

Strategies to achieve social mobility by widening participation

What would be great is...

A system, embedded into the core strategic business of universities and colleges, which actively encourages and facilitates the entry into and through higher education of those people who are currently under-represented in it, in order to promote intergenerational social mobility.

Widening Participation (WP) strategies exist nationally and locally through partnerships of educational institutions and through the activity of individual teams of WP practitioners within HEIs across England. As part of their WP strategies, HEIs use contextual data and offer financial support for under-represented learners.

Here are some further suggestions for the benefit of a socially inclusive society.

What is needed?

UK Government needs a joined up national WP strategy which constructively addresses wider societal issues known to affect access to opportunity across a person's life time.

We need a national publicity campaign which achieves greater public acceptance of different types of qualifications in terms of personal rewards for study. This should include linking vocational higher level skills with the needs of the economy and promote parity of esteem between academic and vocational awards.

UK Government should incentivise those HEIs who pro-actively use alternative methods of admission such as the Accreditation of Prior or (Experiential) Learning (AP(E)L) and Work Based Learning (WBL) to engage under-represented learners with higher level learning.

We need nationally recognised and accredited academic and professional qualifications for WP practitioners at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, to include full awards, short courses and Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

We need HEIs to collect information about the social class of HE students and their parents/carers in order to measure the effectiveness of interventions. They need to also survey their own staff's attitudes to concepts of social mobility and fit with institutional practice. Best practice in this activity should be shared between HEIs via a suitable national body, such as the Higher Education Academy.

We need HEIs to identify and support those at risk from drop out once in HE.

UK Government should establish an annual, independent monitoring report of national social mobility statistics including recommendations for action, linked to the projected needs of the labour market.

