised.

An additional factor that should be borne in mind when attempting to devise a business case framework for the HE sector is that the networked market in which HEIs operate is extremely complex. WP can be a risky business for HEIs (see for example, Johnston 2003, Brain et al, 2004) and produces a range of potentially contradictory responses. For example, it may be that engagement in WP and student diversity initiatives are seen to support a HEI's attempts to increase student recruitment and therefore are valued as a direct contribution to institutional 'business'. At the same time, these initiatives may be viewed as a threat to recruitment because they (directly or indirectly) portray an image of the institution at odds with

its brand value. The current financial status of a HEI, its existing student profile, its course portfolio, its market position and its strategic direction are all factors that will influence how the HEI interprets the value of different benefits that may flow from WP and student diversity. While this argument could equally be applied to the private sector – different firms operate under different contexts – the private sector has an overriding aim to make profit. HEIs, on the other hand, have a complex mission encompassing teaching, research and 'third stream' activity each of which has different outcomes and each competes internally for resources.

The concept of a business case as a tool to underpin the embedding of WP and the support` of a greater student diversity in HE is therefore useful only if the term 'business case' is understood flexibly. Furthermore a 'one size fits all' business case would clearly be of little use. However, the research team believes there is merit in the use of the business case concept in this context. As was noted in Section 3.6 there was very little mention of the business benefits of WP and diversity within the HE sector, and the evidence for any such benefits was dispersed throughout the literature with many gaps. Some of the principles used to create a business case – identifying a range of benefits, weighing them up against the costs, identifying the business drivers that would support such a strategy – would take the sector considerably beyond the idea that WP is something to engage in on ethical grounds only. The concept of a whole-institution approach is also helpful as it allows strategic decisions to be taken which balance out the different priorities within the institution.

This study, therefore, supports the development of business case arguments for WP and student diversity within the HE sector by drawing together evidence from the literature and the case study research to:

- outline the potential business benefits of WP and student diversity
- build on existing and planned work on the costs of WP by drawing attention to any potential negative impacts on different areas of HE business
- draw out the views and perceptions of different internal stakeholders in order to give an insight into the different impacts of WP activity on different functional areas of an HEI, and to provide insights into potential barriers to embedding WP and diversity
- explore different interpretations of WP and diversity and how these impact on outcomes
- provide an outline framework to support HEIs to develop their own business case for WP and student diversity.

4. Exploration of case study findings

4.1 HEI context

As discussed in Sections 2 and 3, the context within which a HEI operates is likely to be a critical factor in respect to its WP and diversity activities. An HEI's approach to WP and student diversity can be seen as contingent on a range of contextual factors emanating from outside the institution, as well as on institutional strategy. In this research a wide diversity of contexts of the case study HEIs was determined by the requirement that the case studies covered the four countries of the UK and the range of types of HEIs found in the UK. In essence then, the diversity of the case study contexts places some limitations on any direct comparisons between the WP practices in case study institutions. As in most areas of social and educational research and practice, 'recipe knowledge' cannot be assumed and practice cannot simply be transferred from one context to another uncritically.

4.1.1 National policy and legislation

There are some distinct differences in educational policy across the four component countries of the UK in which the case study HEIs were located. In historical terms national policy and legislation have framed the tradition of HE in UK countries, not only in terms of the nature of its provision, but also in terms of the level of cohort participation and WP policy and practice.

In England, fees of up to £3,000 are charged per year for tuition and this was a factor raised by participants in respect to WP policy. All HE institutions are required to have in place an Access Agreement which sets out how fairness of access to all will be ensured. In practice this often contains a statement about the payment of bursaries and the targeting of specific under-represented groups. Despite the bursaries, tuition fees were thought by some participants to be causing difficulties in relation to WP policy.

In Scotland first degrees take four years and the minimum age of entry is 17. Students have a great deal of flexibility around their first year, and it is common for entry to be into a faculty rather than a course, and/or for students to change from their original course choice. Scottish institutions do not charge variable fees. Participation rates in Scotland already exceed 50%, a point raised by research participants in Scottish HEIs.

In Northern Ireland (NI), at both institutional and governmental levels, religion – Protestant and Catholic – was viewed as an important aspect

of social stratification and consequently, of WP. For example, one of the two NI government's WP targets for the case study HEI was 'working class Protestants'. Clearly this had an impact on the way in which WP was perceived , and provided a specific dimension to diversity that was far less prominent in other parts of the UK. Also in Northern Ireland a Maximum Student Numbers (MaSN) cap is still applied and the case study HEI is not allowed to deliver Foundation Degrees being limited to validation and quality assurance. In addition Section 75 of NI legislation on equality was viewed by some of those interviewed as 'outlawing' both positive and negative discrimination and thereby constraining WP and diversity.

In Wales, language was viewed as an important factor and Welsh Language provision as an important aspect of WP and diversity policy and practice, which is not found elsewhere in the UK. The targets for WP are focused on the most deprived areas of Wales with an aim of increasing the participation in these areas from 7 to 11%. There is a strong lifelong learning association in Wales (Universities Association for Lifelong Learning Cymru) which shares good practice and works collaboratively on projects across Wales. There are Welsh Assembly funded "Reaching Higher, Reaching Wider" teams for North, Mid and South Wales aimed at bringing HE and FE providers together to tackle low aspiration amongst school pupils and mature learners. This is additional to WP funding available to individual institutions. Unlike England there is no general body which supports the development of Foundation Degrees.

4.1.2 Market position

For a range of reasons the case study HEIs find themselves in differing positions in the market for the provision of HE and/or for potential students. In part this can be accounted for by their location, history and mission. A crude divide can be seen as those whose market position implies that they can be, and are, largely 'selecting' institutions – for example, Institution B, where there were 10 well qualified applications for each course place, while for others the implication is that they are largely 'recruiting' institutions – for example, Institution C. Those interviewed were all quite well aware of the market position of their institutions and this appeared to be important to their WP approach, not only in pragmatic terms, but also in terms of institutional identity and reputation. Published league tables appeared to be influential in locating HEIs in terms of their 'rank'. HEIs that saw themselves to be 'lower' in terms of ranking used this as a rationale for pursuing WP. For example:

> in the hierarchy of universities we're seen as lower down in the rankings… which [has] meant we have a fairly big market for WP students. (WP staff, Institution A)

This presents WP (and its resultant student diversity) as a rational choice based on the market realities of the HE sector. If institutional status is insufficient to attract many highly qualified applicants then casting the net wider to 'WP students' is a positive step that can be taken to carve out a particular market niche and at the same time ensure institutional survival. This finding backs up that by the Higher Education Consulting Group/ National Centre for Social Research (2003) and reported in Section 3.6.2 above that HEIs with a shortfall in demand are more likely to be active in WP. This confirms the strength of student recruitment as a driver for WP and student diversity.

However, there are some disadvantages to such a strategy; one being that the direct link with 'rank' and 'status' may result in suggestions of deficit both for 'WP students' and for the HEI. As one WP practitioner reported:

> *People have a pretty good idea they'd have a chance of getting in…The problem with this way of promoting ourselves is that the popular perception is that it devalues the education on offer. People put down places like this as a failsafe.* (WP staff, Institution C)

Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka's (2006) suggestion that the reputation of an HEI may be inversely proportional to its ability to 'provide a service' – in this case making itself accessible – seems to hold true in this case. There is then a suggestion that HEIs run a risk to their reputation in pursuing a WP strategy that portrays them as accessible to a wide range of potential students. For HEIs in which recruitment is a strong driver, this risk may be one worth taking, but in those which are able to select from well-qualified applicants there is a potential risk that their core business may be adversely affected. In other words, they risk being less popular among what might be termed 'traditional' entrants if they portray themselves as attractive to a broader demographic range. There is some evidence that this is a genuine risk, given the degree of apparent stratification along ethnic and social class lines that is already found within the sector. Reay et al (2001) found that young people from working class and/or ethnic minority backgrounds were torn between wanting to go somewhere they would feel comfortable and 'fit in', and an institution with a 'high' status and reputation. The implication was that they would only fit in at a 'lower' ranking institution. The authors concluded that:

> *Conceptions of 'the good university' are both racialised and classed* (Reay et al, 2001: 865).

For the 'lower' ranking HEI, however, this situation represents a distinct opportunity to enter markets that are difficult for 'higher' ranking institutions, albeit with the risk that this will serve to underline the

perceived 'lower' status of the institution (and, by association, of the 'WP students' themselves).

In the case study HEIs that were 'higher' in the rankings, those interviewed appeared keen to stress their diversity commitment as something that distinguished them from other 'high' ranking HEIs, for example:

> It is very unusual, in many ways, for a Russell Group university (Teaching staff, Institution D)

> We have always been a progressive institution, and didn't try to get into the Russell Group (Marketing staff, Institution G)

There was a sense of research participants wanting to put distance between themselves and other 'high' ranking institutions which might be seen as having a weaker commitment to WP and diversity. It could be that the research participants presented their HEI in this way because they perceived the researcher(s) to be advocates of WP and student diversity and therefore were keen to present themselves in a positive light. There were however suggestions that a fine balance was being maintained between:

> … project[ing] a 'high class' image, and quality degrees, whilst also trying hard to be a friendly and welcoming environment (Admissions staff, Institution D)

and that this could bring its own benefits and represent a distinct market niche in an increasingly crowded and competitive market.

The sense of market crowding was apparent in some interviews, and was frequently linked to market position, for example:

> The university is finding itself somewhat 'stuck in the middle' between the old [neighbouring institution] and the new [neighbouring institution] so is very aware that it needs to market itself as being the most approachable and adaptable and emphasise the historical make-up of its student body (Senior manager, Institution E)

Learning support staff at Institution C reported that 'higher' ranking HEIs were increasingly poaching 'their' potential students – intelligent young people from lower socio-economic groups – causing them to have to cast their recruitment net wider. So it may be argued that the increase in emphasis on WP and student diversity has changed the nature of the market significantly. There was some evidence within this study to suggest that groups that are under-represented, but easier to support – for example high achievers from lower socio-economic groups, or mature students – were being targeted by the 'higher' ranking institutions, and that this was potentially leaving the 'lower'

ranking institutions to educate those students who are less well prepared. This was suggested by members of HEIs across the spectrum – by the 'higher' ranking ones in their reports of who they were targeting, and in the 'lower' ranking ones in their descriptions of how the student body had changed in recent years. This finding allows the research team to develop Gorard et al's (2006) suggestion, reported in Section 3.6 above, that making WP an issue for the whole sector tends to result in change for only certain institutions in 'coping with new student cohorts'. The present study suggests that all institutions are experiencing change, but those 'higher' in the rankings are changing to adapt to arguably the least challenging of 'new student cohorts' which previously might have gone to 'lower' ranking institutions, whereas 'lower' ranking institutions are coping with cohorts that previously would not have entered higher education. In this sense, it could be argued that overall participation is only genuinely being widened in 'lower' ranking institutions.

4.1.3 History and mission

HEIs vary in the extent to which they seek to sustain, or to develop and expand, their mission and market position. The case study institutions in this research include an ancient university, post-Robbins universities, initially founded on the traditional model, and those developed from polytechnics or colleges in 1992 and subsequently, and their market position is a key element of context as outlined above. However, it would be overly simplistic to relate all the differences between institutions to market position alone. There are, for example, older HEIs that have always sought to serve those traditionally under-represented in HE, while some later founded HEIs have developed along the lines of traditional 'selecting' universities.

History and mission were not always seen as synonymous by those interviewed, though both were reported as important and provided a rationale for WP and student diversity. Mission commitment, particularly to inclusion, was reported across all institutional types. A sense of history appeared to provide an even stronger rationale than mission:

> *Having been a polytechnic we had a tradition of egalitarian education for everyone and not excluding anyone not from an affluent background, so in a sense had a natural WP institution to come from – building on exactly what it was created for and building on natural progression.* (WP staff, Institution A)

The fact of having been a polytechnic was also seen as important in Institution C (the other former polytechnic in the study) and the past was spoken about as an era in which WP and diversity were celebrated and done well. There was a 'nurturing ethos' and a 'family feeling' in the past. One member of student support staff in Institution C remembered

her own student days at the Polytechnic, as a working-class young woman, as having been life-changing. Although the polytechnic roots provided a positive rationale for WP and diversity in the current era, there was a definite sense from several participants in Institution C that the 70s and 80s represented an age in which WP was well resourced and successful.

Older institutions were also able to draw on history to explain their commitment to WP:

> *The guiding principles of the [institution's origins] was as an environment to encourage learning for the working classes and women and these principles continue to influence WP activities today.* (Senior manager, Institution E)

> *Since the earliest time [WP, diversity and social justice] have been part of its mission.* (WP staff, Institution G)

The ability and willingness of staff to articulate a discourse around social justice and diversity as being central to a HEI's identity may be important in its ability to embed a diversity approach throughout the institution. It was certainly seen by many of those interviewed as a key rationale for involvement in WP and student diversity.

4.1.4 Location and 'regionality'

Both the actual and the perceived locations of HEIs vary in respect to the diversity of potential students and the stock of the identified groups of the under-represented in HE. In turn this can be seen to have an effect on a HEI's potential scale of engagement in WP and diversity. Actual HEI locations range from city centres, through small market towns, to rural settings and these typically offer varying 'catchment' areas for students, perhaps increasingly marked as a larger proportion of students live at home while studying. However, it is also important to recognise that HEIs vary in their perception of their location and their consequent pool of students, and that these perceptions are based on assumptions about who is, or can be, attracted to them. In some cases these perceptions can be seen reflected in the courses that a HEI offers. In turn this aspect is intimately related to an institution's history and mission. For example, in some of the case study institutions the course portfolio took into account the desire to serve the particular perceived needs of their locality, region or country, while others appeared to address perceived national needs or demands.

A commitment to the region emerged as an important factor in WP and diversity, and the diversity of the student body was sometimes linked back to that of the region. For example:

[This city] is a diverse city, this institution is at the heart of [the city] so has to reflect the diversity of population it serves. (WP staff, Institution C)

and

We're a regional university serving the needs of our region in an inclusive way. (Business & community staff, Institution A)

Given that a growing proportion of students are choosing to stay at home to study, identification with the local region could be considered as a sound marketing strategy. Only in one of the case study HEIs did participants report being a strongly national rather than a regional recruiter, though this may have been due to the sampling of institutions. There appeared to be some evidence of an increased awareness among staff across the sector about areas of deprivation in the local region and a perceived need to help tackle this.

Regional/sub-regional approaches to partnership working to tackle WP, such as Aimhigher in England or WP Forums in Scotland, are likely to be responsible in part for this awareness. One participant in Institution C spoke critically of (unnamed) institutions that 'put up a wall' between themselves and their localities. The way in which many (especially senior) staff across the case study HEIs were at pains to speak sensitively about the needs of their local regions suggests that such 'ivory tower' attitudes are no longer deemed socially acceptable.

4.1.5 Institutional self-identity

Many participants' comments related WP and diversity back to some aspect integral to the institution as a way of explaining both why it was important and why a particular approach was taken. Some of these related to the external contextual factors noted above, while others referred to less clearly categorised factors – in essence reporting that WP and diversity are 'what we are'. For example:

We are a widening participation university. (Senior staff, Institution F)

We are an open and accessible university. (Student support, Institution A)

Diversity – it all comes together in our students. (Business & community staff, Institution C)

Comments such as these may link back to the strong historical and mission roots to WP and diversity in a HEI and serve to reinforce a market position based on WP, diversity and inclusion. Further than this, moreover, they suggest that WP and diversity are strongly internalised by the staff in a way

that promotes embedding and, in theory, allows all areas of the business to be informed by these issues.

4.1.6 Contextual factors in the case study institutions

A summary of these contextual factors on an institution by institution basis is given in table 4.1. It should be noted that because of the need to assure the anonymity of institutions, the level of detail given has had to be limited. These factors are further considered in later sections in connection with the approaches towards, and drivers for, WP and diversity within the case study institutions.

Table 4.1: The contextual factors of the case study institutions

Inst.	National context	Market position, history and mission	Location and regionalness	Self-identity
A	England	Formerly polytechnic but relatively high rank Long history of WP activity and admission of under-represented groups WP part of mission though not central	Evidence of regional identity. Urban areas of deprivation, large rural areas with 'low aspiration'	'an open and accessible university' 'a teaching university'
B	Northern Ireland	Selective Diversity central to mission New to WP as a policy agenda	Large city Highly focuses on Northern Ireland	Small institution that is committed to diversity
C	England	Polytechnic background Long history of WP activity and admission of under-represented groups WP and inclusivity is central to mission Recruiting	Very strong regional identity Large urban area which is highly diverse and has areas of significant deprivation	'a diverse university'

Inst.	National context	Market position, history and mission	Location and regionalness	Self-identity
D	Scotland	Russell Group Selective Widening access and contributing to economic regeneration part of mission	Situated in a large city Sensitive to the deprivation of the area	'unusual for Russell Group' 'less middle class than other universities' 'high class' but 'friendly and welcoming'
E	Scotland	Long established Social mission and ethos	Situated in a large city Commitment to local community	'somewhere in the middle'
F	England	A recently created and fast growing (but small) university. Recruiting	Situated in an urban conurbation Strong local and regional commitment	Strong vocational identity 'a WP university'
G	England	Selective History and ethos of social justice WP not part of mission	Small, affluent town with rural hinterland National rather than regional focus and recruitment	'a progressive institution'
H	Wales	Long established WP and social inclusion cross-cutting themes of mission	Situated in a small town 'Connection with community'	'has always taken a WP approach'

4.2 Understanding and structuring WP and diversity

4.2.1 Understanding WP and diversity

The literature review revealed the different approaches to WP that may be adopted within the HE sector based on radically different assumptions and definitions (Sections 3.5 and 3.7). Furthermore, the discussion about embedding in Section 4.2.3 points to different understandings of what WP is, and what it encompasses. All those interviewed were asked to give their definitions of both WP and diversity and their answers revealed subtly different understandings of these terms. However, the WP discourse used by participants did not always link closely to the definition that they had

supplied. There was more consensus on the definitions of the term 'student diversity', though only a minority offered a clear one, and all were less likely to use the term spontaneously in their answers than the term WP. Where the term 'diversity' was used, this was sometimes within the context of ethnic diversity.

Definitions of WP differed in two respects:

- between a focus on pre-admissions and admissions and a focus on the whole of the student lifecycle (as per HEFCE, 2001)
- between a definition that rested on specific targeted groups and one that did not target but sought to be inclusive more generally.

There appeared to be no correlation between those who defined WP in relation to pre-admissions and either job role (stakeholder group) or institutional 'type'. This suggests that the way WP was defined had more to do with individuals' background and experiences than either organisational culture or role. This type of definition was very much about getting into HE, for example:

> *opening up opportunities to people who for whatever reasons external to the University would not have thought about Higher Education, and for whom there are all sorts of obstacles…in **actually getting here**.* (Senior staff, Institution D. Emphasis added by authors.)

A common theme in the definition of WP was outreach, expressed as 'encouraging', 'enabling', 'reaching' and 'raising aspirations'. For example one member of marketing staff remarked:

> *WP's traditional definition is about raising aspirations.* (Marketing staff, Institution C)

This resulted in a definition of WP that was very much about specific activities; for example, Aimhigher or the GOALS project (Greater Opportunity of Access and Learning with Schools) were occasionally referenced. The perception of WP as activity may be one reason it was linked so strongly to pre-admissions – 'WP activities' are thought to be 'aspiration raising'. This is important inasmuch as the ability to embed WP throughout a HEI, or even to gain support for a broader view of WP that is more central to an institution's operation, may be hampered by such definitions. In other words it could constitute a barrier. As is discussed in Section 4.2.2 below, limitations on the definition of WP, linked to (or even caused by) institutional structure, can lead to unwillingness among some staff to engage in WP. At the same time it is important to note that WP can also be seen as a process that only encompasses pre-admissions and admissions:

[WP is a] Government agenda from New Labour's initiative for getting 50% of 18-30 year olds into HE or vocational training by 2010. (Institution A, WP staff)

Whether WP is seen as an activity or a process, there is an apparent link in the above examples between WP and a minority of staff working in WP, marketing/outreach and admissions. This in turn links WP closely into issues of recruitment, and the arguments discussed in Section 3.6.2, particularly comments by Gorard and Powney, become important. The link between WP and pre-admissions activities and WP as recruitment was not clear in the present research, but there were some suggestions of it which are discussed in Sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3 below.

Only a small number of research participants offered definitions that pointed to other aspects of the student lifecycle, for example:

[Widening participation is] also about supporting progression both to and through HE and also their exits. (WP staff, Institution A)

Some of those interviewed mentioned that merely widening access without addressing the other aspects of the student lifecycle was 'not being fair to the students' (WP staff, Institution C). A number of participants from different institutions were concerned to ensure that students were not 'set up to fail', though occasionally they were sufficiently candid to state that this may in fact be the case due to an increasing drive for student numbers. This latter point tended to be confined to HEIs that predominantly 'recruited' rather than 'selected' and were grappling with such issues on a daily basis.

Another notable difference apparent in the definitions used was whether or not they were linked to specific groups. To some, the definition of WP was inextricably linked to certain groups:

WP is highlighting opportunities to underrepresented groups. (Admissions staff, Institution D)

Non-traditional entry students who are offered access routes into higher education. (CPD Manager, Institution E)

Getting to the groups we haven't reached previously. HEFCE's latest direction on this is focussed very much towards students from lower socio-economic groups, and that's where I see the biggest gap. (Institution A, WP staff)

Other research participants took a broader and more holistic view of WP, linking it to issues and principles such as social inclusion. Such definitions were concentrated in HEIs that already had a diverse student body:

> *My understanding is that we need to give students opportunities for HE from a diverse range of backgrounds.* (Institution F)

> *I believe completely that students who have the ability to benefit should have the opportunity no matter what age they are…People should be educated as highly as it's possible to educate them.* (Business & community staff, Institution C)

This difference of focus – on groups or on individuals – reflects that proposed by Wilson and Iles (1996) between the Equal Opportunities and Managing Diversity paradigm. In turn this suggests that the problems have been associated with an Equal Opportunities model, rather than a diversity model – in that the former is insufficiently holistic, does not take account of individual differences, and excludes certain under-represented groups (Kandola and Fullerton, 1994). This critique could perhaps also be levelled at a WP model that is predicated on the targeting of certain groups.

While the above discussion represents participants' formal definitions of WP, it was clear that the term was sometimes being used in a different way during the course of the interview. Three notable examples of this relate to the use of the term WP to denote a particular group of students:

> *…we have a fairly big market for WP students.* (WP staff, Institution A)

> *There is no correlation between WP students and drop-out rates.* (Senior manager, Institution D)

> *…[WP is] students from non-traditional backgrounds such as those coming from schools in low-participation areas via Summer Schools.* (Student support, Institution E)

Watson (2006) has described WP as 'a portmanteau term' (Watson, 2006:3) into which many different concepts can be packed. The present research supports this description of WP, since multiple understandings of the term were presented – often within the same institution and even by the same individual. WP can be understood simultaneously as an outcome, a process, or a type of student; it may be an issue for admissions and pre-admissions, or one that affects the whole of the student lifecycle. While this multiplicity of definitions is not necessarily a negative, they do have the potential to cause confusion (particularly in communication) and to hamper both the embedding of WP within HEIs together with moves towards a diversity model with a more holistic view of inclusion.

'Diversity' was not always defined by those interviewed and sometimes it was equated with ethnic/racial diversity. For example:

> *Diversity is going beyond the white middle class groups that you would have expected in the past to go to university* (Senior staff, Institution C)

In other cases a definition was given that Wilson and Iles (1996) would equate more with an Equal Opportunities paradigm and that arguably represents a lack of depth in understanding diversity issues:

> *The diversity aspect is more about the different groups in society; colour, creed, gender, sexual orientation etc.* (Academic staff, Institution D)

Some participants spoke of a direct connection between WP and student diversity. For example staff in Institution F did not distinguish between WP and diversity, suggesting that one leads to the other and vice versa. There was some evidence that the understanding of diversity was linked to institutional context. For example, the quote immediately above from Institution C, in which diversity was linked to ethnic diversity by many participants, should be understood within the context of a HEI that draws over 50% of its students from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups. Among those HEIs in predominantly white areas the lack of ethnic diversity in the student body tended to be linked to that of the local area. For example:

> Interviewer: *How would you describe your student profile?*
>
> P1: *Pretty WP but not very ethnically diverse*
>
> P2: *We don't have a large ethnic minority group in the region*
>
> (Focus group of Admissions staff, Institution A)

Speaking about student diversity rather than WP however did have one advantage in that it focused attention on the post-admissions aspects of the student lifecycle (HEFCE, 2001), even if the association was not a positive one. For example, in Institution D, where the focus of the integration of WP was reported as being within admissions (see section 4.2.3 below), a discussion about diversity resulted in the following comment:

> *There is a tension between the diversity agenda and the required commitment to study if students also have work/family commitments.* (Student support, Institution D)

Here, as elsewhere, the use of the term diversity, as opposed to WP, grounded the discussion in the realities of the (current or future) student body.

There is then some evidence that the diversity model is not fully understood or used within the HE sector. However, the present research

suggests that there may be benefits in using the term 'student diversity' based on the diversity model, as understood by Kandola and Fullerton (1994), Wilson and Iles (1996) and others. The term has the potential to move thinking away from the targeting of specific groups which, arguably, perpetuates a deficit model (Jones and Thomas, 2005). It also serves to move the focus on to the realities of the student body and away from specific activities such as outreach, thus being more clearly focused on outcomes rather than process. Moreover, the diversity model is the one associated with organisational change. Woodrow (2000) has critiqued existing WP approaches:

> *While most institutions recognise that students from under-represented groups need to change to survive in an HE environment, fewer are prepared to accept that institutions also need to change.* (Woodrow, 2000:4)

Jones and Thomas (2005), Thomas (2002) and other authors have made similar observations. The use of the term 'student diversity' therefore may be more helpful than the term WP in helping HEIs across the spectrum towards an understanding of a need for change. Whether or not they see a need to change, however, is another matter. Woodrow (2000) points out that most HEIs have been able to adapt quite flexibly to lucrative new markets such as international students. The catalyst for institutional change to facilitate greater student diversity is linked, therefore, to the articulation of clear business benefits associated with such a change. While social and ethical arguments are important, arguably such arguments are not taking the HE sector far enough down the road of change.

4.2.2 Institutional structures

The case study HEIs provided a range of institutional structures both in general terms and in respect of the way in which WP was perceived and managed. While Powney (2002) identified five different institutional structures for supporting widening participation, the case study institutions in the present study did not fall easily into this typology. In some cases this was because the different aspects of WP and diversity were organised differently – for example, the structures and systems in place to attract more young people from lower socio-economic groups – an out-reach activity (Osborne, 2003) – could be different to the systems in place for dealing with students with a disability – an in-reach activity (Osborne, 2003). In other cases the perception of how WP was organised varied although the system was fixed and well defined – for example it was not unusual for stakeholders at some distance from a central WP team such as academics or student services to be unsure as to whether a WP strategy existed.

This latter point is illustrated in the comparison of different stakeholder perspectives in Institution A shown in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2: A comparison of three stakeholder's views of WP strategy in Institution A

Widening Participation Staff	Admissions Staff	Academic Staff
Although HEFCE doesn't require a strategy, we do have one. There is an overarching strategic statement for 2004-2010 and every year we also create an annual operational plan and action plan with targets – important to embed WP and not be marginalised. It is not about a team of people committed to WP, it has to be embedded in the institution	I'm confident there is one. If we're looking at the Admissions Policy, for example, I'm very much aware of the WP agenda and to include points that allude to that and issues of access relating to disability. I know there is a statement because I've seen it but I can't go into more detail.	There is obviously a strategy because it helps to fund one of our members of staff to do taster days etc., but I get the sense it's a bit hit and miss.

As was pointed out in Section 2.4.6, this reflects a different level of knowledge rather than, necessarily, a different view of WP and diversity. However, it does provide an insight into how a clearly defined WP Strategy may be viewed and/or valued differently within an institution. This had a knock-on effect on the ability to embed WP and diversity policy and practice throughout the institution (see Section 4.2.3 below).

Taking these different understandings into account it was possible to identify the dominant features of the approach to WP and diversity to be found in each HEI by comparing the information given in the interviews (particularly by WP and Senior Management Staff) with the official strategic and policy documentation. These have been laid out in relation to the history and mission of the institution as initially presented in Table 4.1 for purposes of comparison.

Table 4.3: Strategic and operational model of WP in the case study institutions

Inst.	Market position, history and mission	Organisational model	Perceived senior commitment	Perceived as core or project funded
A	Formerly polytechnic but relatively high rank Long history of WP activity and admission of under-represented groups WP part of mission though not central	Central WP department with faculty WP staff. Partnership with local colleges that represents a large part of the institution's student diversity	Assertion that Senior Managers are committed, but also perception that commitment to WP depends on personality	Some core funding centrally and devolved to departments and substantial project funding through Aimhigher.
B	Selective Diversity central to mission New to WP as a policy agenda	Small central WP team	Championed by a Vice Principal	Core funded
C	Polytechnic background Long history of WP activity and admission of under-represented groups WP and inclusivity is central to mission Recruiting	Widening Participation Team	Championed by current and previous Vice Chancellor	Generally core funded
D	Russell Group Selective Widening access and contributing to economic regeneration part of mission	WP Committee, though reportedly some members are not able to commit sufficient time to disseminating the strategy to their colleagues	Strong at Principal and Vice Principal level. Vice Principal for Learning and Teaching said to be the "champion"	Core funded

Inst.	Market position, history and mission	Organisational model	Perceived senior commitment	Perceived as core or project funded
E	Long established Social mission and ethos	Widening Access Committee, plus a Centre for LLL. WP staff in faculties and services	Championed by Vice Principal. Responses to this question couched in terms of demonstrating success via performance indicators	A mix of core and project funding, with the perception among some staff being that it is generally project funded
F	A recently created and fast growing (but small) university. Recruiting	WP strategy, but WP and diversity widely regarded as embedded throughout	Strong senior commitment	Largely core funded though with some projects
G	Selective History and ethos of social justice WP not part of mission	Widening participation sits within Admissions, but WP strategy also embedded within Learning and Teaching strategy. WP Forum in development.	V-C provides leadership but 'support is not unanimous'. PVC for Learning and Teaching oversees WP embedded within Learning and Teaching Strategy	Mixture of core and project funding
H	Long established WP and social inclusion cross-cutting themes of mission	No separate WP unit, strategy-driven	Strong at Vice Chancellor and Pro Vice Chancellor level	Largely core funded, no evidence of 'project' culture

Neither Powney (2002) nor Layer (2005) in their discussion of different organisational models for WP discuss the potential implications of the models they describe for the understanding of and effectiveness of WP, nor how it relates to wider issues of student diversity. Thomas et al (2006), however, identify the strengths and weaknesses of two main approaches – centralised and dispersed. They report that one of the problems with having a centralised WP approach is that only this team takes responsibility for WP issues (Thomas et al: 2006:174-5) This approach was echoed in Institution A in which a member of WP staff located within a faculty reported that:

> *The general opinion is that WP staff are employed to do the job and other staff don't want to get involved.* (WP staff, Institution A)

The present research suggests that a further potential problem is that the WP team are perceived as having 'marked out' their territory and that other staff within the institution cannot legitimately take part in some WP activities.

For example Institution C had a strong central WP unit and this had an impact on the rest of the institution by ringfencing the 'outreach' aspects of WP as belonging to that team and divorcing them, in some cases, from other elements of the student lifecycle:

> There are a lot of crossovers [between our roles] but we don't work very closely together. WP is raising aspirations, but marketing is recruitment. I think you can do recruitment and raise aspirations but the mission of the WP team is about general aspiration raising. There's a bit of a conflict. (Marketing staff, Institution C)

It is interesting to note that in the quotation above it was assumed that the WP team took a definition of WP that was similar to that often ascribed to the Aimhigher programme in England, the GOALS programme in the West of Scotland and other non-institutionally based aspiration raising programmes – that it was about 'general aspiration raising' and finished prior to the point of application. However, a senior member of WP staff said that:

> When students get here, the job is not done. We support students in their studies through learning development provision. (WP staff, Institution C)

There was a mismatch within this institution, therefore, between the role that the Central WP team felt they were playing and the role they were perceived to be playing. In this particular case the potential for supportive collaboration between the WP Team and the Marketing Team were compromised by the perception of the Marketing Team that the WP Team were concentrating on fundamentally different kinds of activity. While it cannot be said categorically that this relates to structural issues, similar tensions were found in Institution A which also had a strong WP Team – in this case the Admissions Team were 'not allowed to go into the WP schools' because this was the territory of the WP team. Instead they undertook similar activities (such as students giving talks about student life) in 'non-WP schools'. One member of the Admissions staff admitted:

> I've been here 2 years and have never been introduced to the WP people. I believe at [Institution A] WP is very, very separated … I don't understand why WP feel they have to have their own identity and appear separate. I have asked for help with a project and been told it's not in their remit – experience with WP is they have set schools and set projects and won't go outside that. (Admissions staff, Institution A)

Separations such as this have clear implications for WP practice and represent both a barrier to, and a lack of embedding of WP, even within a HEI that is extremely committed to WP and has a strong reputation for it. Furthermore they perpetuate a definition of WP that rests on the identification of specific groups, and the implications of this are discussed in Section 4.2.3 below.

Table 4.3 above also suggests some correlation, within the case study HEIs, between senior staff's commitment and how central WP and diversity were seen to be to the mission of the institution. Given that it is the role of senior management to champion the mission statement of the institution, this is probably unremarkable. Nonetheless Thomas et al (2006:173 reported that the involvement of senior staff was the key to the success of their WP strategies. There was some limited evidence in the case study HEIs that the perception of senior support was important.   A senior member of staff from Institution D described WP and diversity as:

> *Like a stick of rock, it runs through the University quite deeply.* (Senior manager, Institution D)

It was clear from other interviews within this HEI that WP was unquestioned as an important element of the institutional strategy. Similarly in Institution B there was a unanimous championing of WP and diversity from the most senior level downwards. By contrast Institution G did not put WP and diversity at the heart of its mission and it was acknowledged by a senior staff member that 'support is not unanimous'.

A less clear picture emerges from Institution A where some participants stated that there was a strong senior commitment, while others suggested that it was merely one of many interests that the senior managers have to juggle. This is probably a direct reflection of the fact that WP and diversity are mentioned within the institutional mission, but only as one of many strategic drivers.

Evidence of a link between senior staff's commitment and organisational structure was difficult to identify, though Institution H provided an example. As a result of a recent restructuring widening participation had been identified as a cross cutting theme within its Strategic Plan and a supporting widening participation policy developed, which was being championed at PVC level university wide. Staff here were very clear that this has served to kick start a process of dismantling internal institutional barriers in respect to a lack of 'buy in' and the perceived relevance of widening participation to core business. It was reported that:

> *Once the strategy becomes part and parcel of what is done, like a Health & Safety policy or Human Resources Strategy, there will be more ownership.* (Senior staff, Institution H)

4.2.3 Embedding WP and diversity

The literature review in Section 3 did not explicitly address issues of 'embedding' WP as it was often implicitly assumed, though never defined. However, a subsequent review revealed that Thomas et al (2006) had set out a number of factors that were thought to contribute towards the creation of an 'integrated' approach and these included leadership, valuing diversity in the mission and integrated policies. Issues emerged from the present research which appeared to go beyond a definition of embedding to one of integrating. For example, in talking about their HEI's approach to WP and diversity, a senior member of staff from Institution F reported:

> It is embedded; we exceed all our benchmarks. We are a Widening Participation University. The University is very flexible in terms of the way we approach HE. We are not a full or part- time University, we are a mixture. Half our students study part-time…WP is across the portfolio, we could not pick out one course which is WP we have a range which suit different types of applicants. We don't just offer the standard 3year programme… We offer a wide range of types of study so that a student without academic attainment can be slotted in. That is not the case for most Universities. (Senior staff, Institution F)

This presents a reading of the term 'embedding' that comes close to Jones and Thomas's (2005) concept of a 'transformative' institution in that the entire institution is built around the diverse needs of actual and potential students. Similar views of embedding WP and diversity emerged from the interviews with staff in Institutions C and H and were present in all stakeholder categories (including students, where interviewed).

In the two oldest case study HEIs, however, a different view of embedding was presented. A senior member of staff from Institution D reported:

> I'm very keen that WP should be a fully integrated activity within recruitment. (Senior staff, Institution D)

Similarly a senior member of staff at Institution G reported that WP was becoming more embedded within the admissions procedures. This suggests an understanding of embedding that does not extend to other aspects of the student lifecycle beyond admissions and may in part be linked to how WP is understood and defined (see Section 4.2.2 above).

Another reason for this difference in understanding of the term embedding is likely to be a combination of the HEI's market niche and its existing student profile. There was a sense, particularly towards both ends of the 'recruiting-selecting' spectrum, that HEIs were honing their response to WP

and diversity in a way that reflected their actual and future student intakes. For example, a senior staff member at Institution G stated that:

> *Because we are not successful in attracting WP students, there is no cost for student support.* (Senior staff, Institution G)

In other words there was no need to integrate a programme of measures to support a more diverse range of students throughout their studies because such students were simply not (in the opinion of the staff member) present in the institution. At the same time it should be noted that this institution has embedded WP into its Learning and Teaching strategy, though the quotation above suggests that differences in academic preparedness do not form an aspect of WP in this context. This contrasts with a programme of academic preparation and support that had been integrated throughout the curriculum at Institution C because 'the nature of the student body is that they need it'. These are pragmatic responses to actual situations which help to define a response to the WP and student diversity agendas. These differences, however, allow both these institutions to claim that they have an 'embedded model' and, indeed, both appear to be fit for purpose. The corollary to this is that the actual diversity of the student bodies in Institutions C and G differs markedly.

The issue of project versus core funding also appeared to be an important dimension in the embedding of WP throughout an HEI. It was identified that government funded widening participation initiatives such as Reaching Higher Reaching Wider in Wales, GOALS in Scotland and Aimhigher in England have created an impetus within institutions to embrace widening participation and its relationship with the student lifecycle, albeit with a challenging agenda. However, while these initiatives were seen as positive, not only in respect of raising aspirations and attainment, but also as levers to create change within institutions, concerns were expressed as follows:

> *The challenge is in changing the way things operate within the Institution but it's also ensuring that the commitment that has been shown through [government funded widening participation initiatives] is not suddenly pulled when there is a change in administration.* (Senior staff, Institution H)

The consequent short-term project nature of a significant number of WP (and student diversity) initiatives is reflected in the difficulty that some HEIs identified in retaining staff – often those staff with the most marketable experience and skill are lost, resulting in an additional workload for those remaining. Consequently, the remaining staff can become de-motivated and negative towards the WP agenda. Such staff are often on fixed-term contracts and work in an environment of uncertainty and flux, dictated by changing Government priorities and spending review outcomes

4.3 The drivers for, and benefits of, WP and diversity

4.3.1 Introduction and overview

A key objective of the present research was to explore the rationale and drivers for HEIs to engage in WP and diversity. It was also considered important to understand the benefits for the HEIs as perceived by stakeholders from this engagement in order to begin the process of understanding whether a business case exists for WP and diversity. In the thematic interviews conducted all representatives of key stakeholder groups were asked why their HEI engaged in WP and the benefits they saw as a result.

Table 4.3 provides an overview of the stated reasons for WP engagement and the perceived benefits as reported by participants in each case study institution. These responses are presented and discussed in more detail in Sections 4.3.2 to 4.3.6. The presentation and discussion of findings is structured around the drivers and reasons for engaging in WP and diversity identified.

A number of overarching themes emerged from this aspect of the research:

- Analysis of responses revealed a range of complexly related reasons and drivers underpinning HEIs' decisions to engage in initiatives and policy interventions in WP. These included:
  - moral choices derived from a commitment to social justice, behave in a socially responsible manner and contribute to wider socio-economic development
  - responses to Government policy and legislation
  - a belief that a diverse student body enriches the learning and teaching experience
  - reasons more closely linked to individual HEIs' market position, particularly in respect to student recruitment and business development.

- Obligations in relation to social justice and ideas associated with corporate social responsibility (CSR) – contributing to wider social and economic development – were identified as key drivers irrespective of stakeholder group or type of HEI. Also widespread was reporting on reasons relating to alignment with Government policies. Other drivers, such as opportunities for student recruitment and opportunities for wider business development, were not identified consistently by stakeholders. In cases where these drivers were identified there were variations in the way in which these factors were understood and

interpreted at institutional level. This is consistent with previous research highlighting the importance of mission and market position of HEIs to understanding the reasons for engaging in WP and diversity – see the discussion in Sections 3.6 and 4.1.

- A variety of institutional benefits resulting from WP and diversity were identified by participants. These included: capitalising on the different qualities, knowledge and viewpoints which a diverse student body may bring to the education experience; finding new markets; diversifying products and revenue streams: and developing the university brand and reputation. Such benefits are consistent with the claims made in the literature on 'the business case' and 'managing diversity' reviewed in Section 3.2, as well as the review of literature on the benefits of WP and diversity in section 3.6. It is interesting to note that although concern with social justice and acting in a socially responsible way were widely reported by participants as being motivated by moral choices rather than in anticipation of a business opportunity, institutional benefits in the form of, for example, enhanced reputation with stakeholders and other business benefits were also highlighted as a consequence of being seen to be 'doing the right thing'. This is discussed in more detail below. This suggests that perceived obligations to act in a socially responsible manner may sit alongside a recognition of the institutional benefits to be derived from widening access and managing student diversity

- Participant responses within institutions showed a high degree of consistency in the identification of drivers and benefits as displayed in table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Rationale for and perceived benefits of WP/Diversity by institution

Rationale	Perceived benefits	Institution							
		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Social justice – 'doing the right thing'	Providing equal opportunities	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Meet university WP and diversity targets							✓	✓
	Better 'social mix'; breaks down barriers				✓				
Corporate responsibility	Contributibg to social and economic development	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Enhanced reputation with stakeholders	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓
	Be seen as local/ regional leader in WP and diversity	✓			✓				✓
Responses to government policy and legislation	Meet Office for Fair Access (OFFA) access agreement targets	✓	✓					✓	
	Alignment with government WP policy/ targets		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
	Compliance with anti-discrimination and equality legislation							✓	✓
	Benefits nor specified			✓			✓		
Belief that a diverse student population enriches learning experience	Enriched social, learning and teaching experience for students and staff; add to knowledge base	✓							
	Enriched learning experience					✓	✓	✓	✓
Opportunity for recruiting students: building on traditional strengths of institution in attracting diverse student body; developing existing market; finding new student markets	Sustain/expand student numbers	✓		✓					
	Meet professional body targets for WP and diversity	✓							

Rationale	Perceived benefits	Institution							
		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Opportunity for recruiting students: responding to declining population and increased competition from 'new' universities in the area; opportunities to recruit more students from local population	Sustain/expand student numbers					✓	✓		
Opportunity for recruiting students: 'tapping the pool of talent', e.g. attracting the best brains and so gaining competitiveness and excellence through harvesting talent wherever it is found; responding to professional body developments in widening access to professional areas	Maximise opportunities				✓			✓	✓
	Maintain high academic standards				✓			✓	✓
	Survival of departments							✓	
	Alignment with professional bodies							✓	
Opportunities for business development through community/ employer engagement: e.g. finding avenues to develop research and knowledge transfer; gain access to new funding streams; develop new courses; partnership working	New products and diversification of business	✓					✓		
	New income streams	✓					✓		
	New courses								✓
	New partnerships								✓
	New student markets						✓		✓

In section 3.7 it was posited that the drivers and benefits of WP and student diversity were likely to vary depending on the dominant model of WP adopted. The three models – academic, differential provision and transformative – represent different WP paradigms which map onto different conceptions of diversity, and do not represent an institutional typology. However it is possible to provide a tentative mapping of the case study institutions to these WP paradigms based on the understanding of the drivers and benefits in table 4.4 above.

Table 4.5: A tentative mapping of the case study institutions onto WP paradigms

Institution	WP paradigm	Rationale
A	Differential provision	Concentration on recruitment and business development, but wish to maintain high standards and reputation.
B	Academic	Mainly social justice/corporate responsibility argument. Highly selecting.
C	Transformative	Strong internalisation of diversity agenda. (However student recruitment a strong driver)
D	Academic	Social justice and 'tapping the pool of talent' driver. Wish to maintain standards.
E	Mixed	A range of drivers. 'Somewhere in the middle'.
F	Transformative	Has some aspects of 'differential provision' (i.e. business development) however this applies right across the institution.
G	Academic	Social justice and 'tapping the pool of talent' driver. Wish to maintain standards.
H	Mixed	Some aspects of 'differential provision' drivers but no evidence that separate provision is put on.

The implications of this classification are examined in Section 5.

4.3.2   Social justice and corporate social responsibility (CSR)

When asked to explain the rationale for engaging in WP and diversity, one of the central themes identified by participants was a belief in the commitment of the HEI to social justice and a sense of social responsibility to contribute to wider social and economic development.

This view was widely held by participants, irrespective of HEI or stakeholder group, indicating a high degree of consensus about the role

that a perceived obligation in relation to social justice and responsibility plays in shaping institutional policies and actions in respect to WP and diversity.

The manner in which participants articulated this focus on social justice and responsibility differed only slightly between HEIs. A strong belief in the need to serve the needs of their local and regional communities was a dominant theme across all interviews, as well as a desire to contribute more widely to social and economic development:

> So, why do we engage in WP? It's a sense of social responsibility. We want to attract talented students, and there are talented students in all socio-economic classes. (Senior manager, Institution D)

> [City] is a large conurbation and a large number of people can't take part in its activities. So it has some kind of social responsibility as far as that's concerned. And that was the case before WP came on the agenda. So it engages in WP because it's a good thing to do. (Academic staff, Institution D)

> I think it's part of every university's role, especially for (us) because we're such a large part of the local community. (Marketing staff, Institution D)

> Serving the needs of our particular communities within the region. (WP staff, Institution A)

> One of the university's five values is access and another is service to communities. (Senior manager, Institution A)

> This is what we should be doing, and it is a funding and government priority – we're a regional university "serving the needs of our region in an inclusive way". It's part of the mission. (Business and community staff, Institution A).

A strong sense of serving the needs of local and regional communities (see 4.1.4) was also evident in interview responses in Institutions B, E, F, H and C. In contrast, participants at institution G made no reference to this aspect of social responsibility. In part this difference may be due to the relative importance of local recruitment within each HEI. For example, local and regional students make up the main market in institutions C and F and are significant in others. In Institution G, however, most recruitment is at national and international level. This was summed up by a senior manager in institution G in this way:

> The University sees itself as more national than regional and local. In recruiting terms it is one of 10 institutions which recruit almost wholly nationally. (Senior manager, Institution G;)

Institutional histories were referred to by participants as a key to understanding commitment to social justice and wider social and economic development, at national and local level, and this is explored in Section 4.1.3.

Senior managers in Institutions G and A identified the personal characteristics of the current leaders of their institutions as important in the continuing focus on social justice and social responsibility. Specifically, they cited the background and personal political commitments of the Vice-Chancellor, and other members of the senior management team, as a key to understanding the current stance of their institutions. The importance of senior management leadership and commitment to the ideals of social justice and corporate social responsibility as drivers of the WP and diversity strategy were highlighted by other participants in both institutions and are commented on in Section 4.2.2. At the same time, respondents expressed some concern about the extent to which these values were fully shared within the institution. For example, members of the WP and marketing staff at Institution G suggested that at departmental level 'doing the right thing' in terms of social justice may clash with other imperatives, such as the requirements of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). A similar observation regarding the extent of 'buy-in' to WP at departmental level was made by a member of the admissions and outreach staff at Institution A.

Becoming local/regional leaders in WP and diversity was further highlighted by participants as one of the reasons for engaging in community based activities. For example staff involved in WP and marketing in Institutions A and D, commented on their HEIs seeing themselves, or as wishing to be seen, as 'leaders' in the field of widening access to higher education in their local communities, building on their traditions of widening access and serving the community:

> *You've got the Government side – the funding aspect … and political side of it. But mainly because (the university) prides itself on being one of the forerunners and sees this as a big thing so should be one of the leaders in it.* (Marketing staff, Institution D)

> *We're the major university (in this area) to be doing this and to have links with a lot of the colleges in this area – we have got to be seen to be leading.* (WP staff, Institution A)

There were some signs that interest in regional leadership was not only motivated by 'pride' or 'doing the right thing'. Institutional benefits, such as enhancing reputation with other stakeholders, and opportunities for long term business development, were also highlighted as a consequence of community based WP and diversity activities:

There has been a long history of [WP] at [our university]. Our WP has a national and international reputation, so when it comes to getting external grants and leading regional partnerships, we are always at the forefront, which is good. (WP staff, Institution. A)

This issue is discussed in further detail in section 4.3.4 and is returned to in section 4.5.

As stated above, a concern for social justice and behaving in a socially responsible way was widely reported as a key driver for the development of WP and diversity policies and initiatives. However, across the case-study HEIs, there were variations in the relative importance of these motives compared with other drivers. For example, institutions C and F are located in socially diverse geographic areas, have a long tradition of serving local communities, a large part of their student market is comprised of non-traditional students, and they are 'recruiting' rather than 'selecting' HEIs. Participants at both expressed a strong sense of mission with regard to social justice. At the same time, though, there was a clear understanding of the financial imperative to recruit students for organisational survival, and sometimes the financial driver was seen to be potentially at odds with social justice. One participant at Institution C commented on the significance of the recruitment driver and summed up the conflict by suggesting we are setting them up to fail. In contrast, a senior manager in Institution G (a high recruiting institution) was clear that the single most important motive for engaging in WP and diversity was social justice and that 'self-interest' was not very important:

Well, there is not a lot of self interest. . . in the sense that (the university) is a high recruiter. (Senior manager, Institution G)

Different institutional stances in relation to WP and diversity and student recruitment are discussed in more detail in section 4.3.5

4.3.3 Obligations in relation to Government policy and legislation

In all cases Government policy goals in relation to WP and related funding arrangements contributed to shaping institutional strategies and approaches. This is evident, for example, in Access Agreements drawn up by institutions in Northern Ireland and England specifying targets and their arrangements to safeguard and promote fair access, as well as in institutional education and widening participation strategies which explicitly align themselves with national and regional policy. Participants in Institutions A and G identified membership of local Lifelong Learning Networks (LLNs) as significant in shaping their policies and activities

around WP, especially in relation to partnership working with local colleges and developing links with employers. Within Institution G, this included developing new progression routes and provision, though at present this was confined to lower recruiting departments. Within Institution A this appeared to be linked to a desire to explore new markets, such as learners in the workplace. Aligning institutional strategies with regional development needs was highlighted in this institution, and linked to the possibility of reaching a diverse range of potential students:

> *Our intention is to do more... activity with businesses – linked to regional needs in a policy context, so if targets, regionally or nationally, fall within our areas then courses would be provided for those areas for people from a very wide diverse group.* (Business and community staff, Institution A,)

The availability of core funding to assist HEIs in undertaking WP and diversity activities was commented on in various ways by participants. Interestingly, none of them reported that the availability of mainstream funding for widening participation was a key driver for their engagement. Funding was seen as facilitating and supporting the development of projects and other interventions to achieve a more diverse student body, rather than as an incentive in itself. One participant in the high recruiting, 'selective' Institution D expressed the view that the available mainstream funding for widening participation was insufficient to enable those active in developing institutional strategies to convince colleagues elsewhere in the university to act:

> *The [Funding Council] have a widening participation premium, but it is not enough that it's an incentive. The distinctiveness of the stream allows you to argue for it in meetings but it doesn't go anywhere.* (WP staff, Institution D)

Participants' perceptions of the availability of funding and the extent to which these are adequate, or otherwise, to cover the real costs of engaging in widening participation activities are discussed further in Section 4.4.

The funding council was also seen by participants in Institution F (a recruiting university with a high proportion of 'WP students') as creating a contradictory and unhelpful context within which to pursue widening participation by making mainstream funding available to support this, but also punishing institutions financially for poor retention rates. Again this is commented on in Section 4.4.

The case-study HEIs in this research operate within a framework of laws designed to prevent unlawful discrimination against students and to promote greater equality. The addition of the 'duty to promote' equality in areas covered by the disability, gender and race legislation requires that HEIs not

only follow the letter of the law, but also act positively and pro-actively in changing procedures and cultures. As stated in section 3.6.7 such a legislative framework has important implications for WP by providing a policy context within which HEIs can develop and demonstrate their practice, as well as potential sanctions for those failing to meet the requirements of law. Each case-study HEI had a published equal opportunities policy. Yet, generally speaking, obligations in respect to meeting legislative requirements were not explicitly highlighted by participants as drivers of WP and diversity and neither were the benefits commented on. A few of those interviewed did provide some insight into the significance of the legislation. For example, in Institution H one member of staff spoke about a recent audit of policy and practice for students with disabilities. She stated that managing the implementation of the audit recommendations had promoted the good practice developed for disabled students more widely to the benefit of all. This confirms Davies' (2003: 38) observation that adjustments made by HEIs in response to SENDA 'ha(ve) the capacity to encourage innovations in course design ... to the advantage (also) of non-disabled students'. Legislation may also have the capacity to encourage institutions to act through fear of the legal consequences. This was suggested by a member staff in Institution E:

> The benefits are that the institution will not be open to prosecution
> (Institution E)

However, this was not commented on by any other participant in the study.

4.3.4 Opportunities for business development

As shown in Section 4.3.2 community engagement was seen to be strategically important in all the case study HEIs. In some this was also seen as an opportunity, leading to an enhanced reputation with 'customers' and stakeholders, and the development of new business opportunities. WP activities were seen as a means of enhancing the HEIs' reputation with the community, and as a way of facilitating community participation and engagement which was seen as a vital part of the process of developing the broader business interests of the HEI. The wider benefits of community engagement were explained by a member of the WP staff at Institution A:

> The university benefits because it has mechanisms for the community voice, the business voice, to influence all the other things it does. It also benefits by having healthy recruitment. (WP staff, Institution A)

In addition to student recruitment, which is discussed in more detail in section 4.3.5, staff in institution A identified a number of other benefits from engaging in WP activities with local communities. These included

opportunities for research, knowledge transfer, developing new revenue streams and the development of new courses. Staff in Institution F also highlighted business development opportunities available through capitalising on their strengths as a 'WP university', their traditional role in providing vocational education and their links with the local and regional communities and employers. These were identified as ways of gaining access to funding streams, such as European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund grants, developing partnerships with local schools and colleges, and with key stakeholders outside the sector, such as employers, Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), local authorities and Regional Development Agencies (RDAs). Partnerships were identified with a range of benefits including new students, new course development (continuing professional development; Foundation Degrees), new market areas and professional development for staff:

> Working with FE colleges allows us to tap into partners' expertise and Centres of Vocational Excellence and their staff resources. They are knowledgeable and skilled at teaching. You tap into this network of provision. You can develop tailor-made courses that link to sector needs and you can build on sub-degree and progression. For the FE colleges it is another income source and develops staff and resources and creates a new client group. (Senior staff, Institution F)

4.3.5 Opportunities for student recruitment

The perceived role of WP and student diversity in strategies to maintain sustainable levels of recruitment, or to increase student numbers, differed between HEIs and in some cases within them. Three broad positions were apparent in relation to opportunities for student recruitment:

- WP was seen as not connected to student recruitment
- WP was necessary to tap into the 'pool of talent' which could be of interest because it represents a meritocratic philosophy to which HEIs subscribe, and/or broadening the intake may be necessary in the future because of demographic change
- WP is necessary for survival because otherwise the HEI, or department, or course may not be able to recruit sufficient students to remain viable.

These three positions were clearly correlated with institutional type and market position and reflect the findings of Greenbank (2006) in his analysis of HEI behaviour in relation to WP and student recruitment.

As a '*high recruiter*', those interviewed at Institution G saw no link between WP and student recruitment as a way of sustaining and developing the

university overall. On the other hand in Institutions D and E there were clear indications, from a variety of participants, of a pragmatic interest in the opportunities presented by widening access in relation to the challenges posed by social and demographic changes within the region and the need to ensure the long term viability of the institution. Participants in Institution E described increasing competition from the new universities in the region, coupled with a drop in the population of the region as posing challenges. An increase in the diversity of students was seen as a possible solution:

> *The changing demographics of the area mean that increasing the diversity of students, regionally and culturally, will ensure the long term viability of the institution.* (Senior staff, Institution E)

The challenge of a declining population was similarly recognised in Institution D, which was also in Scotland:

> *We want talent. We believe we're missing talent if we don't go into those areas. If the recruitment pool of our traditional age group is diminishing you have to look more widely. To be perfectly honest I don't think it's a big, big driver for (us) and I think we're positioned within the sector in such a place that if there's a chill wind other places might feel it before we did, in terms of the impact of the demographics. But I don't feel complacent.* (Senior staff, Institution D)

There was also some concern about WP being seen primarily as a tool to increase student numbers and generate income. For example, the WP Manager at Institution D explained that the university is *not struggling for numbers* and stated they would not pursue *'a WP route to put "bums on seats"'*. This was seen as a threat to standards, as well as to the integrity of the institution in terms of its commitment to widen participation for reasons of social justice and responsibility. According to this participant widening access was about finding ways to tap the pool of available talent among the disadvantaged and underrepresented groups and was firmly linked to meritocratic principles in terms of entry. Models of 'positive discrimination', as found in other countries, were firmly rejected. Thus there was a clear distinction between the driver to recruit students for reasons of financial viability/numbers and the driver to tap the pool of talent.

In the newer universities with strong track records in vocational education, attracting 'non-traditional' students and meeting the needs of local communities, the continued ability to attract and retain a diverse student body was seen as a way of exploiting their strengths and as a key to surviving in a competitive HE market:

We would do [WP] regardless of government... it is our strength and has been over the years before the [current] agenda came along... we probably wouldn't survive without a non-traditional base. (Senior staff, Institution F)

It's our core business. We'd be cutting our throats if we didn't maintain that diversity. (Senior staff, Institution C)

Interestingly, one participant from a new university in an ethnically highly diverse inner-city mentioned the role that international recruitment played in its strategy and how this was linked to building on its strengths in actively working with a diverse UK student body. Mindful of the uncertain nature of the home market and comparatively low financial returns, even for non-traditional and under-represented students, together with intense competition for international students, this member of senior staff reported that students were actively recruited from overseas' communities that correspond with those of home students. Furthermore the HEI actively seeks to work with international organisations overseas that share the same social justice ethos. If, therefore, there was a future shift of emphasis away from home recruitment and on to international recruitment, as was suggested by this participant, then the same diversity ethos would be maintained.

HEIs are not, of course, unitary organisations, and there were signs that even where WP did not play a significant role in sustaining recruitment overall, it did bring benefits in some curriculum areas. Participants in Institution G cited examples of enlightened self-interest at departmental level in disciplinary areas in which it is difficult to recruit. Membership of the local Lifelong Learning Network (LLN) was being used in some curriculum areas as a way of creating progression routes from local FE colleges and maintaining student numbers.

4.3.6 Improvements in teaching, learning and the social environment

As discussed in Section 3, a number of authors (for example, Warren, 2002 and Powney, 2002) have argued that WP and diversity can result in innovations in forms of teaching, learning and assessment, and improvement in teaching and learning outcomes for all students. The link between WP and an enhanced educational experience was widely commented on by those interviewed in this research and many of their assertions corresponded with those found in the literature.

It was not entirely clear from the interviews as to whether an enhanced educational experience was viewed as a driver for engaging in WP and diversity, or as a beneficial consequence. In Table 4.3 it appears as a driver and a benefit, depending on the institution. For example, in Institution G, a senior manager expressed a strong belief that a diverse student population

enriches the educational experience and identified this very early in the interview as a key driver for the university's WP strategy.

The potential of a diverse student population to enrich the culture of the HEI and to create a more dynamic social mix was highlighted, for example:

> *Widening participation enriches the culture of the University and the student experience of all the student body is enriched. That in itself is a stimulating and rewarding mix to have.* (Student support, Institution F)

> *We want a more diverse student body – it is good for the institution. Students need exposure to different backgrounds.* (Senior staff, Institution G)

In addition, participants identified benefits for teaching and learning. A more diverse student body was seen to have a positive impact on learning outcomes – both because such students brought rich sources of knowledge with them which they could share and because this led to innovation in teaching and assessment practice:

> *Academia benefits greatly from diversity and a combination of ideas/ debate/ difference. So, to encourage people from alternative backgrounds into an institution will encourage academic debate and research.* (WP staff, Institution A)

> *I think it enhances and enriches learning experience for all students…it is anecdotal evidence, like students giving feedback. Examples might be mature students in the same groups as younger students and eventually how they both benefit from both sides of what they can offer to the group and get peer support. That has often been said to me.* (Academic staff, Institution F)

Two of those interviewed in HEIs that had a diverse student body saw the benefit in terms of their own professional practice and job satisfaction:

> *You have to be better at it [teaching] if the student body is more diverse.* (Academic staff, Institution C)

> *You cannot be a half-hearted lecturer or you soon get caught out. The ones who do well are good teachers and that brings job satisfaction. It has to be innovative, resourceful and use the full range of facilities.* (Student support staff, Institution F)

Thus improvement in teaching and learning may be seen as an unintended but beneficial consequence of WP and diversity, or conversely the desire to improve teaching, learning and the student experience may in and of itself provide a driver for seeking a more diverse student body. The findings of Gurin et al (2004) lend weight to this as a potential driver.

4.4 The costs of and barriers to WP and diversity

Participants across all the case study HEIs recognised the barriers and issues of cost faced in trying to embed WP and diversity throughout an institution. These barriers and issues were raised spontaneously both in the context of discussions about WP in general, or the benefits of WP, as well as in response to direct questions. Not all participants discussed the actual costs of WP, while some did so only reluctantly. However, at all HEIs costs expressed as 'risk' emerged strongly as a theme, highlighting incidences in which extending, or embedding ,WP had had a negative impact on the institution, or where it was perceived as a risk to the institution, even where the word 'risk' was not itself used.

Surprisingly the impact of SENDA and the Race Relations Act (RRA) was not a strong theme and was rarely mentioned. This could suggest a lack of awareness of the impact of equality legislation on the core business of HEIs, or that staff did not regard the ensuring of compliance to be their responsibility. However, Riddell et al (2004:20) in their questionnaire based study of HEIs found that over 90% of respondents reported that they had a good understanding of the implementation of Part 4 of the DDA. It could therefore be the case that the implications of the legislation were not linked explicitly to WP issues by those interviewed.

4.4.1 Costs

Participants tended to refer to costs in very broad terms rather than using the language of a cost-benefit analysis. There was a general awareness of the sources of WP funding, which in practice tended to be a mixture of core funding, including WP premium funds, and externally generated project funding to support WP. WP premium funds are paid to institutions as an identifiable funding stream and therefore represent a benefit to institutions. However, as is reflected in HEFCE's recent review of WP, *within* an institution it is often only the external project funds which are easily identifiable in terms of a cost-benefit analysis. It is difficult, often impossible, to disaggregate core or premium funding for WP activity from that allocated to core business (HEFCE, 2006a) because funds specifically paid as a WP premium are not often visible as a separate budget line at departmental, faculty or school level. The result of this 'embedded' nature of funding is that staff within HEIs tended not to identify the separate 'costs' of WP and/or compare it to the funds that were specifically brought in to support WP and retention. The result is, in practice, a degree of 'embedding' of WP, at least financially. although the nature of the embedding and its implications in terms of a diverse student body varied – see section 4.2.3

The two HEIs which considered themselves to be 'WP institutions' (C and F) regarded the question about cost as being problematic. This was due to the fact that they saw costs as being 'embedded' within the operation as a whole and as indicated in HEFCE, 2006a, impossible to disaggregate. This is reflected in a comment made by a member of the planning team in respect of actual costs from Institution C:

> *Difficult to say because it is integral to what we do.* (Institution C, member of planning staff)

Both these institutions were very clear at the corporate level about the value they placed on student diversity and this is reflected in their organisational approach and the understanding that the staff had of the student body. Institution F's Strategic Plan states that it embrace(s) diversity and value(s) difference. In terms of the 'diversity discourse' discussed in 3.2, the strategic importance of diversity has been taken on board by this HEI and has been translated into its institutional culture in a holistic manner, rather than being merely the concern of a specialist unit (Kandola and Fullerton, 1994). This is borne out in practice by the actual diversity of its student body, not only in terms of gender and ethnicity, but also in respect of socio-economic status, mode of study, entry route and success of its students in terms of learning outcomes. This type of approach aligns with the 'transformative' typology outlined in table 3.4.

By contrast, in both Institutions D and G WP activity is co-ordinated through a specific function located within recruitment and admissions and, in the case of Institution D, student support. In both HEIs the focus of WP activity is on outreach, raising aspirations and attainment and preparation for application and admission. Given this approach it could be argued that this provides a better model from which to calculate actual costs and to demonstrate cost-benefit, using a cost analysis methodology such as that developed by Boxall et al (2002) which is built on identifying and tracking 'WP students' and assessing the cost of 'WP staff' and specific activities. However, neither HEI appeared to have done this. Institutions D and G are 'selecting', recruiting the majority of their students with traditional A-levels or Highers. This is indicative of an approach which is informed by the notion of assimilating students into the prevailing HE culture, rather than one which seeks to adapt itself to accommodate the needs of a diverse student body. This approach to WP serves the 'tapping the pool of talent' and 'corporate social responsibility' drivers.

> *There are really able, bright kids out there whose life chances have been compromised by other things and it's a joy to bring them in.* (Institution D, member of academic staff)

At the same time it has the potential to feed into a deficit model of WP which implies that students are deficient, or not up to standard, if they are not able to assimilate. As far as the 'diversity discourse' is concerned this approach to WP is merely taking steps to relieve the disadvantage disproportionately experienced by some social groups in order to help them into HE. The rest of the HEI may remain relatively unaffected by WP and student diversity issues, demonstrated by the fact that the student body for both Institutions D and G cannot be regarded as diverse in the same way as in Institutions C and F. In this instance parallels can be drawn here with the 'academic' approach to WP and diversity outlined in Table 3.4.

The case studies demonstrated that, whatever the approach to WP in respect of distribution of funds and identification of actual cost, there are difficulties and draw-backs to be dealt with in matching the two together. Notwithstanding these difficulties, it is encouraging that funds are dispersed or 'embedded' as this is an indication that for HEIs where this is the case, they are tackling WP issues across many aspects of core business (HEFCE 2006a). Nevertheless, interviewees were aware of where additional resources were needed to ensure the development of practice to support a diverse student population. These additional resources were consistently identified as falling into the following categories:

Learning & Teaching and Student Support

Cost was identified as a potential barrier in respect to providing appropriate student support in terms of learning and teaching. In all case study HEIs the pastoral care of a diverse student base was evident and all shared a common understanding of the need to provide support for students in respect of finance, disability, mental health and well being, etc. However, interviewees expressed the view that students from 'WP backgrounds' required higher levels of support and made greater demands on teaching than did traditional students. This was seen to be an indirect cost that was borne by the staff involved – 'academic pro-bono support' – together with their faculty and/or department. The diversification of the student body was seen as placing particular demands on teaching staff and as Parker et al (2005) identifies, where the 'official' curriculum is less inclusive, staff adapt their approach to ensure inclusivity, creating an 'unofficial' curriculum. Diversification creates additional demands on staff in terms of providing pastoral support, and places a greater emphasis on developing a wider range of teaching and learning skills:

WP students may be more work. (Admissions staff, Institution H)

In terms of a lecturer, it is additional time spent supporting students outside of lecture time… Pastoral demands are increasing;... you have to adjust learning and teaching style to be inclusive. (Academic staff, Institution F)

Following on from the recognition that such additional demands are a consequence of recruiting more diverse students, concerns were expressed about the amount of financial and human resource required to meet the demands:

The resources don't go up respectively... when people are thinking about recruiting they don't look at the knock on effect for other services. (Student support, Institution A)

I know how much the University spend(s) on my area (study support) to give support for personal development, mentoring, support with disabilities and study skills... everybody thinks things like e-learning are cheap but they are not... the HEFCE premium is not enough and they are talking about taking it away. (Student support, Institution F).

These comments reflect the general recognition that students from non-traditional backgrounds may require extended hours of service and/or extra access to learning resources and that additional staff and capital costs are needed to make such provisions. While some of these activities may be funded directly, for example through premium funds or discrete project funding, the involvement of senior managers and non-WP staff, together with the development and embedding of policies together with the provision of staff training, were also seen to constitute additional costs, often borne by faculties and/or departments.

It is interesting to note that senior staff with strategic responsibility did not identify the cost issues identified above as such a significant issue as staff involved with WP, student support and teaching. At the same time, all staff interviewed agreed that across the sector there is insufficient recognition that a more diverse student population requires different approaches to learning and teaching and student support.

WP has a holistic approach so it's bound to use resources. (Marketing staff, Institution D)

Therefore it could be argued that as a result of the lack of appropriate resources, students themselves need to find the resources and the support networks needed to survive a HEI's prevailing culture which often does not adequately support them.

It is great to see all of society reflected in higher education... but these

students don't always have a support network like traditional students do.
(Student support, Institution C)

Costs to the institution of low retention

A tension was identified between WP targets and the HE funding regime which could operate as a disincentive for those HEIs which recruit students mainly from non traditional backgrounds. It can be argued that setting of targets relating to WP, for example 50% entry to HEI (which was linked to WP by some of the research participants), and financially punishing HEIs with comparatively low retention rates mitigates against a drive to actively recruit students likely to need more support than traditional HE entrants. This was thought to be a barrier on two counts. First, retention rates were thought to depend on many factors outside of an HEI's control:

It is very complex, with many reasons, such as work or family pressures or realising that study is not for them. The retention issue is multi-faceted and complex. (Senior staff, Institution F)

Secondly, while recent research (for example, Hatt et al, 2003) does not necessarily support a link between WP and retention problems, low retention was experienced by two of the case study HEIs which regarded themselves as 'WP institutions', and the financial impacts were seen as substantial. Whilst WP is promoted as a key national priority with the drive to recruit students from non-traditional backgrounds, the financial punishment for losing students was viewed as overly punitive:

We lose students in the first few weeks... we get them in, put systems into place and then get nothing for them. (Student support, Institution F)

A business case could be therefore be demonstrated in the approach which 'cherry picks' (SFEFC/SHEFC, 2004) the 'least disadvantaged of the most disadvantaged' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977:26, cited in Ball et al, 2002:54) as this mitigates against the likelihood of drop out. This compounds the arguments presented by both Powney, 2002 and Gorard et al, 2006, that HEIs regarded as 'selecting' have little financial incentive to accommodate a more diverse student population, or to make adjustments to accommodate their needs. It further links with the 'academic' typology in table 3.4. as 'selecting' institutions are more inclined to work to prepare high-achieving young people from lower socio-economic groups for application and admission in order that they assimilate into the existing culture.

An issue was also raised about the linear model of student progression based on a full time three year degree programme. Should a student

change programme, even for appropriate reasons, within the funding regime they are deemed to have left the programme. Rather than being recognised as positive progression such a move is regarded financially as 'drop out'.

At the same time it is worth noting that, as was pointed out by one Head of Student Services, the retention of non traditional' higher education students was higher than those progressing from the traditional 'A' level route at the institution in question. This supports again the view of Hatt et al (2003) that there is not necessarily a link between WP, a diverse student body and retention. It could therefore be argued that the current funding and dominant full time, 3 year degree programme regimes are not flexible enough to accommodate a diverse student body as only those who are able to assimilate are able to succeed.

Course development

The case study interviews indicated that the development of new courses and new types of provision aligns with the culture of the institution. While costs were involved for all HEIs these were managed in different ways, depending on the prevailing institutional culture.

In those institutions which might be regarded as having an 'academic' paradigm as dominant (see section 3.6.7), for example Institutions D and G, it was found that course development was likely to be undertaken in areas that would maximise income without affecting their academic culture. For example, to cater for an international market or professions, such as law and medicine, without necessarily needing to address WP.

While international markets were seen as a factor in all HEIs, in some Foundation Degrees, CPD provision and bridging programmes were more readily recognised as worth pursuing, both in a WP context and in a business case context, linking particularly with the local and regional economy. A specific example of this was given in Institution H which has developed a bridging programme in partnership with local FE colleges that feeds into its mainstream undergraduate programmes in Law and Criminology. In consequence a partnership has been developed with the police service which now provides scholarships for students studying in the Welsh language who take up employment with the police. The financial cost of developing this type of new provision is off-set by the progression of students into the institution. The risk factor is mitigated in that these institutions do not generally experience recruitment problems. This type of programme has links to the 'differential provision' model outlined in Section 3.7 This HEI has recognised the need to address both the progression needs of a non-traditional group of HE students and a regional economic need. The approach has led to

the development of a new model of progression for a previously untapped market, without impacting on existing recruitment and delivery. In other words it is a responsive, but pragmatic, approach to course development in a WP context that avoids compromising core undergraduate teaching.

Staff interviewed at Institutions C and F which describe themselves as WP HEIs were very clear that they needed to develop new provision in order to increase WP and student diversity. Again this view aligns with the 'differential provision' model in Table 3.4. Such undertakings can be costly in terms of start up, staff time and resources and are coupled with the risk of failure. Developing new courses, or amending existing ones, is a cost not always covered by ring fenced core, or premium funding, or external project funding. This can be a significant risk for institutions such as C and F which, as a matter of course, recruit students from a WP backgrounds:

> *The foundation degree in Health & Social Care is a big recruiter, 400 students and the driver came from the NHS. In other areas, it is a much tougher battle to get them to engage in foundation degrees such as engineering...We are trying to develop a business case and more market intelligence. You can come badly unstuck. For example we had a foundation degree in automotive retail management. We got the professional bodies on board, did it in partnership [with a local college], got lots of interest and then launched it with no takers.* (Senior staff, Institution F)

The above quotation also highlights, as Jones and Thomas have pointed out, that there is no doubt that for some HEIs the development of Foundation Degrees and other vocationally oriented CPD provision provides a good opportunity for business development, especially where an institution has strong links with occupational areas required by the public sector, for example the health sector. For institutions which undertake to exploit these opportunities they provide a realistic route to continue to widen participation and contribute to the 50% Government target for entry into HE. However, it is likely that, where it exists, this type of provision will remain differentially delivered (see Table 3.4), rather than integrated throughout the HEI.

4.4.2 Costs and barriers expressed as risks

A number of potential costs were expressed as having indirect as opposed to direct financial costs to HEIs and consequently posed a risk in relation to existing areas of business.

Risk to standards

The notion of 'dumbing down', or concern about academic standards, emerged as a strong theme in respect to both HEIs' academic standards and to a broader perception across the higher education sector. Performance indicators, particularly their relationship to league tables, posed a potential barrier to overcoming this concern. For example it was suggested in a focus group of teaching and student support staff at Institution C that league tables of performance indicators did not measure excellence in teaching, but are a proxy measure of the demographics of the student population. The same focus group suggested that standards of teaching had to be 'better' if the student body was more diverse and less academically prepared. The suggestion appeared to be that current performance indicators do not adequately take issues such as 'added value' into account and that the standards of the incoming student body were being confused with the standards of the provision. There was a strong sense within this focus group that the heavy demands placed upon the teaching staff in order to meet student needs (see Section 4.4.1) were being offset by those staff gaining a particular kind of experience that they felt enhanced their abilities as teachers. This has some resonance with the views of Parker et al (2005).

This view also supports the arguments presented by Warren (2002) and Powney (2002) which equate a diverse student body with innovative learning, teaching and assessment that provide for improved outcomes for all students. In Institution H it was reported that they had recently undergone an audit of policy and practice for students with a disability. Both academic and support staff highlighted that managing the implementation of the audit recommendations had promoted the good practice developed in respect of disability across the HEI and that it had had a positive impact on learning and teaching across the board. Interviewees in institution H made the following comments:

> *Good practice is for everyone – it has a benefit across the board.* (Student support, Institution H)

> *The impact of actually working with one group of students is that you can demonstrate that it is having an impact for all students.* (Student support, Institution H)

These views echo the assertions of Warren (2002).

The link between student diversity and a more fulfilling student experience emerged as a theme, though from different angles. Both academic and student support practitioners in Institutions E and F recognised that:

> *… a diverse student population enriches the learning experience.* (Admissions staff, Institution E)

> *… it enhances and enriches the learning experience for all students … it is [based on] anecdotal evidence, like students giving feedback. Examples might be mature students in the same groups as younger students and eventually how they both benefit from both sides of what they can offer to the group and get peer support.* (Academic staff, Institution F)

In both these quotations there is the implication that the enriched experience for students is informal, rather than part of the formal academic process. This was also noted by Gorard et al (2006); Powney (2002); and by the Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group, 2004:6. Indeed, Gurin et al (2002) have evidenced a direct correlation between the informal experience and enhanced learning outcomes, although only in respect of diversity in terms of race. What is unclear in the extant literature is whether the informal benefits of a diverse student body are an adequate substitute for innovative learning and teaching and appropriate student support as an integral part of mainstream provision. As a result of the information gathered from the case studies in respect of the need for student support, the 'informal' as opposed to the 'formal' curriculum (see section 3.6.4), it could be argued that it is not. If it were, the mere fact of increasing student diversity alone would negate the need for the student support seen by HEIs as a significant cost. The experience of all case study institutions is that support for a student's academic experience is needed in some form.

Further there is a danger in the over reliance on the 'informal' impact of a diverse student body in that it is likely to lead to the perpetuation of a deficit model of WP. That is that students should be able to assimilate into the prevailing culture of the institution (Thomas, 2001) rather than the HEI adapting to meet diverse needs.

The need to be innovative in curriculum design and delivery when working with a diverse student body in order to secure a good academic outcome for its students was stated in an interview at Institution F:

> *… by using traditional methods you are just wasting your time.* (Student support, Institution F)

The above comment was made in particular reference to the vocational and work-based provision which this HEI regards as essential both for its survival and success. Indeed, at this institution all those interviewed agreed that it had always specialised in vocational provision, flexible curriculum design and non-traditional students, and places a strong emphasis on teaching and learning and student support. There was a recognition that they may take on students who

are less academically prepared but they were positive about the fact that they were able to ensure that all their students achieve a successful and legitimate learning outcome. Institution C, which also regards itself as a 'WP institution' having a multicultural and diverse student body, an 'open and embracing' culture and being accessible, together with a well developed student support service, provided mixed opinions in respect to standards. The view that 'standards had slipped' was expressed in different ways by staff across stakeholder groups. This view was also reported in other HEIs, but by senior managers, or WP practitioners, when referring to academic staff in departments or faculties, in terms of the need to break down the perception that non-traditional students or those from WP backgrounds have a negative impact on academic standards.

> *The overall standard of students has gone down.* (Student support, Institution A)

In Institution H this change in perception has been driven by both senior management and WP practitioners, who have demonstrated that a consequence of employing different learning and teaching methods and a flexible approach is not detrimental to academic standards:

> *Respect is being gained across the university for our provision because of the results which can be evidenced through external examiners' comments.* (Institution H, member of academic staff, Centre of Lifelong Learning)

They also reported that while there was still a long way to go, a discernible shift in the attitudes, approach and understanding within departments could be seen:

> *Pedagogical issues are increasingly being taken on board. Discussion about learning and teaching issues is now taking place, also discussion about retention.* (WP staff, Institution H)

Senior managers in Institution D, a Russell Group university, felt that they were being successful in getting the message across in regard to a level playing field for all students, and promoting the notion of 'measurement of potential' in relation to admissions:

> *Someone with three B's and a C from an anti-education background is possibly a better bet than someone with the same qualifications from an independent school.* (WP staff, Institution D)

While the examples from Institutions F and H demonstrate positive approaches and outcomes in working with students from a non-traditional background, concerns in respect of 'dumbing down' and a decline in standards were consistently expressed in the case study HEI interviews. The fear of the erosion of academic standards as identified by Riddell et al (2004), was

found particularly in pre-1992 institutions where additional support for students with disabilities was thought to contravene the fundamental values of the university. Observations were made with regard to the quality of applicants to higher education and their ability to cope with HE study. For example, a member of staff with particular WP responsibilities at institution H highlighted attitudes across the institution as follows:

> There is a sense that these non-traditional students drop out ….And there's a sense that it's their (the students') fault. (WP staff, Institution H)

A member of student support staff in Institution C reported:

> There is an expectation of a lack of academic preparation. (Student support, Institution C)

It could be suggested that rather than being a reflection on academic standards these observations relate to the quality and preparedness of applicants to higher education. However, as Powney (2002) points out, this lack of preparedness is not necessarily synonymous with merit. Rather students from non-traditional backgrounds challenge the efficacy and wisdom of traditional teaching and assessment methods placing a responsibility on HEIs to examine and develop their practices.

At the same time the notion that the failure of non-traditional student is their own fault can also be challenged. The knowledge base and preparedness for HE could be linked to changes to the 14-19 curriculum, both in respect to A-level and vocational qualifications. Changes to the financial support for students in higher education were identified by a focus group at Institution C as impacting on the student experience, causing students more stress than in the past. The group identified students as working longer hours in order to survive financially and, consequently, having less time to reflect on their studies and academic experience. A member of student support staff at Institution C also identified a higher incidence of mental health issues as a factor which could contribute to a student's ability to cope with the HE environment and undergraduate level study.

Despite the potential difficulties that students from non-traditional backgrounds may face there is clear evidence from the case studies that these students can be successful. It was pointed out by the Head of Students Services at institution H that the retention and success of non-traditional students was higher than those from the traditional A-level route.

Risk to core business

As discussed above, concerns were expressed that engagement in WP activity makes specific demands on resources for student support. One institution also expressed these concerns in terms of diverting funds from existing provision:

> *[WP] can be seen as 'rearing its ugly head' with monies going towards support rather than academic staff.* (WP staff, Institution E)

While WP was reported to be an integral part of corporate strategy, the implication reported here was that some groups of staff perceived that it could have a negative impact on core business, including teaching and research. This was also reflected in Institution G. It was reported that the majority of senior management regarded WP as:

> *... desirable, but not if it adversely affects the business.* (Marketing staff, Institution G)

This type of concern was also expressed anecdotally at Institution A where student support staff reported that they heard a lot of negativity about what WP does to the student body. It was also suggested in Institution C that certain students shouldn't be there, or would previously have been referred to other pre-degree provision such as access courses.

It is worth noting that these views are shared across all types of HEIs included in the case studies. As suggested in Section 3.6.2 these prevailing views can be informed by what each HEI regards as its place in the HE market, its image and reputation. This was demonstrated in Institution C. While concerns were expressed with regard to academic standards (see Section 3.6.4), staff also identified an expectation of a lack of academic preparation in its students. It was also reported that 'staff generally know why they [students] are here', the implication being that they would not have been awarded a place at a more 'academic' HEI, such as Institutions D and G. It was also suggested that if staff were unhappy with the calibre of the student body then they were 'in the wrong place'. A financial imperative and need to recruit students is clearly a key driver for WP in Institution C:

> *We need to get enough students to get enough money in order to survive.* (Senior staff, Institution C)

An HEI's response to WP over the student lifecycle is driven by the nature of the students they have recruited in recent years, which in turn is linked to the institution's awareness of their market niche. There is a sense in which HEIs know what characteristics 'their' students will have. This was found in Institution F which is very open about the fact that it plays a key

role as a vocational provider and has always catered for non-traditional students. However, in Institution D, a Russell group university, it was very clear that they would never pursue WP 'in order to put bums on seats'. Here the drive to WP came from corporate social responsibility and a desire to 'tap the pool of talent', rather than a need to recruit more students. To take any other approach could threaten the reputation of this institution and its market position.

Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) have suggested that in the context of higher education as a service industry, a higher reputation is associated with the quality of provision rather than its quantity. However, given that all case study HEIs reported that they were working to increase their delivery capacity, whether via foundation degrees, modular CPD opportunities, knowledge transfer or international markets, it could be argued that the notion of quantity or a 'mass' HE market is irrelevant in relation to reputation. Rather reputation is linked to the notion of academic rigour in terms of what and how it is delivered, as opposed to the number of students accessing the provision. As a result, whether consciously or not, students are recruited on the basis of their likely ability to survive in an HEI's prevailing culture. It could be argued that for selecting HEIs this ability is judged on the basis of a student's entry qualifications which is an indicator of the 'quality' of the applicant:

> ... *you tend to find it very difficult not to be bedazzled by the five A's at A-level.* (Institution D, member of academic staff)

Thus the culture created as a result of the funding issues with regard to retention highlighted above, coupled with the lack of understanding and negative perceptions of students from WP or non traditional backgrounds, largely equated with progression to higher education with three good 'A' levels, drives the sector towards the notion that what is 'good' in higher education terms is synonymous with 'exclusive' or difficult to access. Consequently, it could be argued that this perpetuates the deficit model of WP, even for those institutions that are clearly committed to and working to embed it.

4.4.3 Barriers

In order to explore the breadth and interlinking of barriers to WP that might be present within an HEI, two examples are presented. These examples represent different institutional types and illustrate the importance of institutional context in considering business case arguments in relation to WP.

Barriers to WP in Institution F

In Institution F all interviewees recognised a range of barriers to embedding WP.

First, the Government and funding council were seen as giving contradictory messages, particularly because they set targets for WP and then financially punished those institutions with comparatively low retention rates.

Second, the student model underpinning WP policy was viewed as inappropriate. Government strategy was seen as being flawed because despite the introduction of Foundation Degrees it was seen as being based on a model of full-time 3 year degree students. This created a range of difficulties and could be seen to underpin the problems noted above. These difficulties included:

- neglecting the funding of and provision for part-time students:

    I'm talking about the mixed message of doing A and communicating B around top up fees. These are clearly focused on the 18 year old undergraduate; there is no support agenda for part time students. (Academic staff)

- assuming a linear model of student progression:

    Another tension is that if a student changes programme they are deemed to have left. This would be seen as a retention problem but often students have been guided by us to doing another programme which might not even be in our University, they have not dropped out at all and probably just progressed. (Academic staff)

- failing adequately to support the full costs of WP students and punishing institutions which recruit non-traditional students with high risks of drop out:

    The benefit is in recruitment but the money for a WP student... the (funding council) premium, is not enough, and they are talking about taking it away. When you lose a certain percentage it reflects badly on the institution. (Student support)

The end result of these barriers was seen to place this institution in:

    a Catch 22, we have to go for WP students given our market but then we lose money because of the costs. (Student support)

Ironically, this might have the unintended consequence of pushing an institution such as this one away from the most risky forms of WP work onto safer income-generating ground.

Within our strategy we are still focusing on the FE/HE links but you might find a tension there mightn't you? For example, do we put our energy into Foundation Degrees or Continuing Professional Development? This will occur in the next year or two... it has to. (Academic staff)

Barriers to WP in Institution G

Institution G similarly reported a number of barriers to WP. As with Institution F, a number of these barriers were external to the institution and outside its control, however they were of a very different nature. First, the external perception of Institution G was considered to act as a barrier to WP in that prospective students from under-represented groups assume that they would not be accepted and therefore do not apply:

They [prospective students] don't think (this institution) would have them. (Senior manager)

Colluding with this view, tutors in schools and colleges do not promote the HEI to a diversity of applicants.

Tutors in schools and colleges don't promote the university. (Senior manager)

Second, this HEI's location in a small town means that the potential for local recruitment – vitally important to many of the highly diverse institutions – is seriously limited by low population density and the fact that the local population is itself not very ethnically diverse.

Unlike Institution F, internal factors were also felt to be acting as a brake to the further embedding and development of WP. It was acknowledged that the entry criteria were at present 'rather traditional' – perhaps providing some basis to the external perception of the Institution as highlighted above. As a 'selecting' HEI with a higher reputation it was identified that the HEI faces:

a dilemma of being a higher recruiting institution and needing to maintain a balance between risk and diversity. (WP staff)

Further, it was considered that the current portfolio of courses was acting as a barrier to further WP, but that there was an ambition to expand more into vocational and professional higher level courses:

Some new vocational departments might help in relation to BME groups. (WP staff)

Though the two institutions currently occupy very different market

positions, it is interesting to note that this is similar to the market that Institution F wished to enter.

Finally it was acknowledged that 'attitudes in the institution, at departmental level' may act as a barrier, and this may be linked to competing pressures such as the forthcoming RAE which is demanding in terms of time and other resources.

> *WP is not a higher priority in some departments and there is a fear of lowering standards.* (Head of Communications)

What is clear from the above examples is that despite their difference in institutional type, these two HEIs both have concerns about the impact of WP on their institutional operation. While both HEIs are corporately committed to WP and inclusive education this is seen to clash with, or cause tension between, other policies and/or priorities, and compete for resources or seemingly discordant aims (Powney, 2005). Good examples of how this might occur are given by Powney:

> *Increasing the staff/student ratio and reducing time spent with students can create a major tension with an inclusive approach to teaching and learning. Inclusive education may also be seen as a threat or competitor for energy and resources in departments with research-led cultures.* (Powney, 2005:25)

For 'selecting' and research intensive institutions such as G this tension is likely to mitigate against organisational change to move away from the deficit 'assimilation' model of the student experience, compounding the view that initiatives to address retention should:

> *Focus on helping students to change, rather than changing course design, teaching or institutional practices.* (Taylor & Bedford, 2004:390)

For 'recruiting' institutions such as F that do not have significant research funding the tension created is that, despite the fact that they are addressing course design, learning and teaching and institution-wide practice the current funding regime does not allow them to service the needs of their students adequately.

> *It is widely acknowledged that students from non traditional backgrounds are more expensive to recruit, educate and retain than traditional students and that the current postcode premium does not adequately reflect these costs.* (UUK/SCOP, 2002)

In addition, in an environment in which 'institutional status in the hierarchy is related to the profile of the student intake' (Gorard et al, 2006:93) HEIs

have little incentive to embrace the diversity paradigm. If the HE sector is to move away from this hierarchy which retains its 'elite instincts and traditions' (Longden, 2000 cited in Gorard et al, 2006:93) then both internal and external barriers to developing WP and diversity need to be openly discussed. If institutional change is to be facilitated then developments in the whole of the HE sector, and individual institutional policy, need to take account of these views. If not, even with the greatest commitment, attempts to create change are likely to flounder.

4.5 Stakeholder perspectives

This section provides some insights into the 'stakeholder views' of WP and student diversity. As was acknowledged in Section 2, the 'institutional view' was perceived to be the dominant one. Nonetheless interesting findings emerged in comparing the responses of particular groups of stakeholders to key questions around drivers, benefits and costs in relation to WP and diversity. As noted in Section 2, eight broad categories of internal stakeholders were interviewed:

- Senior managers/corporate (including VP, Registry, Planning, etc.)
- Widening Participation (including outreach)
- Admissions
- Academic
- Marketing
- Student support
- Business and community and research
- Students and student representatives.

While the differences in perspectives between HEIs tended to dominate the findings of this research, there were small, but notable, differences in views between the different stakeholder groups. Both the agreements and differences within each stakeholder group are of value in relation to the eventual goal of tailoring business case arguments for each group, a key objective of this study.

In the following sections, some material from previous sections of thematic analysis is used again to analyse stakeholder perspectives on these issues.

4.5.1 Senior managers and corporate staff

This group was notably more positive towards WP and student diversity than many of the others, and more likely to take a broad, society-level view. Social and ethical arguments were common themes among this group of stakeholders, for example:

> *In [this region] with the most extraordinary levels of socio-economic deprivation it would be at least morally dubious to feel that you're contributing to the community without needing to address some of that in a direct way.* (Senior manager, Institution D)

Benefits to the region, or the country as a whole, emerged as a strong theme. At the same time there was often a pragmatic linking of this to business benefits for the institution:

> *The benefits are very clear – for the communities and individuals it's transformational and …huge benefits for the university in terms of securing its recruitment and in terms of the diversity of the student mix.* (Senior manager, Institution A)

Not only current benefits, but also potential future benefits, were mentioned, for example, the changing demographics of the UK resulting in a declining cohort of 18 year olds and the consequent need to reach out to new groups for recruitment.

As might well be expected, on the whole the narratives of this group were nuanced in relation to their HEI's market position. Those from older HEIs were more likely to give a rationale around the social responsibility and 'pool of talent' drivers for WP and diversity :

> *So why do we engage in WP? It's a sense of social responsibility. We want to attract talented students, and there are talented students in all socio-economic classes so we are pro active in attracting them because they are less likely to take the decision themselves without support and encouragement to put us on a UCAS form.* (Senior manager, Institution D)

On the other hand those from newer HEIs talked about the recruitment benefits and issues around attracting less academically prepared students, as was evident in the quotation from Institution A above.

Over and above these differences there was not a wide diversity of perspectives within this group and the wider needs of society and the economy, rather than simply institutional benefit, appeared to be an overarching theme.

Senior managers and corporate staff therefore appear to be receptive to the concept of an argument that rests on both ethical/social and business benefits. Hence a business case argument that draws on both is likely to be welcomed as a useful planning tool, and the research team has some anecdotal evidence outside of this research that would support this assumption.

4.5.2 Widening participation staff

Not surprisingly the staff in this category were overwhelmingly positive about WP, though as in the case above the way WP was understood varied according to their HEI's market position. Again, other than these market-related differences there was a remarkable similarity of view within this group, probably linked to the sense of a 'WP community' that crosses institutional boundaries and is encouraged by inter-institutional initiatives for WP. The benefits of student diversity were clearly articulated by this group, for example:

> *Looking at academia, it benefits greatly from diversity and a combination of ideas, debate and difference, so to encourage people from alternative backgrounds into an institution will encourage…academic debate and research.* (WP staff, Institution A)

Benefits were also seen in relation to WP activities – mainly outreach – in which the WP staff were involved directly. This was articulated in terms of the benefits of working closely with partner organisations and the community:

> *The university benefits because is has mechanisms for that community voice, business voice etc. to influence all the other things it does.* (WP staff, Institution A)

As well as WP being seen as positive in general terms, it was also recognised that there could be specific business benefits flowing from such closer relationships:

> *This type of work does help to generate new courses, for example. computing business course… We have to react to what is being delivered in our feeder schools and colleges. If they do, say, games design and related courses and we don't then they are not going to look at you.* (WP staff, Institution F)

This kind of market intelligence is potentially of considerable value to HEIs and yet is probably being under-exploited – business and community staff were the only other group that raised this issue. Furthermore, it represents a form of relationship marketing by which, as Johnson (2001) states, the HEI itself may be marketed rather than its products. While there was some understanding of the role of student ambassadors and mentors in both recruitment and retention (for example Bennet, 2006) the role of outreach staff in representing the HEI and its culture to a broad audience was arguably less well understood.

It was interesting to note that other direct benefits such as recruitment were very rare within the narratives of this stakeholder group. In general there was the sense that although specific benefits of WP and student diversity could be articulated, the drivers were self-evident. The effectiveness of this stakeholder group in championing a move towards organisational change, via a business case for WP and diversity, could perhaps be enhanced by an understanding of the need to establish a strong rationale for engagement based on such institutional benefits, as well as on ethical and social grounds.

4.5.3 Admissions

A range of issues was raised by this stakeholder group. Admissions staff were generally found to be positive towards WP and student diversity, and pointed to a range of benefits:

> WP enriches the culture of the University and the student experience of all the student body is enriched. That in itself is a stimulating and rewarding mix to have. (Admissions staff, Institution F)

Surprisingly no issues emerged that could be ascribed specifically to the admissions' role and there were no hints as to how admissions staff in general react to the WP and diversity agenda, or the implications for their own work. The positive comments of those who took part in the study can be seen to show that there is a willingness to engage.

4.5.4 Academic

Teaching, learning and assessment implications, both positive and negative, dominated the narratives of this group. The challenges of teaching a more diverse student body came across very strongly:

> It is also…you have adjust to learning and teaching style to be inclusive… well, for example, in group-work I'm always conscious of how I'm breaking groups up and being culturally aware that some students because of a WP agenda need your encouragement, as the lecturer, for them to be involved. For example, asking questions that you know they know the answer to and drawing on their experience so you do have to use good classroom management and techniques. You have to draw on a wider range than if you had a white 18 middle class group. (Academic staff, Institution F)

While acknowledging that this causes additional pressures, academic staff were also likely to view this as a positive opportunity to develop their professional skills in teaching. As was discussed in Section 4.3.6, among academic staff in Institution C there was a very strong sense that they

considered themselves to be better teachers as a result of the diversity of their student body, and there was some pride in this. This has some resonance with Parker et al (2005) who associated WP practice in the curriculum and a recognition of diversity issues with high teaching quality.

Benefits were articulated at the subject level and were very diverse. For example, an arts lecturer spoke of the value of recruiting young people who had high level 'practical skills' rather than being academic – one aspect of student diversity. A mathematics lecturer spoke of the need to maintain the viability of the subject by attracting more students into the discipline, the implication being that WP would deliver the required numbers. Finally, an academic working in teacher education reported the benefits of a diverse classroom in developing students' professional identities, and spoke at length about how she used the diversity of the students in the classroom to contribute to learning experiences.

In HEIs where the student body was less diverse, there was a sense that academic staff understood the issue only in a theoretical sense because WP and diversity had not impacted directly on them. For example, a member of academic staff at Institution D spoke of WP as a good thing to do for reasons of social responsibility, but did not elaborate on any implications.

For this stakeholder group there are the obvious threats of additional work as Parker et al (2005) have pointed out. However, in the present research it was non-academics who tended to worry about overloading academics, rather than the academics themselves. At the same time it should be borne in mind that the academic staff interviewed in this research were selected for interview by the HEIs' key contacts (usually a senior manager responsible for WP) and therefore are likely to be those most aware of, and positive towards, the WP and diversity agendas. While, as Parker et al (2005) make plain, those academics who are ideologically in favour of WP and student diversity are the ones who make adaptations to the curriculum as a matter of course. Other academics whose interests lie more in research may lack the time, or the inclination, to do this.

The comments of many of the academic staff in this study suggest an opportunity to promote the professional development aspects of working with a more diverse student body in order to encourage WP and student diversity to be valued among academic staff. The other potential teaching and learning benefits outlined in 3.6.4 are likely to be of interest as well, though these would need to be presented in a manner that took into account the differences between subject specialisms.

4.5.5 Marketing

As a stakeholder group, marketing was not well represented in the interviews conducted and they were not interviewed at every HEI. Despite this limitation, some useful findings can be identified. There was a strong sense among those few who were interviewed that diversity could be presented as an institutional strength. Not only did it 'enrich the culture' of the HEI, but it could also be presented as a strong, positive marketing strategy. A marketing manager reported that students found the diversity of his HEI 'refreshing'. WP and student diversity present many opportunities not only to promote a favourable picture of the HEI, but also to penetrate new markets using new outreach methods. The divisions that sometimes exist between marketing and WP (see Section 4.2.2) may serve to hamper these opportunities, possibly exacerbated by the requirement for some WP staff, especially those funded through Government partnership programmes, to provide impartial aspiration-raising.

The discussion in Section 3.6.2 suggests that there are opportunities to restructure the marketing of a HEI around diversity principles. There was no direct evidence, even within 'WP institutions', that this had been discussed or done. The researcher who did the fieldwork at Institution C suspected that there were elements of this thinking in some of the outreach activities, but was unable to ascertain this for certain.

4.5.6 Student support

On the whole this group of stakeholders was somewhat more negative about WP and student diversity than the other groups. The reasons for this were clearly stated, for example:

> We don't really see the benefits because the students who come to us are the problem students. Most of the time it's tears. (Student support, Institution C)

Members of this stakeholder group were able to see a wide range of benefits to WP and student diversity and these did not differ significantly from those reported by the other groups. However, these benefits were balanced by concerns about the resources needed for support, or the resources lost through lower retention rates.

Staff who play direct student support roles, such as Student Services or Learning Support Tutors, are likely to need reassurance that sufficient resources will be given to enable them to meet the demand for their services from students. Furthermore, there was a suggestion that some

staff, such as librarians, are not always made aware of the specific needs of students with disabilities and, therefore, are inadequately prepared to meet such students' needs.

4.5.7 Business and community and research

Analysis of interviews with this stakeholder group indicates that they were giving an 'outside' perspective, one in which they did not feel directly engaged with WP and diversity. This group was diverse and covered both research and 'third stream' staff, though the opinions of staff on the business and community side tend to dominate because of the higher number from this category in the stakeholder group. Staff involved with CPD and business training projects were able to appreciate that their work brought about greater student diversity, even though it had not been based on WP motives. Reputational benefits were highlighted, with WP being seen as enhancing the profile of the HEI with businesses and community groups. It was important to be seen positively by the community as this could sometimes lead to funding opportunities. This links closely with the views of some outreach staff, though there was no evidence of the recognition by WP staff that the two agendas – WP and third stream – could be complementary.

In one case a member of business and community staff proved very critical of their HEI's WP strategy. This provided a useful perspective in understanding the HEI in a more rounded way, but also highlighted the individual nature of some of the findings reported here. Where individuals had strongly held views, these did not necessarily link in any way to their job roles and this lack of relationship should be kept in mind.

4.5.8 Students and student representatives

The students and representatives that were interviewed expressed two main views about WP and diversity. On the one hand they tended to be passionately concerned about diversity, while on the other hand they hinted concern about the effect that a diverse mix of students might have on the academic experience. They perceived contradiction in these views and this may be because diversity was seen as being related to ethnic diversity, whereas concern about academic experience may have been linked to the social class and/or lower prior academic attainment of some students.

Where diversity was seen as a positive this was clearly articulated, for example:

> *Traditional students can learn a lot from different people and the more they are segregated in university or society that's where racism comes from*

and the thought that people are different, because they don't understand. All the fears and racism is sprung from fear and not understanding others – if you integrate people at university level they can learn from each other. Possibly the traditional students benefit more than the minority groups themselves. (Student representative, Institution A)

These views were so strongly held that in some cases the students were critical of their HEI's approach to diversity, feeling that it was not strong enough to meet the needs of students, and pointing out the lack of diversity among senior staff.

However, such strong views were balanced by the understandable, self-interested position that diversity should not be at the cost of the quality of their own educational experience. This was hinted at, rather than stated, for example:

Yes, younger students will then get a broader education and an idea of different cultures…but there needs to be a strict admissions policy so there is no concept of reducing standards to increase the range of students. (Student representative, Institution E)

Behaviour is the number one point raised by course reps – students answering phones, coming in late, getting up and walking out…a lot of the younger students are from lower socio-economic backgrounds and this has an impact on retention and transitions. (Student representative, Institution F)

One student representative provided an insight into the importance of localness in encouraging a more diverse range of students:

Course reps are not typical people who would go to Uni – they see the Uni as part of their local self, there are people they know from the area. (Student representative, Institution F)

This view has strong links with Bourdieu's concept of habitus (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). If a HEI is part of the local landscape and clearly makes itself accessible to local people, then it becomes part of the 'local self' and is not contrary to the habitus of those who may otherwise be under-represented, notably those from lower socio-economic groups (Bourdieu, 1994).

5. Conclusions

5.1 The business case revisited

Within the case study research there was a lack of understanding of the concept of a 'business case' for WP and student diversity and moreover some negative reactions to it, for example:

> *I wouldn't use the term [business case], we are about more than the bottom line and making profit. We are not in that game but making people's lives better.* (Admissions staff, Institution F)

At the same time the findings in this research relating to the drivers for, and benefits of, WP and student diversity suggest that a viable business case could be constructed.

This study has presented a set of complex accounts in which HEIs' perceived commitments and obligations to behave in a socially responsible manner and respond to government policy, sit alongside, and interrelate with, recognition of the institutional opportunities and benefits to be derived from embracing student diversity. As discussed in Section 3.2, Kirton and Green (2000) suggest that a business case model asks different questions in relation to equality and diversity, seeking to establish benefits to the organisation rather than drawing solely on a social justice rationale. Our research suggests that HEIs can and do recognise benefits to themselves of having a more diverse student body and to the practices and approaches of WP. However, as Wilson and Iles (1999) point out, moral, ethical and political justifications should not be neglected. Therefore a business case model that draws on both types of justification should be both appropriate for the HE sector (see section 3.8) and acceptable to the key internal stakeholders involved.

Our research has suggested throughout that the market position of a HEI has a strong bearing on how WP and diversity are perceived in terms of benefits and drivers. However, it has not yet demonstrated unequivocally the way this perception relates to how WP and student diversity are responded to in practice. Table 4.3 showed a variety of organisational models that did not necessarily map onto any feature of the institution per se, though there were implications that flowed from the model adopted. Furthermore Section 4.1.1 did not disclose any discernible pattern to the way in which WP and diversity were defined, concluding that it was highly individual. However, Section 4.2.3 demonstrated some very different understandings of embedding WP and student diversity that

had some correlation with institutional market position, while Section 4.4.3 contrasted the perceived barriers to WP and student diversity in a 'selecting' and a 'recruiting' institution, concluding that these were seen in a very different way linked to the existing market position and student body.

Table 4.4 offered a tentative classification of the case study institutions within the three 'WP paradigms' developed in Section 3.7 and based on institutions' perception of WP drivers. These may be compared with known information on the market position, history and mission of these institutions:

Table 5.1: Comparison of the case study institutions' history and mission with WP paradigms

Inst.	History and mission	WP paradigm
A	Formerly polytechnic but relatively high rank Long history of WP activity and admission of under-represented groups WP part of mission though not central	Differential provision
B	Selective Diversity central to mission New to WP as a policy agenda	Academic
C	Polytechnic background Long history of WP activity and admission of under-represented groups WP and inclusivity is central to mission Recruiting	Transformative
D	Russell Group Selective Widening access and contributing to economic regeneration part of mission	Academic
E	Long established Social mission and ethos	Mixed
F	A recently created and fast growing (but small) university Recruiting	Transformative
G	Selective History and ethos of social justice WP not part of mission	Academic
H	Long established WP and social inclusion cross-cutting themes of mission	Mixed

There is a clear correlation between the higher ranking 'selective' institutions and evidence of an 'academic' paradigm for WP. Similarly the two institutions who have the greatest need to recruit students appear to be demonstrating elements of a 'transformative' paradigm. This should perhaps come as no surprise given that a strong feature of the 'academic discourse' (Jones and Thomas, 2005:617) on which it is based does not challenge the wisdom of demanding entry requirements, and thus represents the status quo for highly selecting institutions.   On the other hand, the 'transformative' discourse (op cit: 619) stresses the need for change to respond to the needs of under-represented groups and therefore mirrors the need for 'recruiting' institutions to adapt themselves to the markets that are, realistically, open to them given their market position.

This does have strong implications, however, for the way in which diversity might be viewed. In terms of managing the diversity of the existing student body there was evidence that all case study institutions were committed to an inclusive approach. However WP implies increasing the diversity of the student body. Given that there is evidence that attainment at A-level is closely correlated with socio-economic group (for example, Gorard et al, 2006) then increasing the social diversity of the student body cannot be divorced from a discussion about entry qualifications. The 'academic' paradigm, built around a 'tapping the pool of talent' driver, could be criticised on the grounds that it results in a model that is:

> *directed at plucking what are assumed to be anomalous intelligent working class students from their roots in order to place them in the 'top' universities.* (Jones and Thomas, 2005:617)

This strategy may fail to reach a large number of people who are members of those communities but not regarded as the 'cream' (Taylor, 2000; Coates & Adnett, 2003), or to put it another way, those who fail to be '"survivors" of a process of class attrition in education' (Reay et al, 2001:850). As one participant in the present research remarked:

> *Sometimes in WP [Nationally] we have had arguments about fair access – about making sure people with good grades go to the top universities, which has taken the focus away from a whole segment of the population who don't even think about university.* (WP staff, Institution A)

A further aspect of the 'academic' paradigm is that:

> *institutional reform is all but disregarded. In particular, the curriculum is not viewed as problematic and remains unchanged.* (Jones and Thomas, 2005:617; see also Quinn, 2003)

This corresponds closely with the parallels drawn between an 'academic' paradigm and an equal opportunities paradigm in section 3.7. Both advocate (explicitly or implicitly) a model of assimilation and do not result in organisational change. Conversely the diversity paradigm, which underpins the concept of a business case, actively requires organisational change. The claim that 'selecting' institutions that adopt an 'academic' WP paradigm are unlikely to recognise the need for organisational change is given weight by the findings about embedding – that is given that within the case study institutions the 'selecting' institutions saw WP as something to be embedded within their admissions procedures rather than across the institution.

Given the discussion above it would be short-sighted to say that it is not feasible to construct a business case for WP and student diversity for institutions which embody an 'academic' paradigm. For one thing, HEIs contain a lot of internal diversity and even in the most highly 'selecting' institution, practices and beliefs can, and do vary, considerably. Rather, it would be fairer to say that institutions that currently enjoy a high rank and high popularity will experience constraints on their approach to WP and student diversity and on any organisational change resulting from a business case approach, linked in part to the drive to maintain their market position within the current system. This holds as a pragmatic fact whether or not one believes that the current stratification of the HE system is ethically justifiable. Moreover there are structural issues that come in to play here, such as the drive to maintain research quality which may limit the time academic staff can spend on teaching (section 4.3.3).

So far there has been little discussion of the 'differential provision' paradigm which, as acknowledged in Section 3.7, is somewhat problematic and, moreover, does not match very well with the Jones and Thomas (2005) typology which informed the rest of the model. Within the case study institutions only one institution fell in to this paradigm. This was an institution subject to multiple and potentially conflicting drivers. On the one hand it had a relatively high ranking for a 'new' university, on the other hand its history and identity was closely linked to WP and a regional commitment. In treading a middle line between maintaining its standards and reputation, and promoting diversity and WP, establishing an initiative for separate off-site provision aimed at different markets (more localised, mature learners, non-traditional entry qualifications) represents a shrewd strategy, and there were indications that Institution A had made it work successfully.

However, this is arguably just a bolder example of a phenomenon found in many case study institutions, including those very high in the rankings, of departments in which the usual criteria for admissions do not apply. Such departments – often centres for lifelong learning or continuing education –

may be more or less marginal, larger or smaller, depending on the institution, but they do represent a vehicle for achieving student diversity, albeit in a limited way. The extent to which this provision is limited either by resources or by 'esteem' within the core of the institution is likely to have an impact both on the potential of this provision to act as a vehicle to increase the diversity of the student body and on the achievement of pan-organisational change based on a business case for WP and student diversity.

While the above discussion points to some of the limitations that may need to be taken into account when constructing a business case for WP and student diversity, it does not provide the full picture. There was some limited evidence that the purely 'academic' discourse was beginning to break down. Those interviewed in Institution D talked about the recognition of demographic change that was likely to have an impact on future recruitment and, while that was couched in terms of 'tapping the pool of talent', saw that it provided a potential lever for change. Those in Institution G spoke about the impact of the local Lifelong Learning Network and suggested that some of the more vocationally oriented provision being developed as a result was being viewed as an opportunity both to move into new markets and to increase diversity. HEIs operate in a rapidly changing environment and any business case model needs to recognise that the drivers on which it is built are subject to change by external factors outside the control of individual institutions. This could be viewed as an opportunity; for example, it opens the possibility of UK Government and Funding Councils providing policy and funding levers that would alter the drivers in a way that supported a move towards greater student diversity for all or parts of the sector.

5.2 Principles of constructing a business case

Given the highly contingent nature of the drivers for WP and student diversity and how they are perceived and acted upon throughout the sector, together with the wide diversity of practice, approach and structure within the sector, a 'one size fits all' business case model would not be appropriate. Rather, this section seeks to set out some of the principles of a business case that may be used by institutions to support the development of their own version. These are set out in the context of a commitment by the Academy to provide materials to support the process of embedding inclusive policies and practices in UK HEIs.

Below, based upon the findings of this research, are a number of strategic questions that could be used by HEI key stakeholders to appraise the relevant drivers for WP and student diversity likely to be supportive of both their

institution's strategic direction and current organisational culture. Given the diversity of the HE sector it is not possible to provide indicative answers to these questions. However the findings and arguments presented in Section 4 provide some source material that may be used in seeking answers, and furthermore the sample stakeholder planning tools in Section 5.3 provide a summary of evidence and examples that may be used. The process of seeking answers to these questions is likely to be valuable in and of itself:

- How do staff in the institution define and understand WP?
  - Is it seen as relevant across the whole student lifecycle?
  - Is it defined broadly and inclusively or is it associated with particular groups?
- What is the level of understanding in relation to student diversity within the institution?
  - Are the potential benefits of diversity recognised or is it linked to assumptions about lowering academic standards (particularly among academic staff)?
  - Does this understanding extend to the recognition of the need to increase the diversity of the student body?
  - Are student diversity and WP explicitly linked?
- What position does the institution occupy in the HE 'market'?
  - What is the current market position and what position is it likely to occupy in 3-5 years' time?
  - If the institution is planning to expand (or envisages a squeeze on current markets), which markets are being targeted?
  - How will the institution need to change in order to reach those markets?
- Which of the benefits associated with WP and student diversity are most relevant to the institution?
  - Where drivers are statutory ones, are all staff in the institution aware of their statutory responsibilities and what these entail?
  - Do staff have the same recognition of the drivers behind the identified benefits and why these are important for the institution?
  - Do staff associate these benefits with an increased student diversity?
  - Do staff have the required understanding and skills to make the most of these benefits?
- What areas of operation need to change to enhance WP and diversity?
  - Is there a willingness at senior level to undertake institutional change?
  - What are the limitations on the scope of this change?
  - What are the implications – how will changes in one area affect other areas?
  - How can change be undertaken in a way that involves all stakeholders (including students)?

5.3 Stakeholder tools

An important finding of this research is that the costs and benefits of WP and promoting diversity tend to be articulated as general assertions, personal impressions or beliefs. It is important to take such articulations seriously and to build on them by providing an evidence base both at the general and the local level. The interview evidence across the case studies suggests that no detailed rationale of the benefits of WP and promoting diversity had been presented to those interviewed in each institution. Typical comments in interview when asked for evidence of costs or benefits such as '*this is anecdotal but..*' or '*to my knowledge that case has not been made*' indicate this.

There appears to be an evidence-based policy gap in relation to understanding the costs and benefits of WP/promoting diversity. Also, there appears to be an evidence-based policy gap in relation to developing arguments that can be used to promote and facilitate the prioritisation of WP/promoting diversity by different stakeholder groups within HEIs.

The evidence base for assessing the costs and benefits of WP/promoting diversity needs further development, both at the institutional level and in relation to specific stakeholder groups. To support the development of this evidence base it would be possible to develop straightforward strategic business case planning tools tailored to different groups of stakeholders.

The following pages provide examples of business case planning tools:

- At the strategic, pan institutional level (aimed at senior stake holders)
- Related to teaching and learning (likely to be of direct interest and relevance to academic and student support staff).

The planning tools are intended to be used as a guide to developing the link between strategy, policy and evidence in relation to building a case for WP/promoting diversity.

The plans link instrumental (self-interest) business case arguments with ethical/social mission business case arguments by treating WP/promoting diversity both as a desired policy **outcome** in itself and as a **catalyst** for achieving other stakeholder goals. Indeed, one of the goals of using the planning tools would be to encourage stakeholders to link ethical/social mission/corporate responsibility with instrumental rationales so that an institutionally specific case for WP/promoting diversity could be developed that addresses key internal stakeholder groups.

Of the two versions of the tool given below, the second (teaching and learning) includes a summary of illustrative evidence and examples. This

is something that could be developed and built upon. For example, the strategic tool could also include links to evidence and examples, though given the breadth of material that could be included here and practical considerations of space and layout this would be better done in another format, for example as a web tool using hypertext. Such a tool would also allow for the filtering of information based on institutional contextual factors in order to ensure it is targeted appropriately.

Stakeholder Business Case Plan
STRATEGIC

Widening participation/Promoting diversity as a mechanism for achieving corporate goals	**Widening participation/Promoting diversity as an outcome of university-wide strategy**
Illustrative Strategic Questions	**Illustrative Strategic Questions**
• How can a more diverse student body enhance our learning and teaching, research and third stream activities? • What role can WP/promoting diversity play in enabling the institution to provide local/regional/national benefit? • How can WP/promoting diversity contribute to increasing student numbers locally / regionally / nationally / internationally? • How can WP/ promoting diversity stimulate course and curricula development? • What role can WP/promoting diversity play in enhancing the learning culture/student experience? • What role can WP/promoting diversity play in developing new partnerships and meeting demands of key stakeholder groups such as professional bodies?	• How is WP and diversity represented in key plans, strategies and policies / is there a WP/diversity strategy, eg has WP / promoting diversity informed the admissions policy; has WP / promoting diversity informed the learning & teaching strategy? • Is there high level commitment to promoting WP and diversity across the institution / who is the senior champion? • What mechanisms and structures are in place to ensure effective implementation of the strategic commitment to WP and diversity across the institution? • How are resources allocated to support WP / promoting diversity activity? • Are staffing resources deployed appropriately / effectively? • Is there a common understanding of WP / promoting diversity in the context of the institution and how it relates to corporate goals? • How do WP / promoting diversity inform development opportunities for all staff?
Illustrative Strategic Questions	**Illustrative Evidence Required**
• Examples from other HEIs • Existing literature and research • Recruitment, retention and transition figures • Student feedback • Partnerships developed • New courses developed	• Examples from other HEIs • Existing literature and research • Recruitment, retention and transition figures • Staff feedback • Relevant staff development opportunities provided • Identification of resource allocation

Stakeholder Business Case Plan
TEACHING AND LEARNING

Widening participation/Promoting diversity as a mechanism for achieving learning and teaching goals	**Widening participation/Promoting diversity as an outcome of learning and teaching policy and practice**

Illustrative Strategic Questions	**Illustrative Strategic Questions**
• How can a more diverse student body facilitate innovation in pedagogy and assessment? • What role can WP/promoting diversity play increasing student numbers and tapping the pool of talent? • How can WP/ promoting diversity stimulate course and curricula development? • What role can WP/promoting diversity play in enhancing the learning culture/student experience? • What role can WP/promoting diversity play in developing new partnerships and meeting demands of key stakeholder groups such as professional bodies?	• What is our student profile and recruitment, retention and transition profile? • To what extent are recruitment, retention and transition issues analysed in terms of WP/promoting diversity? • How does Teaching, Learning & Assessment (TLA) policy and practice support WP/promoting diversity? • How is the TLA linked to other institutional stakeholders? • How does pedagogy and assessment facilitate the inclusion of a diverse student body? • How can curricula be best developed to attract and retain diverse groups of students? • What teaching and learning support systems are in place to ensure student success? • What partnerships can be developed to support curriculum provision?

Illustrative Strategic Questions	**Illustrative Evidence Required**
• Examples from other HEIs (see next page) • Existing literature and research (see next page) • Recruitment retention and transition figures • Student feedback • Partnerships developed • New courses developed	• Examples from other HEIs (see next page) • Existing literature and research (see next page) • Recruitment, retention and transition figures • Student feedback • Range of assessment practices • Quality of learning support

WP/Promoting diversity as a mechanism for achieving learning and teaching goals

Examples from other HEIs

Using the diversity within the classroom to contribute to group discussions by drawing on different experience (Institutions C and F)

Using the diversity of the cohort as a resource for developing the professional identity of individuals on a professional course (Institution C)

Diversity in the classroom is an opportunity to build the professional skills of teaching staff (Institution C)

A more diverse student body is reportedly beneficial for students in terms of their learning, social and professional development (Institutions A, F, G)

Outreach work supports the development of partnerships that can have a positive impact on curriculum and new course development (Institutions A, F)

Existing literature and research

Argument that the changes to curriculum provision and learning, teaching and assessment, which have occurred alongside the transition from an elite to a mass participation HE sector, benefit all students and can have a positive impact on higher level and critical thinking skills (Powney, 2002; Warren, 2002, JM Consulting, 2004, Gorard et al, 2006).

Positive correlation between informal interactions with ethnically diverse peers in higher education institutions, and learning outcomes (Gurin et al, 2002)

Provision of a more inclusive curriculum tends to be resource intensive (JM Consulting, 2004; Layer et al, 2002), may compete with other institutional priorities such as research (Powney, 2002) and may have an impact on overall quality, standards and performance indicators within the institution (Powney, 2002; Boxall et al, 2002).

WP/Promoting diversity as an outcome of learning and teaching policy and practice

Examples from other HEIs

Embedding academic literacy skills in the curriculum for all students (Institution A)

Using a review of curriculum in light of SENDA requirements to improve teaching and learning for all students (Institution H)

An increase in the diversity of students must be met with appropriate resourcing for non-embedded as well as embedded support so as to avoid overloading student services (Institution C) and the student union (Institution F), but not at the expense of funding for direct teaching costs (Institution E).

Development of more practical and vocational subjects may increase the diversity of the student body (Institution A, Institution F)

Existing literature and research

Identifying the characteristics of prospective learners during course design is good practice in teaching and learning, and particularly important for working with non-traditional groups. (Powney 2002:22)

Student diversity challenges existing practice (Powney, 2002)

Some academics routinely make adaptations and extend the curriculum to make it more accessible to a wider group of students. However, this relies largely on the goodwill of individuals and departmental funding where this practice does not accord with institutional strategy and creates tensions (Parker et al, 2005)

Institutional changes to facilitate the inclusion of one group of students may benefit all students (Craig and Kernoff, 1995; Ramsden, 1987; Warren, 2002).

5.4 Areas for consideration

A number of cross-cutting themes emerged during the course of this study that require some further consideration and, in some cases, research. These are set out below:

- The study revealed a patchy understanding of 'diversity' as applied to the student body – for example, definitions sometimes referred only to ethnic diversity. This is flagged as an area for concern, particularly given the recent changes in equality legislation.

- Widening participation is potentially a problematic term as it can be used to denote particular activities, an outcome, or even to define a group of students. Furthermore, some of the targets with which the term is associated are more about increasing rather than widening participation – for example the 50% HE participation target. The concept of achieving and managing greater student diversity is arguably less open to this range of interpretations and therefore less problematic. At present though it is not a term fully understood by, and accepted within, the HE sector. However promotion of the term 'student diversity' to describe a desired outcome to which WP activities may contribute might help to alleviate any potential confusion and harmonise understanding across the sector.

- It will be clear, particularly from Section 3.6, that there is only very limited evidence (and none from the UK) on the impact of a greater student diversity on teaching and learning outcomes, though many of those interviewed assumed that the impact was positive, or that it was 'good for' the students. Further research into the benefits of greater student diversity, particularly in relation to teaching and learning and the student experience, would be of considerable benefit in establishing the reality of these assumptions. If positive impacts were more firmly established this would provide a persuasive driver for embracing greater student diversity and one that would be of particular interest to academic staff.

- The competitive situation in which HEIs operate promotes market stratification and there is some evidence that this is linked to the perpetuation of WP paradigms that are limiting in their scope for promoting diversity. At present social class forms an important dimension of market stratification, with socio-economic groups being unevenly represented across the sector. Increased marketisation of higher education brings the danger that this social stratification will increase, thus decreasing the diversity of the student body within any one HEI and pushing the responsibility of WP onto the institutions that are currently

most financially stretched. Furthermore, competitiveness in the form of league tables may hamper the adoption of radical solutions by HEIs that would genuinely promote student diversity. It is noted that in Scotland institutions operate in a highly collaborative way in respect to WP and social inclusion that genuinely mitigates against some of these competitive difficulties . At the same time it is also the case that some evidence of market stratification was found in the Scottish institutions which participated in this study (see Section 4.1.2). It is to be hoped that the present study gives support to the arguments of those (cited throughout the report) who are concerned about the issue of stratification in the UK HE system and its implications for WP and diversity.

- The scope of this study did not include HE in FE. However, the experience of some of the authors in the Lifelong Learning Network (LLN) initiative suggests that there is potential from HEIs to gain useful knowledge and examples of practice from HE in FE, and that this learning can be facilitated by partnerships such as LLNs.

Postscript: The nature of knowledge

All research has loose ends and this is no exception. There are always further territories to be explored and paths to be taken which have the potential to inform future work. Discussions with WP and diversity managers at a recent Academy event centred around one of these 'paths not taken' and related to the nature of knowledge itself. The Wilson and Iles (1996, 1999) distinction between equal opportunities and diversity paradigms included a distinction between equal opportunities, on the one hand, being underpinned by 'a narrow, positivist knowledge base' and diversity, on the other hand, being underpinned by 'a wider, pluralistic knowledge base'. This distinction was not something that was adopted within the eventual model of WP paradigms developed in Section 3.7 and was merely set aside.

Without any reference to Wilson and Iles, discussion at the Academy event began to turn to whether members of 'older, more traditional' institutions had a different concept of knowledge than those of 'newer' institutions. It was suggested that the newer institutions, 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. This is something flagged in Bowl (2003) and points to an understanding of knowledge similar to that of Gibbons et al's (1994) 'Mode 2' knowledge.

Within the scope of this study it was not possible to pursue this line of enquiry. Nonetheless it represents, potentially, a difference in philosophy that may underpin the differences between HE institutions and may explain why change is more difficult in some than in others. It is not only a question of difference in understanding, but an implied 'hierarchy' of knowledge, with traditionally academic and discipline based knowledge at the top.

Exploring the implications of the epistemological underpinnings of HE could well be justified as a study in its own right. We recommend this as an area for further study and suggest that it may add significant insight to the work we have presented here.

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Appendix 1: Thematic interview schedule (staff)

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the research. The research is aimed at exploring the 'business case' for widening participation and supporting a greater student diversity and we would like to discuss the policy and practice in your HEI. We are interested in your perspective and would like you to be assured that the interview is confidential and anonymous. Please feel free to be open in your answers. There are no right or wrong answers. Can I confirm that you are happy for the interview to be recorded?

Theme 1: Overall rationale and approach to WP&D and key areas of practice

What do you understand by the terms widening participation and diversity in the higher education context?

How would you describe your student profile?

What type of students and courses provide your main market?

Where do you see your market focus in the future, and why?

What image are you trying to project as an institution and why?

Reasons for engaging in WP&D activities?

Explore key drivers for institution in respect of WP&D

Prompts:
- income generation?
- recruitment?
- retention?
- improved teaching and learning outcomes?
- diversification of provision and move into new market areas (e.g. CPD, foundation degrees)?
- developing regional profile of HEI or profile in community?

Explore areas of WP&D which institution focuses on and why this focus?

Theme 2: Exploration of how WP&D is/is not embedded across the university

Is there a University strategy/policy clearly linked to the HEI's overall mission, aims and objectives?

How is commitment to WP&D demonstrated at the senior level?

Who does interviewee feel are the stakeholders of WP&D policy? How is WP&D strategy/policy communicated to them?

Explore how WP&D policy run across the following areas?

- admissions
- teaching and learning
- employability
- research
- business and community activities?

Are mainstream resources (core budget) committed to WP or is it dependent on project funding?

Are targets set for widening participation? How is progress evaluated/measured?

Theme 3: Explore the impact of WP

Explore the costs and benefits to the institution of WP&D? Check in relation to following

Prompts:
- recruitment
- retention
- income generation
- teaching and learning
- new course development
- third mission/Regional economy/governance agenda

Explore what kinds of evidence are used to assess costs and benefits?

Theme 4: Obstacles limiting the development of WP activities in the HEI

What do you think are the obstacles that limit the development of widening participation activities in your institution?

Explore :
- internal barriers/obstacles
- external barriers/obstacles

Prompt for issues around student lifecycle – outreach, admissions, teaching and learning

Prompt for funding, policy, stakeholder support

Theme 5: Business Case for Diversity

What would be your understanding of the term 'business case for greater student diversity'?

Has anyone in the institution attempted to articulate such a case?

If you had to make a business case for greater student diversity, what would you include and why?

Appendix 2: Thematic interview schedule (students)

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the research. The research is aimed at exploring the 'business case' for widening participation and supporting a greater student diversity and we would like to discuss the policy and practice in your HEI. We are interested in your perspective and would like you to be assured that the interview is confidential and anonymous. Please feel free to be open in your answers. There are no right or wrong answers. Can I confirm that you are happy for the interview to be recorded?

Theme 1 – Reasons for coming to university

Why did you come to university?

Why did you choose this institution?

Theme 2 – HEI image

How would you describe the profile of students here? (May need to explain what we mean by 'student profile')

How would you describe the image or reputation of this university?

Have you had any difficulties settling into university life and coping with study?

(If so, explore what these were; if not explore what helped them to settle in etc)

Theme 3 – Exploration of images of different kinds of HEI

If you could go to any university in the country which one would you choose and why?

Are there any universities you wouldn't go to? Why?

How important do you think it is that the university you go to has students who have a similar background to your own?

Do you think it is important for a university to have a diverse student body? (Explain what this means – i.e. range of class, gender, ethnicity, educational backgrounds, range of courses)

Prompt:
- what about those coming in with vocational qualifications rather than A-levels?
- what effects would this have on you as a student (look for positives and negatives – e.g. is a diverse environment more stimulating? do they perceive that students with a vocational background would impact on 'standards'? do students with a variety of different needs take up lecturer time? etc)

Explore the answers to see if this is an important influence on choice of institution.

Theme 4 – HEI costs and benefits

Drawing on your own experience as a student:

- what would you say were the benefits of going to university? What are the costs?
- what are the specific advantages of studying at this university? Are there any disadvantages?

Appendix 3

Table 4.4A: Rationale for and perceived benefits of WP/diversity in Institution A

Rationale	Perceived benefits
Social justice – 'doing the right thing'	Providing equal opportunities
Corporate responsibility	Contributing to social and economic development
	Enhanced reputation with stakeholders
	Become identified as leader in WP and diversity in the region
Response to government policy and legislation	Meet Office for Fair Access (OFFA) Access Agreement targets
Belief that a diverse student population enriches learning experience	Enriched social, learning and teaching experience for students and staff; add to knowledge base
Opportunity for recruiting students: building on traditional strengths of institution in attracting diverse student body; finding new student markets	Sustain/expand student numbers
	Meet professional body targets for WP and diversity
Opportunities for business development through community/employer engagement: e.g. finding avenues to develop research, knowledge transfer, gain access to new funding streams, develop new courses	New products and diversification of business; new income streams

Table 4.4B: Rationale for and perceived benefits of WP/diversity in Institution B

Rationale	Perceived benefits
Social justice – 'doing the right thing'	Providing equal opportunities
Corporate responsibility	Contributing to social and economic development
Response to government policy and legislation	Meet Northern Ireland targets for WP
	Meet OFFA Access Agreement targets

Table 4.4C: Rationale for and perceived benefits of WP/diversity in Institution C

Rationale	Perceived benefits
Social justice – 'doing the right thing'	Providing equal opportunities
Corporate responsibility	Contributing to social and economic development
Response to government policy and legislation	
Opportunity for recruiting students: build on existing strengths of admitting non-traditional and underrepresented groups; develop existing market; find new markets	Sustain/expand student numbers

Table 4.4D: Rationale for and perceived benefits of WP/diversity in Institution D

Rationale	Perceived benefits
Social justice – 'doing the right thing'	Providing equal opportunities Better 'social mix'; breaks down barriers.
Corporate responsibility	Contributing to social and economic development Be seen as local leader in WP and diversity Enhanced reputation with stakeholders
Response to government policy and legislation	Alignment with government WP policy
Opportunity for recruiting students: 'tapping the pool of talent'	Maximise opportunities; maintain high academic standards

Table 4.4E: Rationale for and perceived benefits of WP/diversity in Institution E

Rationale	Perceived benefits
Social justice – 'doing the right thing'	Providing equal opportunities
Corporate responsibility	Contributing to social and economic development Enhanced reputation with stakeholders
Belief that a diverse student population enriches learning experience	Enriched learning experience
Response to government policy and legislation	Alignment with government WP targets
Opportunity for recruiting students: responding to declining population and increased competition from 'new' universities in the area; opportunities to recruit more students from local population	Sustain/expand student numbers

Table 4.4F: Rationale for and perceived benefits of WP/diversity in Institution F

Rationale	Perceived benefits
Social justice – 'doing the right thing'	Providing equal opportunities
Corporate responsibility	Contributing to social and economic development
Belief that a diverse student population enriches learning experience	Enriched learning experience
Response to government policy and legislation	
Opportunity for recruiting students: responding to declining population and increased competition from 'new' universities in the area; opportunities to recruit more students from local population	Sustain/expand student numbers
Opportunities for business development opening up a range of potential funding streams, such as Aimhigher monies, European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund grants and Continuing Professional Development; community/employer engagement; opportunities for partnership working and new product development.	Diversification of income and product; new student markets

Table 4.4G: Rationale for and perceived benefits of WP/diversity in Institution G

Rationale	Perceived benefits
Social justice – 'doing the right thing'	Providing equal opportunities
	Meet University WP and diversity targets
Corporate responsibility	Contributing to social and economic development
	Enhanced reputation with stakeholders
Belief that a diverse student population enriches learning experience	Enriched learning experience
Response to government policy and legislation	Alignment with national policy
	Meet OFFA and access agreement targets
	Compliance with requirements of anti-discrimination and equality legislation
Opportunity for recruiting students: 'tapping the pool of talent'; find new student markets for hard to recruit discipline areas/departments; respond to professional body developments in widening access to professional areas	Maximise opportunities; maintain high academic standards.
	Survival of departments
	Alignment with professional bodies

Table 4.4H: Rationale for and perceived benefits of WP/diversity in Institution H

Rationale	Perceived benefits
Social justice – 'doing the right thing'	Providing equal opportunities
	Meet university WP and diversity targets
Corporate responsibility	Contributing to social and economic development
	Local leader in WP and diversity; enhanced reputation with stakeholders
Belief that a diverse student population enriches learning experience	Enriched learning experience
Response to government policy and legislation	Alignment with government and regional WP strategies
	Compliance with requirements of anti-discrimination and equality legislation;
Opportunity for recruiting students: 'tapping the pool of talent'	Maximise potential; maintain academic standards
Opportunities for business development: through community/ employer engagement opening opportunities to develop new courses.	New courses; new students; partnerships

Embedding widening participation and promoting student diversity

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