

New Deal for Communities

The National Evaluation

Research Reports

Social Disadvantage and Widening Participation in Higher Education

Research Report 52

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Social Disadvantage and Widening Participation in Higher Education

Research Report 52

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Executive Summary

There is a strong desire in current policy to widen participation in higher education from lower socio-economic groups. Government initiatives include the 2003 White Paper (DfES, 2003b); the DfES report on Widening Participation (2003a); the establishment of the DfES/HEFCE project AimHigher; the development of an Office for Fair Access (OFFA) and the appointment of a Director of Fair Access in 2004. Despite these many initiatives social disadvantage and poverty continue to impede educational opportunities and work against participation in higher education.

Two schemes currently exist within the NDC programme to promote widening participation initiatives. These are in Bradford, Yorkshire and in Tower Hamlets, London. Both areas have high levels of poverty and social disadvantage in terms of unemployment, poor housing, low levels of household incomes and low educational attainment. On a positive note, both areas have considerable cultural and religious diversity and community-based activities. Our case study data exemplifies a key paradox, i.e. that higher education can be a ladder out of poverty, but that poverty can impede participation in higher education. The education theme team originally visited the Bradford project for an earlier report: this return visit offers an opportunity to see whether the project has built on its early successes.

The projects have been especially **successful** in certain respects:

- Bradford has attempted to address financial and aspirational barriers to higher education. Two models of widening participation in HE projects have been developed in Bradford NDC. They include a bursary scheme aimed at the local student population and a primary scheme aimed at familiarising primary school children with higher education.
- Tower Hamlets Ocean NDC has replicated the bursary scheme with a recent start in January. It is hoped that the bursary scheme will also help develop a network of local role models in the area.
- In both NDCs the original objective was to encourage and support more residents from the local area to access higher education. The other key objective was for those people who receive bursaries to then become local role models within the community.

Key factors associated with successful initiatives are:

- The evaluation found that in all the cases of the 21 students interviewed across the two NDCs, the decision to go to university was taken before they were aware that they would qualify for a bursary. In many cases the students had even started their course. However, the financial aspect of the bursary helped a number of them avoid dropping out, as there was a sense that their debt would be reduced.
- The bursaries helped students financially, but they also helped to develop a commitment to the local community and social responsibility.
- The fact that the community work remains **flexible** is necessary for students who take up a university place away from the local area.

Some **barriers and problems** remain:

- The Tower Hamlets project is having some teething problems. The Sixth Form College managing the bursaries had a delayed start in January. They have not yet appointed the two positions paid for by the NDC. It is hoped that they will be able to benefit from some of the good practices that have been highlighted in the Bradford project.
- By its nature, NDC resourcing must focus on residents in the designated area: however, the high levels of need locally do not end with the particular postcodes selected for inclusion and some potential students might end up being excluded from eth scheme on the basis of where they live.

Introduction

Although increasing participation in Higher Education (HE) is a major strand of government policy, to date only 2 NDC partnerships appear to have included initiatives for widening participation in HE. The situation has only marginally improved since data for the first report were gathered almost three years ago. The first project, in Bradford, seems to have been replicated more recently in Tower Hamlets. This report on the issue arises from work in 2004/05.

The report focuses on fieldwork undertaken in two NDCs:

- Bradford (Trident NDC)
- Tower Hamlets (Ocean NDC)

The projects that are in progress vary in focus and size and have been running for different lengths of time. The Bradford project started in 2000, the Tower Hamlets project started in January. We visited the Bradford project for an earlier report on widening participation (Lall & Morley, 2003); this return visit allows us to gauge whether the project has been able to build on its original successes.

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
- evaluation of current outcomes and impacts of the projects
- 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). In Tower Hamlets unemployment is around 20%, 51% of local households have incomes of less than £10,000 per annum, 33% receive income support and 55% receive housing benefit.

Table 1: Unemployment levels locally and nationally

Tower Hamlets Ocean NDC	20%
Bradford Trident NDC	13%
National	3.1%

Source: Partnership baseline information (Delivery Plan 1999)

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 economically support children beyond the age of 18. This

is compounded by levels of educational achievement in the NDC areas which are traditionally well below the national average, as indicated, for example, in Table 2. This illustrates a key paradox: higher education is perceived as one ladder out of poverty, yet poverty appears to play a significant role in impeding participation. The issue of student finance has received attention in media coverage and public debate, especially where issues of recruitment are concerned (Callender 2003).

Table 2: Residents (working age only) without qualifications

Tower Hamlets Ocean NDC	41%
Bradford Trident NDC	31.4%
National	16%

Source: MORI¹

In Bradford of the residents of working age, 31.4% have no formal 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). According to the partnership statistics only 6.8% of the 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. (All data Partnership delivery plan 1999)

Both areas also have a significant proportion of minority ethnic residents with considerable cultural and religious diversity. 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.²

A central recommendation in the Schwartz Report (2004) was that for university admissions, it is fair and appropriate to consider contextual factors as well as formal educational achievement.

The Policy Context

There is a considerable emphasis within national policy on the need to widen participation in higher education. Reaching the target of 50% participation in higher education amongst those under 30 by 2010 is the cornerstone of the government's widening participation policy. Access to university education is seen as an important policy intervention to counter social exclusion and poverty, and to promote local and national regeneration across the UK. Universities are seen as playing a vital part in expanding opportunity and advancing social justice (DfES, 2003b). The Scottish Parliament established widening participation as **Milestone 16** in progress towards a more socially just Scotland (Scottish Executive, 1999).

The expansion of higher education in the UK has been rapid. The number of people in England who seek a higher education qualification has grown enormously, with over 934,000 full-time undergraduate students and an additional 521,000 studying part-time. The student population studying HE is diverse, but certain groups are still under-represented (Schwartz, 2004).

The DfES and Universities UK acknowledge that the gap between students from higher and lower socio-economic groups is still 'stubborn' (DfES 2004b:76). Around half of the population describe themselves as working in occupations which are classified as skilled (manual), partly

¹ NDC National Evaluation: Wave 1 Household Data: our thanks to Dr Mike Grimsley of Sheffield Hallam University for additional analyses of these data.

² All statistical data taken from the Partnership's baseline information which was attached to the delivery plan.

skilled or unskilled. Yet, in 2000 just 18% of young people from these backgrounds were benefiting from higher education (DfES, 2003a).

In the past, people from working class backgrounds have largely accessed higher education through part time provision and the polytechnic sector. The expectation that they will be full time university students at 18 or of there being a local 'university' to go to, is a relatively new, essentially post 1992, phenomenon in the UK (Connor *et al.*, 2004). Hence, there have been some important national milestones in recent policy developments to support this important transition:

- in 1998, the then Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals (now known as Universities UK) published an influential report 'From elitism to inclusion: good practice in widening access to higher education'
- "The Future of Higher Education", the Government White Paper published in January 2003, included a clear commitment to widen participation in higher education, and signalled the introduction of an "Access Regulator" to approve access agreements before any institution can charge higher variable fees
- the DfES published "Widening Participation in Higher Education" in 2003, which included its proposals for the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) and its vision for widening participation, including in the context of higher fees. Both these documents were widely circulated and generated a large volume of consultation responses
- the Higher Education Act 2004 provided a framework for the work of the Director of Fair Access (otherwise known as OFFA), and further details of access agreements
- the Schwartz Report (2004) was published and this drew attention to the need for admissions processes to be fair and transparent. A fair admissions system is understood as one that provides equal opportunity for all individuals, regardless of background, to gain admission to a course suited to their ability and aspirations
- Sir Martin Harris was appointed as Director of Fair Access on 15 October 2004
- the DfES/HEFCE AimHigher Programme was set up to raise aspirations and provide information to young people from 'non-traditional' backgrounds, such as minority groups and disabled persons. The project also aims to offer information and support about financial matters. The programme is supported by the organisation Action on Access

Policy is focussing on 'four conditions which need to be met if a capable student is to embark on an appropriate higher education course' (DfES 2003a:7). These are: attainment, aspiration, application and admission. There is also awareness that initiatives for change need to be regionally specific and rooted in the practice and strategic planning of organisations. For example, the new AimHigher programme uses a regionally based structure with commitment from practitioners' currently, 90% of higher education institutions are involved (HEFCE, 01/36a 2001:3)

Widening participation has also been structurally linked to government funding of higher education. Higher education institutions need to comply with revised admissions' procedures in order to be able to charge 'top-up' fees. Hence, the role of the Office of the Director of Fair Access to Higher Education (OFFA) is to scrutinise the Access Agreements that higher education institutions submit and then approve the use of top-up fees.

Another key intervention to promote widening participation is the use of outreach programmes and initiatives to raise aspirations of 'non-traditional' learners (DfES, 2004a). Hence, the projects discussed in this report clearly articulate with government policy.

Main barriers to participation, retention and achievement in HE as seen by local residents

Poverty and physical space are inextricably linked. As detailed above NDC residents live in disadvantaged, and often overcrowded areas. This is often compounded by large families living in reduced space. In general this results in many of the young people not being able to study and do the required homework for school. Educational achievement is affected and consequently, their chances of entering higher education are substantially reduced.

'...because people live in over crowded households and often the older siblings either don't have somewhere quiet to study at home because they're sharing bedrooms, and there aren't enough rooms in the house (...) and I'd say it's the girls' parenting duties as well (...) and it's not through a lack of will on the part of families, families want to be supportive, but if you live in an over crowded household then it is difficult to find somewhere quiet to study.' (Education Co-ordinator, Trident NDC).

As the above quotation illustrates, poverty also has gender implications, with young women sometimes being expected to take responsibility for caring and domestic roles in addition to their school responsibilities. This is a feature noted in many studies in low-income countries too (Dunne and Leach 2005; Morley *et al.* 2005). Participation in the public spheres of education and employment are often restricted by gendered responsibilities in the private domain.

Much research has been conducted on the influence of family background, local community and participation in higher education (e.g. Ball *et al.*, 2002; Tamboukou and Ball, 2002). Dyhouse (2002) concludes that there is a 'multiplier effect' to higher education. That is, if one person in an extended family participates, then they are likely to recommend higher education to family and friends. This can also be a form of support once higher education is accessed. This is one way in which working class students are often disadvantaged because they are less likely to have experience of HE in their families.

The Trident area's residents do not have a tradition of going into higher education. Most of the students interviewed for this report were the first in their families to go to university. Some had elder siblings who have studied, but none had parents with a university background. This resulted in a marked lack of role models and informal guidance and support.

Another factor was low achievement at school level, which can mean that young people do not consider higher education as an option. Nationally, there is still a strong correlation between socio-economic background and educational attainment. For example, only 19% of those from manual backgrounds gain two or more A-levels by the age of 18 compared to 43% from non-manual backgrounds (DfES, 2003a). However low achievement in school is not necessarily an indication of potential or ability. The Schwartz Report (2004) noted that while prior educational attainment data remain the best single indicator of success at undergraduate level, and continues to be central to the admissions process; equal examination grades do not necessarily represent equal potential.

While lack of preparedness for higher education can be a factor, often slightly older residents will consider going to university as mature students.

'... you get large numbers coming out of schools with virtually no qualifications at all, very low levels of literacy and numeracy who then find their way into work (...) who progress over a period of years and by the time they get to, usually 25, to 35 start to re-evaluate where they are. They can see that they've got 30 or 40 years of working life left and do I want to be doing this for the next 30 or 40 years and that's when we tend to pick up an awful lot of them.' (Project Co-ordinator Trident Bursary project)

'I think they need to see more successful people on Ocean Estate actually saying that yeah, this is what I've achieved through going to university. Because I don't think that there's enough, or if there are they're hidden away somewhere because I don't know, I don't know if it's true but a lot of people might have degrees on the Ocean but they probably move away from the Estate. So there's not many people there, that people can look up to and say he's got an education and he's doing really well.' (Student 3 Ocean NDC)

In much of the debate on widening participation, a combination of structures and agency are perceived to be major factors. The structures relate to material poverty, educational disadvantage, institutions' perceptions about low-risk entrants and lack of mechanism for support for 'non-traditional' students. Agency can relate to aspirations and confidence. Our interviewees made links between structures and agency and comment on how social disadvantage can influence how people see themselves and their future options:

... '[Not] self esteem per se, quite so much as...' 'I'd never see myself doing that and I'm not sure I could see myself doing that'. And I think again recognising that people in their first year are finding it very daunting, (...) it's probably a much bigger step for people from this area to take (...) but I think for people from this area, from families where there is no prior history of take-up in higher education, (...) where the family has no understanding or comprehension of the higher education system and it's a huge leap for both young people and more mature people to take...' (Project Co-ordinator Trident Bursary project)

Often a lack of information on the variety of courses and the range of careers after university means that potential students do not know what to study. While there are strong initiatives to locate universities in their local communities, there is still a strong sense that universities only represent the interests of a socially privileged minority. The myth that university is only for the 'gifted' or those who did well at school is another barrier.

'I think another is like not many people know what to do like a degree in. They don't know what they can, you could say, I don't know what I'm going to do to be honest with you...' (Student 2 Trident NDC)

'Because a lot of people I talk to, are like (...) what's the point? I'm not clever enough, I can't do this, can't get...as soon as they think you do sciences, they assume that you've got to be really, really clever, a lot of it is, the way I see it is there are so many courses that you can go into absolutely anything you want to, and people don't realise that...you don't have to go GCSEs, A-levels - you can do you know other sort of courses and get to uni that way.' (Student 5 Trident NDC)

The issues of debt and delayed earnings are central to many young people when considering HE:

'Most people are stopping because they don't think it's worth going down the education, they think the money is there and start working and just getting along, they can't be arsed with 3 years or 4 years studying, plus 2 years A-levels, 5 years. (...) Extra 5 years, since they are 16, they think, "Oh I can get a job and start earning..." (Student 3 Trident NDC)

Our findings are similar to those of Callender (2003) who reported 'debt aversion' as a significant deterrent to participation. Even if young people decide to go into HE, there are still many who eventually 'drop out' and leave with no qualification and a general sense of failure. Often this is due to not having been told what to expect, to the wrong choice of subject or institution, or, once again, to poverty (Yorke *et al.*, 2002). In his earlier study, Yorke (1997) identified the five most significant reasons for student non completion generally as: incompatibility between the student and institution, lack of preparation for the higher education experience, lack of commitment to the course, financial hardship, and poor academic progress.

Lack of preparedness, particularly for independent learning was noted in this study. Most of the students interviewed for this evaluation mentioned how their biggest shock was that they were left to their own devices and had to manage their time and studies without lecturers chasing them. In fact, not understanding the way universities work and the level of freedom and independence, can in turn lead to failure and dropout.

'...they're told that university isn't as difficult as the A-levels, therefore a lot of time in the first semester is wasted (...) they don't realise until later in the first year that you've got to get your head down and study cos otherwise you're not going to pass it. And when you get to the point where you either, you're going to fail it or you're going to get a very low grade, you've got the choice of re-sitting that same year or going on to another degree, and some people decide, "Well I don't want to be, I'll have wasted a whole year I might as well just leave it"...' (Student 4 Trident NDC)

Nature of the Intervention

In view of the low levels of students from NDC areas entering Higher Education, two NDCs have decided to offer tailored 'Widening Participation' schemes. Two models of widening participation in HE projects have been developed in Bradford NDC. They include a bursary scheme aimed at the local student population and a primary scheme aimed at bringing the reality of Higher Education into primary schools. The bursary scheme has been replicated by Tower Hamlets Ocean NDC with a recent start in January 2005. It is hoped that the bursary scheme will not only develop a network of local role models in the area, but also address some of the local barriers explored above.

The Trident Bursary

The Bursary scheme is now running in its fifth year and provides for a study bursary for any resident (of any age) 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. 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. The Bursary was nominated for an NDC Achievement award and came second.

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 additional selection/competition as such.

The Primary School Project

The second project, Excellence Challenge Primary Project (Going On, Primary) is delivered by Excellence Challenge and was launched in January 2003. It 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 Further Education colleges and 15 universities. The NDC partnership is directly involved through eight primary schools in their area.

The project introduces year six (aged 10-11) and 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. 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 Ocean Bursary scheme

The Ocean Bursary scheme resembles the Trident scheme in many ways. The bursary scheme was developed for Ocean NDC residents who enter higher education in academic year 2003/04 to fund up to 20 students per year (the evaluation was assured that if there are to be greater numbers of qualifying students in future, the scheme would be expanded accordingly). It is expected that by the third year of the scheme there will be up to 60 students receiving funding. A critical aspect of this project is to encourage young people to take up higher education places and to act as role models for young people in the area. The qualifying criteria for the bursary award are that the student has to have been an Ocean NDC resident for at least two years continuously immediately prior to undertaking a higher education degree course, have acquired a place on nationally recognised higher education course leading to degree status, and be aged between 18 and 21 years of age when they commence their higher education place. Each student is to receive £1500 over three years divided into £600, £300 and £600 for years one, two and three respectively. There is no means testing as it is expected that residents on the Ocean estate are sufficiently disadvantaged to benefit from this scheme. The bursary scheme is delivered through the Tower Hamlets Sixth Form College. The NDC has made funds available for two posts to be financed to run the scheme - one widening participation officer (full time for two years) and one part time administrator. To date these posts have not been filled.

Aims and Objectives

In both NDCs the original objective was to encourage and support more residents from the local area to access higher education. The other key objective was for those people who receive bursaries to then become local role models within the community. In Bradford this has meant giving back up to 40 hours a year community service. The hope was that more people within the community would see people doing degrees and that would help raise people's aspirations about the possibility of university study.

In Tower Hamlets the project emerged out of a piece of research that looked at the experience of young people on the Ocean Estate. Rather than asking the question 'why do people *not* go on to university from council estates', to ask, 'why *do* people go on to higher education from council estates? What is special about those young people?' The fact that the estate is directly across the road from Queen Mary College of the University of London and that there are a number of other universities nearby raised questions about access and perceptions that led to the development of the project. At first a publication, entitled 'Aiming Higher' was produced, based on in-depth interviews with young people from the estate who had successfully gone to university. This was followed by the setting up of the bursary project, which aims to encourage the young residents to go into Higher Education and to create a local network of role models spreading information to perpetuate increased access.

In neither of the two projects was the actual monetary value of the bursary seen as central:

'... and whilst the 750 bursary per year, wasn't a sufficient incentive to make people think, yes I want to do a degree, it was something to really help and recognise and make it slightly easier for them.' (Trident Bursary project manager)

However, in the case of the Bradford Trident bursary the money can make a significant difference in a student's life. It remains to be seen whether the much reduced figure of £1500 in a London borough spread over three years will have a similar effect.

'... one of the outcomes of the research really was, in a way finance is not the major obstacle to our students' participation in higher education because they mainly go local and their costs, day-to-day costs are pretty low because of the life style they lead. (...) In itself it [£600] won't will it? Because in itself I would not go to university for the sake of 600 pounds in the first year. I don't think that's going to make the decision, but as I say partly as a symbolic act, partly because of the publicity it will generate, and partly I suppose on the margins for some people it may be the difference between going or not. But I think the key thing will be the follow on that the involvement of students and widening participation work will be the thing, in the long term, will be the effect.' (Project Manager Ocean Bursary)

The evaluation found that in all the cases of the 21 students interviewed across the two NDCs, the decision to go to university was taken **before** they were aware that they would qualify for a bursary. In many cases the students had even started their course. However, the financial aspect of the bursary helped a number of them avoid dropping out, as there was a sense that their debt would be reduced.

The role of the still to be appointed widening participation officer in Tower Hamlets is seen as central to the Ocean project. It is expected that the person in this post will liaise with the students on the scheme, organise events in schools where the students can speak to young pupils and also help raise HE participation figures from the local sixth form college (at which s/he will be based).

Beneficiaries

The students on the programme receiving the bursaries are the primary beneficiaries in the short-term. However, there are numerous longer term social benefits from increased levels of HE participation.

In Bradford a cohort of students have come to the end of their degree program and have given feedback that they have found it useful and beneficial. Most of them also found the voluntary work a rewarding experience and there have been quite a lot of complimentary thank-you letters from the community-based organisations. Aside from the voluntary organisations benefiting, students have realised that work experience helped them get jobs.

'It encourages people to go to university. Plus the voluntary work that you do, it's good on your CV as well, so you can apply for a job and it's like good saying that I've done voluntary work in 3 different areas. (...) I did one in a primary school, I did one with the local health action project, I did some voluntary work with them and I'm doing some with another school, like special needs and stuff.' (Student 1 Trident NDC)

Students feel that going to university is a difficult but individual choice that they have to make. Many of their friends remain on the estate and success and failure are often linked to peer group influence. In this case what makes a difference is that the widening participation project

will give more people contacts with community members who have been academically successful:

'...Do you know when like it's a really bad area its got like high crime rates and you know people like smoking drugs in East London. I'm sure you remember like (...) you know its all about influence. One does it and the rest joins in like, without, taking...whatever the consequences, that's it. I decided to take a different path in life that's all.' (Student 1 Ocean NDC)

Although the bursary may not have been the key factor in deciding people to apply to HE, it can be critical in helping them remain on course:

'Basically I was the only person from my household to go to university, so basically it was an extra help because I didn't really get much (...) support from family in terms of financially (...) if I needed anything at university any end of year bills to pay, or books to buy or things like that, so it did help.' (Student 2 Trident NDC)

For some it meant that they could reduce their part-time work, which helped not getting distracted from their studies.

'... this really helps (...) some people go into part time jobs, to like, to help them with expenses well then they get so into work and they get used to the money and then they cool off the education.' (Student 7 Trident NDC)

The primary scheme benefits the young children in primary schools, but also their parents as it gives information at an early age about what Higher Education is like. It allows children and parents to ask questions, visit universities and experience a day in the life of a student. During the evaluation such a day visit was a part of the programme and it was clear that the pupils all were very intrigued by the life the students led. Often the primary focus of their questions were mundane things, such as where the students slept and ate and if they had to work hard, but many also had their curiosity awakened by the demonstrations in the science labs. Some of the local students on the bursary scheme take this opportunity to do some of their community work in the schools where the primary scheme is operating.

'... the "Going on Primary" scheme (...) has been picking up our own students to come back in and work on that scheme. Because, partly because it's a good scheme, and it's good fun and (...) lots of positive feedback from the young children and their schools, and (...) it's been very nice to see our students, because that's so powerful when those kids recognise these are students - "But hang on I see you", and "I've seen you somewhere else, and yet you live in the next street", so that, for me, that's been the biggest positive.' (Education Co-ordinator, Trident NDC)

When asked what their message to other, potential students would be, the bursary holders were full of enthusiasm:

'Go for it. (...) Knowledge is power. I think it's good to be educated, the young people so basically, I think it improves their thinking as well, their outlook on life.' (Student 2 Trident NDC)

Several specified that the myths surrounding Higher Education had to be broken and that getting information to potential students was key:

'... that they have to be aware that university isn't only about the arts, isn't only about the sciences, there's large variety of subjects to study, they can go into mechanics, even go into things that they haven't contemplated (...) for example fashion, they don't think that

fashion is available at university. (...) find out which course they enjoy and something they do well in.' (Student 6 Trident NDC)

Delivery

The Trident Bursary scheme is delivered by EASA, a voluntary organisation. The main change made to the delivery since the project started was to extend funding to EASA to allow them to track students once their degrees had ended and to give them exit interviews and career guidance (such as help with CVs and job applications). EASA still informs potential, eligible students by letter. However the evaluation found that a number of students found out about the bursary through word of mouth and friends and that number had been picked up in the course of their first year at university. Whilst there was no 'back pay', all eligible students who had started their studies received the bursary.

In general the project is well received by the local community, the voluntary organisations involved and the students (who find that the money makes a substantial difference to their lives).

'It's a popular project, and ...I value it partly because it feels like a genuine response to what people ask for. (...) I think it is having an impact that was always hoped for which is that we are building a body of people in the area who are graduates, who are articulate and (...) involved in their community, many of them are involved anyway but all of them are involved as a result of the bursary scheme through their work with young people, and I think that there's, (...) some cement going into the community that will have a long term effect.' (Education Co-ordinator, Trident NDC)

2006 will be the last intake of students for 4- and 3-year degrees. There is no new intake planned beyond this as the project does not want to differentiate between three and four year degree entrants in 2007. By 2010 well over 200 students are expected to have benefited from the bursary project. Students are enthusiastic, especially as they understand that it reduces their debts substantially:

'It's a lot of money when you think about it, 750 pounds, (...) and you know that you don't have to pay it off, (...) it helped me (...) it's not as much as some of my friends and they were like, "Oh I wish we'd got that cos it would be a lot easier and we wouldn't have to worry about paying it back".' (Student 1 Trident NDC)

The 40 hours community service are not seen as a big impediment. As mentioned above many students found the work experience useful and a number of them had done community work before and saw this as a natural way of giving back.

'I knew that from the beginning, that I'd have to do community, but I've done loads of voluntary work in the last few years so it wasn't something that was...you know...I've already done the voluntary work.' (Student 5 Trident NDC)

'...it gives you an idea of which direction you would like to work in, what career you'd like to delve into, so that gave me that opportunity as well, that was, that's the good thing of the bursary really, the experience that you work in, it's only 40 hours which is not much really over the summer.' (Student 8, Trident NDC)

The Primary Project

The co-ordinator of the Primary Project increased the size of an already successful scheme with NDC funding. Programmes are run through the individual primary schools. Students meet

pupils and talk about their experiences and both pupils and parents are taken on fieldtrips to universities to experience campus life first-hand. The students take care of the children, starting off by explaining who they are and what they do. The children are then split into groups and taken to different areas of the university. They have lunch in the refectory and are taken to lectures. Some specific stalls are also set up for them with staff offering scientific demonstrations.

'... when I first went in I thought that, children wouldn't be really that fascinated and I was thinking oh they're too young, they're not going to know. But they really are, it's like... if I see a miracle today it amazes me and that's how it is with them: it's as though we're showing them a miracle. (...) and the children, they ask us questions and you'd not think they'd be so interested to know but there's things like, who's your lecturer? And how many lectures do you have in a day? And what time do you start and what time do you finish? And they want to know every single detail (...) and you know, you'd think they're too young to begin at that age, but when you take them they aren't too young too learn that they've got to go there one day, if they have an aim now they'll aim for the right direction.' (Student 4 Trident NDC)

Since last year the Primary project has expanded to include visits to local companies and give the children a taste of working life. This was on the basis of feedback from the coordinating team at one of the primary schools had an anxiety that the success of the project was perhaps detracting from other possible destinations at the end of compulsory schooling. As a result the NDC decided to broaden that scheme to include visits to local companies.

'... and that took us to our own business forum, where we made a presentation about the importance of education and training for their future business and so on. And they were very, very positive about working with us and the reaction of local businesses has been absolutely super.' (Education Co-ordinator, Trident NDC)

This in turn has led to a link between the education and the worklessness programme at NDC level. The summer school that is run by the project has been extended from one week to a fortnight: one week is spent out in local firms, plus people from firms going in to the primary schools. The link with education and jobs is made as individuals explain their role and what they did at university to get into that profession. Examples included accountants and IT managers who work in local firms.

'Well one company (...) they make (...) cooked chilled food for mass catering, Asian food, and they were a real supporter of this idea, and they were wondering, you know, we're going to have 30 primary age kids wandering around our food preparation factory, what shall we do? So they simply decided to shut down, yep they lost a days production. (...) All the staff came in, they were paid to come in, and they ran it for the kids, so the kids made their own food that day and ate it. (...) the children actually realised that the people working in these businesses, had all got degrees.' (Education Co-ordinator, Trident NDC)

Outcomes and Impact

The impact of the bursary project has been immediate. There has been an increase in students and a reduction in dropouts. Many of the students are the first in their family to go to university and being linked into the bursary project they feel encouraged to go on even when things get difficult. Hence, there are wider social benefits embedded in the bursary scheme-beyond that of material support.

'...after the foundation year there was a decision about, either carrying on or not. And the fact that I had the bursary just helped me because I used the bursary as a loan in the

foundation year, and that made me realise how much more debt I'm going to be in when I finish.' (Student 4, Trident NDC)

Students enthused about the impact the bursary and the project has had at various levels. It helped to reduce debt, buy books, gain community experience, and develop independence.

'You need money to survive but I also think that it does help, because basically when you go for a job, at university before, if somebody applies before they start they can say I'll be doing, helping the community, helping children, so it's just some experience...' (Student 2, Trident NDC)

'I needed funding for my books and stuff like that for uni, cos the books cost bout 80 quid, and so it works out pretty expensive. So I paid some towards that. Plus I'm living by myself, so it helps towards that as well.' (Student 3, Trident NDC)

'when it comes down to university students, they do require as much help as possible. Law books do cost quite a bit and that was something that I wasn't expecting, cos the books just for this year were about 150 to 200 pounds and they were just the essential core books - they were not additional books that we could buy - it was just the essential ones that we needed for the course. So I think that has helped in a big way. And then we have the additional, because my university is based in zone 1 [for public transport], and the travel cost is very expensive to go in and out of zone 1, so it's helped in that way as well.' (Student 2, Ocean NDC)

But the impact is much wider and goes beyond what money can buy and experience can teach you. The students realise that education changes them and have fed this back to the project co-ordinator:

'...they would describe having done it as having their eyes opened, and their whole perception of the world has changed. Because they see things in different light, they think in a different way. And that's a massive thing, and then to come back in to the community with people who haven't seen what they've seen...' (Project Co-ordinator, Trident Bursary Project)

Or as a student put it:

'...you never know what's going to happen, like later on but that's like, you can have something there with you all the time, no one can take that away from you, you've got that and if anything does happen, you've got that; you've worked for that. And you've got that for the whole of your life and no one can take that away from you.' (Student 7, Trident NDC)

Students have generally expressed surprise at the fact that once at university they are left on their own to get on with their studies. Some have found it challenging, and others liberating, in contrast to their previous school-based experience:

'... no one pushes you around, that you have to do everything yourself. At school, cos I did my A-levels in school as well and they like always pushing you, say you haven't done this and you haven't done this, but at uni they don't give that.' (Student 3, Trident NDC)

'Biggest surprise at university - you're a bit more independent, when you go to university they leave it down to you: do what you want, when you want. You know, it's up to you to get your assignments in on time, it's more different from college and school, it's a big step.' (Student 14 Trident NDC)

The impact on widening participation rates of the Primary Project will take time to be visible but the project workers are aware that decisions to go to university are not taken in isolation at the age of 18:

'...it wasn't, the bursary wasn't making the students take a decision of yay or nay in terms of taking the student path, that is something which happens much earlier, that is not only directed by finance (...). The bursary will make it easier but the bursary will not necessarily allow for that crucial decision to take place, that crucial decision takes place at the age of 10, 11, 12, 13, 14.' (Education Co-ordinator, Trident NDC)

The two projects are also linked at another level as the bursary holders act as role models and some of them do so directly through the Primary Project.

'The layers of this project are really extraordinary because the working back in the community might be a role model thing but you're actually doing a direct role model thing in the primary schools.' (Education Co-ordinator, Trident NDC)

The students taking part as role models in the Primary Project have enjoyed their interaction with the younger group. They have also been surprised by the interested reaction they have been getting as pupils engage with them.

'I think that's excellent because we see how much we can actually change a child's mind and make them feel more positive about university and how fascinating, the smallest things we tell them are nothing to us but it really fascinates them. And they're the future, they're going to be going to university sooner or later (...) you've just got to be able to tell the children that you can get to university, it's not difficult.' (Student 4, Trident NDC)

'I was working with the same set of students and I think they found it really interesting to have, not a teacher but a younger person in the classroom (...) I was shocked at how interested they are just because I was going to university...' (Student 11, Trident NDC)

What Works

The Trident Bursary project has had a resounding success. Everyone interviewed spoke extremely highly of it. The NDC staff even have personalised contacts with the students. The money has made a tremendous difference.

'... my experience of bumping into them and meeting them in different contexts, has been universally positive, they all...all the ones I've spoken to so far have been extremely positive about. Well they've all been very grateful for the help that Bradford Trident has been able to give them but very positive about the fact that they're at university and enjoying what they're doing in the community. I mean they are a very positive bunch. It's great.' (Education Co-ordinator, Trident NDC)

This is resonant of what the students said during the interviews: the money has allowed them to keep their debt at a lower level; being on the scheme has encouraged them to stay on the course when things became difficult; and the community work, in addition to its intrinsic benefits, has also given them something positive to put on their CV. So, in a simple way, this project has met a local need and adds to the weight of evidence from the education theme of NDC that **projects that are requested by the local communities** are generally the most successful.

The fact that the community work remains **flexible** is necessary for students who take up a university place away from the local area. Currently there is a choice between doing two weeks on a summer play scheme, or offering day-time hours in school during term time. Students can

also contribute time in the evenings by working with youth club groups. Flexibility in how the money can be spent is also central:

'... getting people started so they have, lose a fear around kind of obtaining materials, books etc, (...) we have no limits, we don't say what this money should be spent on, so who am I to say that going out and buying a CD which relaxes you - its up to the individual student, there is no other strings attached to it apart from the notion that they do some form of community service, which is yet to be specified on an individual basis.' (Education Co-ordinator Ocean NDC)

The delivering organisation EASA has also been commended by students who feel that the project manager has always been there to answer questions and has helped with getting the letters from the universities and with other bureaucratic hurdles.

Students have expressed the desire to be able to meet others from the bursary project. A possible way to extend the network might be for the NDC or EASA to get all of them together twice a year to exchange views and experiences - and perhaps to even extend this to their families.

Problems Encountered/Barriers to be Overcome

The Trident Bursary has had its first and only attempt of **fraud** when three students presented an identical letter, photocopied, to show that they had completed their voluntary work. When this was checked with the person who'd reportedly signed the letter, it emerged that he had in fact only signed one letter. The bursary was removed from all three students who had been involved.

The NDC is also aware that **not all eligible students might be reached** despite letters, pamphlets and word to mouth advertising. However, the numbers seemed to have plateaued at around 40 students per annum.

'The first year that we started we had 20 students and in the second year 30 and in the third year 40 and that's too neat and tidy by a country mile but those are the figures and I can't believe that in 3 years the number of students doubled and I kind of think that maybe in the first year there were some that we missed.' (Education Co-ordinator, Trident NDC)

The Tower Hamlets based project is having some teething problems. The Sixth Form College managing the bursaries had a delayed start in January 2005. They have not yet appointed the two positions (funded by the NDC) who are supposed to run the project. As a result it is left to the head of the sixth form college and his secretarial staff to manage the students and the bursaries. This seems to be challenging. One of the problems that emerged was that the students had not been informed that they would have to do some form of community service. In fact, it is still not certain that Ocean will follow the Bradford model: they may simply ask the students to come and deliver a message in schools.

The age limit of 18-21 years means that mature students are currently excluded from the scheme. This could mean that a substantial number of potential students excluded, as the Bradford experience has shown that a large number of people on the scheme are mature students.

A recurrent issue has concerned the area-specific nature of the NDC initiative. This dilemma concerns the fact that, by its nature, NDC resourcing must focus on residents in the designated area: however, the high levels of need locally do not end with the particular postcodes selected for inclusion. Several previous education theme team evaluations have noted this problem. Here, schools have been reluctant to advertise initiatives for the very reason that it is tied to a particular postcode.

'I think it's all around the marketing and the making sure that people from this area A) know about before they embark on a degree course, and B) once they have, they're in a position to claim it. Now we've tried several methods (...) including access to the database of the people that have applied for student loans, I mean it was more, it was simpler in the days of grants, re...now because they've changed the database we have to send off stamped addressed envelopes they do a post code trawl and send out the letters to anybody who they have on their database from the area. We publicise through the [local NDC] magazine and leaflet drops in the area, but we couldn't do any wider publicity because obviously you know, if you live that side of the road you get it, if you live this side of the road you don't. And we had a spate of people from [a nearby area] hearing about it and contacting us because they wanted it too. And it's very nice to give something away to people but it's very difficult when you have to keep saying no to other people for no good reason other than, you know they have the wrong address. So marketing is a nightmare in terms of making sure people know about it, but that the right people know about it.' (Trident Bursary project manager)

However, despite the problems, the projects are doing well:

'... at the end of the day there can't be many complaints from the fact that Ocean Estate are giving you money to go and get your education.' (Student 3 Ocean NDC)

Conclusions and Recommendations

Widening participation in Higher Education is a major government priority. In this report we have examined a small number of schemes meant to help stimulate wider participation in NDC areas where there is no established tradition of HE attendance. Our findings suggest the following:

- poverty and social disadvantage are still impeding participation in higher education
- the two schemes that we evaluated are in line with government initiatives to provide outreach and to raise the aspirations of young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds
- the Bradford scheme has been running for five years and is largely evaluated as successful in so far as it has helped to support student retention in higher education. It has also operated a multiplier effect. That is, if one member of an under-represented group participates in higher education, they spread the word to their immediate community. This was achieved via outreach programmes, with the young people themselves acting as intermediaries between the university and local primary school children
- the project in Tower Hamlets has not yet had the chance to demonstrate significant successes as it only recently started. We wish to recommend that they identify the good practices from Bradford and evaluate whether these could be usefully transferred into projects in Tower Hamlets
- information for participants on these schemes needs to be clearly communicated in order to avoid any potential misunderstandings about the nature of the contract
- the age limit could be removed in order to encourage more mature students to participate: can a bar on mature students be justified?
- in the interests of social inclusion and cohesion, it may be necessary to reconsider the best ways of marketing the schemes so as to not create the feeling of a postcode lottery, i.e. the impression that people who share high levels of social disadvantage are artificially excluded from schemes because they happen to live just outside the NDC area
- opportunities to disseminate and share good practice to other NDCs could be established further

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