Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: Staffordshire University

Unit of Assessment: 25 – Education

Title of case study: Social Inclusion in Education

1. Summary of the impact

Social Inclusion in Education has been the focus of research for a number of years at the Institute for Education Policy Research (IEPR). This case study draws on research projects on supporting non-traditional learners in education, and offering advice for informed decision-making in education. This has involved externally funded research projects, and outputs in refereed academic journals which have been much cited by policy–makers as well as the academic and practitioner community. The main impact of our research has been on education policy-makers, and those individuals whose lives have been affected by the work of policy-makers.

2. Underpinning research

(2006) Gorard, S., Smith, E., May, H., Thomas, L, Adnett, N. and Slack, K. '*Review of widening participation research: addressing the barriers to participation in higher education',* Bristol: HEFCE.
http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100202100434/http://hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2006/rd13_06/
This literature review looked at the findings of a large number of studies conducted to determine the nature and scale of the barriers to participation in higher education faced by a range of under-represented groups. The review identifies a lack of clear knowledge about patterns of participation in higher education, their causes, and how to improve them, and highlights the danger that the widening participation debate is being hijacked by fees and finance issues at the expense of more far reaching institutional change. Much of the research reviewed focuses on minor changes to improve the opportunities and experiences of students from under-represented groups. The review demonstrates that patterns of participation in higher education are highly influenced by family background and early experiences.

(2007-2008) Davies, P.; Slack, K.; Hughes, A.; Mangan, J.; and Vigurs, K. '*Knowing where to study? Fees, bursaries and fair access'* (Sutton Trust).
This project investigated the impact of financial considerations on 16-20 year-old students' decisions about participation in higher education. Nearly two-thirds of students who had decided not to pursue higher education reported that avoiding debt had affected their decision. 'Socially disadvantaged' students with low or medium grades were much more likely to attend a local university. Most students made their choices about studying at higher education level before they heard about the bursary options available.

(2008) McCaig, C.; Bowers-Brown, T.; Slack, K.; Barley, R.; Adnett, N.; Cripps, C.; Wolstenholme, C.; and Willis, B. '*Fair Admissions to Higher Education: A Review of the Implementation of the Schwartz Report Principles Three Years on'* (DIUS/SPA)
http://www.spa.ac.uk/documents/SchwartzReview/Schwartz_Report_Review_Report_1_Final10.12.08.pdf
This project reviewed the implementation of the Schwartz Report to assess the changes in admissions processes in higher education to support the Report's five principles. Many institutions suggested that the Schwartz Report was not a major influence on the development of their admissions policies and process. However, practice and policy *has* changed and a number of recommendations in the Schwartz Report have been successfully adopted by the sector, particularly in relation to some areas of transparency, staff training, some aspects of professionalism, and the use of technology to share resources and information.

(2010) Renfew, K.; Baird, H.; Green, H.; Davies, P.; Hughes, A.; and Slack, K.; '*Understanding the information needs of users of public information about higher

education' **(HEFCE).**
http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/hefce/content/pubs/2010/rd1210/rd12_10b.pdf
This project found that only a limited set of information is regarded as a priority by most prospective students. Only around half of the respondents had tried to find this information, indicating that many prospective students do not look for information even when they think it would be useful to them. Any changes in policy should therefore take account of the potential risks of providing information without also tackling the issue of involving students in using information who do not look for it. Failure to do this may increase gaps between students.

3. References to the research

The outputs in this section are based on externally-funded research projects. The quality of the research is evident in the fact that project proposals are sent out for peer review by the funders, and the final project reports are scrutinised. Also, these outputs were published in high impact refereed academic journals which follow the practice of blind peer review by at least two reviewers.

1. Davies, P., Mangan, J. and Hughes, A. (2009) Participation, financial support and the marginal student, *Higher Education,* 58(2) 193-204. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10734-008-9190-9
2. Mangan, J., Hughes, A., Davies, P. and Slack K., (2010) Fair access, achievement and geography: explaining the association between social class and students' choice of university, *Studies in Higher Education*, 35(3) 335-350. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075070903131610
3. Mangan, J.; Hughes, A. and Slack, K. (2010) Student Finance, information and decision making, *Higher Education,* 60(5) 459-472. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10734-010-9309-7
4. Adnett, N.; McCaig, C.; Slack, K. and Bowers-Brown, T. (2011) 'Achieving Transparency, Consistency and Fairness' in English Higher Education Admissions: Progress since Schwartz? *Higher Education Quarterly* 65(1): 12-33. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2273.2010.00468.x
5. Davies P., Mangan, J., Hughes, A. and Slack, K. (2013) Labour Market motivation and undergraduates' choice of degree subject, *British Educational Research Journal*, 39(2), 361-382. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01411926.2011.646239
6. Slack, K.; Mangan, J.; Hughes, A. and Davies, P. (2012) 'Hot', 'cold' and 'warm' information and higher education decision making, *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* (iFirst). http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2012.741803

4. Details of the impact

Over the years, IEPR researchers have worked on a number of externally-funded projects on Social Inclusion. These include, for example, projects funded by the DFES, the Learning and Skills Development Agency, and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. These earlier projects enabled us to gain experience of research in this field and acted as a springboard to submitting further bids to other funders. They also allowed us to build a reputation as researchers examining Social Inclusion issues, and facilitated funding from other funders. We note below the impact of three of our later projects, mentioned in Section 2 above:

Davies, P., Slack, K., Hughes, A., Mangan, J. and Vigurs, K. (2008) *Knowing where to Study? Fees, Bursaries and Fair Access.* **Report to The Sutton Trust.**
This project report has been widely referred to in the press, e.g. the *Guardian* front page headline; cited by pressure / special interest groups, e.g. *BMA, Canadian Federation of Students, National Union of Students, UCU, ISC, UUK, Global Higher Education, Royal College of Nurses, HEPI, NFER;* and quangos, e.g. *OFFA and the Higher Education Academy.* It has also been referred to directly in government papers: It was one of the few research studies referred to in *Alan Milburn's report, 'Unleashing Aspiration: the final report of the panel on fair access to the professions', published by the Cabinet Office.* It is also cited in the *BIS research paper, 'The role of finance in the decision-making of higher education applicants and students'.* The impact of the project is

evident in the fact that the Government used this report to justify its policy on fair access.

McCaig, C.; Bowers-Brown, T.; Slack, K.; Barley, R.; Adnett, N.; Cripps, C.; Wolstenholme, C.; and Willis, B. (2008) *Fair Admissions to Higher Education: A Review of the Implementation of the Schwartz Report Principles Three Years on.* **Report to SPA**

Through a survey of senior managers responsible for admissions, and 10 case studies, this review found that a number of principles in the Schwartz Report had been successfully adopted by the sector, particularly in relation to the areas of transparency, continuing professional development, aspects of professionalism, and the use of technology to share resources and information. The project resulted in a series of good practice guides, which were widely distributed. The following paper, which is in Routledge's Highly-Cited Research Collection, was published from the above project.

- Adnett, N.; McCaig, C.; Slack, K. and Bowers-Brown, T. (2011) Achieving 'transparency consistency and fairness' in English Higher Education Admissions: Progress since Schwartz? *Higher Education Quarterly,* 65, 1, 12-33.

Renfew, K.; Baird, H.; Green, H.; Davies, P.; Hughes, A.; Slack, K. (2010) *Understanding the Information Needs of Users of Public Information about Higher Education.* **Report to HEFCE.**

The above project was one of the two research studies commissioned by HEFCE on which most of the proposals in its November 2010 document, *'Public information about Higher Education'* are based. It was cited by the Government White Paper, *'Putting Students at the Heart of Higher Education'* (BIS, June 2011, p.28). The findings of the report were also mentioned in the media, e.g. *Times Higher Education* (13-19 December, 2012, pp.38-41). Further, the expertise in areas related to Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) has enabled the IEPR team to lead two locally-based initiatives on IAG. The first is with three secondary schools and one FE college to develop IAG materials for school/college students. These are currently being trialled at all four institutions. This project is significant because of the recent Government policy to devolve IAG to schools. The second focuses on mature students, involving one FE college, Platform51, the Prince's Trust, and Adult and Community Learning in Stoke-on-Trent. Research is currently underway with learners engaged with these agencies to investigate their specific IAG needs. Representatives from the agencies will then work with us to co-develop IAG resources for learners. The following papers were published from the above project.

1. Davies P., Mangan, J., Hughes, A. and Slack, K. (2013) Labour Market motivation and undergraduates' choice of degree subject, *British Educational Research Journal*, 39(2), 361-382.
2. Slack, K.; Mangan, J.; Hughes, A. and Davies, P. (2012) 'Hot', 'cold' and 'warm' information and higher education decision making, *British Journal of Sociology of Education,* (iFirst article)

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

The Sutton Trust Report and the two related journal articles (1 & 2 in section 3 above):
1. The Sutton Trust (2008) *Knowing where to study? Fees, bursaries and fair access,* at: http://www.suttontrust.com/research/knowing-where-to-study
2. Alan Milburn's report (2009) 'Unleashing Aspiration: The final report of the panel on fair access to the professions'. The Cabinet Office: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http:/www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/227102/fair-access.pdf
3. BIS research paper (2010) 'The Role of Finance in the Decision-making of Higher Education Applicants and Students': http://www.employment-studies.co.uk/pdflibrary/bis10529.pdf
4. The findings of the project were presented to the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Aimhigher HEI Group (April, 2008); the Aimhigher professional Development Conference at Staffordshire University (May, 2008); and the Stoke-on-Trent Local Education Authority Widening Participation Coordinators' Meeting (June, 2008). Corroborating source: Head of UK Partnerships, Staffordshire University.

The HEFCE Report and the two related journal articles (5 & 6 in section 3 above):

5. HEFCE (2010) - *Understanding the information needs of users of public information about higher education: Enhancing and developing the National Student Survey*: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2010/hepublicinfouserneeds/#d.en.64124
The Key Information Sets (KIS), provided through the UCAS site and elsewhere to encourage informed choice of higher education courses, are based on this report.

6. IAG with local secondary schools/colleges. Corroborating source: Assistant Head, Clough Hall Technology School, Stoke-on-Trent.

7. Times Higher Education Supplement (2010) 'Read all about your course – if you really want to, that is' (5 August), at: http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/412883.article

The SPA Report and the related journal article (4 in section 3 above)

8. DIUS/SPA (2008) *Fair Admissions to Higher Education: A Review of the Implementation of the Schwartz Report Principles Three Years on'*, http://www.spa.ac.uk/information/fairadmissions/schwartzreportreview

9. Government's response to the 11th Select Committee report (2009) 'Students and Universities' (October, p.7)

Evidence of the impact of our overall research on Widening Participation

10. http://www.gmc-uk.org/Identifying_best_practice_in_the_selection_of_medical_students.pdf_51119804.pdf
A review commissioned by the General Medical Council (GMC) (2012) to identify best practice in the selection of medical students with a particular focus on widening participation looked at the effectiveness of widening access initiatives used to promote fair access and made a series of recommendations to the GMC to inform practice. The review drew on 5 of our publications: Slack (2003); Gorard et al. (2006); Davies et al. (2008); Mangan et al. (2010); and McCaig et al. (2011).