

New Deal for Communities

The National Evaluation

Research Reports

Widening Participation in Higher Education

Research Report 11

The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit is currently sponsoring the 2002-2005 national evaluation of New Deal for Communities. This evaluation is being undertaken by a consortium of organisations co-ordinated by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University. The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit.

Those wishing to know more about the evaluation should consult the evaluation's web site in the first instance
<http://ndcevaluation.adc.shu.ac.uk/ndcevaluation/home.asp>



Sheffield Hallam University

Widening Participation in Higher Education

Research Report 11

Authors:

Marie Lall
Louise Morley
David Gillborn

Institute of Education, University of London

July 2003
ISBN: 184387 037 1

Contents

Executive summary	i
Introduction.....	1
Context and problem.....	1
Socio-economic context.....	1
The Policy Context	2
Barriers to Participation: research findings	2
Barriers to participation: residents' perceptions	3
Nature of the intervention	4
The Trident Bursary.....	4
The Primary School Project.....	5
Aims and Objectives.....	6
The Trident Bursary scheme.....	6
The Primary scheme.....	6
Beneficiaries	7
Delivery	8
Reaching and maintaining contact with the students	8
The students' community work.....	8
Working with schools and parents in the primary project.....	9
Outcomes and impact	9
What works	10
Problems encountered/ Barriers to be overcome	10
Conclusions.....	11
Key Issues for Partnerships: Widening Participation in Higher Education	12
References	13

Executive summary

The Government has set ambitious targets for increasing the proportion of young people who stay in education beyond 16 (the minimum leaving age) and for widening participation in Higher Education (HE). Widening participation projects have been established in a number of New Deal for Communities (NDC) areas as a part of the education theme programme. However, most established schemes tend to focus on widening participation in Further Education (FE) and not in HE. Widening and increasing HE participation is a highly challenging goal. Nevertheless, if Government targets for this field are to be met, and the potential of NDC residents to be realised, very many more NDCs will have to address this issue in the future. This report on widening participation in HE is based on a case study visit to the Bradford Trident Partnership.

The aim of the schemes was to help overcome barriers experienced by individuals with regard to entering HE. Issues that were seen as barriers locally include:

- **Low aspirations:** People's perceptions of the value of HE and young people's view that HE is not a real possibility for them.
- **Fear of debt:** It is felt that the publicity given by the national press on student loans and debt has adversely affected the local population's perception of HE.
- **Mature students:** The barriers for mature students include balancing the pressures of looking after children and living on a reduced income.

The research to date has identified a number of key attributes of effective widening participation projects:

- **Local knowledge:** Different communities have different needs and approaches have to take into account both social class issues and minority group differences. A key ingredient for this is the organisation that delivers the project on the ground.
- **Tackling financial issues:** The importance of finance and debt issues should not be underestimated. Links with local universities and appropriate 'aftercare' for recently graduated students is also of help.
- **Simplicity and trust:** A simple, yet effective scheme, based on trust allows for a maximum of inclusion without unnecessary administration and bureaucracy.

The research also suggests that the following areas require particular consideration:

- **Part-time study:** Currently only full-time degree students are eligible for support under the scheme.
- **Balancing demand and funding:** The worry that the project might be a victim of its own success highlights the need to review funding locally.
- **Sustainability:** In the long run there are questions about whether the level of cash support is sustainable in the absence of some form of means testing.
- **Risk management:** Although the next bursary instalment is always dependent on the successful completion of the previous term, there is a risk that the funding may not go towards the desired uses, especially if a student 'drops out' of their course.
- **Time demands on students:** The role model structure in itself also brings with it further problems as it pulls students away from their studies (to engage in the community work). However, the flexibility of the scheme allows students to build in time over weekends, evening or during holidays to fulfil their obligations.

Introduction

Widening participation projects have been established in a number of New Deal for Communities (NDC) areas as a part of the education theme programme. However, most established schemes tend to focus on widening participation in Further Education (FE) and not in Higher Education (HE). This overview of widening participation in HE is based on a case study visit to the Bradford Trident Partnership, which from the available evidence seemed to be the partnership that had got furthest with the development of such projects. These are:

- Trident Bursary Scheme – delivered by the Education Advice Service for Adults (EASA): began September 2000
- Excellence Challenge Primary Project (Going On, Primary) – delivered by Excellence Challenge, launched January 2003

Whilst the first project has been running for 2 years and the other has just been set up, they are still in the relatively early stage of development and long-term impact is, as yet, difficult to quantify.

This report covers the following areas:

- The context in which the widening participation projects have been established and the problems they are trying to address
- The nature of the intervention in terms of objectives and targeted beneficiaries
- The way in which the widening participation projects have been delivered, in particular focusing on the two different types of interventions that are offered and the assumptions behind these interventions
- Current outcomes and impact of the project
- Key lessons that have been learnt so far from such interventions

Context and problem

Socio-economic context

According to the baseline information that was gathered to identify local need, the Bradford Trident area has high levels of unemployment (local unemployment is 13% as opposed to 6.4% in the City of Bradford metropolitan district). The area also experiences low levels of household income (34.7% receive income support and 35.9% receive housing benefit, compared to 19% nationally for both income support and housing benefit). Of the residents of working age, 31.4% have no qualifications (17.9% nationally) and 18.5% of the pupils attain no GCSEs (6.6% nationally). A number of families have three or more children (12.6% compared to 6.2% nationally) but there are fewer lone parent families than nationally (6.3% as opposed to 21%). These figures indicate significant poverty and social disadvantage. They also help to explain why few local residents feel they have the option to go into higher education. In part this is the case because many families cannot support children beyond the age of 18. The lack of local role models has furthermore been a key barrier to entry into HE. According to the partnership statistics only 6.8% of local school leavers enter higher education compared to 14.5% for the district. This is despite the fact that over 70% of Bradford residents would not have to pay fees and there are 13 universities within 50 miles of Bradford.

The area also evidences some of the shifting demographics seen elsewhere in Britain. The increased 'individualisation' of life chances and choices and the increased departure from traditional social structures where choices were dictated by gender, social class and local labour market prospects mean that there is an increased risk of social exclusion and poverty in certain areas (Ferri et al 2003). Family structures have also changed, with more single parent families. It is interesting to note, however, that although there is a perception of a large number of lone parent families in the Trident area, in fact the numbers are well *below* the national average (see above).

The area also has a significant proportion of minority ethnic residents with considerable cultural and religious diversity (less than half of NDC residents self classify as 'white'). However, the baseline classification is problematic as three groups (Indians, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis), who account for around 80% of minority ethnic residents, are put together under one heading; as are ethnic Chinese who are regrouped with 'other'. There is evidence that both in education and employment there are strong racial disadvantages in the locality: Only 12.5% of Black Caribbean pupils, 21.8% of Pakistani and 26.4% of Bangladeshi pupils gain five or more higher grade (A* to C) passes in GCSE examinations: compared to 34% of their white peers. Unemployment levels for the Pakistani and Bangladeshi community are 36.1% and 36.4% respectively, compared to the local rate of 13%. The Trident partnership has identified racial disadvantage as being a significant problem in the local area and are trying to address it across the NDC themes of education, housing and health through various programmes and projects.

The Policy Context

Widening participation in higher education is high on the UK Government's policy agenda: the target is for participation of 18-30 year olds to reach 50% by 2010. Working class students are significantly less likely to enter higher education. If they do enter HE, they are more likely to enrol on courses at the so-called 'new' universities, which have higher drop-out rates and lower teaching income per student than the elite universities in the 'Russell Group' (a self-selected elite body of research-led institutions). Access issues are becoming performance indicators in higher education. The White Paper 'The Future of Higher Education' (DfES 2003) is linking participation of 'non-traditional' students with universities' entitlement to raise tuition fees. Official monitoring and regulation is proposed. Geodemographics, including postcodes, are being used to denote a range of social variables and to provide a social class measure.

Barriers to Participation: research findings

There are a number of structural, material and attitudinal barriers to higher education for members of lower social class groups.

- **Debt Aversion:** recent research suggests that financial issues are especially important to working class students who are undecided about entry into HE (Callender 2003). For them, higher education is seen as a particularly 'risky investment'. Their perceptions stem partially from their tendency to overestimate the size of likely student debt and underestimate income. The research further suggests that working class students and Black British students are less willing to incur significant debts than white, middle class students.
- **Expectations:** Because working class students are less likely to enter HE, there is less experience of HE in working class communities. Additionally there is evidence that careers advice does not always project HE as a possibility for students from

disadvantaged backgrounds. Consequently, in areas such as NDC partnerships there is frequently no tradition of HE and a sense that universities are beyond their personal and community experiences.

- **Loss of Community:** Recent studies suggest that working class students often feel marginalised and out of place in HE. They may also feel that they are somehow betraying their roots by making a move into a field that is not usually associated with working class communities (Archer et al 2003; Reay et al 2001).

Barriers to participation: residents' perceptions

'The Bradford disease is to talk ourselves down and to apologise for being Bradfordians' (Excellence Challenge coordinator and assistant head teacher at a local secondary school).

It is clear that many of the issues identified by previous research are evident in the Bradford NDC. According to those interviewed the main reasons for local residents not to consider HE as a viable choice is principally based on low aspirations. Both the project coordinators and the students taking part in the scheme spoke of barriers which went beyond the debt and affordability debate. Whilst that was still seen as a major problem, people's perceptions of the value of HE and young people's view that HE was not a real possibility for them, was considered an even bigger problem:

'For it even to be an aspiration for some of these young people is quite difficult.... For them to even consider... it is just not within their sphere of understanding.' (EASA manager)

'I think it's cultural. (...) Because although there is lots of people in the area, which is a very mixed area, and I feel that if it was more (...) accessible. (...) I think expectation is a barrier (...) but I think it is the low general expectation of people living in that area. You know what I mean – it is almost like a self fulfilling prophecy.' (Student taking part in the bursary scheme)

Fear of debt is undoubtedly a major issue:

'There's a huge lack of understanding about working class and debt. (...) Never a borrower or a lender be, all that sort of stuff was deeply engrained in me.' (Primary Project Manager)

The project coordinators felt that the publicity given by the national press on student loans and student debt had adversely affected the local population's perception of HE.

'The average degree in law will cost you £21,000. And you know, it is making our work almost untenable.' (Excellence Challenge coordinator and assistant head teacher at a local secondary school)

The coordinators found that British Asian students were more likely to attend HE than their white working class counterparts, a pattern that is also reflected in national statistics.

'They are big HE attenders, beyond their profile in the city.' (Excellence Challenge coordinator and assistant head teacher at a local secondary school)

However, there is also a feeling that certain families are concerned that their children might have to leave home to go to university. There is fear that they would risk alienation and isolation (see above).

For mature students the barriers were more about balancing the pressures of looking after children and living on a reduced income. The partnership felt it was a priority to engage and support those who would consider going back into education after having done other things. This would aid capacity building and also demonstrate to other residents that higher education is something that can be taken up at any age. One mature student, for example, mentioned that he thought that the shift from manual labour jobs to the service industry required many to re-qualify and that this scheme could be of help to those who were worried about the financial implications.

Students taking part in the Trident bursary scheme strongly believed that education was important, but they also felt that the wider community might not be aware of the benefits of HE and, indeed, that some might be sceptical of the value of a degree. One student commented on the view that:

‘No matter how good you are and what degrees you have, when you are from the north you have limited ability’.

The fact that universities and HE was seen as mainly a middle class ‘thing’, where they might not quite fit in, was also repeatedly mentioned.

Nature of the intervention

Two models of widening participation in HE projects have been developed in this partnership.

The Trident Bursary

The first is a Bursary scheme, which is now running in its third year and provides for a study bursary for any resident of the Trident area who is studying on a full time first degree: in exchange, students agree to provide 40 hours per year of community work.

The scheme provides a cash grant of £750 (in three instalments: £250 at the start of each term) for the duration of the degree course to residents who go to university on a first full time degree course. In principle the grant was meant to cover only three years, but since some courses are four years long the partnership has recently decided to continue giving the grant until the end of the degree. There are only a minimum of rules and criteria, as it is intended to be as simple as possible: the students have to have been resident in the area for two years and be registered on the electoral role. In return for this they agree to take part in community activities, which can be either a regular weekend/evening session or a summer activity. This community work is intended as a role model activity, which should encourage others in the local area to consider higher education as a viable choice.

‘One of the aims was to increase the number of people. It does not have to be young people going to university. So it would be contrary to the principle aim of the project if we did limit it.’ (Education Coordinator)

The scheme is being delivered by a voluntary group called EASA (Education Advice Service for Adults). They receive a 10% allowance of the bursary project funds for managing it, which is over and above what the students receive. They work with the Bradford Council student loan service, which in turn give them the names and addresses of all students who apply for a student loan with the NDC area postcodes. They approach the potential candidate by letter and then try to find out if the person meets the other necessary criteria. EASA is very proactive in trying to track down the students and there is no selection/ competition as such.

Table 1: Students enrolled in the Trident Bursary Initiative

	Year 1 (2000/01)	Year 2 (2001/02)	Year 3 (2002/03)
Students enrolled	20	30	40
Cumulative total	20	50	90

At first the project was only due to run for three years but, after an internal evaluation by EASA, it has been decided that money will be provided for another six or seven years. By the time the last cohort of students finish their studies the partnership will be in its 9th year (Year 10 will not be an academic year – since NDC planning years run from March to March). The Bursary Project currently has a budget of £269,000 for the first 5 years.

The Primary School Project

The second project is a recently launched pilot that aims to introduce the concept of higher education to primary school pupils through presentations and visits. The project is a part of the Excellence Challenge Scheme (DfES funded and a part of Excellence Challenge) in Bradford that is run in 28 secondary schools, eight primary schools, three FE colleges and 15 universities. The NDC partnership is directly involved through eight primary schools in their area.

‘Excellence Challenge is a mainline EIC strand. So all mainline areas like Bradford, Leeds, and Sheffield have got Excellence Challenge. Because it’s to do with a fifty per cent target for 2010 engaged in higher education, when you look at the staying on rates into higher education from places like Bradford at 14%.’ (Excellence Challenge coordinator and assistant head teacher at a local secondary school)

The project will run for two years in the first instance, introducing first year six (aged 10-11) and later year five pupils (aged 9-10) to the idea of university through visits, drama and other workshops, and by working with role models who are currently at university or who have recently graduated. The project will have a local contact teacher and Roy Long is the manager. Parents are also encouraged to join in the university visit and the scheme hopes to develop other ways of involving parents at a later stage. The idea is to involve parents whilst the children are still young as it is felt they become increasingly disengaged from their child’s education in secondary school.

‘We know it’s often a hard nut to crack because, you know, actually in primary schools parents are pretty good at turning up at the gates. (...) In high schools they are certainly not. You know, you can get them there for parents’ evenings. So perhaps there can be some spin off.’ (Primary Project Manager)

The NDC became involved in this project when it was established that the funding to primary schools was limited to only 5% of the total funds. The partnership’s interest in widening participation in higher education was known and the NDC was approached to co-fund a part of the scheme. They are financing around £20,000 for the first year.

Both the Trident Bursary and the Primary School Project are based on the basic assumption that local residents need support to consider HE as an option.

‘It came from the early days consultation during the planning stage for the delivery plan. Lots of comments from residents and families about getting help with encouraging young people to go to university. (...) It was a comment that was made on sufficient separate occasions by enough different people to convince us that this

would be welcomed widely by residents and schools and by groups in the area.’
(Education Coordinator)

Aims and Objectives

The Trident Bursary scheme

Financial help encouraging students to enter and remain in HE

The idea emerged in the early days of designing the delivery plan when local residents were consulted about local needs. There were comments from resident families about getting help with encouraging young people to go to university. There were concerns about debt, which needed to be addressed.

‘The view was taken that there was quite a lot of support for young people who were going into FE [but not HE].’ (Education Coordinator)

Consequently the partnership decided to focus its resources in the field of widening participation in HE. The basic aim is to increase the number of people who go to university from the local NDC area. The project aims to be as inclusive as possible and is advertised in various community settings (such as mosques, day centres, schools and via a newsletter).

Role model idea to encourage others to consider HE

The basic concept of students returning to work in the community, in their free time, seems to fit in well with other NDC education objectives and projects, such as the homework clubs and learning mentors.

‘Helping young people from nursery to university’ is a commonly stated aspiration among NDC officials in the area.

It is hoped that there will be a ‘trickle down effect’ whereby the local role models would be recognised by other residents who would then consider it a less exceptional choice to go into HE after leaving school. The partnership hopes that after the 10 NDC funded years such a scheme will be un-necessary, as higher education becomes a natural choice for young people everywhere and from every background.

‘Now that I have taken part in this scheme (...) my role is to encourage young people in the area that I live in, especially since it is known as a deprived area, to encourage them that education is a must (sic) that it is vital.’ (Student taking part in the Trident Bursary scheme)

The Primary scheme

Widen horizons and raise aspirations of pupils at an early age

Excellence Challenge aims to help meet the 2010 national target of 50% of young people going into HE. ‘Staying on’ rates for Bradford are 14% and only 6.8% in the Trident area. The aim of the project is to raise aspirations – getting children to believe they can go to university and getting them to realise it early. The hope is that by addressing these issues at an early age, high aspirations and changed expectations will become routine:

'Nothing breeds success like success' (Excellence Challenge coordinator and assistant head teacher at a local secondary school)

'Esteem is a big part of learning' (Primary Project Manager)

Seek parental cooperation and make information available to all

The project also hopes to introduce the local universities to the residents, so that the residents can realise that the students do not necessarily have to live away from home, as this also increases the cost for the family – there are 13 universities within fifty miles of Bradford.

'You know, when families are asking – where do they sleep, these students? It's a big question and it's a big issue, you know, to put people's minds at rest. Certain families don't want sons going away, never mind their daughters.' (Primary Project manager)

It also aims to clarify the funding issue for parents, making sure people know that currently 73% of Bradford students do not need to pay fees.

Both projects fight low self-esteem, low aspirations, poor peer and role modelling from friends and families. They also clarify issues of fear/confusion over finance. This is an increasingly complex area, with the introduction of student loans, followed by discussion about 'top-up fees', and, most recently, a combination of grants and fees. In this fast changing policy context it is hardly surprising that many parents and potential HE entrants are confused and/or feel distant from the system:

'And you can't beat them up for that either, because who *does* know these days? Where are we with fees and top up fees and tuition fees and all that sort of thing? That did HE in the UK a great disservice'. (Primary Project manager)

The aims and objectives of both projects tie in with the wider objectives of the NDC in terms of raising the educational profile of the local community and giving people more life choices.

Beneficiaries

The Bursary scheme is open to all residents (after 2 years of residency) but specifically aims to target white working class and those of minority ethnic backgrounds who cannot/ do not want to be in debt in order to allow their children to go to university.

'Would a bursary of £750 pa help? You do not have to repay the bursary.' (Trident Bursary leaflet)

There is a strong sense that it has already been quite successful at reaching those who *have* considered HE, but will only reach those who have not considered it after a few years, once the 'role model' system has had longer to have an impact. The project is also aware that some eligible students are not picked up initially, and so there are on-going attempts to identify new beneficiaries.

'I was not aware of the scheme when I first enrolled. I found out later through my course and visited the Trident office.' (Mature student taking part in the scheme)

The Primary scheme will involve all year 5 and year 6 pupils and their families from the eight local primary schools. In the current year this means that 360 pupils aged 10 and 11 will participate.

'Going on – Primary will raise children's awareness of local colleges and universities, Going on – Primary will give children a taste of student life' (leaflet published by Bradford Trident)

The project takes a novel approach to a long standing problem. At the time of writing, however, the project was only a few weeks old and so it is too early to comment on how effectively it reaches the target group.

Delivery

Reaching and maintaining contact with the students

EASA manages the daily administration of the Bursary project. They access the students through the Bradford Council student loan services, who in turn give them the names and addresses of all students who apply for a student loan with the NDC area post-codes. They also maintain a good relationship with the students throughout their course and are willing to offer them advice on their voluntary work as well as potentially helping them with their job search after they graduate.

'They (EASA) have a very personal and personable approach to the students and you know, students being students, they forget to send things in or... and I mean, they've even had situations where they haven't really believed it, that somebody is actually going to give them a grant and they have pro-actively encouraged them to – yes, you know, it's to support you.' (Education Co-ordinator)

The Partnership also advertises the scheme widely, including via its newsletters and through fliers in various community locations (including mosques, youth centres, and other drop-in centres).

'We've done a real sort of belt and braces approach by sending out flyers and writing to as many of the community groups in the area as they could think of but sometimes they do miss people who get picked up at a later stage.' (Education Coordinator)

Both the partnership and EASA hope that there will be a 'trickle down' effect, which will gain momentum and naturally increase awareness of the scheme, in turn increasing the number of students in the area.

The students' community work

The students' community work is seen to be fairly flexible. Students choose what they want to do, where and when. Examples of work undertaken include summer schools, organising summer play schemes at the local fairs (which involve children from age 9 to 15), working with cancer patients, homework clubs (where volunteers help children once a week) etc.

'Basically I volunteer there and help the children to read and just generally help them with their homework. So I am just there as another helper within that setting.' (Student taking part in the Bursary scheme)

'In Bradford city centre there was a scheme whereby there was a set of a mini seaside resort, we basically had sort of sand and palm trees and everything; the effect of the seaside. (...) We took the young people down there and it was really good fun.' (Student taking part in the Bursary scheme)

The Trident partnership gives a list of contacts of voluntary groups and activities to EASA that is then passed on to the students, but it is also expected that the students have their own contacts and friendships and may wish to do their voluntary work in a familiar setting. However EASA has to approve the individual projects.

It is interesting to note that the students interviewed did not seem to think that the community work was a 'role model' situation as such. They tended to think of their work more in terms of 'work experience', networking, giving back to the community and adding to their CV.

'To me that's been fulfilling as it has allowed me to open doors, different avenues in interacting with young people. So it's been of tremendous help really because that is the direction I would like to go into, teaching young people as well as adults.' (Student taking part in the Bursary scheme)

Furthermore they feel that schemes like the bursary will encourage others in the community to consider the HE option and to drop a perception of limited ability or limited options.

Working with schools and parents in the primary project

Presentations are organised across all primary schools and visits arranged to local universities with parents and children. Role model students are available for the children to interact with and ask questions. These sessions try to engage children to think about the future before they become cynical. The engagement between pupils and students, getting them together around focused activities and encouraging them to talk to each other, is seen as a critical element of the delivery of the scheme.

The project also creates a network between schools, families and universities/ FE colleges through *Excellence Challenge* and opens that to the NDC partnership and its residents. As schools begin to build contacts with universities it is hoped that more exchange of information will be facilitated and, in time, applying for university will become less daunting (where other local children have already succeeded). In addition, parents and their children will get a more accurate picture of HE requirements, especially relating to fees and debt, through the interaction with students and the coordinators.

Outcomes and impact

The projects aim to change things in the long run and are still at an early stage: even the bursary scheme has not run through a complete degree cycle yet. As a result it is difficult to offer definitive judgments about impact at this stage. Nevertheless, there is a great deal of confidence among those involved in the initiatives and the early signs are positive.

One of the most important outcomes of the Bursary scheme to date is that retention is higher than expected. There were only two 'drop-outs' in the first year and none since: this is a retention rate far in excess of national figures for students from working class backgrounds.

The money has allowed students to make choices, such as buying a computer and studying from home. In effect it has also reduced the financial risk many students would have had to take otherwise:

'I am actually going to get some money to help with my studying which was brilliant. Because what that actually meant was that instead of saying I can't afford to pay for that book, say 30 quid, I could then at least consider it. You know what I mean, it

made a difference, a real big difference to get the information and the study equipment I actually needed.’ (Student taking part in the Bursary scheme)

The scheme also promotes the students’ chances of success beyond the completion of their degree by giving them the opportunity of a community work placement which enhances their employability. In the long run it is hoped that the scheme will help to embed the concept of higher education in the local community, not least by having been a lived experience for an increasing number of local residents.

What works

Widening participation projects aim to encourage more students to ‘stay on’ in education. The idea is to bring potential students and universities together, overcoming real and imagined barriers.

Local knowledge: For the Bursary project to work elsewhere it is essential that local staff know the area well, so as to be able to reach those in the community who would want to go into higher education, yet do not have the means and/or the knowledge on how to do so. Different communities have different needs and have to be approached by taking into account both social class issues and minority group differences. A key ingredient for this is the organisation that actually delivers the project on the ground. The support on offer has to be personalised and available for both parents and students.

Tackling financial issues: The importance of finance and debt issues should not be underestimated. Links with local universities and appropriate ‘aftercare’ for recently graduated students is also of help. Links with other national projects, such as *Excellence Challenge*, which can open up a national network for a local area, are to be encouraged.

Simplicity and trust: The Trident partnership has managed to set up a simple, yet effective scheme, based on trust, that allows for a maximum of inclusion (no means testing) and without unnecessary administration and bureaucracy of checking how funds are being used.

As we have noted, the Bursary scheme has yet to complete a full degree cycle. Nevertheless, the signs are encouraging and confidence is high. At least one other partnership has already been in touch to discuss developing a similar scheme.

Problems encountered/ Barriers to be overcome

This overview of the HE widening participation projects has raised a number of issues of which other NDC areas should be aware.

Part-time study: One of the major issues raised was that of students who are registered part-time: currently only full-timers are eligible for support under the scheme. Neither are Higher National Diplomas or Diplomas of Higher Education considered to be eligible courses of study: where such courses are converted into a degree, the conversion year is eligible for funding. The logic behind these decisions reflected caution and a desire to avoid diluting support to a point that it would become meaningless. Part-time students were also seen as taking longer and often having a job. However, this does raise certain questions in terms of the recent White Paper’s recommendations to increase access to HE via two-year foundation degrees. The partnership is aware of the issues this has raised and the fact that student needs may be wider than was initially supposed.

Balancing demand and funding: The coordinators face a constant worry that the project might be a victim of its own success; again, highlighting the need to review funding locally.

‘If there was an avalanche one year then we would probably have to go back to the working group and either look to extend the budget or possibly dilute the amount to each student.’ (Education Coordinator)

Sustainability: In the long run there are questions about whether this level of cash support is sustainable in the absence of some form of means testing. However, the simplicity of the scheme, and the trust it shows in NDC residents, are part of its strength.

Risk management: The coordinators are also aware of an inherent risk in giving money upfront. Although the next bursary instalment is always dependent on the successful completion of the previous term, there is a risk that the funding may not go towards the desired uses, especially if a student ‘drops out’ of their course. To date, however, the risk has paid off and any decision to make the scheme more bureaucratic could backfire.

Long-term solutions to immediate problems: Both projects seek to build greater awareness and raise expectations within the NDC area. The Bursary scheme, for example, addresses not only those students who gain directly, but also the wider community and successive generations of potential students. This approach is exemplified in the primary project which, by definition, addresses an audience of pupils who are literally years away from university entry (no matter how exciting the prospect). In view of the pressing needs in the area, and the target for improved HE participation by the end of the decade, there is a case for considering additional approaches that operate within a shorter timeframe.

Time demands on students: The role model structure in itself also brings with it further problems as it pulls students away from their studies (to engage in the community work). However, the flexibility of the scheme allows students to build in time over weekends, evening or during holidays to fulfil their obligations. The rate at which this community work is, in effect, paid for is also higher than most part time jobs (it works out at £18.75 an hour) and represents excellent value for the student.

Conclusions

The policy context for Higher Education is a fast changing, sometimes confusing arena. Add to this the lack of an HE tradition in the NDC areas and it is clear that widening and increasing HE participation is a highly challenging goal. Nevertheless, if government targets for this field are to be realised, and the potential of NDC residents to be fulfilled, *very* many more NDCs will have to address this issue in the future.

Although still in its infancy, the Bradford partnership has shown that real progress can be made. The Trident partnership has developed an interesting approach to this issue, which addresses current needs and demands (through a bursary scheme) as well as trying to encourage greater demand in the future (through the primary school scheme).

Signs of early impact are very encouraging: Every year has seen a marked increase in the number of students taking part and retention rates are high. Other partnerships have already expressed interest in the schemes. A similar project, for example, may be established in the Kensington partnership in Liverpool. The projects in Bradford are not perfect, but they offer a practical approach and show promising signs of impact.

Key Issues for Partnerships: Widening Participation in Higher Education

Barriers

- **Low aspirations:** NDC residents often view Higher Education (HE) as an unrealistic ambition. In addition, they are frequently sceptical about its usefulness.
- **Fear of debt:** It is felt that the publicity on student loans and debt has heightened residents' fears of getting into debt through HE.
- **Mature students:** The barriers for mature students include balancing the pressures of looking after children and living on a reduced income.

Emerging Good Practice

- **Local knowledge:** Different communities have different needs and approaches have to take into account both social class issues and minority group differences. A key ingredient for this is the skill and knowledge of the organisation that delivers the project on the ground.
- **Use of local mentors:** A key aspect of this case study concerns using local residents with positive experience of HE as mentors for others. This is a relatively simple, but potentially very powerful, approach.
- **Tackling financial issues:** The importance of finance and debt issues should not be underestimated. Links with local universities and appropriate 'aftercare' for recently graduated students is also of help.
- **Simplicity and trust:** A simple, yet effective scheme, based on trust allows for a maximum of inclusion without unnecessary administration and bureaucracy.

Continuing Issues and Problems

- **Part-time study:** It is important that schemes give equal consideration to the possibilities for part-time study. This will be especially useful for certain groups of residents (such as lone parents) for whom full-time study may not be practical.
- **Balancing demand and funding:** Funding levels should be reviewed regularly to ensure that growing demand can be met without jeopardizing quality.
- **Sustainability:** resource levels must be sustained if early successes are to be built upon. In this case study, for example, there are questions about whether the level of cash support is sustainable in the absence of some form of means testing.
- **Risk management:** security of funding must be balanced against possible losses where students 'drop out' before completing their studies.
- **Time demands on students:** The role model structure in itself also brings with it further problems as it pulls students away from their studies (to engage in the community work). However, the flexibility of the scheme allows students to build in time over weekends, evening or during holidays to fulfil their obligations.

References

Archer, L., Hutchins, M., Ross, A., Leathwood, C., Gilchrist, R., and Phillips, D. (2003) *Higher Education and Social Class: Issues of Exclusion and Inclusion*. London, RoutledgeFalmer.

Callender, C. (2003) *Attitudes to Debt and its Impact on Participation in Higher Education*.
www.universitiesuk.ac.uk

Department for Education & Skills (DfES) (2003) *The Future of Higher Education*. London DfES.

Ferri, E. Bynner, J. and Wadsworth, M. (eds.) (2003) *Changing Britain, Changing Lives: Three generations at the turn of the century*. London, Institute of Education.

Reay, D., M. David, and S.J. Ball (2001). "Making a Difference: Institutional Habituses and Higher Education Choice." *Sociological Research Online* 5(4):
<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/5/4.reay.html>.