1 INTRODUCTION

The University of York is committed to widening participation in higher education. Social justice dictates that access to higher education should be on the basis of ability rather than means or social background. Furthermore, the vitality of a diverse student community can be part of the educational experience in itself.

Principles of inclusion and equality of opportunity are central to the University’s selection, recruitment and retention of students. These principles are intrinsic to the University’s corporate vision, aims and values as a world leader in the generation and transmission of knowledge. ¹

Plans for a major expansion of the University, presented in a Strategic Development Fund bid to HEFCE in 2005, have widening participation as a key theme. Expanding national student numbers by widening participation will help to sustain growth and enable the University to develop a vibrant and diverse community.

To realise its vision to its fullest, the University will need to attract those of the highest ability, considering potential as well as past achievement, from a variety of backgrounds.

1.1 Policy Context

The University is a world-class leader in teaching, learning and research, founded in the sixties, at the start of broadening access to university, on values which incorporate equal opportunities and inclusion. Our aims for Widening Participation (WP) align with national, regional and local policies pertaining to access to education, skills and employment.

National policy is part of the social inclusion agenda and is informed by research which shows the continuing HE divide between advantaged and disadvantaged. Our WP target groups are:

- Mature students
- Young students from social classes 4-7 and/or in low participation areas who have the potential to benefit from higher education.
- Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students²
- Students with disabilities

¹ University of York Corporate Plan 2005 - 2009
² BME students are not part of Office for Fair Access (OFFA) targets. Whilst BME students are not under-represented in HE nationally, they are under-represented at the University of York
Despite energetic and targeted efforts in many sections of the University, we have not yet been successful in increasing the proportion of our students who are from socio-economic groups 4-7, low participation neighbourhoods, mature students or Black and Minority Ethnic students. We know that the same is true in many other comparator universities and that this in part reflects the social patterning of educational achievement and progression.

This updated strategy refines and develops current practice based on our own experience and a review of the literature about good practice and impact.

1.2 Relevant Research and Policy Implications

Gorard (2005) in an analysis of official statistics of widening participation points out that ‘there is no simple pattern of under-representation among socially disadvantaged groups in either applications or admissions to HE, once prior qualifications for entry are taken into account.’\(^3\) [our emphasis] He also notes the difficulty of analysing the participation of groups ‘such as those of non-traditional age or with alternative vocational prior qualifications.’\(^4\)

Much of the literature focuses on case studies as a guide to effective practice. The latest study by Universities UK, *From the Margins to the Mainstream* analyses 34 case-studies and evaluates their effectiveness in increasing access to higher education by disadvantaged young people.\(^5\) The key recommendations of this study serve as a guide to action and prioritisation of resources in our widening participation strategy. They are:

1. To ensure that we target groups that are under-represented and clearly defined
2. To work with primary schools and parents
3. To include more information about vocational routes into HE, student finance and careers in outreach and induction activities
4. To include current HE students in WP activities
5. To develop more sophisticated and longer-term monitoring and tracking of students’ progress
6. To ensure a balance between outreach activity and action within the institution
7. To build WP objectives into other institutional strategies.
8. To introduce greater flexibility and alternative modes of study
9. To ensure all students benefit from the additional support they require
10. To ensure embedded and sustainable WP practices.

\(^3\) *Where Shall We Widen It? Higher Education and the Age Participation Rate in Wales*, Stephen Gorard, (January 2005), P 4
\(^4\) *Where Shall We Widen It? Higher Education and the Age Participation Rate in Wales*, Stephen Gorard, (January 2005), P 14/15
\(^5\) *From the Margins to the Mainstream*, Commissioned by Universities UK and SCOP (December 2005)
We have also consulted key DfES and HEFCE reports for guidance on best practice and for information: the Schwartz report on Fair Admissions \(^6\) and *Young Participation in Higher Education.* \(^7\)

Fair admissions involves a holistic approach to selection, in which the decision about whether to offer a place is not based solely on academic achievement. Even so, the competition for places at the university can create difficulties for widening participation. Disadvantaged students may not have the support and opportunity to make effective and convincing applications; students from low achieving schools may present with less good grades than others of the same academic ability; and our position at the top of league tables may have the effect of making the University appear beyond peoples’ reach, which means that some able students may not apply to us at all. These are all issues that our schools liaison and outreach programmes continue to address.

National patterns suggest that students from SEC 4-7 and BME students are more likely than other students to study close to home. If this is the case, it may limit the impact that our widening participation work has on University of York registrations: there is no large local catchment of disadvantaged students and the local population is predominantly white. But much widening participation work involves the promotion of generic higher education rather than recruitment to the university, so successful outcomes may involve the progression of students to other HE providers.

Our goals will be to meet or exceed HEFCE WP benchmarks and where none are set, to move towards the national average where we are below it.

2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Aims:
- to increase diversity in the Home student population \(^8\)
- to promote achievement and access to HE amongst WP groups

We meet our benchmark on recruitment of students with disabilities and will ensure compliance with new disability legislation.

Objectives:
1. To achieve a greater proportion of applications and admissions to the University from mature students and from young people who come from
   - Social classes 4 to 7
   - Postcodes with low participation in HE
2. To maintain or increase the proportion of students from State schools
3. To increase the ethnic diversity of the Home student population
4. To continue to support and integrate students with disabilities, as specified in our Disability Strategy.

\(^6\) *Fair Admissions to Higher Education: Recommendations for Good Practice,* DFES (September 2004)

\(^7\) *Young Participation in Higher Education,* HEFCE (January 2005)

\(^8\) University of York Corporate Plan 2005 - 2009
The first two WP objectives against which progress will be measured are the same as those specified in our Access Agreement and statistics about past performance and future objectives are given in Appendix 1. We aim to move towards the national average for our third objective.

2.1 Proposed Programme of Activity

We want to achieve the aims and objectives through activity designed for appropriate impact at different stages in the student lifecycle. This can be usefully grouped in stages as shown below:

1. Aspiration and attainment
   Aspiration raising and provision of information
   Improving attainment in schools and colleges

2. Application and entry
   Application and admissions
   Preparation, transition and induction

3. Learning and teaching
   Learning and teaching approaches
   Curriculum content and development

4. Enhancing the student experience
   Social Integration
   Student services and support

5. Enhancing Employability
   Personal Development Planning
   Work Experience

We remain committed to broad WP activities carried out through local, regional and national partnerships, which benefit the wider community. This strategy will be the basis for embedding WP more deeply within the University with the aim of attracting, recruiting and retaining a more diverse student body. We will ensure best use of finite resources by more effective targeting of potential WP applicants, by helping to raise attainment with more taster and master class activities, and by working closely with departments to support and develop existing WP initiatives.

The University’s commitment to WP, independent from external demands, is evident from the Corporate Plan. The widening participation benchmarks set by HEFCE and the targets agreed with the Office for Fair Access are challenging ones. They will not be achieved without widely-supported efforts but the rewards of achieving them will be substantial. Our vision is for an institution of higher learning and research enriched by the diversity of experience, culture and background of all its students and staff.
2.2 Aspiration and attainment

We will continue to work closely with a range of partners to raise awareness of and aspirations to Higher Education, including a varied programme of activities for schools and colleges, talks, subject tasters and residential courses. This activity will be reviewed to ensure visits from schools in HE participation ‘cool spots’ are prioritised. We will be alert to opportunities to counteract the under-participation of boys. Our work to improve attainment is increasingly tailored for specific groups and subjects, e.g. science events for gifted and talented young people who are also from a WP background; taster sessions for BME groups.

The Green Apples programme targets local WP students for sustained intervention and has been running for seven years; we are working with partners to track post-16 progression routes of this cohort.

Raising aspirations needs to start at upper primary school level, targeted at younger children and their parents. We are working with teachers to plan awareness raising activities aimed at young families and with the Centre for Lifelong Learning who will offer level 4 (first year university) courses to parents of Primary School children.

Reaching BME young people is a particular challenge for the University; targeted initiatives will be necessary to attract applications from this group. We will continue to develop positive relationships with schools with a high percentage of BME students and with relevant organisations such as the Windsor Fellowship.

The Hull York Medical School (HYMS) is developing its own WP strategy which will contribute to the overall WP aims and objectives. We will work together to ensure synergy of ideas and action.

We will further develop activity to foster interests and raise aspirations within the community to participate in Higher Education. The principles of inclusion of those with disabilities are an explicit part of aspiration raising activity.

We will build on our use of student ambassadors and student tutors to inspire mature students and young people to study at degree level. They serve as role models, tutors and mentors on visits and residential at the University and in colleges and schools. We will continue to involve them and to train them to provide the general overview of HE that is required.

2.3 Application and entry

We will continue to support students to make applications to higher education by offering guidance on: courses, writing personal statements and finance and to staff on writing references. Presentations on these topics are also made to parents and teachers. We will develop this work to increase support to mature learners, to young vocational learners and to identified WP applicants.
Many of our mature students come from York College, one of our top sending institutions. We work closely with the College to ensure smooth transition from Access courses and Foundation years through visits and information events. We will support the development of extended degrees. We provide training for those providing information, guidance and advice to adults in York and North Yorkshire. We also offer the same events and support to students and staff at other FE colleges.

WP applicants from the region will benefit from the White Rose Compact Scheme. This allows local schools and colleges to identify individuals whose circumstances universities may wish to take into account when considering applications. We will work with schools and colleges to encourage effective use of the scheme for young and mature applicants and with admissions tutors to ensure understanding of its aims.

Departmental profiles on WP criteria will be produced as data becomes available to help departments focus on recruiting a more diverse student population. Some departments such as the Hull York Medical School, Health Sciences and Educational Studies (PGCE) have specific WP requirements placed on them from outside agencies. We will identify and change practices which may work against WP aims. We will research the potential for a University Compact Scheme for both young and mature entrants to specific departments.

Special measures are required to retain and support non-traditional students. We will consider offering an enhanced pre-entry programme of information and study skill development through use of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), or the SITS facility e-vision, combined with mentoring by students from similar backgrounds.

We will uphold current high standards of fairness and transparency in the admissions process, and ensure all staff involved in admissions understand the aims and principles of widening participation and how to apply these including the removal of unfair barriers to entry. This will be achieved through training (including briefings on vocational qualifications) and a high-profile campaign to establish consideration of widening participation criteria as the norm. The introduction of geo-demographic software to identify applicants from low HE participation areas and to link easily to schools data will support this process.

2.4 Learning and Teaching

We plan to increase applications from WP students by continuing to expand our provision of courses more likely to attract WP groups. The current degrees in Social Work, Nursing and Management are examples. Plans for future degrees include Theatre, Film and T.V. and also Law.

We are committed to ensuring the content and delivery of programmes meet with the standards of good practice in equality and diversity. To this end we will further embed the current *Equality and Diversity in the Curriculum* project.
The University plays an active part in Higher York, which comprises local FE and HE providers committed to planning vocational progression routes within and across sectors. In consultation with partner institutions, we will consider increased provision of part-time courses.

We will offer some foundation degrees (and validate others) that are aimed at students who need a step-wise approach to full undergraduate qualifications. The Centre for Lifelong Learning already offers a range of taster courses which can be used as a foundation for admission to a degree or even as credit towards it in order to attract students with more diverse entry qualifications.

Widening participation encompasses specific training needs of those in work. The Enterprise and Innovation Centre aims to support the skills base required by local and regional business and industry through continued professional development. Participation in such courses may well lead to extended learning in Higher Education.

2.5 Enhancing the student experience and employability

Mature students are offered an induction programme of support and study skills in their first term. A focus group is planned to find out what else the University can do to provide for the needs of this group throughout their degree. We need to improve access through improved time-tabling, part-time provision and facilities outside traditional term-times.

We will consider a summer programme of orientation and transition to HE through use of the VLE combined with mentoring by students from similar backgrounds. Centralised and other study support for students who need it should be readily accessible and take into account specific requirements of individuals and programmes. We will ensure supervisors are made aware of a student’s circumstances when leave of absence is requested so that the student is supported appropriately in returning to his/her studies.

Effective widening participation requires a culture change within the institution. We need to anticipate as well as to consult on social, cultural and religious needs, on the needs of students with children, and on the needs of those who work to support a family as well as pay for their studies and on the needs of students with disabilities. Colleagues at every level and in each sphere of the University’s activities will be involved in these changes. This will encompass facilities management, time-tabling (including time of lectures and access to childcare), college welfare systems, student support services and careers guidance as well as academic departments.

WP students need ready access to support services throughout their university career. Addressing these needs will be critical to student retention and successful completion. Student Support Services, academic support in departments and the outreach links of the WP team will combine to ensure students’ needs are canvassed and adequately provided for.
The Careers Service provides for students' broader personal and skills development, together with opportunities for work experience and careers guidance. In particular, students have the opportunity to develop confidence and employability skills through accredited schemes such as the York Award. Most services are delivered one-to-one or in small groups and can be tailored to serve the needs and interests of WP students.

The need for investment in further study skills support has been identified and will be addressed.

3 ACCOUNTABILITY AND MONITORING

The Widening Participation Strategy will be a policy of Senate and monitoring of its implementation will take place as follows.

- There will be an annual report to Teaching Committee.
- The Chair of the Equal Opportunities Committee will be invited to Teaching Committee when WP reports are presented.
- The PVC for Teaching and Learning will report to Council on the Key Performance Indicators KA5a and KA5b. All Departments and support services will be engaged in working towards widening participation using the Implementation Plan as a guide to action.
- Widening Participation Managers in Admissions and Schools Liaison will provide the link between those responsible for delivering the strategy and the PVC for Teaching and Learning.
- The Director of Admissions and Schools Liaison will, as stated in the Access Agreement, report to Planning Committee on the specific targets that have been accepted by the Office for Fair Access.

Connie Cullen, Director of Admissions and Schools Liaison (cjc1)
Jane Austin, Widening Participation Manager (ja519)
Liz McNeil, Widening Participation Manager (em509)

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*Implementation Plan to be prepared by WP team by end June 2006.*
### Key statistics for monitoring purposes: past performance

All figures relate to full-time Home students and are taken from HEFCE/HESA data.

#### (Young entrants)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>State schools - degrees (%)</th>
<th>State schools - UG (%)</th>
<th>Low socio-economic groups - degree (%)</th>
<th>Low socio-economic groups - UG (%)</th>
<th>Low participation neighbourhoods - degrees (%)</th>
<th>Low participation neighbourhoods - UG (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001 Nat'l</td>
<td>86% (77%) 79%</td>
<td>87% (77%) 79%</td>
<td>26% (18%) 15%</td>
<td>26% (18%) 15%</td>
<td>14% (10%) 9%</td>
<td>14% (10%) 9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001 York</td>
<td>86% (77%) 79%</td>
<td>87% (77%) 79%</td>
<td>28% (21%) 18%</td>
<td>29% (21%) 18%</td>
<td>14% (10%) 9%</td>
<td>14% (10%) 9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002 Nat'l</td>
<td>86.8% (79.2) 78.7%</td>
<td>87.3% (79.3) 78.7%</td>
<td>28.6% (21.1) 16.6%</td>
<td>29.2% (21.2) 16.6%</td>
<td>13.9% (10.6) 8.4%</td>
<td>13.9% (10.6) 8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002 York</td>
<td>78.7% 77.30%</td>
<td>77.30%</td>
<td>17.60%</td>
<td>17.60%</td>
<td>not available</td>
<td>not available</td>
</tr>
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<td>17.60%</td>
<td>17.60%</td>
<td>not available</td>
<td>not available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### (Mature entrants)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Degree students mature (%)</th>
<th>UG students mature (%)</th>
<th>Degree matures from WP groups *** (%)</th>
<th>UG matures from WP groups *** (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001 Nat'l</td>
<td>22% 6% 23% 5%</td>
<td>27% 13% 27% 12%</td>
<td>14% (12%) 13% 14% (15%) 19%</td>
<td>15% (18%) 16% 16% (21%) 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001 York</td>
<td>22% 6% 23% 5%</td>
<td>27% 13% 27% 12%</td>
<td>14% (12%) 13% 14% (15%) 19%</td>
<td>15% (18%) 16% 16% (21%) 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002 Nat'l</td>
<td>23.0% 4.50% 5.50%</td>
<td>27.7% 11.40% 12.00%</td>
<td>(13.6) 10.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002 York</td>
<td>14% (10%) 9% 14% (11%) 8%</td>
<td>13.9% (10.6) 8.4%</td>
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<td>not available</td>
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### Key statistics for monitoring purposes: targets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>(Young entrants)</th>
<th>(Mature entrants)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>State schools</td>
<td>Degree students mature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Low socio-economic groups**</td>
<td>UG students mature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Low participation neighbourhoods</td>
<td>Degree matures from WP groups ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>80% 80% 82% 82%</td>
<td>19% 19% 20% 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>82% 82%</td>
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<td>2010</td>
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<td>14% (12%) 16% 16%</td>
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<td>15% (18%) 16% 15%</td>
<td>20% 20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Notes:

*Data for entry 2004 are preview data provided by HESA and do not include low participation neighbourhoods.

**The definition of low socio-economic groups changed between 2001 entry and 2003 entry.

***WP groups for matures combine students with no previous HE and those from low participation neighbourhoods.

Jan-06