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A framework for whole institutional inclusive practice developed from shared governance, curriculum development and pedagogy

Report to HEFCE by the University of Westminster

This report is submitted in fulfilment of the HEFCE grant programme relating to links between higher education institutions, schools, colleges and academies

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1   Executive summary

1.1   Key messages from the research findings

- Independent learning for higher level study was seen as essential to transition from level 3 to level 4.

- Higher education (HE) induction processes should be owned and shared by staff in schools, colleges and HE.

- A communications strategy is needed to underpin partnership working.

- A cluster approach to a particular menu of activities was considered the way forward.

- Customised agreements would provide fit for purpose progression routes.

- Strategic planning should be owned and championed by senior management.

- Mutual and equal standing across any partnership work is a core principle.

- Continuous professional development (CPD) should be embedded within all partnership work.

1.2   Overview

Operational delivery to feeder institutions was seen as efficient and proactive. However, these links were based upon individual contacts between the university and the school or college. As a result of this reliance and approach to collaborative work, information about the background to linked work was often not evidenced to give a full account of working practice. Links with academic staff were on an ad hoc basis and again relied on individual contacts. Some pre-entry programmes (master classes) did provide a coordinated approach to academic engagement with schools and colleges. However, these were dependent on external funding with reporting lines to external committees linked to Aimhigher work. The main area of work for this type of engagement was the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ), which was referred to on several occasions during the interviewing stage. Curriculum, particularly with reference to the 14-19 reforms, was seen as core to any collaborative activity to support transition to HE and progression through HE, with the sharing of data about learner attainment and learning profiles.

1.3   Strategic and inclusive planning with an adequate allocation of resource was seen as the way forward. Several interviewees noted that the links with the University of Westminster needed development and would benefit from a senior management steer on a consortium basis. Several models of engagement were articulated during the interviewing process and these are outlined later within this report. The main reason for institutions to engage with the University of Westminster was to harness expertise and knowledge transfer around skills for higher level learning, independent thinking skills and CPD for staff. It was noted several times that schools and colleges could be limited by being educational factories to process learners through exam situations, with independent and critical thinking skills falling by the wayside.

1.4   **The strategic approach to engagement**
During the interviews the staff from schools and colleges articulated several models of engagement. Analysis of the transcriptions showed that there were five emergent models of engagement which varied in ethos, aims and objectives. In the main these models fell into three groupings, with CPD embedded in all three:

- curriculum and teaching and learning emphasis

- more formal validation arrangements around Foundation Degrees (these already happen with six Associate FE Colleges)

- information, advice and guidance (IAG) and careers advice linked to UCAS preparation.

The focus group **(see Appendix 3)** which took place following the 23 interviews with 20 institutions further developed the thinking for a cluster approach to engagement. Institutions were explicit in their belief that any model of engagement should be developed and planned in an equal and mutually beneficial way. Senior managers had to be involved, with a clear communication strategy for strategic planning linked to operational delivery for effective and sustainable working practice. A pattern emerged of a cluster approach customised to common aims and objectives. The research findings showed that there would be three possible cluster approaches to engagement. However, these findings are only the beginning, as consultation and dialogue would need to continue at all levels of institutional strategic and operational practice.

2 Introduction

2.1 The purpose of this research project was to investigate the University of Westminster models of inclusive practice at different levels of engagement with 30 of the university's key feeder institutions. The findings will inform the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) objective which is to investigate examples of effective working practice (SHELL schools – HE links in London). SHELL is a project that is active in supporting all aspects of school-university partnerships in London.

2.2 The University of Westminster is one of three London universities to have been commissioned by HEFCE to conduct this research. The research evaluated the University of Westminster's existing model of engagement with schools and colleges. We worked with a selected group of 20 feeder institutions, from which the university receives a range of numbers of applications. The intended outcome is to investigate how we might build on practice and develop a model of engagement that is fit for the purpose of all participating partners.

2.3 Each of the seven university academic schools was represented by a member of staff who conducted a qualitative set of interviews with a grouping of institutions. In most cases we tried to link subject specialists with the institution's specialist status or area of excellence. This was to build on an academic dialogue across sectors. However, because of time constraints for both institutions, sometimes this was not possible and fieldworkers were linked with staff who were available, given workloads. There was a contribution of £250 to each participating institution.

2.4 Participating institutions were briefed on the potential outcomes of the research project:

- increased engagement by academic staff with outreach and governance

- a framework for outreach work that will begin to develop sectoral quality benchmarks

- shared sector knowledge for teaching and learning and curriculum development

- a network of staff across the sector to enhance progression through subject area dialogue.

2.5 This research proposed to evaluate the existing model of inclusive pre-entry practice, which is delivered at different levels of engagement with the 20 institutions. The following were the aims within the research proposal:

- identifying teaching strategies for differentiated learning

- planning for IAG

- innovative curriculum development to link level 3 and 4 delivery.

2.6 The rationale of this research was to look at the way we might share and collaborate on these aims to develop an HE-school links model. It concentrated on some of the most challenging London school and college environments.

2.7   Westminster's entry data illustrates that we recruit strongly from a particular set of institutions. In 2008, 46% of home fees entrants originated from our top 100 institutions, with 29% from the 30 key feeder institutions. These students are accepted in all schools and departments within the University of Westminster.

2.8   It was proposed that the research would probe further into how the Westminster model works across departments. The evaluation included both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. We explored the model within the institutions by:

- the subject link, using primarily our academic staff to deliver face to face interviews with colleagues in schools

- surveying the nature of school governor activity within the university, before a series of interviews/focus groups to identify what is needed to embed this engagement in an institutional HE-school linked model

- sourcing data on student progression and attainment from the originating institution collecting feedback through a staff discussion forum (focus group).

3   Methodology and approach

3.1   **Qualitative research**
Research fieldworkers were selected by deans of school at the University of Westminster to conduct face to face interviews, thus placing the ownership of the research project at subject and school level. Fieldworkers were academics drawn from subject areas: Social Sciences, Humanities and Languages; Law; Media, Art and Design; Computing; and Integrated Health. Business, and Architecture and the Built Environment were represented by the Partnerships Officer.

3.2   Institutions were contacted by letter and then by telephone and email. Owing to the tight timescale and colleagues' workloads in participating institutions, 23 interviews were conducted with 20 institutions: 7 schools, 3 academies, 3 sixth form centres and 7 further education (FE) colleges. Three more sets of interviews were held with three of the multi-site institutions for added information. This happened with two FE colleges and one sixth form centre. Interviews were held with a range of staff, covering careers staff, directors of curriculum, vice principals with a remit for either curriculum or 14-19 in higher education, directors of post-16 studies, heads of sixth form, deputy heads and heads of 'A' level subject areas.

3.3   The interviews were of one to two hours' duration and all participants were interviewed with the same format of questions **(see Appendix 1)** and briefed prior to the interview about the research protocols. In addition, there was a focus group with the research fieldworkers and participating institutions to evaluate and discuss the emergent findings from the interviews. All the interviews were transcribed, and the key themes and findings are articulated within this report. **Interviews were conducted with clear guidance that all participants would remain anonymous.**

3.4 **Quantitative research**

An online survey was disseminated to all University of Westminster staff to investigate the level of governor engagement with local schools and colleges. The findings are included within this report. Finally, data on progression and attainment was analysed by the university's Planning Office to investigate the levels of progression and attainment to HE of the participating institutions for the research project. The purpose was to assist strategic planning for provision linked to successful learner progression and attainment.

3.5 **Linked research**

The School of Law wished to investigate why there had been a group of students who had not progressed at level 4 **(see Appendix 4)**. This part of the project indicated that:

- better sector links are an important way to tackle issues of student retention and progression at university

- sector links must impart more than just academic knowledge and enable students to develop 'soft skills'

- links should be better coordinated, more formalised and better tailored to those in most need of transitional support

- investing in better links is financially beneficial as it may save universities HEFCE funding money

- more research, debate and evaluation are needed to support and develop these links in order to establish good working practice.

4   Existing model of University of Westminster engagement with the participating schools and colleges

4.1

Level 1	**Initial outreach work – first point of contact** Email mail-shot Mail out HE fairs Ambassador work
Level 2	**Information, advice and guidance** University and subject choice talks UCAS application support/fair preparation talks Subject talks Campus tours Careers and university links Parents' evenings Personal statements advice and guidance/mock interviews Year 9 options Ambassador interventions
Level 3	**Progression work linked to teaching and learning** Extended project CPD sessions Themed activity days (e.g. Black History Month/National Science Week) Westminster Business Den University experience day Taster days – subject specific workshops Student finance talks and workshops Study skills workshops Master classes

4.2   **Table of level of activity with the participating institutions**

- 'The following table is based on the number of enrolments in 2008.

- In the top 100 institutions there are currently 12 institutions where we have a high level of activity.

- There are currently 62 institutions where we have a medium level of activity.

- Some institutions which have multiple sites are recorded separately – e.g. City & Islington College VI Form is separate from City & Islington College; the same applies to Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College.

- Beal School, St Marylebone High School and Mulberry School are not included within the 100 institutions.

4.3   Institutions interviewed that are within the existing top 100 institutions, many of whose students apply to Westminster.

Institution

	2008 enrolments	Type	Relationship	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1	Operational	Strategic
City of Westminster College	64	ASS	High	YES	YES	YES	Yes	Yes
Leyton VI Form College, London E10	50	SIX	High	YES	YES	YES	Yes	Yes
Harrow College	47	ASS	High	YES	YES	YES	Yes	Yes
Uxbridge College	44	ASS	High	YES	YES	YES	Yes	Yes
Hammersmith and West London College	36	ASS	High	YES	YES	YES	Yes	Yes
College of North West London	25	ASS	High	YES	YES	YES	Yes	Yes
Ealing, Hammersmith & West London College	11	ASS	High	YES	YES	YES	Yes	Yes
City and Islington Sixth Form College	65	SIX	High	YES	YES	YES	Yes	Yes
Westminster Kingsway College, London	73	ASS	High	YES	YES	YES	Yes	Yes
City & Islington College VI Form	27	FEC	High	YES	YES	YES	Yes	Yes
City & Islington College	15	FEC	High	YES	YES	YES	Yes	Yes
William Morris Academy	11	SIX	High	YES	YES	YES	Yes	No
South Camden Community School	9	SCH	Medium	NO	YES	YES	Yes	No
St Angela's/St Bonaventure's Sixth Form	9	SIX	Medium	NO	YES	YES	Yes	No
St Francis Xavier Sixth Form College	9	SIX	Medium	NO	YES	YES	Yes	No
Acland Burghley School	3	SCH	Medium	NO	YES	YES	Yes	No
North Herts College	3	FHE	Medium	NO	YES	YES	Yes	No

ACA   Academy
ASS   Associate College
FEC   Further education college
FHE   Further and higher education college
SCH   School
SIX   Sixth form college

5   Emergent themes from the findings

- There was a varied range of activity that informed working relationships with the University of Westminster. There were only a few examples of academic dialogue between subject areas.

- All FE colleges valued stronger links with Media and Business. A possible model would be two years at FE level with a top-up programme at HE level. What has come out is the real understanding that this is about a business relationship. So when discussing linked subject areas participants considered how realistic it might be in terms of income generation and employability.

- School and college links tended to be either localised or with the Russell Group or 1994 Group. Particular higher education institutions (HEIs) developed a reputation for particular areas of work, i.e. Birmingham University for study skills sessions, Cambridge for mentoring/interviewing skills, Queen Mary University of London and Middlesex for mentoring in the east end of London. There were progression

agreements with Kingston/Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College/Middlesex/Southbank.

- Owing to the different levels of resource funding, work to date has been varied for some institutions. Therefore there has been an ad hoc approach to work dependent on projects and dependent on external funding and individual contacts.

- Westminster was positioned midway between the two main mission groups, with a more informal approach. Institutions wanted either more formal links with more concrete outcomes – progression agreements or guaranteed places – or a flexible approach to dip in and out of a set menu of activities.

- Most staff surveyed in the feeder institutions had no idea how long there had been links with their own institution and Westminster. Depending on the member of staff interviewed, knowledge of the range of activity was within the sphere of that person's influence**. It was noticeable that communications about pre-entry work were not shared within the institution**. At senior management team (SMT) level there was more understanding of operational and strategic activity.

- Operational delivery of pre-entry activity was seen in the main as effective, with efficient delivery. Strategic links were seen as needing development, particularly in the areas of teaching and learning linked to academic faculties. Subject links would need to be organised within the calendar of events.

- Curriculum development was seen as core to any engagement. Schools, in the main, were cautious about the 14-19 Diplomas, with the post-16 sector signing up to this vocational route to HE. All participants were keen to work in collaboration on the Extended Project Qualification.

- The Extended Project and a programme of independent learning skills was what most institutions wanted from Westminster. They wanted a concrete activity that formed a core part of a formal agreement. Unlocking potential was seen as vital by all participants, linked to widening participation, retention and recruitment.

- The three academies interviewed were proactive in their willingness to engage with the University of Westminster. They were pleased to source **'off the shelf work'** for planned programmes. Academies recognised the university as a long-term partner. They wanted links with academic departments for enhancement of the student experience and greater academic input. Careers and ambassador work was seen as useful IAG work as many students would benefit from this active approach.

- The Westminster Group of Associate Colleges was considered unusual compared to other HEI approaches to collaborative agreements. A formal set of 6 FE colleges interacting with the University of Westminster on several levels, such as: academic quality linked to validation, curriculum design and employer links, progression work, IAG, international student recruitment, teacher training, CPD and for future work – research and funding. The Westminster Group generally believed there was a need to develop enhanced strategic links, with greater levels of support and resource within linked FE/HE subject areas.

- Institutions felt that it was better when activities were joint enterprises on the basis of equal partnership, although often this was activated by the institution requesting the activity from HE. The University of Westminster was seen to work with an ethos of mutual collaborative benefit for the transition of students to HE.

- Timeframes could be tight, so an understanding of calendars was considered an asset as institutions said that not enough lead time was given by HE. Institutions would publish information through a weekly bulletin, and a month was usually needed for institutions to respond to HE. HE needed to understand the best times of the year to provide particular programmes, the better times being after exams and at the end of the academic year. Staff did say that there was a need for consistent rules for students and therefore clarity about timeframes was essential.

- Nearly all the staff interviewed agreed that **independent thinking is a key skill.** Other skills cited were: critical thinking skills, research skills to develop interest in the subject, the ability to make links and think creatively, and finding evidence in support of a debate.

- Staff noted a huge shift from a very prescribed curriculum in schools to a more flexible modular approach in HE. Concerns were expressed that schools are often about teaching people to pass exams, so independent learning does not come into this approach.

  'Teachers have a fear of failure as they feel they are judged on the performance of their students. Often it is then hard to let the student learn independently.'

  All quotes are anonymous and taken from the interview transcriptions.

- Most participants had not heard of a learning profile and the transition of this information across sector. A Director of Diploma talked about the '**Unique Learner Number'** and several talked about the lack of transference of data. The UCAS application form was thought to be the only real way of transferring information about the student, particularly because of data protection safeguards.

- The academic subject referenced many times by a high proportion of the participating institutions for work on curriculum links was Business.

- In the main, institutions valued stronger links with the University of Westminster, not controlled by the HEI but equal in collaboration. Links worked best if initiated from the SMT with linked academic contact across sector for particular subject areas (with emphasis on vocational learning). There needed to be a certain amount of informality because of the need for developing dialogue to capture expertise and potential areas of joint research.

  'Institutions need to work together to manage the change in learning culture and lessen drop out.'

6   Findings: Planning data

6.1   The Planning Office at the University of Westminster supplied data on student progression to the university and student attainment whilst studying at the university. This data was drawn from existing University of Westminster datasets extracted annually from the Student Record System. For the purposes of the research, comparability of data for two groups of institutions was sourced. These were a group from those institutions interviewed, of which there were 20, and a group drawn from the 15 institutions not interviewed but which were part of the listing originally sent to HEFCE with the original submission bid for the grant programme. All institutions have participated in pre-entry work with the university.

6.2   **Group 1, interviewed institutions, comprised schools, sixth form colleges and colleges.**

6.3   **Group 2, not interviewed institutions, comprised schools and sixth form colleges.**

6.4   **Attainment at higher level study**
        From both groups' data the student attainment varied from year to year. In 2006/7 and 2007/8, the interviewed grouping (group 1) had a higher proportion of students with 2:1 degrees or above. In 2008/9, both groups had the same proportion of students with 2:1 degrees; however, the interviewed group had a higher proportion of 1st degrees.

6.5   **Comment:** The university receives higher applications and conversion rates from group 1; however, the student attainment rate has fallen from 53% in 2006/7 to 29% in 2008/9 (those who received a 2:1 degree). For group 2 the university student attainment and completion of a higher level course had a similar pattern.

6.6   A cluster approach to schools and sixth form colleges would be helpful to enhance conversion rates and effectively engage with these institutions for the independent learning work that many of the staff interviewed requested.

6.7   **Student progression and completion at the university**

        Progression: During 2006/7, for group 1: 642 students progressed through the university (levels 4-6), with 204 who did not successfully progress. For group 2: 566 students progressed, with 133 who did not progress. For group 2 there were fewer applications; however, the conversion rate was higher, at 80% rather than 75.2% for group 1.

6.8   For years 2007/8 and 2008/9 the pattern is similar, with both groups having very similar progression rates; however, group 2 has much smaller numbers within the non-progression category.

6.9   **Comment:** Group 2 is therefore more successful regarding conversion rates from application to the university. The schools and sixth form colleges group 2 is therefore more successful on conversion. This may be an indicator that lower attainment from group 1 reflects recruitment from a more diverse range of backgrounds.

6.10 **Completion of course:** There is a higher rate of completion year on year for group 1: in year 2006/7 – 184, year 2007/8 – 185, year 2008/9 – 117, compared with group 2: in year 2006/7 – 164, year 2007/8 – 155 and year 2008/9 – 89 students.

6.11 **Comment:** There has been a steady rate of progression over the three years for both groups, although the numbers of those who have progressed have declined for the interviewed group 1.

7 Findings: Governance survey (see Appendix 2)

7.1 Seven governors at surveyed institutions were staff at the University of Westminster at the time of this survey. Governors were placed at: 1 school, 3 sixth form colleges and 3 FE colleges. Several staff who were interviewed thought it helpful to links that this did happen. However, in previous years it had been the norm for members of the university's senior management team to undertake the role of governor (including the Vice-Chancellor, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, the Director of Finance and the Academic Registrar). With the Associate Colleges there were also governors from other HEIs, such as Thames Valley University (TVU) and Middlesex.

7.2 For the purposes of this research, we conducted an online survey sent to all University of Westminster staff. This survey was closed after one month and happened during June 2009. We had 26 respondents, with 56% letting us know that they were involved with governorship; 42% of this 56% said they would still continue with this work. The highest reason for involvement was due to family reasons. This was a low response rate compared to the numbers of staff employed within the University. Owing to this low response the conclusion might be that staff are not ready to volunteer to do this work, possibly because of their own workloads.

7.3 The SHELL delivery plan 2009-11 does note that it would be desirable for HE staff to be appointed to governing bodies as they would be able to signpost school and college staff and students to materials that would provide preparation for admissions to university. **For this institutional approach to happen it might be suggested that the work of governorship would need to be part of a university school brief for external engagement underpinned by the need for knowledge transfer. This way the work would be recognised as important to shared IAG and pedagogy.**

8 Findings: Existing delivery of pre-entry activity

8.1 Work started with year 9 students in schools/academies and year 12 for 14-19 curriculum activities in colleges. A general comment was made from the post-16 sector around the need to do more work on the 14-19 Diplomas and the Extended Project.

8.2 **For all institutions** the main themes of operational work were in connection with: ambassador work, mock interviews, master classes, taster days/open days, study skills classes/courses, and the Student Associates Scheme funded by the Training and Development Agency for Schools (SAS-TDA work). Excellent practice was highlighted as:

'Interactive taster sessions with the student taking the work back with them to their own institution.'

8.3   In general, links tended to be varied according to the level of the staff collaborating. Aimhigher came up on several occasions, and there seemed to be confusion about which staff were connected to the university or which staff were connected to the local authority in central London. **Links were either at grassroots level with careers/Aimhigher/liaison staff for IAG/careers work or at SMT level for pedagogy and curriculum development.**

8.4   Many institutions did not have formalised links with HEIs. It was noted that the Associate Colleges linked to the university had formal links and this was where the strategic level dialogue would happen. They were also part of the Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training. All the Associate Colleges were interviewed: Harrow; Ealing, Hammersmith and West London; North West London; Uxbridge; City of Westminster College; and Westminster Kingsway.

8.5   **For the schools** the subjects of greatest interest for engagement were Business and Sciences; Media, Sociology and Psychology followed. For the FE sector this was Business, Sciences, Languages, vocational areas of study – and initial teacher training.

8.6   **The three academies** particularly liked the Student Associates Scheme funded by the TDA. Work happened, with the emphasis on careers programmes, ambassador work and admissions sessions (which the academies prioritised as key to progression work). At the Westminster Academy, every year 12 student had made contact with the University of Westminster.

'We are very happy with our links with Westminster and we are confident that they will develop further with the existing programmes.'

8.7   **Two sixth form centres** with informal partnership links with Westminster were interviewed (Director of Curriculum and Head of Media). It was noted that there could be an ad hoc provision and this was due to access to funding and resources for these activities. Achievement week was a key linked area of work which was funded and happened each year.

8.8   One institution felt that the partnership needed more resources for organised activities, as '**Westminster is a natural partner'**. More activities were wanted (due to the formal link), with better links with Law, and master classes and more work on progression agreements with the new Diplomas.

'Westminster is very typical of work with other HEIs.'

8.9   **All Associate Colleges (Westminster Group)** were interviewed, and the key areas of work evidenced were: governorship, careers and admissions sessions, generic visits for HE experience, subject specific visits to work with academic staff, master classes, ambassador work, bridging programmes for level 5 to 6 for Foundation Degrees (validated by the university), and support for the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review. Work was both **operational and strategic. One example of practice was:** continuous professional development. **Several Associate Colleges mentioned that employability and progression were interlinked.**

8.10　At a strategic level, Associate Colleges thought the following important to planning: CPD, teacher training, curriculum development (EPQ), Foundation Degrees and links to strategic networks such as the Lifelong Learning Networks. The larger the institution the more work happened at subject level. Associate Colleges talked about the possibility of bridging courses that are transferable to the post-16 sector to strengthen 14-19 Diploma links.

8.11　In the main the Westminster Group considered that there needed to be more strategic planning. Westminster links were not as strong as with other HEIs: Middlesex, TVU, South Bank, Kingston (Compact scheme).

8.12　**Examples of existing practice**

Example 1
Sixth form college collaboration with the university – embedded and delivered a three-day bridging course (on site) within curriculum. The model was then transferred to their own receiving institutions.

Example 2
Consortium approach to delivering the Extended Project – FE/sixth form college and the university. Purpose: to enable cohorts of students to have access to HE and critical thinking skills.

Example 3
Soft partnership works well with FE colleges, such as a strong presence at awards, sponsorship of awards, and supporting enrichment activities; such as ambassador work and master classes.

'You have good people at Westminster – they are interested in partnership and making it work.'

Example 4
Differentiated learning in the classroom – the AchieveAbility National Network, the Training and Development Agency Student Associates Scheme.

Example 5
Scholarship programme for Associate Colleges, with a linked volunteering activity from alumni students. It was noted that a communications strategy for this work would raise the profile of this excellent practice.

9　Findings: Barriers to progression and skills required

9.1　In some schools, 80% to 90% (Central/East London) of the children had English as an additional language. There were high levels of poverty within the family in some schools, with up to 70% on Education Maintenance Allowance and 90% on free school meals. Several staff talked about the nature of poverty, which restricts access to different experiences, less healthy living, less able to participate, less level of parental involvement and then less chance of progression. Several participants cited poverty linked to wellbeing as a key factor for lack of progression to HE. Finance was still seen as a key factor. The level of parental support was linked to lack of confidence, cultural

issues and implicit skills that might be developed from parental support and influence – skills such as confidence, communication and social face to face networking.

9.2 Other barriers were:

- **lack of intellectual skills** to juggle theories and ideas

- **lack of differentiation** – students have to adapt to different cultures of learning; students are not taught to their way of learning – the varying teaching styles between school/FE and HE – the need for staff to ensure that academic skills are owned by the learner

- **time constraints** on students due to their need to work to gain financial support. Particular financial concerns were for single parents, homelessness and those travelling long distances to work and study (FE)

- **lack of role models** in life, with early pregnancy, immigration status and unstable housing cited as life changing situations that affected educational experience

- **lack of general knowledge** about world news in order to be up to date and informed. Staff said students do not listen to the news

  'There is a lack of cultural capital and frightening low level of knowledge.'

- very low progression rate to the University of Westminster from feeder institutions outside of London due to **lack of experience of other environments**. In the main, up to 80% progression rate to London HEIs from many of the institutions interviewed.

10 Findings: Skills identified

10.1 To address some of these barriers several institutions gave examples of programmes they delivered.

10.2 Nearly all the staff interviewed agreed that independent learning skills were important to progression at HE, such as: independent thinking, critical thinking skills, research skills necessary to develop interest in the subject, the ability to make links and think creatively, and finding evidence in support of a debate.

10.3 Most participants considered soft skills as being: interpersonal skills, time management, group work and the ability to work under pressure.

'It's difficult though because teachers are judged on the performance of their students. You will find that the students find it hard to learn independently and some teachers find it harder to let them learn independently – because there is a risk involved there.'

10.4 The Extended Project Qualification was seen by sixth form colleges as an excellent way to develop soft skills. It was noted that the school personal, social and health education programme (years 12/13) is about social skills/health and wellbeing. In FE this is called '**behavioural study skills'** and is linked to financial management and time

management. FE also has a programme called **'skills for success'** about literacy and numeracy.

11 Findings: Communications

11.1 **Communications in general:** Bulk mail-shots from HE were not recommended because of the amount of information received in one go. Email was useful, with personalised relationship work noted as most important. The preferred way of having face to face contact was through workshops, conferences, CPD sessions and discussion forums. Meetings should happen at least twice a year. If the institution was a multi-site organisation then communications became more complex. In these cases central contact was seen as most important, with the senior management team buy-in, and strategic links became even more important.

11.2 **What worked well:**

- Websites were key and provided an efficient service because of easy access to information to be able to follow up with a request to the HEI. This was considered particularly useful as students used the internet all the time (the Facebook generation).

- Generally, internal communications happened through bulletins emailed to all staff, often on a weekly basis. E-learning centres were used to pass information instantly to students, with the school virtual learning environment (VLE) 'Fronter' used for events pages with students booking on electronically.

- Aimhigher coordinators were often thought important in aligning internal and external communications. They would often report on an annual basis to governors and heads of department.

12 Findings: Planning for sustainable progression work

12.1 **Sharing of information and data:** Staff noted that there needed to be more sharing of data and information about pre-entry activities for transition, progression and attainment at FE and HE.

12.2 **At FE level** there was mention of individual learning plans (ILPs), with three learning reviews a year. Staff can identify areas of weakness and strengths as useful information to HE. ILPs are electronic and monitored and managed by both the staff and students and would be a way student progress could be measured for transition from FE to HE.

'I think there is an unnatural barrier between level 3 and level 4. I think that it makes it hard for the learners to progress, because of the different learning styles, so I would want to see a more seamless progression route through from entry to completion.'

'If the learners are helped to be aware of their own learning then they can negotiate their educational journey. Helping students understand their own learning style directly links up to course choice and how the course is taught.'

12.3 For the Associate Colleges there was reference to the University of Westminster within their three-year strategic plans, self-assessment reports or the widening participation assessment strategic plan if they delivered HE provision.

12.4 At FE, staff tracked students and recorded achievement. It was interesting that several institutions thought that HE now required information from them about the student achievement and learning journey. Data protection came up because of the requirement to provide references for UCAS that were positive and therefore became sanitised.

12.5 **At school level:** The self-evaluation framework (SEF) and school improvement plan were cited as ways of articulating strategic links. SEF was particularly effective in auditing links and student destination (parents are informed).

13   Sustainability – key points raised

13.1 All believed that working together was about unlocking the potential of learners. Institutions raised the following points as useful to sustainability:

- Need to know more about how HE funding works and the learning environment so learners understand more about the course.

- Strategic links with subject areas and departments were thought to be helpful.

- Collaboration was seen to be mutual, with friendly and quick response greatly appreciated.

- Timetabling and timing of meetings to include: shared vision, confident delivery, viability of offer, agreement on progression.

- Planning for transition to level 4 meant shared knowledge on various forms of formative and summative assessments (quality and what is this).

- All wanted access to HE resources with training for immediate impact on subject areas.

- Need a contact list of who to speak to for certain areas of work – i.e. additional learning unit.

- Need to understand each others' funding regimes so that we can share resources strategically (the Cert Ed).

      'We need transparent and regular commitment as well as reliability.'

13.2 **What worked well for all institutions:** Sustainable links were thought to be drawn from the core business of teaching and learning. So at a strategic level CPD and teacher training were mentioned. One school mentioned the chance to co-deliver a presentation at the recent Teaching and Learning Symposium.

- EPQ was seen as an excellent way to collaborate on teaching, learning and pedagogy.

- Master classes for subject area and study skills were thought useful for transition from level 3 to 4.

- The University of Westminster's scholarship programme for FE students in Associate Colleges was seen as excellent, as loans could be seen as outside the ethos of some cultures.

- Bridging courses were seen as '**brilliant'** for study skills.

'Raising the entry requirements does not mean that students stay on programmes, educationalists need to consider how to engage learners as effective teaching is for the learner.'

'What is HE doing to understand different learning needs? – whilst not dropping standards but looking at how to be more accessible for tutorials.'

'The difference is that colleges are a little ahead of universities in understanding that actually teaching is neither here nor there, it's only learning that matters.'

14   Suggestions for the way forward drawn from the interviews

- Short-term key consideration would be clarity of communication. Knowing what is wanted by providing a form listing activities and asking you to identify what you might want during the academic year.

- Long-term strategic approach would be building on the Westminster Group (Associate Colleges) programme. Linked more to subject activity with cluster subject tutor groups experiencing HE at different times of the year.

- FE needs to develop own curriculum and students need to see the university and share FE/HE space.

- Greater engagement through: more meetings, student visits and more CPD that is shared.

'Things need to happen more frequently, Westminster needs to see what we are doing.'

- A group of interested parties working round the table working out a matrix of activities.

'A timetable is needed; we could organise a CPD programme. Westminster staff could attend faculty meetings and we could factor Westminster into the programme of meetings and CPD. Need equality of engagement.'

- A framework for working together with top level steer to make decisions and for faculties to operate. Protocols are needed for service agreements/progression agreements.

'Every faculty is doing something slightly different so personal dialogue around designing level 4 curriculum. Catalysts are needed. Regular senior contact. We need to understand funding for progression.'

- More engagement on vocational, work based learning.

- Shared research work linked to relationship and quality of teaching and learning.

- The university deans should be at Associate College meetings so that staff can be linked with heads of faculty, heads of school and managers of curriculum. The work needs to be owned across levels of working.

- Staff development was wanted, with updating on HE developments. It was noted that many staff had not been within the HE environment for many years. They wanted knowledge about expectations of admissions processes. Institution staff demonstrated depth of knowledge about the realities of vocational qualifications and progression.

- More formal links with more concrete outcomes around progression agreements or guaranteed places, with a flexible approach to dip in and out of a set menu of activities. 14-19 Diploma links to be worked on more effectively.

- Tailored curriculum to the strengths of the University of Westminster. Better pairing of departments, with a named person for each department.

- Action planning for a more formal approach to work, with an outcome being completion by learners of HE course. Senior management to make the final decisions.

- Key consistent contacts at HE are vital, with strategic involvement from SMT linked to heads of year and careers staff.

- Academic staff contacts placed on the website for subject areas. **Relationship was seen as more important that the subject focus.**

- A customised agreement cluster approach. Each cluster of institutions to have a defined approach to a programme of engagement. The emphasis for each programme would be developed in line with the cluster institutions' strategic aims and objectives.

- Resources were a concern, as who in the end pays for these programmes to be delivered. The underpinning premise would be subject links with a structure of engagement.

- Any programme would run at set times, negotiated with partners and in keeping with calendars and timetables. Each partner has the ability to say what is required.

'By the second week of September this should be made clear as tutor groups are up and running with timetables agreed.'

- A central point to manage the range of programmes and deal with programmes that are clustered around subject sets.

- A tracking system that looks at why students drop out from levels 3 to 6, with feedback across these levels on any progression issues. To support knowledge on retention rates and the expectations at HE.

15 Conclusion

15.1 **The rationale revisited:** This research was to look at the way we might share and collaborate on the aims to develop an HE-school links model. It concentrated on some of the most challenging London school/college environments. This research proposed to evaluate the existing model of inclusive pre-entry practice which is delivered at different levels of engagement with the 20 institutions. The following were the aims within the research proposal:

- identifying teaching strategies for differentiated learning

- planning for IAG

- innovative curriculum development to link level 3 and 4 delivery.

15.2 The research revealed a rich amount of information about the transition and progression needs of learners and the desired levels of engagement by staff across the educational sectors. There was a real wish to work more closely to share resources and knowledge about the teaching and learning. It was interesting that whilst HE in the main understood what was meant by 'soft skills', the schools and colleges mostly had to ask for clarification. This demonstrated how different the terminology can be across the sectors, making collaboration even more beneficial. Institutions wanted to work in collaboration on a range of models of engagement with HE. A few institutions were happy to source activities as and when; however, most institutions wanted to have a more strategic approach to collaborative links. There was a real lack of clarity about points of contact between the university and schools and colleges. There was a clear message that a structured approach to management of communications and delivery of activity was wished for, with senior management having an active steer and interest. Across the school, college and HE sectors information tended not to be shared, which meant that a strategic approach to information management to inform transition to HE was not being fulfilled.

15.3 Action planning for engagement was seen as essential, with a matrix of key consistent contacts from SMT level to heads of year at linked institutions and with contacts at the university being deans and heads of department. Lack of adequate resources was mentioned many times and linked to ad hoc delivery if not enough resources were available.

15.4 Subject focus was important but the overarching strategic planning was considered key to sustainable links. Subject focus was seen to work when there was a pairing of departments (across sector) with a named person for each department, this pairing to be part of a cluster approach to customised work. In the main, institutions saw the form the relationship took as being much more important to the development of a shared

approach to governance, curriculum and pedagogy. Governance, however, was not discussed much and was not seen as essential to best practice for links between institutions.

15.5 There were some noticeable gaps in knowledge and provision for some institutions and the university. These were to do with activity and planning, sometimes because of institutional restructuring, but in the main because of resource allocation and the lack of knowledge by receiving institutions about the learner's educational journey and a lack of understanding for feeder institutions about how HE funding works. There was a real desire to understand how the university culture works and a thirst to learn from each other. This enthusiasm and commitment to the learner's educational experience could be built on and developed with a consortium approach to provision for learner transition to HE. Whilst progression rates were steady, planning data for the quantitative part of the research showed that for both groups of institutions the attainment rates of the students (once they came to the university) were down year on year in terms of 2:1 degrees and higher.

15.6 **The following models of engagement were articulated during the interview process.**

Model 1: IAG – fitting student needs with a realistic offer
Careers programme linked to subject areas, with the ambassador scheme providing the generic link to all subject areas; academic year to start with a large IAG/HE fair event to link staff across subject areas. **Key people – heads of careers service and sixth form.**

Model 2: UCAS preparation with the strand approach
Formal links for enrichment sessions across subject area and structured to the school syllabus. UCAS sessions delivered based around the personal statement. Desired outcomes: feedback on progression from HE with a programme of visits and an open day personal invite. **Key contact – head of sixth form.**

Model 3: Direct faculty links on a formal and flexible basis
A list of activities to act as a guide for the flexible structure. The activities would be around admissions and teaching and learning, with activities such as: lectureships delivered for staff and students, study skills, admissions and careers links, sessions for transition to HE. The Extended Project to develop curriculum areas, and gifted and talented (G&T) students to have a structured access. The school self-evaluation framework would be part of the feedback for the formal agreement. The school improvement plan would also focus on progression work. Added value would be: collaborative evaluation and keeping up to date with HE developments. **Key contacts – senior management, heads of faculty.**

Model 4: Strategic steer set in a complex organisation (14-19 years)
Contact and link on different levels with senior management and heads of faculty down to grassroots level. Owing to the nature of large institutions, a communications strategy would be helpful linked to directors, heads and careers staff. Delivery of activity would be through the 14-19 Diplomas. **Key contacts – senior management.**

Model 5: Cluster approach with schools, colleges and HE (14-19)
Cluster approach with a guaranteed offer. Institutions linking on HE provision with modular provision shared across institutions. Individual learning modules delivered as

blended learning. More seamless referral of learners to HE. Additional bursaries to be made available. **Single point of contact – head of teaching and learning.**

16   Recommendations: framework for inclusive practice to links between higher education, schools, colleges and academies

16.1   During the interviews the staff from schools and colleges articulated several models of engagement. Analysis of the transcriptions showed that there were five emergent models of engagement, which varied in ethos, aims and objectives. In the main these models fell into three groupings, with CPD embedded within these models of engagement:

- curriculum and teaching and learning emphasis

- more formal validation arrangements around Foundation Degrees
- IAG and careers advice linked to UCAS preparation.

16.2   The research findings are only the beginning, as consultation and dialogue would need to continue at all levels of institutional strategic and operational practice. The following recommendations are drawn from the 23 interviews and the focus group interview, and are placed in order of short-term and long-term planning. The template in 16.5 is an example of action planning for a cluster approach to links with feeder institutions.

16.3   **Short term**

- to investigate three models that have emerged from the five articulated models

- action planning for a framework of collaboration **(see example in 16.5)**.

16.4   **Long term**

- senior management steer for a multi-partnership delivery of cluster institutions

- senior management involvement in a communications strategy

- develop a clear and structured network of liaison points for delivery

- negotiated menu of services and delivery practice for each cluster approach

- university network of consistent contacts to be housed within academic departments

- operational delivery to be planned based on shared calendars

- curriculum development to underpin the delivery of practice

- practice to be based within teaching and learning and the student experience

- practice to be developed based on negotiation and a customised approach

- strategic practice to be informed by market analysis, CPD, curriculum development

- operational practice to be delivered through enrichment activities for independent learning

- IT to be integral in communications and teaching and learning for the cluster approach

- shared data on learner attainment

- tracking of student progression.

16.5 **Example of action planning to implement a framework for collaboration**

Short-term goal	Responsibility	Actions and activity	Outcome and time	Evidence and evaluation
Investigate models	Academic services	Audit of partners	Identified cluster model	
Long-term goals	Senior management			
Communication strategy				
Structured network of contacts				
Menu of activity				
Negotiated delivery				
Shared data				
Recruitment of students who will progress and attain				
Tracking of progression and attainment				

Appendix 1

Face to face interview questions

Nature of links with Westminster

1 In what ways does your institution have links with Westminster?

☐ Aimhigher activities/gifted and talented work

☐ Westminster member of staff as governor

☐ Careers and admissions sessions

☐ General visits to HE to learn about universities

☐ Shared staff development support/CPD or IAG sessions

☐ Subject specific visits to work with academics

☐ Workshops/master classes from university students and staff

☐ University student ambassador work

☐ Study skills for HE short courses (bridging)

☐ 14-19 Diploma links

☐ Other: _____

2 Does your institution have links with other HEIs in the areas listed above?

3 How long has your institution had links with Westminster – as far as you are aware?

4 At what age group do your links with Westminster start?

5 At what age group does the majority of your work with Westminster occur?

6 Who is involved in your links with Westminster?

☐ Senior management team

☐ Heads of years

☐ Careers staff

☐ Gifted and talented coordinator

7 What is the nature of their role?

8 Do links with Westminster feature in your:

☐ Self-evaluation framework – http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/

☐ Aimhigher work – http://www.actiononaccess.org/

☐ School improvement plans – http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/

☐ Curriculum development (Extended Project – 14-19 curriculum)

Skills to succeed

9   What do you believe are the key academic skills that enable students to make a successful transition from post-16 to HE?

10   What do you believe are the key soft skills that enable students to flourish in HE?

11   What do you believe are the greatest barriers to the academic success of students at both post-16 and HE level?

12   How can the student learning profile be evidenced by the post-16 and HE sectors?

Learning within a subject focus

13   How many of your staff and how many of your subjects are involved in your work linking with Westminster?

☐ Staff (give details): _____

☐ Subject (give details): _____

14   To what extent are activities that you undertake with HEIs planned together as joint enterprises?

15   What are the considerations in planning a linked activity?

16   Would you value stronger links between subject areas in teaching and curricula? And in what areas/subjects? (Please expand on discretion)

Building on the future links with Westminster

17   What value would you gain from strengthening links with Westminster?

18   What impact on your pupils and students do you think your links with Westminster have had and could have?

19   How do your links with Westminster differ from those with other universities?

20   How could your links with Westminster develop further?

21   Which of the activities that your institution undertakes with Westminster are the most effective and why?

22 What methods are used to monitor the effectiveness or impact of these activities on students?

23 How much of your link with Westminster is about unlocking potential to higher education?

24 Are there any gaps in your links with Westminster? If so, what are they?

25 In what areas do you have stronger/weaker links with Westminster?

Sustainable future

26 What would such a relationship between your institution and Westminster look like and how could it be achieved?

27 <u>Who</u> would be the key people in ensuring sustainable links?

28 What would be the most effective way to communicate between schools, colleges and university?

29 What do think are the criteria for engagement with HE?

30 Other questions. (May pertain to academic links/specific subject areas)

This face to face interview has been conducted with the understanding that all participating institutions will remain anonymous, unless there is a wish by a participating institution to have particular information attributed to their institution within the final report to HEFCE.
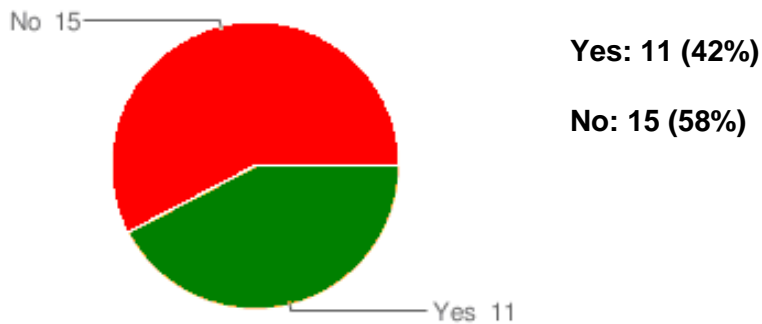
Appendix 2

HEFCE research governance survey – summary of 26 responses

During your professional career have you been involved with governance of a school or college?
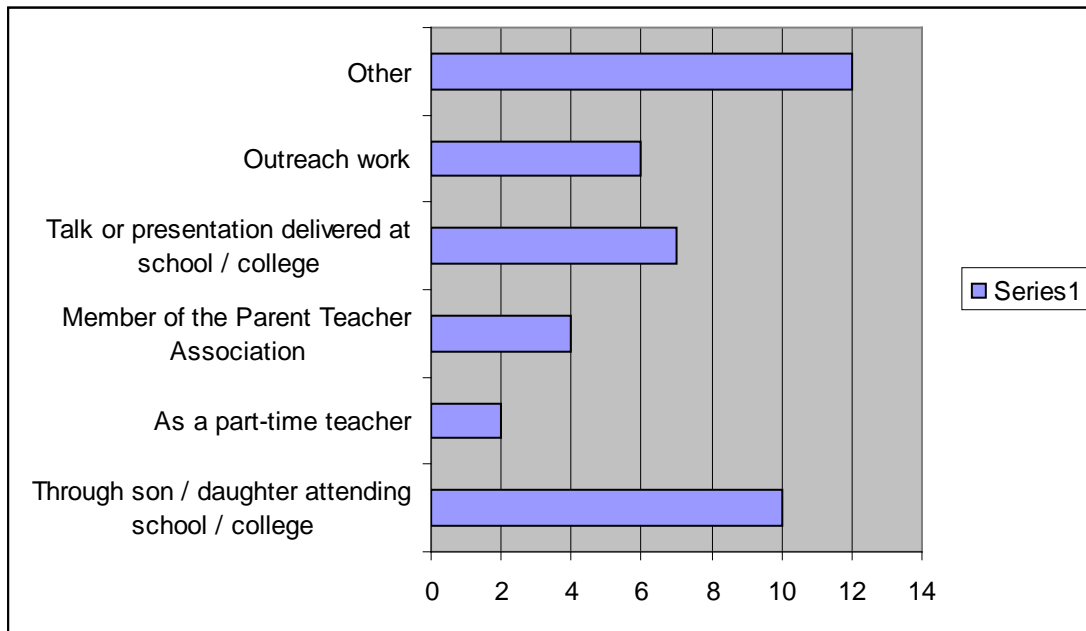

Yes: 14 (54%)

No: 12 (46%)
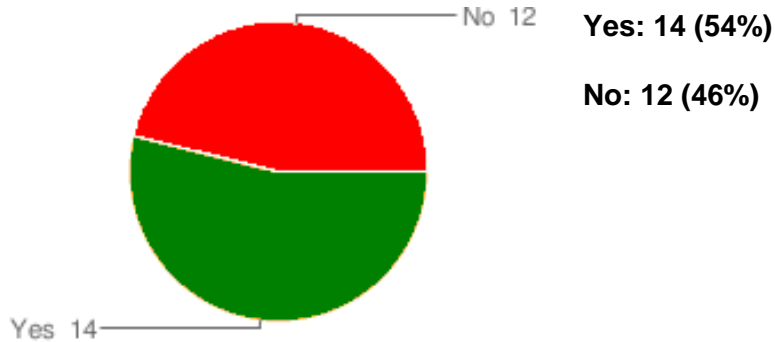
Are you a governor now?

Yes: 11 (42%)

No: 15 (58%)

Would you be interested in developing this work?

Yes: 11 (42%)

No: 10 (38%)

Other: 5 (19%)
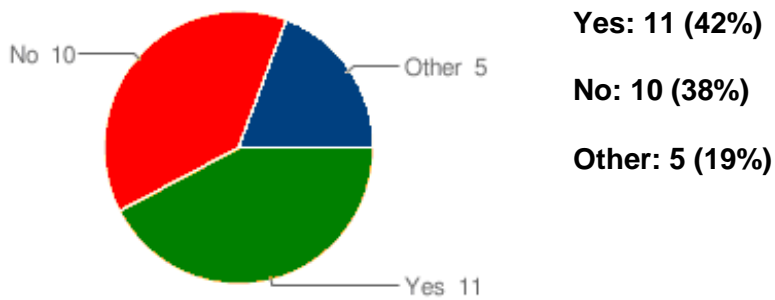
Do you have links with schools or colleges other than as a governor?

Through son/daughter attending school/college		10	38%
As a part-time teacher		2	8%
Member of the Parent Teacher Association		4	15%
Talk or presentation delivered at school/college		7	27%
Outreach work		6	23%
Other		12	46%

NB: People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.

Appendix 3

Notes from the focus group transcription

Key themes and recommendations drawn from the focus group, 21 July 2009.

Five fieldworkers and two representatives from participating FE colleges (Westminster Group), Graeme Atherton as facilitator.

Four main sections to this feedback:

1) Types of links and activities

2) Barriers and issues in terms of progression

3) Future sustainability and planning

4) Second phase for HEFCE –

1)   Types of links and activities – key points

- Tendency for very aspirational schools to put students forward to Westminster who are middle range, with the high achievers going to Russell Group HEIs. Middle range student do not get so much attention.

- Lots of dissemination within institutions, although staff would tend to work separately, with key information about engagement not transferring across institution. Example: some senior managers did not know about the activities that were happening in their own school. Many participating institutions wanted some sort of link, with many wishing for formal links.

- Careers staff were thought to know a little about a lot of areas of work, with heads of department making the decisions. Could be fragmented.

- Planning structures within institutions varied in terms of HE links.

- Noticeable how different institutions could be regarding the student aspiration.

Recommendation
Teachers in FE would gain from real knowledge of the HE lecture or seminar.
More staff discussions around transitional issues and skills for progression.
Agreement on common values for relationship work and what the challenges might be.

2)   Barriers and issues in terms of progression – key points

- Independent learning was a key skill for all when considering progression to HE.

- Parental push for the professions that did not consider student aptitudes.

- Parental hostility to HE because of own working cultures.

Issues
Need to improve subject links. Some institutions knew education liaison well, others not so well. In the main, a positive experience of individual approaches and work. Less clear on strategic planning. More joint work around academic links, giving master classes.

- **IAG** – get too much information, flooded with brochures. Need to have information you can digest. Most students go to local HEIs in London, although in some schools/colleges there is a push for the G&T students to go outside.

- Colleges are more likely to have students progressing locally. Some students know exactly what they want. **The Extended Project and independent learning skills were what most institutions wanted from Westminster.**

- They wanted a concrete activity that formed a core part of a formal agreement.

   Example: student accessing HE and resources for research purposes and then going back to their own institution for the Extended Project. Mentoring included with ambassador students.

- **Generally fairs were not useful. Open days were not as useful as subject specific events**

- Time and calendars were a core issue, with many institutions saying that HE did not have any idea about the best time for working with feeder institutions.

- More communication needed on this, with long lead times. Several institutions asked their researchers to come back to give talks, demonstrating a real need for greater contact across subject areas.

- Some institutions were quite vague about what they actually wanted. In general they wanted HE to come to them and make first contact. There was a differentiation between those who knew a lot about types of activities and those who had vague recall on work.

- Work was organised in various ways through careers, heads of department or senior management.

- One large FE college was asked how progression work was organised.

   Example: Level 3 and 4 progression is coordinated at tutor level and through the advice and guidance team. There are managers for HE who run level 5 and 6. There are cluster tutors linked to a head of school/head of faculty for subject links. Objectives need to be worked out for HE and FE and schools: i.e. curriculum development – shared pedagogy.

Recommendation
The cluster approach with a customised agreement. Each cluster has a defined approach to a programme of engagement. The emphasis for each programme would be developed in line with the cluster institutions' strategic aims and objectives, e.g. CPD.

3)   Future sustainability and planning – key points

Short term: Key consideration would be clarity of communication. Knowing what is wanted by providing a form listing activities and asking you to identify what you might want during the academic year.

Long term: Strategic approach – building on the Westminster Group (Associate Colleges) programme – linked more to subject activity. Cluster subject tutor groups experiencing HE at different times of the year. The programme for these students to run in years 12 and 13.

Resources are a concern – who in the end pays for these programmes to be delivered? The underpinning premise would be subject links with a structure of engagement. The university would then know the type of subject specific activity to be requested and at what time of the academic year.

Recommendation
A central point to manage the range of programmes, to deal with programmes that are clustered around subject sets.

A tracking system that looks at why students drop out from levels 3, 4, 5 and 6. Feedback across these levels on any progression issues. Knowledge on retention rates and the expectations at HE. For example, the Foundation Degrees liaison tutor arrangement is excellent.

Recommendation
A strategic model for Westminster. The programme to run at set times, negotiated with partners and in keeping with calendars and timetables. That each partner has the ability to say what is required. By the second week of September this is made clear as tutor groups are up and running by then, with timetables agreed.

Concerns
Staffing at subject level for this type of engagement. The university is run with visiting lecturers in many areas. We need hours and time otherwise this recommendation sounds 'fantastic'. How can this be within job descriptions.

4)   Issues to influence a strategic model

Completion of course at HE level

Working on pre-arrival and induction

Cannot deliver any strategy unless resourced and funded

Deans to write into job descriptions

Widening participation – funding has gone into teaching enhancement

Work linked to targets set for curriculum leaders

What is the university skill set for progression?

Feedback on achievement of students to originating institutions

Shaping the student body – knowing the student profile of learning

Communications with personal tutors – skills set

Prep week for all subject areas – how to write essays, terminology, plagiarism

Bridging course whilst still at level 3, with access to library

Flexible delivery

Credit-based framework pre-entry for entry/modular learner.

Appendix 4

Linked research project – School of Law

Kenneth Umeh
School of Law
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1 Introduction/context

1.1 As part of this report, we at the University of Westminster Law School wanted to carry out internal research about our own student body. Our focus was the students who had failed to complete their studies at level 4 and had consequently failed to progress to their second year. We sought to uncover from the institutions from which these students came their family background, qualifications on entry and reasons for their non-continuation. We aimed to investigate whether there were particular issues affecting students from specific backgrounds and institutions and to improve how we worked with these students in order to better bridge their transition from college or school to induction and progression within the university's law department.

2 Statistics

2.1 All the data provided in this paper is from the Planning Office at the University of Westminster, with the exception of chart 5. The Planning Office provides a range of services that support the strategic planning process of the institution; these services include the provision of management information and student performance indicators as well as statutory returns ensuring that the University of Westminster receives the correct amount of government funding. Suffice it to say that this paper could not have been completed without this information and their support. The data collected comes from a small sample of students[1] and it would be unwise to draw definitive conclusions about the schools and FE colleges from which these students originated or their ability to prepare the students for HE. It would also be unwise to draw firm conclusions about entry qualifications, ethnicity and age group as being definitive factors for non-continuation. Rather, it is hoped that this data can be used as a platform for a broader and more rigorous analysis within the School of Law in the future.

3 Type of institution

3.1 Chart 1 shows that over a half(19) of the students who did not progress came to the School of Law from FECs(19). Of note perhaps, is the fact that only two students came from high school. As already mentioned, with such a small pool of data to draw from it would be fatuous to suggest that because only two students came from schools, schools better prepare their students for HE. What is perhaps of significance, however, is the fact that these two schools are located outside of London (Surrey and Wales). Greater links with local feeder schools would certainly be beneficial, but what of schools outside the local catchment area, like Surrey and Wales?

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[1] The sample data is from 36 students and there were 412 level 4 law students at the start of the 2008/9 academic year. These include students on the following courses: LLB (Hons) Law, Law with French, European Legal Studies and Commercial Law.
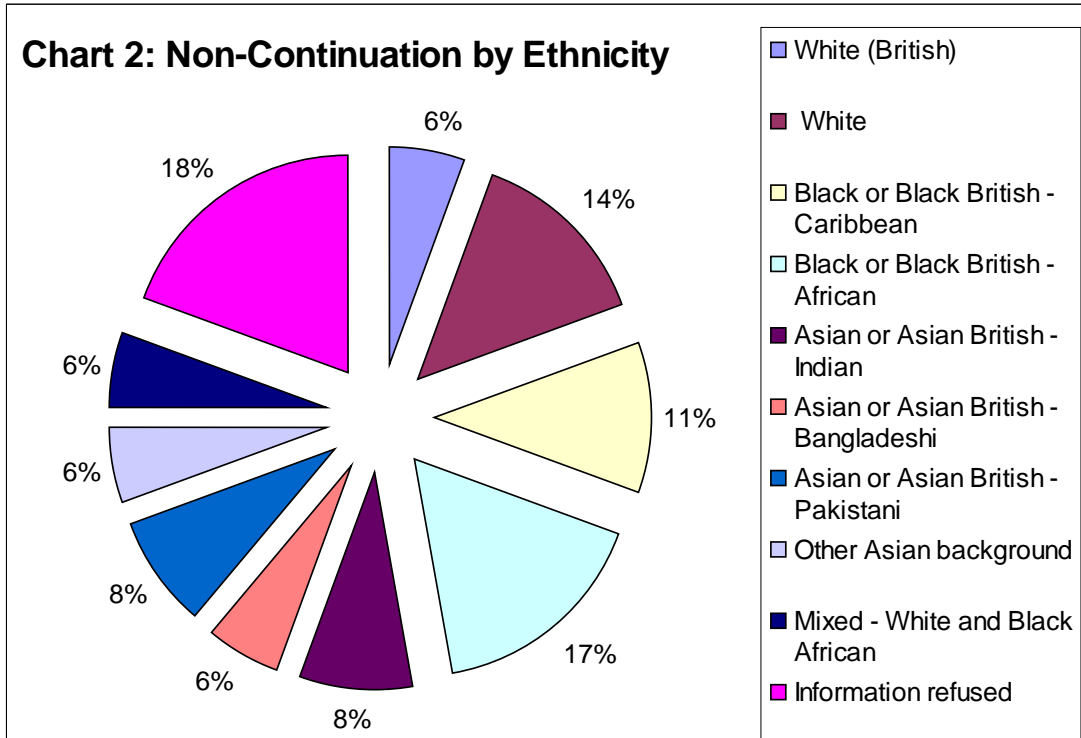
3.2   In the Foster Review, it was estimated that more than a third of all university students come from FE colleges.[2] If, however, the School of Law is recruiting a higher proportion of its students from local FE colleges, then there is a clear need for greater strategic planning between the Law School and these colleges in order to facilitate a better transition from further to higher education.

3.3   Additionally, three students transferred to the School of Law from other universities and perhaps better inter-university communication is needed in order to facilitate the induction and integration processes for direct entrants. This is, however, beyond the remit of this study. Finally, there remained a large number (11) of students whose previous institution was unknown.
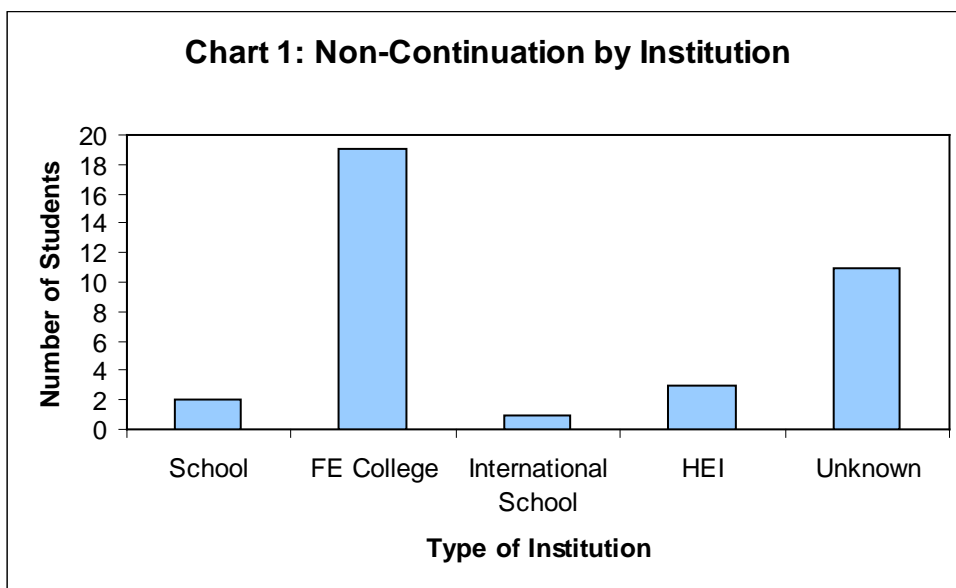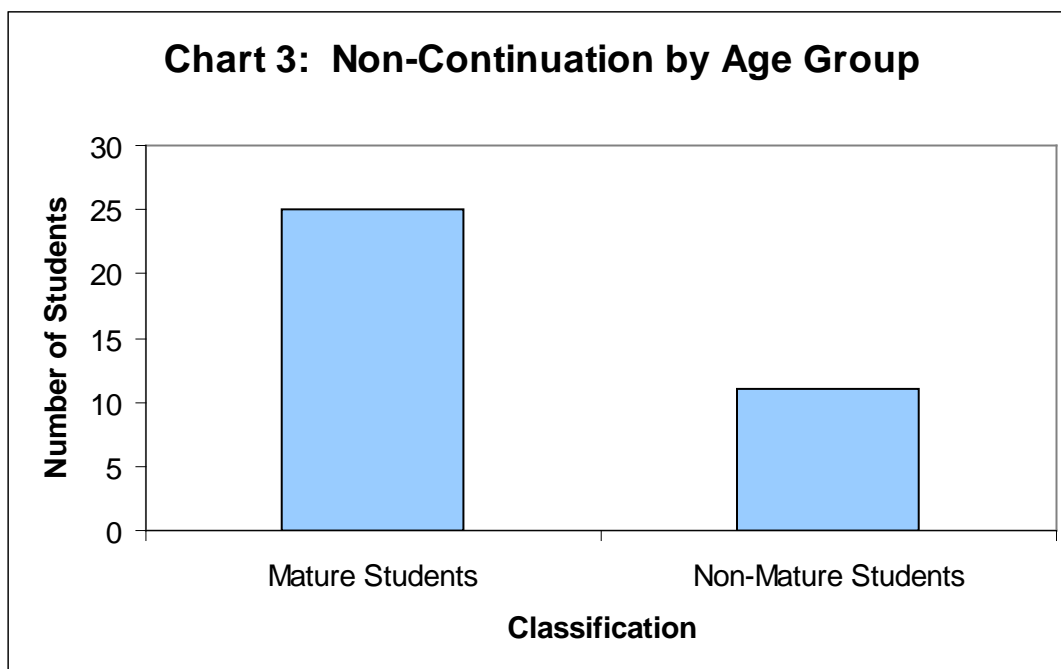

4   Family background (ethnicity)

4.1   For a university located in central London, there is quite unsurprisingly a broad ethnic mix of students at the Law School, though ironically the highest rated classification shown in chart 2 is 'Information refused' (18%). Students with a Black or Black British-African ethnic ancestry (17%) and White (non-British students (14%) rank highest with regard to non-continuation at the School of Law, with Black or Black British-Caribbean (11%) and the Asian groupings relatively closely behind.

4.2   The lack of significantly expansive gaps between ethnic groups is again reflective of the small pool of data used for this paper, but it is also reflective of the broad range of ethnic groups in our feeder institutions. So at the Law School, maybe family background (ethnicity) is not as significant a factor in issues of non-continuation in the first year of academic study, though it may well be a factor in regard to level of attainment and degree classification, another significant issue outside the remit of this paper.

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[2] Parry, G. 'Foster Review of FE 'think piece': The higher education role of further education colleges' (2005) at www.dcsf.gov.uk/furthereducation/uploads/documents/Higher_EducationinFE_Gareth_Parry.doc

Chart 2: Non-Continuation by Ethnicity

Legend:
- White (British)
- White
- Black or Black British - Caribbean
- Black or Black British - African
- Asian or Asian British - Indian
- Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi
- Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
- Other Asian background
- Mixed - White and Black African
- Information refused

Pie chart values: 6%, 14%, 11%, 17%, 8%, 6%, 8%, 6%, 6%, 18%

5   Age group

5.1   Mature students in the United Kingdom are classified as students who are over the age of 21 on commencing their first year of study. Chart 3 shows that a significant amount of students who did not progress were mature (25). What does this mean in terms of our links with schools and colleges? Well, it would again suggest a need for stronger links with our feeder colleges, as mature students are more likely to be attending access courses at FE colleges rather than schools. When starting college and university, mature students face a variety of barriers, both internal and external, which perhaps universities should be more attuned to. These internal barriers include feelings of not belonging, being an imposter and what Reay (2002) has described as the 'shadow of earlier academic failure' (p.404). External barriers include financial concerns, family and parenthood and the emotional strains put upon them as they embark on a journey of identity transformation. This identity transformation is highlighted by Baxter and Britton (2001) and it is imperative that FE colleges and universities are aware of these barriers, as they are potential factors for non-continuation amongst mature students. Mature students also have a different desire for entering higher education, not simply seeing it as a means to an end but an experience in itself.

Chart 3: Non-Continuation by Age Group

[Bar chart showing Number of Students (y-axis, 0 to 30) by Classification (x-axis). Mature Students: 25. Non-Mature Students: 11.]

6 Gender

6.1 The School of Law's student gender composition make-up for the 2008/9 academic year was 67% female and 33% male, across all levels throughout the school. Of the 36 non-continuation students at level 4, 47% (17) were male, with the remaining 53% (19) female.

6.2 It is impossible here to delve extensively into the debates about male and female attainment and non-completion, but looking at this data sample a higher ratio of males may be struggling with the transition from schools and colleges and perhaps the School of Law should focus on establishing male-specific programmes with their feeder institutions. A new report produced by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI)[3] would again reiterate the recent trend that identifies male students as more likely to struggle at university compared with their female counterparts.
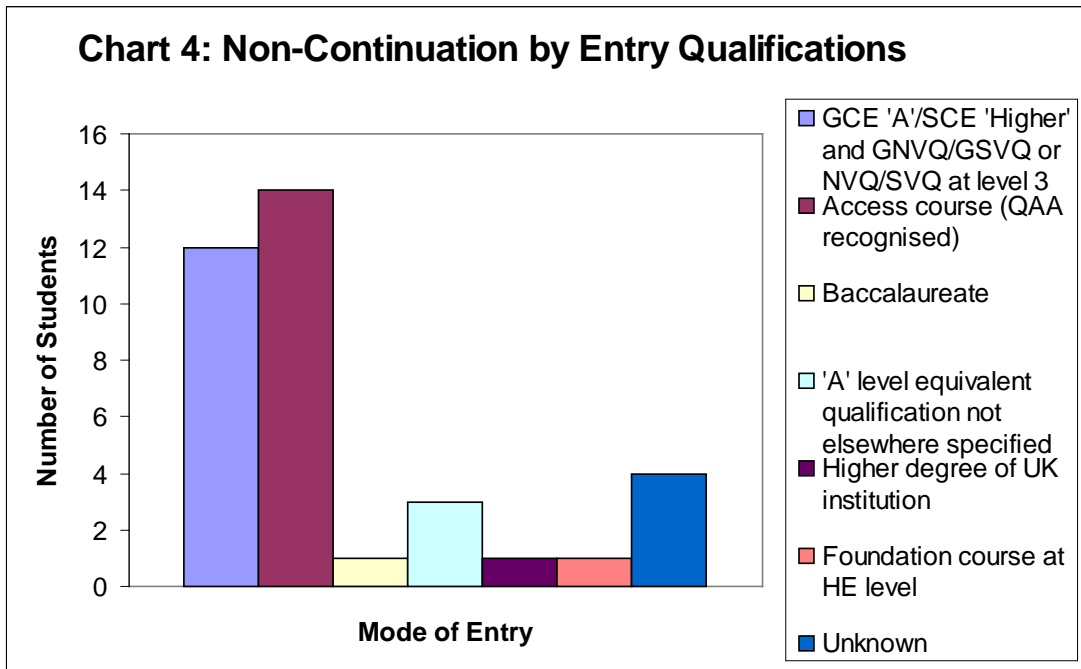
7 Entry qualifications

7.1 Qualifications on entry by nature appear to be the factor most contributory to non-continuation.[4] The idea that the greater level of ability a student demonstrates before they start higher education, the more likely they are to succeed, has been debated in a whole variety of academic spheres.[5] According to chart 4, most of our non-completion students entered the School of Law through access courses. The issue here could be one of curriculum content and, again, further investigations will be necessary. HESA, the Higher Education Statistics Agency, show that for the 2007/8 academic year, a

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[3] HEPI 'Male and female participation and progression in Higher Education' (2009) at
http://www.hepi.ac.uk/167-1409/Male-and-female-participation-and-progression-in-Higher-Education.html

[4] National Audit Office (NAO) 'Staying the Course: the retention of students in Higher Education' (2007)

[5] Example: http://www.vetnetlln.ac.uk/about-us/publications/Academic%20predictors.pdf

significant number of students with access qualifications were struggling with issues of non-continuation, although so were a whole range of other students.[6]

Chart 4: Non-Continuation by Entry Qualifications

Legend:
- GCE 'A'/SCE 'Higher' and GNVQ/GSVQ or NVQ/SVQ at level 3
- Access course (QAA recognised)
- Baccalaureate
- 'A' level equivalent qualification not elsewhere specified
- Higher degree of UK institution
- Foundation course at HE level
- Unknown

Y-axis: Number of Students
X-axis: Mode of Entry

8   Why did they leave?

8.1   As Student Support Administrator at the School of Law, I am the first port of call for students experiencing personal problems. Through our tutoring system we strive to be proactive in this support and we monitor student attendance at tutorials as part of our pastoral support strategy. I came into contact with some of the students who did not progress at various points of the academic calendar. From this contact I cannot identify one single reason for their non-completion and failure to progress. Instead, there are several factors that affect non-continuation within HEIs. In this institution, Planning Office data suggests two main factors:

1. gender (males are less likely to progress)

2. qualifications on entry.

8.2   However, further insight based on my daily experiences as the Student Support Administrator and seeing students experiencing difficulties first hand has led to identifying three further categories that can be used to classify reasons for non-continuation:

1. personal/non-academic issues

2. issues of teaching/institution and course match

3. reason unknown.

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[6] http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1438&Itemid=141

Chart 5: Reasons for Non-Continuation
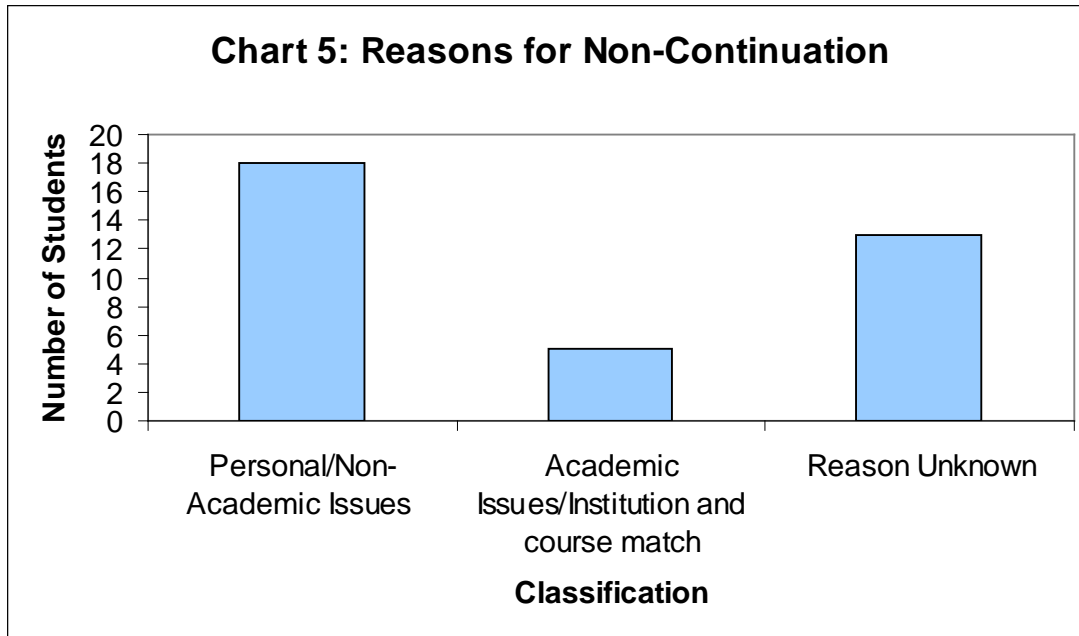
8.3   In my estimation, half of the 36 students can be said to have experienced personal issues that directly contributed to their non-continuation, with under a quarter failing because of academic issues (chart 5). Again, a significant number (13) of the reasons are not known.

8.4   One of the questions featuring in the questionnaire that shaped the research for this paper asked 'what do you believe are the key soft skills that enable students to flourish in HE?' Answers demonstrated that academic attainment never was or will ever be centred on knowledge alone; it is also a test of character, temperament and emotional intelligence. If more of these issues of non-continuation are centred on personal/non-academic issues, issues that cannot be predicted, then perhaps schools, colleges and universities need to be doing more to enhance the 'soft skills' of our students, increasing their communication skills, self-awareness skills and in the process better equipping them with the skills required to deal with the difficulties of life as a young adult in the global community of the 21st century, as opposed to 'just' imparting them with course specific knowledge that enables them to pass exams. The question then becomes, how can we equip these students with these skills?

9   Students who do not progress

9.1   Greater pre-entry work between the School of Law, our feeder institutions and our incoming students may have helped to prevent several of the students' failure in completing or progressing. A question that must be asked is whether or not these students had fully integrated into the institution to a degree that would have enabled them to take the necessary steps to have deferred their studies or sought advice and guidance about how to best handle their academic responsibilities. Moreover, in a large institution such as the School of Law they may not have identified with anyone in whom to confide or been fully aware of the support mechanisms available to them. This would serve to highlight the greater need for support during the induction and transition phases

of the academic cycle. If these students had been sufficiently integrated into the academic processes of the School of Law then perhaps their non-continuation could have been prevented.

9.2   This begs the question what form should this pre-entry work take? Greater links between schools, colleges and universities are no doubt a necessity, but realistically no amount of time spent showing a student how to read case-notes or how to improve their essay writing skills and how to reference will help to enable a student to cope with the trauma of losing a relative, or deal with their guilt over their parents' separation, or be more forthcoming about being trapped in an abusive relationship. For schools, colleges and universities to work more efficiently in preparing students for the transition do they need to become more personal and compassionate institutions that encourage personal growth, openness and emotional intelligence amongst their student bodies? Is there space for a debate about more compassion in higher education?

9.3   If, as suggested previously, there is an issue of gender and male students struggling more than females, how is this issue to be addressed? Do male students need to be integrated into our School of Law and other institutions in a different manner to females? The same questions must also be asked about mature students, where it would seem a greater emphasis on support is needed. The University of Newcastle provides a range of services for their mature students, including employing a Mature Students Support Officer, running a mature students orientation programme, and a guide for mature students.[7] Initiatives such as these, initiatives that offer a more personalised service more tailored to a specific type of student, appear to show a way forward. If we know which types of student are struggling with the transition to higher education, then the basis of our links with schools and colleges should focus on programmes that prepare these students for HE in a more effective manner. Surely the widening participation agenda must also mean widening the support given to the non-traditional students who are now participating. Perhaps these could be the first tentative steps towards a sustainable future. With such a small pool of data it was always going to be impossible to provide clear answers and strategies in this paper; nevertheless, it is hoped that the questions asked here will move the debate further along.

10   Bibliography

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[7] http://www.ncl.ac.uk/undergraduate/support/mature/

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