University Widening Participation Strategy 2009-12: Background information

The three-year WP Strategy which is being submitted to VCEG for consideration and approval has been written to articulate the University’s approach to Widening Participation across the full life cycle of the student.

It has been developed and considered by the WP Task and Finish Group, chaired by Janice Kay (full membership given below), and will form the basis of the WP Strategic Assessment which the University must submit to HEFCE by 30 June.

Background to the Strategic Assessment

The submission of these Strategic Assessments will be a condition of the continued receipt of the HEFCE widening participation allocation; this funding is worth £1.4 million to Exeter in 2009-10. Each Strategic Assessment will cover a three-year period (2009-12) and is designed to bring together HEIs’ Widening Participation and Fair Access policies, including transparent admissions systems, into a single public document. It will also include the University’s Access Agreement as an Appendix.

We will be required to report annually each December on the level of resource committed to WP in the previous academic year and progress towards the targets and milestones as set out in the Strategic Assessment. We will also be required to update the Access Agreement annually in line with DiUS’ announcements on student support for the following cycle.

The structure for the Assessment prescribed by HEFCE comprises two sections as follows:

a) An overarching statement that identifies the place of WP in the institution’s forward planning; sets out the overall aims and objectives; includes a high-level statement on admissions; and explains how the institution intends to measure success.

b) The full range of the institution’s WP activity at an appropriate aggregated level; the detailed targets and milestones; and the level of resource committed to WP including, but not limited to, the HEFCE WP allocation and the spending on outreach and bursaries covered by the access agreement.

Exeter’s WP Strategic Assessment will be informed by the WP Strategy but will include the additional quantitative information listed in (b) above which is currently being compiled with support from Planning Services and Finance. The Strategic Assessment will be submitted to VCEG on 22 June.

WP Task and Finish Group membership:

Janice Kay (Chair)
Vic Alcock (Vice Chancellor's Executive Officer)
Jonathan Barry (Dean of Taught Faculty)
Amanda Brook (Head of Marketing, Student Recruitment and Admissions)
Sue Burkill (Head of Educational Enhancement Unit, Academic Services)
Sean Fielding (Director of CaP/Research & Knowledge Transfer)
Jasper Knight (School of Geography (Cornwall Rep))
Sam Miles / Francesa Litchfield (School of Geography (Cornwall Rep))
Liz Murphy (Guild Representative)
Linda Peka / Nicky King (UK Student Recruitment Manager & Acting Head of Admissions)
Wendy Robinson (Biosciences - School Manager/Science Schools Representative)
Chris Smith (Graduate School of Education)
Emma Stephenson (Secretary)
Mark Wynne (Outreach Manager)

HuSS (Academic Rep)
University of Exeter
Widening Participation Strategy 2009-2012

Executive Summary

This three-year strategy covers the institutional approach to Widening Participation (WP) across the full life cycle of the student. It supports the Education Strategy and will sit in parallel with other institutional policies including the University’s Access Agreement. Exeter’s approach to Widening Participation is informed by the work of the National Council for Educational Excellence (NCEE) and has three key objectives:

- Widening Participation in the South West to encourage progression to Higher Education;
- Fair Access: increasing the number of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds who enrol at Exeter and other research-intensive universities; and
- Ensuring on-course support and progression for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

For each of these objectives the Strategy identifies the target audiences and a series of strategic actions.

These audiences are:

- Local and regional young people from WP backgrounds with the potential to benefit from higher education including gifted and talented university entrants from WP backgrounds
- National young, gifted and talented university entrants from WP backgrounds
- Current undergraduate students at the University of Exeter.

Targets and milestones have been set to monitor the University’s progress towards each objective. Annual monitoring and evaluation will be undertaken as part of the WP Strategic Assessment and reporting on the Access Agreement to the Office for Fair Access (OFFA).

1. Scope and context

This three-year strategy covers the institutional approach to Widening Participation (WP) across the full life cycle of the student. It supports the Education Strategy and will sit in parallel with the Access Agreement, Outreach Plan, Admissions Policy, Equal Opportunities Policy, Race Equality Policy, Disability Policy and WP aspects of individual Academic School Plans. Responsibility for delivery of the strategy sits with the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Education) with specific responsibilities for the various elements being devolved to the appropriate areas of the University. These include, but are not limited to: the UK Student Recruitment Office, the Admissions Office, Education Enhancement, Student Experience and Academic Schools.

As identified by the National Council for Educational Excellence (NCEE) report, WP is about both increasing the percentages of students from lower socio-economic groups who progress to Higher Education and Fair Access (the percentages of students from lower socio-economic groups who go on to attend the most selective universities). Exeter’s approach to Widening Participation addresses both these areas in addition to support and guidance to ensure student success post-entry and we regard WP and Fair Access as complementary.

Strategic engagement with schools and colleges in the region contributes to our Fair Access work which is designed to increase the number of students from a WP background at Exeter.

The sections below identify the key objectives, and for each of these objectives, the target audiences, the planned actions, the targets and milestones by which we intend to measure progress.

2. Objectives

The themes and activities outlined in the strategy will address and will seek to have impact in three main areas:

**Widening Participation in the South West**
To contribute to regional Widening Participation through our work with target students to encourage progression to higher education

**Fair Access at Exeter**
To increase the number of students from a Widening Participation background enrolled at the University and other research-intensive HEIs. As part of this objective, we will develop our approach towards pre-entry Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) and ‘needs-blind admissions’ and we will review our current policy with regard to bursaries.

**On-course support and progression**
To develop an approach to on-course support that ensures students from disadvantaged backgrounds are as successful as their peers in their progress into employment or further study.
3. Target audiences

In defining our primary audiences for each of these objectives we have taken account of the following key factors, some of which are externally driven and some of which are based on internal drivers:

(i) HEFCE guidance on the identification and targeting of disadvantaged students (HEFCE 2007/12)

(ii) The National Council for Educational Excellence (NCEE) recommendations that HEIs should continue to use, and where possible expand, the full range the information available to them to identify the best students with the greatest potential and ability to reach the highest academic achievement. (DIUS 2008)

(iii) The findings and recommendations of the Realising Opportunities Project1 to develop a shared fair access programme between research-intensive universities.

(iv) The University’s top 10 by 2012 ‘super KPI’ of raising UG entry qualifications as measured by UCAS tariff scores and the supporting KPIs measuring: entrants from state schools and lower NS-SEC groups.

(v) The commitment in the Corporate Plan and Education Strategy to ‘Attract, recruit and retain highly talented students, regionally, nationally and internationally’.

As key influencers parents, teachers and careers advisers are important secondary audiences. The strategy therefore includes some priorities for development in this area such as activities and resources to improve Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG).

4. Objective - Widening Participation in the South West

Target audience:

- Local and regional young people from WP backgrounds with the potential to benefit from higher education

This will be the target group for our regional Widening Participation work and will be identified in line with current HEFCE guidance for identifying students from lower socio-economic groups and disadvantaged backgrounds. These programmes will include activities for both pre- and post-16 students.

Actions:

(i) We will review our current Regional Partnership scheme to develop a sustainable and mutually beneficial relationship with a targeted group of schools and colleges in Devon, Cornwall and Somerset. In order to ensure optimal use of resources and measurable outcomes, targeting will be based on those with a history of (a) relatively low GCSE results, one of the primary indicators for progression to higher education and (b) prior active participation in our outreach and WP activities. This group is likely to include some 11-16 schools, which previously fell outside the scope of the Regional Partnership, and will be in line with school-level targeting criteria agreed for a range of WP projects in which the University is involved.

(ii) We will continue to provide a range of activities, both in-school and on-campus including residential programmes, subject taster sessions and IAG activities for students. The focus will be on helping improve decision-making at key transition points. These will be regularly reviewed for quality, impact and value for money and will be defined in the annual Outreach Action Plan.

(iii) We will continue to develop activities and resources for teachers and IAG advisers to improve their capacity for providing accurate and appropriate information and advice to students. We will seek to improve the provision of good IAG at key transition points (particularly Years 9 and 11) by working with staff in partner schools.

(iv) We will work proactively to ensure the maximum benefit is derived from programmes run across University. Opportunities to integrate awareness of the WP agenda into the training, activities and

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1 The Realising Opportunities project is a DIUS supported bid for Hefce funding by 11 research-intensive universities. The project aims to identify the ‘most able least likely’ students and encourage applications to research-intensive universities through a progressive programme of interventions, to support entry and encourage successful progression. The universities participating are Birmingham, Bristol, Exeter, King’s College London, Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Southampton and Warwick.
materials used by these programmes will be identified through collaboration between the Outreach team and the relevant managing teams. In particular, we will seek ways of supporting and promoting aspiration-raising activities in primary school by identifying synergies in existing and future programmes. These might include, but are not limited to: the Initial Teacher Training programme, Student Associate Scheme, Sports Volunteering Scheme, Community Action and the Excellence Hub).

(v) We will continue our engagement with the Exeter City community to raise educational aspirations across the City through initiatives such as Excellence in Exeter and the Exeter Progression Awards. We will support, as appropriate, the Exeter4Learning Partnership in its work to raise aspirations and attainment across the City.

(vi) We will continue to lead the Aimhigher Information and Resources Strand, producing high quality publications and websites to support progression across the Peninsula area. We will support the partnership and contribute as appropriate to its management and governance. The University will continue to match-fund the Aimhigher programme through provision of office space and facilities to the team and through attendance by appropriate managers at area and regional meetings.

(vii) We will continue to develop the Aimhigher Associate Scheme alongside our other mentoring and tutoring programmes to ensure an integrated approach to a high quality programme of intensive interventions with targeted WP students.

Targets and milestones:

**Engagement and progression in the South West region**

- **2009/10** To have established a newly focussed partnership scheme to include 11-16 schools. All Exeter schools to be engaged in pre-16 WP activities in addition to Community Engagement events such as Excellence in Exeter. Data will be collated to show HE progression through UCAS for all 11-18 target schools.
- **2011/12** All schools targeted for WP activities will have students participating in one or more programmes across years 10 and 11. 90% of participating students identified by schools will meet WP targeting criteria. School progression data will show an increase in progression to HE for the 11-18 target schools.

5. **Objective - Fair Access at Exeter**

**Target audiences:**

- **Local and regional young, gifted and talented university entrants from WP backgrounds**
  This will be the target group for our regional Fair Access work. Students will be identified as being capable of benefitting from education at a research intensive university and in line with current HEFCE guidance for identifying students from lower socio-economic groups and disadvantaged backgrounds. These programmes will include activities for both pre- and post-16 students. Given the need for our WP programmes to be sustainable and the likelihood that more students will consider studying close to or living at home as tuition fees rise, we need to ensure we build and maintain our relationships with these students.

- **National young, gifted and talented university entrants from WP backgrounds**
  Through our involvement in the Mutual Recognition Scheme and Realising Opportunities Project, we will participate in mutually beneficial programmes to encourage gifted and talented students from a WP background to apply to research-intensive institutions outside their immediate geographic area.

**Actions:**

- **Partnership working**
  (i) We will focus our activity within the revised Regional Partnership group (section 4 action (i)) to ensure that the maximum mutual benefit is derived from our relationships with these schools and colleges.

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2 The Excellence Hubs are DCSF funded collaborative projects to provide HE-led outreach activities for gifted and talented learners in schools. The south west Hub is lead by Plymouth University with Exeter leading the provision in the Exeter area. The programme currently has funding until 2010.

3 The Mutual Recognition Scheme is the first-phase in the development of the more extensive Realising Opportunities Project. Students who complete a Fair Access scheme with one university but decide that they wish to apply to any of the participating universities, will be given ‘special consideration’ when their applications are considered and offers made. The type of consideration given will depend on the university concerned and whether or not students have successfully completed all or part of the components of their particular scheme.
(ii) We will develop a new Fair Access Compact scheme aimed at the revised Regional Partnership group. This scheme will identify students from disadvantaged backgrounds through participation in pre-16 WP activities and build a relationship with them to support and encourage their progression to HE in general and to Exeter in particular. This may include, where appropriate, a somewhat reduced offer for those who apply to the University.

(iii) We will develop the new Compact scheme in phases:
   o Phase 1, the Exeter Adds scheme, will flag previous WP participants at the point of entry for 2010 and 2011. Additional support will be provided during the application cycle and contextual information will be considered at the offer and confirmation stages.
   o Phase 2 will establish a more in-depth scheme being developed through collaborative work with other institutions and partners from 2012 entry onwards. We will develop a targeting mechanism and provide opportunities that are consistent with the Realising Opportunities Project for research-intensive universities, subject to appropriate funding being secured for the project. Other partners, including the Sutton Trust, will be sought to ensure the maximum benefit is derived from the scheme.

(iv) As part of the Compact scheme we will work with partner schools and colleges to support the improvement of IAG to better prepare students for progression to research-intensive universities such as Exeter.

(v) Activities will support the shortage and vulnerable subjects of STEM and modern foreign languages where appropriate.

Fair Access
   (i) The University’s Admission Policy states that:
      The University of Exeter believes that a diverse community is an essential part of its core values, and that diversity amongst our student body enriches learning, teaching, and research. In pursuit of this the University’s Undergraduate Admissions Policy sets out the means by which we will encourage and welcome applicants with different educational and social backgrounds. Exeter is committed to ensure that no student with potential to meet our entry requirements is deterred from applying, and all applications are considered and evaluated on the basis of individual potential.

   (ii) We will use contextual information to inform decisions in the offer-making process in line with admissions best practice in higher education, as defined in the Quality Assurance Agency’s Code of Practice and the Schwartz Recommendations for Good Practice and reflecting the recommendations of the NCEE.

   (iii) We will take account at the offer-making stage of the educational environment in which a student achieves their qualifications. A slightly reduced offer can be made if the average Level 3 attainment of UCAS applicants from that school or college is judged to be sufficiently low compared to national attainment levels. The exact level at which this threshold is set is reviewed annually by the Admissions Policy Group.

   (iv) We will encourage applications to our courses from students from disadvantaged backgrounds through the development of the Fair Access Compact scheme. A reduction in the level of offer will be made dependent on the student’s completion of the required elements of the Compact scheme. This reduction may be in addition to that related to consideration of the school attended (see (iii) above). The progress of these applications will be tracked to monitor the rates of offer-making, conversion and enrolment.

Bursary Support
   (i) We will review the University’s Access Agreement each year to ensure that our bursary provision and spend on outreach activities from additional fee income offer both the most effective support for the target audience and achieve maximum value for the University in meeting its Fair Access objectives.

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(ii) We will maintain the UK Access to Exeter Bursary to offer appropriate means-tested support for all eligible undergraduates, targeting the maximum support at those with the lowest household incomes.

(iii) We will provide additional financial support in the form of top-up bursaries for students facing additional hardship or barriers to participation in HE particularly for the South West. We will develop this provision to support students who are admitted through the Fair Access compact schemes.

Targets and milestones:

Performance against the HESA location adjusted benchmark for lower NS-SEC for young full-time first degree entrants

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<th>Performance to date:</th>
<th>Milestones:</th>
<th>Target:</th>
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<td>2006/07</td>
<td>2009/10</td>
<td>2011/12</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Percent from NS-SEC classes 4,5,6 &amp; 7</td>
<td>Maintain/improve percent from NS-SEC classes and state schools (based on internal data for 2009 entrants)</td>
<td>Maintain/improve percent from NS-SEC classes and state schools (based on internal data for 2011 entrants)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.7 (HESA data)</td>
<td>Reduce distance from location adjusted benchmarks (based on 5 year average 2003/4-2007/8)</td>
<td>Achieve location adjusted benchmark (based on 5 year average 2006/7-2009/10)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Percent from state schools</td>
<td>72.8</td>
<td>71.3</td>
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<td>2007/08</td>
<td>2010/11</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percent from NS-SEC classes 4,5,6 &amp; 7</td>
<td>Maintain/improve percent from NS-SEC classes and state schools (based on internal data for 2010 entrants)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17.4 (HESA data)</td>
<td>Reduce distance from location adjusted benchmark (based on 5 year average 2004/5-2008/9)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Percent from state schools</td>
<td>71.1</td>
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<td>2008/09</td>
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<td>Percent from NS-SEC classes 4,5,6 &amp; 7</td>
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<td>20.2 (internal data)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Percent from state schools</td>
<td>71.3</td>
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Supporting entry to the University by students from WP backgrounds

2008/09 Introduce Exeter Adds scheme for 2010 entry
Programme to support first Exeter Adds cohort through application cycle
Increase applications and conversion to offer/acceptance of students from WP backgrounds

2009/10 Enrol first students from Exeter Adds scheme
Appropriate benchmark for application/conversion from Exeter Adds scheme to be confirmed following assessment of first year out-turn (to include both progression to Exeter and to other participating institutions)
Identify and target Yr 12 students for Realising Opportunities Project, subject to HEFCE funding being secured

2010/11 Programme to support first Realising Opportunities cohort through application cycle

Bursary support

To ensure that the bursary take-up rate remains above the sector average (currently 94% against 92% sector wide)
To develop a bursary scheme that supports the new Compact arrangements and encourages progression to the University as measured by an increased uptake in dedicated top-up bursary funding (currently the SW Access to Exeter scheme)

6. Objective - On-course support and progression

Target audience:
- Current undergraduate students at the University of Exeter

The University recognises that Widening Participation is as much about progression and student success as about entry and participation in higher education. We need to ensure that our anticipated diversification of the student population at Exeter is accompanied by an effective approach to support and that we develop opportunities in the key areas of: academic skills; volunteering; work experience; and a-curricular recognition schemes that are accessible and beneficial to all students equally.
Actions:

(i) We will establish appropriate tracking mechanisms and look at the evidence regarding academic progression/achievement and employability outcomes for students from WP backgrounds within research-intensive institutions, including those from our own Compact scheme.

(ii) Subject to appropriate funding being identified, we will undertake research to assess the needs of students from WP backgrounds and to establish whether students have less access to, or make less use of, support and development opportunities in the key areas of: academic skills; volunteering; work experience; extra-curricular awards and recognition schemes.

(iii) In response to the findings and subject to appropriate resourcing, the University will establish an approach to post-entry support, which ensures that students from WP backgrounds have proper access to the opportunities available to all students and to ensure they are as successful as their peers. These developments may be in collaboration with other research-intensive universities through the Realising Opportunities Project.

(iv) We will share between Academic Schools and Services examples of effective practice in supporting disadvantaged learners to improve and innovate in this area.

(v) We will continue to provide a dedicated service for students with disabilities through the Disability Resource Centre. The funding for this is provided through the Disability allocation within the HEFCE WP allocation and is ring-fenced for this purpose. We will continue to contact students prior to enrolment to try and ensure that the services and facilities provided are aligned with their needs and support their progression and attainment while they are at the University.

(vi) The Students’ Guild Advice Unit will examine ways to improve the targeting and promotion of its services in order that those students who would most benefit from its support and advice services make use of these at an appropriate stage in their ‘journey’ both pre- and post-arrival in order ensure successful transition and progression.

(vii) We will work with the Frank Buttle Trust to gain the Frank Buttle Quality Mark for Care Leavers in Higher Education. We will ensure that our services and provisions recognise the disadvantages that Care Leavers face and ensure that we take account of their needs in designing support services.

Targets and milestones:

On-course support and progression

- **2009/10** To undertake research and develop a pilot project for post-entry support with appropriately targeted undergraduate students with appropriate monitoring systems
- **2010/11** To implement an approach to supporting students from WP backgrounds in line with Realising Opportunities recommendations
- **2011/12** To evaluate impact with a view to possible implementation of the Realising Opportunities project.

7. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation will be undertaken annually at both the student and the institutional level as part of the WP Strategic Assessment to be submitted to HEFCE each December. Targets and milestones are set for each objective to monitor the University’s progress toward meeting the institutional targets set out in the WP Strategic Assessment and Access Agreement.

(i) The impact of our Widening Participation in the South West will be measured through levels of engagement by appropriately targeted young people, and by the progression rates to higher education from their schools.

(ii) The key institutional measure will be the extent to which the distance from the location adjusted HESA benchmark for participation from lower NS-SEC groups and state school entrants is reduced. This will be reviewed annually and progress towards agreed targets will be monitored.

(iii) The success of our emerging Compact scheme will be judged by the number of students who have participated in our pre-16 WP activities who progress into the post-16 compact and subsequently apply to and enrol at the University of Exeter or another participating university. We will also monitor application and conversion rates for WP background students on an annual basis.
(iv) The university’s bursary provision will be reviewed to ensure it is in line with institutional priorities and changes in Government policy and be monitored for the rate of take-up among eligible students and the effectiveness with which it is targeted.

(v) We will develop a system of tracking retention, progression and achievement (including employability) of students from WP backgrounds, including those entering under our Compact arrangements to evaluate the effectiveness of the targeting of and improvements to post-entry support.

8. **Annual action plan**

An annual action plan will be developed to show the planned activities for each academic year. This will give the following information:

- Activities, programmes and research to be undertaken for each objective identified above
- Objectives and evaluation methods
- Deadlines and milestones as appropriate
- Lead responsibility.

Professor Janice Kay, Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education)
Emma Stephenson, Outreach Manager
June 2009