
Supporting thriving communities: The role of universities in reducing inequality



University Alliance Regional Leadership Series

Foreword



Few would disagree with the idea that everyone should have an equal chance to succeed on the basis of their individual merit. But our local communities can also benefit and thrive as a result. People's potential is fulfilled while social cohesion improves as a direct consequence of creating and supporting life chances. Yet too often this is not the reality of life in Britain.

Barely a week goes by without us hearing how wealth and opportunity continues to be concentrated at the top of society, with those from disadvantaged backgrounds being unable to fulfil their potential.

Universities play an essential role in supporting people and communities to succeed, and not just those at the top of society. In recent years, all universities have increased their widening participation activity in response to legislative changes. However, for many, this activity has been integral to their way of working all along, reflecting their origins in close links to industry and the need to reach out to a more diverse student body. Consequently, the impact of many universities extends well beyond educating graduates. Rather, most modern universities consider their strong civic role an essential part of their mission – fulfilling a range of useful functions, which contribute to the success of the place in which the university is situated. These include training and development, plugging skills gaps locally and regionally, impactful research, entrepreneurship and strategic partnerships – all of which are explored in our Regional Leadership Series reports.

In addition, between 2010 and 2020 UKCES has predicted we will need an extra 4.7 million people educated to higher levels to meet the demands of the UK economy. Broadening opportunities for progression to higher study throughout one's lifetime is therefore going to be essential for social justice and economic productivity. But it is not enough to focus on access to higher study alone. Once students have made it to university, we need to keep them there and support them into good careers.

We must also reach out to our communities to ensure the benefits of higher education are felt beyond our student populations.

In this challenging environment, this paper seeks to shed some light on how universities are tackling inequality in their locality, to identify what the opportunities and barriers are to doing this well and to suggest some areas for further exploration and discussion. We demonstrate here that the best way to achieve impact is through a sustained and strategic commitment to widening participation and ensuring student success. This also requires us to work actively with our local communities.

This activity should be a core part of all university missions. It adds value to our communities, to our institutions and to our students. And with increasing devolution, which sees regional civic leaders gaining more direct influence in creating opportunities, universities can be important partners to ensure we can maximise talent and contribute to prosperous places.

Professor Steve West
Vice-Chancellor, UWE Bristol
Chair, University Alliance



While 14% of the UK population identifies as coming from a Black or Minority Ethnic (BME) background, just over 7% of paramedics are from BME groups. To address this gap, Health Education East Midlands commissioned Sheffield Hallam University and Northampton University to devise a project to increase the numbers of BME learners studying to become a paramedic through outreach work and by reducing bias and barriers at the application stage.

Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Foreword | 03 |
| Executive summary | 06 |
| Key findings and policy recommendations | 08 |
| 1. Reducing inequality – why does it matter and how can universities help? | 10 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access • Retention • Graduate success • Community engagement • Research | |
| 2. The experience of three universities in the wider London economic region | 21 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A strategic and inclusive approach • Using data • BME attainment gaps • The importance of partnerships • Targeted interventions for student success • Graduate success and employability • The importance of role models • Working with the community | |

Acknowledgements

Our thanks to those listed below for their support and advice in preparing this publication:

Anne-Marie Canning, Kings College London
 Claire Callender, Birkbeck
 Ed Clarke, Centre for Cities
 Felicity Dunworth, Kent and Medway Progression Trust
 Gary Loke, Equalities Challenge Unit
 Graeme Atherton, London Higher
 Julian Skyrme, University of Manchester
 Nik Miller, The Bridge Group
 Rachael Tooth, Office for Fair Access (OFFA)
 Sue Betts, Linking London

Executive summary

1. Despite efforts by successive governments to improve social mobility in Britain, wealth and opportunity continue to be concentrated within relatively small sections of the population. The Child Poverty and Social Mobility Commission has identified a 'growing social divide by income and by class'. As well as being socially divisive, evidence shows that inequality is bad for economic growth and productivity.¹
2. Universities are often accused of doing little to tackle this inequality and even of supporting the status quo.
3. On the one hand, high tariff institutions tend to recruit from the social elite who then go on to gain high status jobs. On the other hand, some argue that too many people are encouraged to undertake an expensive university education when they would be better served by following a vocational pathway. A third accusation is that the concentration of knowledge workers around universities can actually be a key driver of inequality as their greater affluence drives up prices for certain goods.
4. The Institute for Fiscal Studies, meanwhile, has found that unequal outcomes persist for graduates from opposite ends of the social spectrum, with those from higher income backgrounds earning significantly more, even after completing the same degree course from the same university.² Clearly universities can't solve the problem alone.
5. Nevertheless, the purpose of this report is to demonstrate that universities can play a positive role in supporting social mobility, if they make a meaningful strategic commitment and adopt sustained strategies for access, retention and graduate success. Government also has a role in supporting universities to do this, through policy and through the work of public bodies in the higher education (HE) sector.
6. The Prime Minister has set a target, announced in 2015, to double the proportion of disadvantaged students entering higher education by 2020 (from 2009 levels). This is an ambitious target that seeks to build on progress already made in widening access to higher education for young, full time undergraduates in recent years. In response, Universities UK's Social Mobility Advisory Group has been tasked with identifying practical solutions for how universities can make greater strides in widening participation and supporting student success.
7. Universities have considerable economic and social impact within the regional economy, not just at the top end of the labour market – where they generate more than 100 full-time equivalent jobs in other industries for every 100 generated within universities themselves³ – but at every level. There are more higher-value jobs in cities that have access to large numbers of knowledge workers⁴ and their presence is key to the government fulfilling its devolution and regional growth agendas.

¹ See for example, UNDP (2014) Why does inequality matter, JRF (2014) Cities, growth and poverty: evidence review

² Jack Britton, Lorraine Dearden, Neil Shephard and Anna Vignoles (2016) IFS working paper: How English-domiciled graduate earnings vary with gender, institution attended, subject and socio-economic background.

³ UUK (2009) The Impact of Universities on the UK Economy

⁴ Centre for Cities: SME Outlook 2015 and Delivering change: Universities and High Growth Firms

8. However, the debate about the role of higher education in tackling inequality has disproportionately focused on access for young people to a small number of universities. This approach is too narrow. Although it has been pursued for years, high tariff institutions have not significantly diversified their intake and the approach only captures a small proportion of the student population: at best one third of full-time, and one fifth of part-time, students.⁵
9. It is time to give attention to helping the full range of potential students to choose the best course and institution for them, and to give the same focus that is given to access, to retention and student success.
10. To demonstrate the greater impact universities can have we include here detailed case studies from three universities in London and the wider economic region around the capital. These are institutions with diverse student populations in the context of a largely prosperous, global city that nevertheless continues to have pockets of significant deprivation. We have also included a selection of best practice examples from institutions outside of the Alliance group.
11. This work is set within the wider contribution universities make to the 'opportunity ecosystem'. Higher Education Institutions work with a wide range of organisations – schools, employers and cultural institutions, to name just a few – to support vulnerable groups, provide cultural enrichment opportunities for those from a broad range of backgrounds and contribute to more effective public services. This activity should also be recognised and championed.

⁵ HESA (2014/15) Student Numbers for 'Sutton Trust 30' universities

Key findings and policy recommendations

| AREA | KEY FINDINGS | POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| <p>Access</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The best way to support under represented groups to apply to university is to encourage deep and sustained partnerships with the schools where these students typically study. • To do this requires working closely with schools as well as collaborative outreach with a range of organisations to raise aspirations and attainment. This collaborative approach helps to increase the reach and impact of university activity, allowing institutions to share expertise with relevant organisations and reduce duplication. • Universities that are ahead of the game in supporting access into higher education work closely with local stakeholders including schools, local councils, businesses and charities. • However, in an increasingly competitive HE sector that continues to experience considerable change, incentives for collaboration are not always there. Incentivising collaboration in the local context, while recognising the added cost associated with widening participation students and targeting resources accordingly, will support universities to ensure their activities achieve maximum impact. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. OFFA has helped to drive improvements by identifying and incentivising best practice approaches, including collaboration, and target groups of students, while HEFCE's recently launched National Collaborative Outreach programme also focuses resources. The two organisations, and the Office for Students, when it comes into being, should continue to have a strong role, supported by funding incentives such as Student Opportunity Funding, to encourage universities to set stretching access targets and hold them to account if they fail to reach them. |
| <p>Retention</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although the government's targets are focused on access we must not forget the importance of retention and progression: ensuring students stay and complete their study. • Largely as a reaction to policy incentives, universities are increasingly using data to track 'what works' in order to improve the impact of their retention activities and reduce duplication across their institutions. This should continue to be encouraged and supported. • Strong senior leadership is important in driving effective activities with an institution-wide focus on belonging and inclusion for all students. Policy drivers that prioritise this activity could help to drive greater action. • Specialist support is also essential and complementary to institution-wide strategies. These activities should be evaluated in the specific context of each individual university. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Government levers such as the public sector Equality Duty have driven positive action, focusing attention, driving data collection and analysis and helping to protect resources for relevant activity. Government can help to maintain current momentum to reduce inequalities through continued clear messaging and funding incentives to collect data, evidence impact and support partnerships. |

| | | |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| <p>Graduate success</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With diverse populations of students, often lacking the skills and networks to navigate the world of employment effectively, universities must and do work hard to ensure their graduates achieve good outcomes. • They work with a range of employers to provide opportunities for their students and graduates, from work experience to collaboration on course design and opportunities for continued professional development. • Government efforts to improve the links between employers and educational institutions, to raise the profile of work-based learning and to create more funding opportunities for part-time and postgraduate study are all positive steps. • However, we know that non-traditional learners face disadvantage in the work place and later life relative to their more affluent and higher social status peers, despite the fact they bring valuable different experiences, knowledge and expectations of life and work, qualities that can support them to succeed in higher education and employment. Universities and employers can do something to change this. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Universities should do more to adjust institutional practices and processes – for example, ensuring that they are interrogating their entry processes, curriculum design and assessment procedures – to ensure students’ diverse learning and employment needs are met. 4. Government could support this by requiring universities to report and evidence to OFFA the mechanisms they have in place to support different types of students to achieve their potential. 5. Employers should also be encouraged to flex their entry and assessment criteria to reflect greater cultural awareness and recognise potential in all its diverse forms. A government Charter mark or award scheme for employers could support this. |
| <p>Community engagement</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As well as creating opportunities for students, universities are actively engaging local communities, and involving them in decision-making. • This helps to break down barriers to employment, helps businesses to grow and supports regeneration. It also improves access to broader opportunities such as cultural enrichment, which can itself support educational engagement and reduce educational disadvantage. • Through this activity, universities, working with local decision makers, support their communities and contribute to more effective delivery of public services through their expertise and capability, for example, by helping refugees and asylum seekers to access educational opportunities. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Universities play an important role in creating thriving cities and region. To ensure they can maximise their impact LEPs should be required to consider higher level skills within their core remit and they should also be obliged to proactively involve their local university(ies) in discussions about economic and social development and local and regional skills policy. |
| <p>Research</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universities play a key role in producing knowledge and bringing this to bear on the causes and consequences of inequality. • For example, Nottingham Trent University has launched a dedicated centre which brings together more than 80 researchers to address the inequalities in health and life chances affecting families, children and young people. • Universities are using their research expertise and capabilities, working with partners, to tackle inequalities in strategic ways that achieve long term impact. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. University research can be an incredibly valuable resource for improving life chances. Government could help to ensure this kind of research remains a priority by strengthening the impact element of the Research Excellence Framework, and by encouraging funding streams, such as the Social Innovation Pilot programme run by HEFCE, to fund excellence wherever it is found. |

1. Reducing inequality – why does it matter and how can universities help?

Why is reducing inequality important?

While the UK has been out of recession for some time now, economic gains have not been shared equitably. The Child Poverty and Social Mobility Commission recently found that the top 10% of the population hold nearly 40% of total income, 66% of all wealth, and are overwhelmingly represented in the most prestigious and influential professions.⁶ This is deeply unfair. But there is also a considerable body of evidence (and increasing recognition from across the political spectrum)⁷ that shows high levels of inequality have a negative effect on both the quality and sustainability of economic growth.⁸ Ensuring as many people as possible have a stake in the country's economic success is therefore essential; it can ensure better use of skills and knowledge and lead to increased spending in the economy and increased local economic demand to grow businesses, which in turn leads to increased tax receipts and reduced spending on welfare, freeing up investment for other projects to enhance growth. To do so means reducing social and regional inequality to promote economic productivity alongside growth.⁹

Why do universities care?

Universities are often accused of doing very little to reduce inequality – and indeed of promoting the status quo. A university education has, after all, traditionally been an elite pursuit (though participation rates have improved dramatically in recent years, at least for young, full-time undergraduates). High tariff institutions tend to recruit from the social elite who then go on to gain high status jobs. Conversely, some argue that we are funnelling too many people into advanced study at the expense of more vocational educational pathways. A third accusation is that the concentration of knowledge

workers around universities can actually be a key driver of inequality as their greater affluence drives up prices for certain goods. If that were the case, it would be hard to defend the continued protection of higher education budgets, when drastic cuts have been made elsewhere, such as to further education (FE) and Local Authorities.

It is certainly the case that the debate around inequality in higher education has been disproportionately focused on access: getting individuals into university. This focus is unhelpful because we know that even when they get in, certain groups of students fare worse at university. BME students, for example, are less likely to gain a good degree (2.1 or 1st) than their white peers and are less likely to say they are satisfied with their university experience. And graduates from poorer backgrounds earn less than their richer peers, even those who have studied the same degree at the same university.¹⁰

HEFCE has identified that differential outcomes are influenced by a whole range of factors, from the structure of the HE system as a whole and intractable social and cultural structures such as race, ethnicity and culture, right through to individual interactions between staff and students on a day-to-day basis.¹¹ Research by the United Nations also finds that, across the world, 'an individual's chances in life depend significantly on group ascription and the ways in which both the individual and group interacts with public institutions and the labour market'.¹² This implies a role for smoothing interactions between individuals and groups, particularly targeted at disadvantaged groups, to ensure they can contribute to and benefit from economic opportunities.

⁶ Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, State of the Nation 2015

⁷ See for example, Sir John Major's Hinton Lecture, Nov 2015, "A nation at ease with itself?"

⁸ For example, UNDP (2014) Why does inequality matter

⁹ JRF (2014) Cities, growth and poverty: evidence review

¹⁰ Jack Britton et al (2016)

¹¹ HEFCE (2015) Causes of difference in student outcomes

¹² UN (2013) Inequality Matters: Report of the World Social Situation 2013, p75

We argue that universities encounter inequality in myriad ways and most recognise they have both a practical and moral obligation to address it. Firstly, universities encounter inequality through the place in which they are situated, often in cities, which tend to have pockets of both affluence and poverty. Many universities were born out of industrial demand for certain skills and have a long history of providing a varied educational offer to mature and part-time learners as well as (increasingly in recent years), young full-time undergraduates. Because of their history and the fact that they are large institutions, physically located in a particular place that is often close to deprived communities, many universities feel they have a stake in supporting their local community and region, economically and through raising aspirations. As a result they contribute through a range of activities including spending, creating and sustaining jobs, generating ideas, information and talent, research, providing business support services and investing in the physical environment, among many other activities.¹³

To maximise their contribution, universities, which do after all control their own admissions processes, must first address inequalities of access. There are well-documented benefits to higher levels of education – better health, greater civic engagement and personal wellbeing, etc¹⁴ – but the degree to which students gain access to, and benefit from, higher education is still heavily influenced by socio-economic background.¹⁵ The policy agenda has been focused on young, full time undergraduate students, with target groups for increased participation mostly identified through socio-economic status. While this has achieved considerable success it has led to a lack of focus elsewhere: we have seen a large drop in part-time and mature students; the gender gap in participation appears to be widening: in 2015, 26.2% of 18 year old British men entered undergraduate degrees, compared to 35.4% for women; and we continue to see considerable differences between course and subject areas. For example, 84% of those accepted on engineering and 86% on computer sciences courses in 2015

were men; in ‘Subjects allied to medicine’, which includes nursing and midwifery courses, women made up 81% of the students accepted in 2015.¹⁶

For certain groups of students there appear to be particular barriers to success. For example, there is a significant attainment gap between Black and Black Caribbean students compared to their White British peers, even those with the same levels of prior attainment.¹⁷ The number of disabled people in higher education is increasing but they remain under-represented as a proportion of the total. They are less likely to remain in higher education and those declaring a disability but not receiving Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) are less likely to receive a good degree.¹⁸ There are also growing numbers of students within higher education declaring mental health problems. Changes to DSA, while well-intentioned, threaten to disrupt progress further. Other groups where policy to support widening participation and student success through higher education is underdeveloped include LGBT communities, carers and care leavers and people following certain religions.

While socio-economic background may to a large extent determine outcomes, we know that it does not determine potential. As well as being socially unjust, skewed access to and success through higher education is economically inefficient – a waste of talent and a vast untapped resource that could be contributing more meaningfully to public and economic life.

Some have argued that this sort of inequality cannot be properly tackled at the level of higher education, since much of this disadvantage begins much earlier in the student lifecycle and is ingrained over the course of compulsory education. Of course schools are important and cannot be exempt from responsibility. But while prior attainment is a strong predictor of progression to university, there is evidence of good progression even in areas where attainment is low and vice versa poor progression, even in places where there is strong attainment.¹⁹

¹³ See, for example, UUK, *The Impact of Universities on the UK Economy*, University Alliance (2014) Job Ready

¹⁴ See, for example, OECD (2012) *Education at a Glance*

¹⁵ See, for example, Child Poverty and Social Mobility Commission, *State of the Nation 2015*

¹⁶ UCAS, *End of Cycle 2015 Data Resources*

¹⁷ HEFCE (2015) *Causes of difference in student outcomes*

¹⁸ HEFCE (2013) *Higher education and beyond: Outcomes from full-time first degree study*

Evidence also shows state school pupils tend to exceed the performance of privately educated peers once they get to university.²⁰ This suggests that universities can and should have an impact on reducing inequality.

How can government help?

Government incentives, such as the introduction of the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) and the requirement to have Access Agreements in order to charge the top rate of fees, have focused time and resources on addressing some of the gaps above. The removal of student number controls has also been essential to increasing access and the strong focus in the recent Green Paper on student success and added value continues to concentrate attention on this agenda.

Alongside these policy incentives, the Government's new localism agenda presents an opportunity for universities – working with other local actors – employers, education institutions, Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs), Chambers of Commerce, cultural institutions and so on – to do more. City regions have been encouraged to look at education and skills, (un)employment, business taxes and other business investment in a more joined up way than before and universities are increasingly getting involved in these discussions.

Tackling inequalities through higher education is hugely complex because different groups are likely to need different forms of support to succeed. But universities are trying out different approaches: they are increasingly thinking more strategically about linking up their different activities in order to best support their students, graduates and local communities. For example, they are working with partners to build multi-use spaces and facilities for both students and communities, offering pro-bono services such as legal advice, and broadening access to enrichment activities including cultural events, in attempts to break down social divides. They are also working together to successfully address challenges. For example, the Athena SWAN Charter, developed collaboratively by universities and now with the Equalities Challenge Unit, has had a significant impact on women's representation and influence within universities.²¹

For illustrative purposes universities' essential activity to reduce inequality is divided into five categories: access (to university); retention (and developing students' skills and abilities to support their success); graduate success (supporting students into employment and giving them the tools to progress once there); community engagement; and research.

Proportion of 18 year olds accepted for entry by UCAS cycle



¹⁹ See HEFCE NNCO projects Breaking Through the GCSE Barrier and GCSE Attainment: Examining the gaps, expected to report in November 2016.

²⁰ See for more information: University Alliance (2014) Closing the Gap: Unlocking opportunity through higher education

²¹ ECU (2015) Celebrating ten years of the Athena Swan Charter

Access

Universities have learned that the best way to encourage under-represented groups to apply to university is to enter deep and sustained partnerships with the schools where these students typically study. By working in partnership, the university's activities have greater reach and scale. For example, each year, Nottingham Trent University's outreach programmes work with 30,000 pupils to run more than 700 activities. As part of these partnerships, universities also set up their own academies, trust schools and University Technical Colleges (UTCs). University involvement provides proactive and visible engagement in governance and capacity building as well as legally binding arrangements for example through sponsorship of a federation, academy or trust. By improving the visibility of higher education and promoting routes in and through higher-level study (including mixed models such as apprenticeships and work-based learning) universities are supporting progression. Examples of where this has made a difference include the University of the West of England, Bristol (UWE Bristol) where academic attainment and HE participation at the schools it works with has increased. Progression to higher education at the school UWE Bristol sponsors – Bristol City Academy – has grown from 1 in 10 in 2003 to 1 in 3 in 2009 and the University's Trust in Learning group of schools in the south of the City saw a 30% gain in attainment at GCSEs over the four years the university has been a sponsor.

Beyond schools, universities work with a whole range of partners to support progression to HE, targeting those who are most in need. Kings College London, for example, is expanding its outreach work to encompass vulnerable students such as young adult carers, refugees, asylum-seekers and estranged students. Students from these groups are given priority for places on all widening participation schemes delivered by the Widening Participation (WP) Department at the university and the team is working with other organisations such as the Refugee Support Network and Carers Trust, to refine their approach and ensure it is impactful.

Good cross- and inter-sector collaboration adds value to the outreach of an individual institution; it extends their reach, saves them money, adds to the reputation of participating universities in schools, and allows for proper investment through

shared costs, particularly when working with smaller groups such as care leavers, refugees or traveller communities. Collaborative targets also take the pressure off individual institutions to meet every target for themselves. For example, the four main higher education institutions in Greater Manchester (The University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University, the University of Salford and the University of Bolton) are working collaboratively to support Looked After Children and care-leavers into higher education. This includes the joint delivery of the annual Greater Manchester Care Leavers' Awards and the provision of information and guidance for key influencers including social workers and foster carers. The universities work closely with local authorities in Greater Manchester and have supported the delivery and enhancement of Manchester's Care to Change Council. Good collaboration also begets good collaboration: the National Network for Care Workers, for example, grew directly out of AimHigher partnerships and a desire to maintain and grow the existing national network.

In an increasingly competitive higher education market, government can support and grow this work by incentivising collaboration between and within higher education providers although incentives must take account of local conditions. For example, HE providers in rural or coastal communities may find it much easier to collaborate, because there is no direct competition for students. In areas with high concentrations of HE providers, different incentives may be needed. At the moment, however, there are competing policy drivers which challenge large scale collaboration. The removal of student number controls, while essential for access, has increased the tension between outreach and recruitment and made some universities more protectionist. This, combined with the frequent (re)introduction of different policy mechanisms and funding streams, contribute to a messy environment which increases the tension between outreach and recruitment and can dampen enthusiasm for collaboration.²² OFFA has helped to drive improvements by identifying and incentivising best practice approaches, including collaboration, and target groups of students, while HEFCE's recently launched National Collaborative Outreach programme also focuses resources.

²² Outreach is institution-blind, collaborative and focuses on the needs of the individuals that universities serve. Recruitment, on the other hand, serves the needs of the individual institution. The two can be complementary but they are different.



Coventry University set up Coventry University College for people who want to benefit from high quality courses but who have decided that the traditional student experience is not for them. It delivers flexible study options which meet the needs of students and employers, by offering full-time, part-time, work-based and distance learning programmes.

Retention

Current research on best practice suggests that the most important activities to support retention in HE involve fostering a sense of belonging, tackling attainment gaps and engaging students in the wider HE experience, including ensuring access to enrichment activities outside of the core curriculum to build social and cultural capital.²³ However, it is an anomaly that for some years now universities have held considerable data on students before they get to university, as well as (albeit imperfect) data on students when they leave (through the Destinations of Leavers survey), but know little to nothing about what happens to students while they are studying at the university. This means we do not yet know why some students perform better than others at university, even controlling for other variables such as grades on entry and family background. It is reasonable to assume that individual aptitude and cultural fit play an important role, but it is also reasonable to

expect that programmes of support put in place by the university can support student success.

The government narrative on the importance of successful outcomes, including in the recent Green Paper, has helped universities to think about collecting 'in-reach' data and analysing it. OFFA has driven institutions to collect data and it is increasingly driving the evaluation of this data and relevant interventions. Separately, projects such as the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) involve members (52 at the last count)²⁴ pooling their data to identify gaps and the meaningful interactions that might plug them. Improved data collection should allow us to answer important questions such as, does it matter how many times you interact with the student while they are at university – i.e. how many academic or support sessions they are exposed to – to ensure their success? And what

²³ See for example, OFFA and HEFCE (2014) National Strategy for Access and Student Success

²⁴ February 2016

effect does each of those interactions have, individually and cumulatively, on their degree classification, employability and later in life?

Those institutions that have been quickest to react to these changing priorities have built in a strong strategic commitment to reducing disparities, with Vice-Chancellor and senior management buy-in, putting in place institution-wide provision and looking across academic departments and student characteristics to identify and tackle pressure points for different groups of students. This is particularly important in institutions that have very diverse student bodies, as individual interventions would miss so many students, but it also helps to create a sense of belonging. For example, at Plymouth University, there are around 3,600 students with a declared disability, representing 16% of the student population – around double that of the national average. A proactive approach to encouraging and supporting these students into higher education, reinforced by the public sector Equality Duty, has resulted in a university-wide strategy with the Disability Assist team running awareness-raising sessions with academics and working with Teaching and Learning Support to look at how they might advise academics on ways to make the learning environment even more inclusive. The University's approach has strengthened the partnership between Learning, Support and Wellbeing and the student body. For example, the acclaimed Peer Assisted Learning Scheme is largely delivered by trained students who lead regular study sessions with those in the year below, facilitate discussion around course content and approaches to learning, and capture and reflect experiences and concerns from their students. This supports student engagement, develops communication skills, student teamwork and autonomy, and contributes to students' Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR).

Specialist support complements institution-wide strategies to strengthen an inclusive higher education experience. Mentoring activities, for example, are designed to reduce inequality of experience, assist retention and improve achievement and the development of skills for life. Teesside University provides specialist one-

to-one mentoring to support disabled students to engage effectively in their academic studies. Students undertake a needs assessment that identifies areas of challenge for the individual in usual day-to-day study-related activities such as time-management and organisation, maintaining a healthy work/life balance, stress management, presentations, group work, social interactions and communication. The aim is to help students develop strategies to reduce challenge and achieve their potential. Progress is monitored and reviewed and 'distance travelled' evaluated to help students see what they have achieved as they grow in skills and confidence. Liaison with academic schools and the Library ensures that the University is supporting students in the development of key skills and that their provision complements what is available to all students. The University also uses what they learn through mentoring provision to inform staff development activities and to influence the development of good inclusive practice.



Network75, run by the University of South Wales, gives undergraduates the opportunity to apply their academic knowledge to real-life work within a host company. Riah Spickett (pictured) graduated from the scheme in 2015. Whilst studying the BSc (Hons) Mechanical Engineering degree, Riah was placed with GE AviationWales in South Wales.

Graduate success

Most modern universities work hard to add value to their students by preparing them for the world of work and helping their graduates to access good employment opportunities. Indeed they have to work hard, since they tend to have diverse student populations that lack the personal and professional connections to effectively navigate the world of employment. Working with partners and combining academic and vocational practice is a success story for many universities in England, an approach that has enabled them to make vital connections for their students. There is an important role for universities in creating these work experience opportunities and they are always looking for more employers to get involved, particularly outside of London.

Recent government initiatives to improve the links between employers and education, and to amend accountability mechanisms in schools

to encourage greater promotion of work-based learning as well as academic routes is welcome. Continued engagement between employers and educational institutions will support this and build on existing success. Liverpool John Moores University's World of Work Careers Centre (WoW), for example, creates an environment that brings students and employers together in a city region with some of the lowest numbers of businesses in the UK.²⁵ In 2014-15 the Centre worked with nearly 900 local and national employers from the for-profit and third sector, SMEs and multinational corporations. In addition, since January 2016, WoW has operated three campus-based Careers Zones to enable students to access careers support closer to where they study. Zone usage is monitored and analysed using a bespoke tablet App meaning careers provision and employer visits can be better targeted at under-represented groups of students. This approach has led to a

²⁵ Centre for Cities, Cities Outlook 2016

significant increase in student uptake of careers provision, particularly by students who might not have typically engaged with the careers services. Government could further incentivise this activity by encouraging businesses to work with and recruit from a wider range of universities, perhaps building on the concept of the Opening Doors Awards which recognised organisations that had committed to offering fair and open access to their jobs and professions.²⁶

The extension of loans to more part-time students and to postgraduate study as well as the apprenticeship levy are also welcome and, we hope, will create more opportunities for diverse populations. But the impact of these policies is not yet clear. The currently small number of highly competitive degree apprenticeships is unlikely to considerably diversify the workforce, for example. In the meantime, universities have built up a varied offer, working with partners, to support students to access good employment outcomes – through comprehensive employment support, developing ‘soft’ skills, and offering opportunities for lifelong learning. For example, Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) currently offers a retailing Masters for staff of JD Sports Design, a company that has grown from a single store in the North West of England to a multimillion-pound British business since 1981. At the request of the employer, students use online materials and support as well as studying at the institution once every six weeks. The university teaches and assesses the content and students can practice what they are learning in a real world setting. Through this work MMU has built a strong relationship with the business, which now offers placements and internships to university students and looks to the university when sourcing its graduates. Key to the success of this programme has been the strategic engagement of senior management as, while these programmes can have long-term benefits, they tend to be resource intensive to set up.

Graduate employability is partly about supply, and the training students receive while in education, but it is also about demand and therefore employers have an essential role to play. Whilst we will not go into detail here (the issues have

been covered elsewhere²⁷) employers can greatly support or fatally damage the opportunity for individuals to realise their potential. We know that businesses are limited in the resource they can dedicate to hiring and the importance of getting the right people to work for them. But given repeated reports of the overrepresentation of advantaged groups in high status jobs,²⁸ employers, along with universities have a responsibility to tackle this head on – to really examine their recruitment practices, to address issues of unconscious bias and to ensure they can recognise talent in the diverse forms that it might be presented to them.

²⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/deputy-prime-minister-calls-in-the-dragon-to-open-up-the-jobs-market-for-young-people>

²⁷ See, for example, The Bridge Group (2016) Graduate Outcomes and Social Mobility

²⁸ Sutton Trust (2016) Leading People



UWE Bristol led two large consortia bids to secure funding for more than 150 paid internships and a small number of apprenticeships to offer to young people in the creative industries sectors. This is the largest scheme offering such opportunities anywhere in the UK through the Arts Council's Creative Employment Programme.

Community engagement

As well as creating opportunities for students, modern universities undertake a range of activities to extend opportunity to their local populations. Actively engaging local communities and involving them in decision-making helps to break down barriers to employment, helps businesses to grow and supports regeneration. Public engagement helps universities to maximise their impact.

In local economies, growing businesses, and enabling them to grow the number of jobs, especially good quality jobs, is essential because it extends opportunity to greater numbers of people, something that is essential for local growth and prosperity. In places where jobs are scarce, competition for those jobs is high and the inevitable result is that those with the greatest resources get these jobs, leaving fewer opportunities for those less well off in the region. In Portsmouth, for example, private sector job growth is weak²⁹ and so a challenge for the city-region is growing local businesses. In response to

this challenge, Portsmouth University Business School (PBS) has developed a particular strength in engaging small businesses. In the past two years over 1,100 PBS students have engaged in live client projects with 196 small businesses in the locality, supported by staff with practitioner experience. This supports student learning, business growth and regional development and the university has received Silver Small Business Charter recognition for its work.

Involving communities in decision-making helps to ensure the sustainability of programmes to reduce inequality. By consulting with the people in the place (or places) where the university operates they can keep up to date with community developments and concerns and can plan and target activity to reduce the burden on certain populations accordingly. The University of Salford, through their City Wide Equality Action Plan, is looking at how they can increase the influence of disadvantaged groups within decision-making processes by working with other

²⁹ Centre for Cities, Cities Outlook 2016



Teesside University has been working with refugees and asylum seekers in Middlesbrough to improve education provision and life chances. This work also creates opportunities for university students to engage with people from diverse backgrounds.

local stakeholders – Salford City Council, Salford CVS, schools, GM Chamber of Commerce, to name just a few – to link their strategy to Greater Manchester’s regional and national equality groups, develop an Equality Charter for Salford and coordinate data and information sharing, including methods of best practice. They are also working to gain a better understanding of the diversity of their local communities through developing a Community Cohesion Strategy for the city which improves knowledge of community identity, promotes belonging and creates better links to academic research in the city (and beyond) to inform decision-making for example around mental health challenges.³⁰

University activity to address inequality also includes breaking down barriers to accessing broader opportunities. Many universities are working closely with cultural organisations to widen access to the arts and promote cultural enrichment for those from a wide range of backgrounds, thereby contributing to building their social and cultural capital. The University of Huddersfield supports a wide variety of cultural events and activities including the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival (the archive of which they hold within Heritage Quay) and Huddersfield Literature Festival. The university received the Queen’s Anniversary Prize in 2016 for world-leading work to promote, produce and present contemporary music to an international audience.

UWE Bristol led two large consortia bids to secure funding for more than 150 paid internships and a small number of apprenticeships to break down barriers to young people (16-24) in the creative industries sector. At the time this was set up it was the largest programme of paid internships and training being offered anywhere in the UK through the Arts Council’s Creative Employment Programme. UWE Bristol worked with colleagues

in the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership (WoELEP) and the Department for Work and Pensions to develop a programme of skills support and development for the young people taking part in the scheme. Between 2013-16 the two bids brought more than £800,000 into the region in additional funding for young people to access creative sector employment. As a result of the project UWE Bristol is continuing work with the WoELEP, Bristol City Council, Bristol Cultural Education Partnership and Arts Council England to deliver a programme of collaborative training and education for young people aged 16-19 who face barriers to accessing the arts, creative and cultural labour markets in the city.

Universities also use partnerships to effectively support vulnerable groups. For example, Middlesbrough has the second largest community of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK outside of London. Teesside University has been working with these communities to improve education provision and opportunities, while also creating a more internationalised environment for students through opportunities to engage with people from diverse backgrounds. Teesside University has been steadily building relationships with refugee and asylum seeker groups and the professionals who support them such as the Regional Refugee Forum, Methodist Asylum Project and Justice First. The University provides opportunities to learn and practice their English skills as well as offering encouragement, inclusion and support, often in the form of help with childcare. In turn, the University is able to help students engage with people from diverse backgrounds and as learners of English, the asylum seekers are students for trainee CELTA teachers, who are studying to teach English as a second language.

³⁰ See more information here: http://www.partnersinsalford.org/Citywide_Equality_Strategy.htm

Research

Research is a traditional higher education pursuit and universities have long used their research expertise to tackle the big challenges of the age.³¹ Inequality is no exception. Universities are engaged in a wide range of research projects to tackle the causes and consequences of inequalities. This contribution to reducing inequalities deserves greater exploration and celebration. For example, as part of its partnership with Fulham Football Club, Kingston University researchers are working with the Club's charitable Foundation to improve health education and employability by sharing academic expertise and helping evaluate the impact of existing programmes. These include initiatives using football as a tool to educate children, young people and adults in Surrey about key health and wellbeing issues (NHS and Sport England pilot intervention – fanActiv – in conjunction with Brentford and Tottenham Hotspur FCs), as well as projects working with people not in education, employment or training such as over-50s in Guildford and young offenders at Feltham Prison. HEAT has also set up a research observatory to share best practice and at the University of Kent they are carrying out action research to identify where the university should prioritise its activity to support retention.

In addition, in the face of significant funding cuts local authorities are increasingly concerned with how best to support their communities in resource-efficient ways. Universities can help: they are working with partners in their local communities to explore whether they can contribute to more effective delivery of public services through their research expertise and capability. For example, the University of Essex, with HEFCE funding and working in collaboration with Essex and Suffolk County Councils, is undertaking a project to better understand the factors contributing to social outcomes for vulnerable people and the role of volunteering and community assets in shaping these outcomes.

Leveraging the data analytics research expertise at the University, the project will develop and test a set of smart tools to assess risk, evaluate

impact and map community assets in Essex and Suffolk. A Community and Public Service Hub will also be developed to deliver increased volunteering opportunities for students, adding to community assets and providing students with skills development, improving employability and building social capital.

At the University of Manchester a new Inclusive Growth Analysis Unit, funded in partnership with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, will be working with city and regional partners to ensure poverty reduction is central to processes for economic growth in Greater Manchester. And through their award winning research and development unit – Community Finance Solutions – University of Salford researchers have developed new microfinance tools to increase access to finance for excluded groups, reduce unmanageable debt and improve their quality of life.³²



Hundreds of University of Portsmouth students have given thousands of hours of time and expertise to help the city and region flourish. About 1,000 students are members of the Students' Union Volunteering in Portsmouth (VIP) group while a further 700 volunteer through the University's employment and careers office, Purple Door. Around 200 also volunteer as coaches through the sports department which has worked with and held activities at almost every school in the city. Then-MSc student Naomi Morris (pictured) responded to the Haiti disaster by volunteering her advanced mapping skills. She has since worked in numerous major disaster zones around the world.

³¹ See for example, University Alliance, Real World impact

³² www.unialliance.ac.uk/blog/2015/02/16/tackling-financial-exclusion-and-poverty/

2. The experience of London and its wider economic region

In order to illustrate the arguments made above, this section provides an in-depth case study of three universities in London and the wider economic region around the city: University of Greenwich (inner London), Kingston University (outer London) and the University of Hertfordshire (wider London economic region, recruiting a large proportion of its student population from London).

London is a prime example of how the proceeds of economic growth are unevenly distributed: since 2001, London saw some of the strongest growth in gross value added (GVA) per head compared to other UK cities but its progress in reducing poverty was only average.³³ London, therefore, is home to considerable inequality but, operating in a global city, with a diverse population, high concentration of employers and infrastructure investment, universities should be in a good position to address some of these inequalities.

The picture in London:³⁴

- 38% of the population identify as coming from an ethnic minority background, this is compared to 13.7% BME in England as a whole.³⁵
- The City and Richmond are the only local authority areas within London with no areas in the most deprived 20% of England.³⁶
- Attainment gaps are narrower in London than in other regions of England. For example, around 50% of poorer pupils in London achieved five or more GCSEs at A*–C including English and Maths (or equivalent) in 2013, compared with just 30% in the rest of the south-east of England.³⁷

Universities in London:

- There are currently 48 universities and branch campuses in the city.³⁸
- Participation rates are some of the highest in the country at 48% compared to 33% in the North East of England.
- London universities tend to be more diverse in terms of their ethnic profile although this varies across institutions. 53% of students identify as from an ethnic minority (18% Black, 24% Asian and 11% Other). This is compared to 25% in England as a whole (8% Black, 12% Asian and 6% Other).
- They also tend to be slightly more diverse for academic staff with 18% BME – 2% black, 11% Asian and 5% other, compared to 14% BME – 2% black, 9% Asian, 3% other in the rest of England. London actually has the highest proportion of BME staff for any region but this is still shockingly low, particularly given the mix of the city as a whole.³⁹

³³ JRF, www.jrf.org.uk

³⁴ Statistics are for Greater London

³⁵ 2011 Census: Key Statistics for local authorities in England and Wales

³⁶ Indices of Deprivation 2015, <http://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/indices-of-deprivation-2015>

³⁷ Social Mobility & Child Poverty Commission (2014) Lessons from London schools for attainment gaps and social mobility,

³⁸ www.study london.ac.uk/universities

³⁹ HEFCE (2013) Trends in Young Participation Rates, HESA (2014/15) Student Numbers, HESA (2014/15) Staff Numbers

The Universities of Greenwich, Kingston and Hertfordshire are large institutions with mixed populations of students. They each have more than 20,000 students, undergraduate and postgraduate, home and overseas. For the Universities of Greenwich and Hertfordshire, nearly 50% of their students identify as coming from a BME background. The picture is similar at Kingston where 55% of the student population identifies as BME (the second largest number of BME students in London and third in England behind the Open University and University of East London). All three institutions attract high numbers of students who live close to the university and commute regularly. At Greenwich this number is 85%. Nearly one third of Greenwich students are also mature students.

All three universities have a long history of supporting widening participation and working with partners to promote access and student success as well as contributing to thriving local communities. Senior managers describe tackling inequality as being at the heart of what they do; it's 'in the DNA' of the institution. Although they are engaged in considerable amounts of outreach, given the diversity of their student bodies the focus for these institutions is less about getting disadvantaged students into the university and more around ensuring they can do as well as their peers from more traditional higher education backgrounds. Their approach is interesting, and impactful, because it is led from the top of the institution, with strong buy-in from senior leadership on the need to reduce inequalities. Their activities involve a high degree of collaboration with employers and, through utilising research and dialogue within the institution and the wider community, they are implementing practical projects to tackle specific gaps such as gender balance and attainment. They are also focusing increasingly on data with attempts to measure the impact of ongoing programmes linked to institutional performance indicators.

A strategic and inclusive approach

While many universities have a long-standing commitment to reducing inequalities, some, including all the universities in this section are increasingly taking a more strategic approach to tackling equality and diversity issues and to working in, and with, their local communities. Equality and diversity awareness is increasingly embedded and integrated into everything the universities do. The involvement of senior managers such as the Vice-Chancellor and Directors of Planning and HR has been important because it has given others in the institution permission to have difficult conversations about the issues and to identify shared objectives and strategies for tackling them. This, together with an inclusive and consultative approach, with internal and external stakeholders including course programme leaders, schools, local councils and university students, is enabling them to embed equality and diversity in the institution so that it is not reliant on a single member of staff driving progress. For example, at Kingston University their inclusivity strategy is embedded into the core values of the university; all job descriptions and role criteria specify valuing diversity as a key requirement and staff must demonstrate their commitment to diversity in order to receive a promotion. Similarly, at Hertfordshire, all external speakers and recruitment panels must reflect the diversity of the University.

Government incentives can support this activity and can change behaviour. At Kingston University, for example, a major catalyst for introducing a strategic and focused approach to addressing inequality has been the introduction of the public sector Equality Duty. At the University of Hertfordshire too, the National Scholarship Programme (NSP), for all its faults, was the catalyst for the University implementing its pastoral care programme for widening participation students. Maintaining momentum, however, is a constant challenge. External drivers can impact on the progress of activity, for example, the introduction of the National Student Survey (NSS), changes to assessment and feedback requirements and the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) may disrupt this activity and lead to a loss of focus. Consistent championing of the importance of university activity in this space, with incentives, is needed to ensure that institutions make this a continuing priority.

The importance of partnerships

Working in partnership – with other educational institutions but also with employers, local government, third sector bodies and others – has been crucial to all three universities' ability to support widening participation and student success. Greenwich, for example, has strong links with local colleges which enables them to create progression routes and to deliver flexible learning (HNDs/Cs as well as degree programmes) for those less able to travel; they partner with the NHS and local councils to provide continued professional development; and with other organisations such as a wide range of employers to provide students with work experience and placements.

Working with partners allows the institutions to deliver a significant programme of outreach, improving visibility for hard to reach groups. In 2014-15 for example, Kingston University reached more than 14,000 people through information, advice and guidance workshops for local school and college learners and their parents. As part of the HEFCE-funded National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCOs) the University of Hertfordshire runs Herts Ahead working with every higher education provider in Hertfordshire and other partners including the LEP and Veterinary College. And Greenwich University's widening participation team has created a network of local authorities, HE providers, charitable organisations and private education providers to support care leavers into higher education – the South East London Designation of Staff Group. The group sits 3-4 times per year and supports members to build networks to support access. Through this group the University is regularly contacted by Local Authorities to support care-leaver students.

Partnerships can also create new and interesting opportunities for students and communities. After being put in touch a year ago by Kingston Council to explore ways they could use each other's sports facilities, Kingston University is working with Fulham Football Club and the Fulham FC Foundation on a pilot programme, using football to raise awareness of the benefits of higher education, particularly among students with no family history of university education. The organisations have since worked together on a number of sport and education initiatives, including linking the football club to the University's state-of-the-art sport-science facilities, enabling journalism students to put their reporting skills to the test at key under-21 Premier League games and offering internship opportunities for students in fields such as computer science and business and marketing, helping those students to access good quality employment after they graduate.

Targeted interventions for student success

These universities' work to support progression continues in earnest once the student steps through their door. We don't know enough about commuting students, for example, but there are indications they have lower engagement with the university and, probably as a result, lower attainment. Ensuring that these students, many of whom may travel large distances and have additional responsibilities, engage with the whole university experience (not just the academic side) is a challenge. About 40% of University of Hertfordshire students live at home and commute, a large proportion of them from North London. To support this community of students the University set up its own bus service, now running for more than 10 years, to help them get to the campus from parts of London; they have adjusted timetabling; and helped the Students Union to establish a specific engagement team for commuting students that offers a range of pre-induction activities to foster a sense of belonging.

Care leavers in higher education are another group that are still very small in number and often require specific interventions to support their success. The University of Greenwich set up the 'Greenwich Friend' programme, which provides support to settle in to independent living and learning. This includes peer mentoring and help with orientation. Since the programme has been operational the proportion of care leavers dropping out in their first year has more than halved – reducing from 30% to 14%. Kingston,

too, has had particular success supporting care leavers into higher education. In 2007 they were aware of just four care leaver students but by 2012/13 this had grown to 122, the highest number among 62 universities reporting to the charity Buttle UK. Kingston University also offers a specific programme of support called KU Cares. Student ambassadors, many from care backgrounds themselves, act as role models for new recruits. A 'learning community' has been developed to provide opportunities for peer-to-peer support and highlight care leavers' needs to the University. Social activities are also organised at potentially difficult times of year such as Christmas and graduations, to provide extra support.

This tailored support is essential and complimentary activity to institution-wide approaches to promoting inclusivity through which these universities are able to support a wide range of students to achieve their potential. For example, through its members, Greenwich's cross-institution LGBT+ Staff Network increases the visibility of LGBT issues in the workplace, provides support and information to staff, and acts as role models. It is linked into other LGBT organisations and the community outside the University in order to share best practice. As a result of this work the University of Greenwich is now a top 100 employer on Stonewall's 2016 index, jumping more than 100 places since 2015.



Kingston University offers a specific programme of support for care leavers called KU Cares. KU Cares' Student Ambassadors (pictured), many from care backgrounds themselves, act as role models for new recruits at Kingston University.



A programme of social activities including adventure weekends organised by the University of Hertfordshire aim to ensure widening participation students feel a part of the university community.

BME attainment gap

Between 2010/11 and 2013/14 the BME degree attainment gap decreased from 18.4% to 14.1% although for black students only the attainment gap is still 23.1%.⁴⁰ Because Greenwich, Hertfordshire and Kingston Universities all have very high numbers of BME students (and because, anecdotally, they are aware of being viewed as universities that are welcoming to ethnic minority students) they are particularly keen to address inequalities amongst these students and have focused considerable efforts on reducing the BME attainment gap. All three universities are actively moving away from a deficit model – where the student is assumed to be ‘lacking’ certain skills or attributes – towards a focus on institutional policies and practices. Communication has been key to driving forward their agenda. Kingston University, for example, engages staff and students on a peer-to-peer level to discuss challenging issues, finding courses where there are correspondingly large and small attainment gaps and talking to course leaders about what is going well or less well. In fact they have found that the conversation itself, and the focus on course teams to be self-reflective with the data available, has proved one of the best strategies for engaging staff and discussing issues with course leaders.

Developing an inclusive curriculum has been an important component of these universities’ approach to reducing the gap. The University of Hertfordshire issues inclusive teaching guidance (including the implementation of anonymous marking to reduce actual and perceived marking biases). Kingston has linked its approach to the HEA’s Professional Standards Framework, mainstreaming programmes across the university and making it easy for people to engage, for example, by investing in practical models to develop an inclusive curriculum. Initial feedback from staff has reported that this approach raises confidence and gives them the tools to tackle difficult issues.

Unconscious bias training has also been important. The training has included challenging assumptions by asking staff to do implicit association tasks or getting staff and students to comment on an anonymous application or presentation to identify what sort of background that student is from. Over 700 University of Hertfordshire staff members have voluntarily signed up to unconscious bias training (including university bus staff) while university partners have put their own staff through the University’s unconscious bias training to support the

⁴⁰ HESA Student Qualifiers, UK Domiciled First Degrees, 2013/14

success of the individuals that pass through their organisations. Kingston University has reduced their BME attainment gap by one third between academic years 2011-12 to 2014-15 and Hertfordshire had reduced theirs by 7% up to 2014/15. The University of Greenwich is working towards its Race Equality Charter Mark – another policy incentive – and Hertfordshire and Kingston hold two of the eight current Bronze Awards, with commendation for being beacons of good practice regarding their inclusive teaching work and for sharing their approach with other universities.



Having professional photos taken for their LinkedIn pages can help ensure University of Hertfordshire students stand out as they enter the workforce.

Using data

Partly as a response to government pressure in this area, universities are increasingly using data to inform and refine their approach to tackling inequalities. Kingston, Hertfordshire and Greenwich all have a number of ongoing initiatives – looking at protected characteristics and student outcomes, and at course-level issues – and using data to evaluate this activity.

Kingston University, for example, has strategically linked the outcomes of its engagement across the institution to a number of goals including key institutional performance indicators (KPIs) around diversity. This includes investigating and addressing continuation rates for generation-one white males – do they stay, progress, continue onto postgraduate study, for example – and gaps between BME, male and female, and disabled students. In particular, the University is using added value data to identify the BME attainment gap and how to tackle it. They have set the institutional KPI against the value-added score rather than against the attainment gap meaning the focus is on ensuring BME students are performing as well as expected, given their prior attainment, and that they are as likely to get a 2.1 or 1st at Kingston as at any other institution. Crucially, the University has set the target so that it is relative to other students. This means that to perform well against the indicators the institution (and staff) need to close the gap between different groups of students rather than raise the base level, which could encourage grade inflation. They are in the process of compiling module-level information to provide further granularity as to cause-and-effect of attainment gaps.

Graduate success and employability

While supporting employability demands partnerships, the importance of a strong outcome for graduates deserves its own discussion. Greenwich, Kingston and Hertfordshire all have a focus on building employability from the beginning of the students' academic career through university-wide initiatives and embedding employability-type skills into the curriculum as well as offering co-curricular support. These activities help students to identify and access employment opportunities but they also support belonging, ensuring students feel part of the university community.

For example, the University of Hertfordshire has developed a wide range of programmes including taking widening participation (WP) students⁴¹ on social and subject-specific outings (including sending students to language schools in France and Spain), intensive interview skills practice, providing students with a voucher to buy a suit for an interview, giving them a bursary if they have secured an unpaid internship, offering an international buddy scheme and helping students to participate in international conferences. In the first year the University implemented this programme of support (2014-15) the withdrawal rate for WP almost halved, dropping from 14% to 8%. Kingston University has developed a number of initiatives such as their equality mentoring scheme which annually links about 90 students

from BME backgrounds, white males who are first in their families to enter higher education, women in STEM and students with disabilities, to professionals who are mostly from the surrounding communities. Kingston's 30-year partnership with the University of North Carolina at Charlotte creates opportunities for an exchange programme which enables students to broaden their horizons and increase their confidence.

A slightly different approach can be seen at the University of Greenwich which has set up Greenwich Bright, an enterprise initiative that brings together the University, students, local businesses and community organisations. Launched in 2015, the programme involves students working on a range of projects, from filming with Sky at Charlton Athletic Football Club and developing creative and website resources that help local charities and SMEs to be more effective and to grow. The scheme is co-funded by the University, the Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF), and individual businesses, and students are mentored by industry practitioners or academics. It aims to embed employability and help students to be more entrepreneurial whilst also contributing in a positive way to the development of the local community.



The international Buddy Programme builds links between students from the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW) and the University of Hertfordshire (UH). Aimed at second year Herts Success students thinking about studying abroad, it helps them to develop an appreciation of different cultures and educational practices, and form new friendships.



University of Greenwich students can film with Sky at Charlton Athletic Football Club as part of the Greenwich Bright enterprise initiative. Greenwich Bright helps local businesses and community groups to develop their projects and then uses students with appropriate skills to deliver the work - providing them with valuable work experience related to their studies.

⁴¹ Because University of Hertfordshire attracts a large number of students from non-traditional backgrounds funding restrictions mean that they define WP students eligible for additional support as those whose family income is less than £25,000 per year and also living in POLAR quintiles 1 & 2.

The importance of role models

In London, just 18% of staff identify as being from a BME background in a city where the total ratio is just under 40:60. This matters because there is evidence that a lack of role models restricts progression opportunities for certain groups – particularly women and those from BME and working class backgrounds – into employment, postgraduate opportunities and research careers.⁴² Many universities, including all three in this section, believe they need to tackle the issue of staff diversity in order to provide role models for students looking to progress in their career as well as to hold others to account for failing to promote equality of opportunity. There is also a strong business case to ensure they do not miss out on talent. Changing the recruitment profile of the university is not always easy, however.

The University of Hertfordshire, for example, employs a large number of local people and the local population is not particularly diverse. Consequently, the university is looking at anonymous recruitment for academics as a way to tackle this and they have introduced a Postgraduate Scholarship Scheme with positive initial results: of the 70 students supported so far, 25 were NSP students, about 10% of the NSP cohort. Similarly, the University of Greenwich has set up its Careers Pathways Programme which aims to improve the transparency of the promotion process making sure that all staff are clear about what is expected for them to progress.



An innovative partnership between the University of Greenwich and Charlton Athletic Football Club combines resources to help local people and organisations including schools, hospitals and community groups. The university's students are among those to benefit from the partnership, including having access to some of the state-of-the-art sports, exercise and training facilities at Charlton's training ground, which sits next to the university's Avery Hill Campus.

⁴² See, for example, Paul Wakeling and Chris Kyriacou (2010) Widening participation from undergraduate to postgraduate research degrees, ESRC and NCCPE.

Working with the community

For all three universities in this section, building and maintaining a strong relationship with their local communities is a key part of their mission. They are large employers, which bring large numbers of local people into contact with their institutions, but beyond that they are involved in a whole range of community programmes and activities, with partners, to tackle inequality in their surrounding areas.

At the University of Hertfordshire for example, the community is encouraged to access university buildings and resources. Community groups have used rooms on campus for meetings; and the primary school uses the University auditorium for its pre-school to school 'graduation' which helps to familiarise students and their families with the campus and raise their aspirations to study at university. The University has strong engagement with local partners including Local Authorities, the Police and NHS and they have run joint events with Welwyn-Hatfield Council to raise the University's profile among different stakeholders, in order to cement stronger community links. This is all part of the University raising confidence in the local population and encouraging local people to be part of the conversation about how the University can support the area in which they live and work.

These universities are also involved in the physical development of their local towns. For example, Kingston University runs an annual project in collaboration with Kingston First - the town centre management group for Kingston Upon Thames - and other partners (John Lewis, Bengalis, Kingston Racial Equality Council and various other architects and voluntary organisations). The project offers final year students studying Human Geography and Physical Geography the opportunity to work with Kingston First. The initiative was established to get students engaged with the problem of decision making in the real-world situations and to try to address inequalities in the town's urban landscapes. Students are given a brief to look at how a space within Kingston could be redesigned to be more inclusive as well as to meet the requirements of the different stakeholders involved. During the past 10 years, various elements of the students' designs have fed into improvements around the town.



Kingston University is working with Fulham Football Club and the Fulham FC Foundation on a pilot programme, which uses football to raise awareness of the benefits of higher education. The organisations have since worked together on a number of sport and education initiatives, including with young people of all ages.

Photo courtesy of Fulham FC Foundation.



A festival set up by a Huddersfield University academic nearly 40 years ago has grown to become the UK's largest annual, international celebration of new and experimental music – and at the same time provides a wide range of cultural opportunities for the local community. The Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival has matured into an independent organisation based in the University's Creative Arts Building and continues to operate with the University as its major partner

www.unialliance.ac.uk



University Alliance is a limited company registered in England and Wales, Company Number 8137679 VAT Registration Number 221 3621 56