



GENDER, LIFELONG LEARNING
AND SOCIAL CLASS

Social class, gender, participation and lifelong learning

Progress Report

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Executive Summary

There is concern in many countries in the European Union that there are invisible but very real barriers which stop some individuals from accessing education or learning opportunities. The problem is that these barriers are not due to a lack of ability or desire to learn but can be due to simply what gender the person is and from which social background they originate. The consequences of this for European society are social injustice, a lack of social cohesion and the fact that Europe itself will lose out in the global competition in education, research and innovation.

The GLAS project is aimed at raising the awareness and understanding of staff, working in various job roles in higher education institutions (HEIs), in ways to encourage and include those people who might otherwise face these barriers and be easily excluded, so that they can participate in learning at higher education institutions, and make the student body of those HEIs more representative of the communities in which the institutions are located.

The project has been coordinated from the UK by Linking London, which is hosted by Birkbeck College, by building on the knowledge and experience acquired by the largest lifelong learning network in London. In year 1 all project partners have shared their local, regional or national experiences and knowledge in the areas on which GLAS is focussing. This has been possible, in part, through the collaborative on-line space which the partners at Universitat Rovira i Virgili, based in Spain, has created for GLAS in order to share and jointly author documents. ECHO, the diversity policy experts from The Netherlands, have brought new perspectives and experience in diversity training and Hogeschool Zuyd also from The Netherlands have brought expertise in several core themes.

By sharing examples from different countries, via e-conferences and organised visits to partner's institutions, GLAS has started to produce resources and materials which demonstrate how social inclusion has been encouraged in different settings and to show how to support and develop staff to create a similar environment in institutions where social exclusion might be taking place. The project has also produced recommendations that will help countries' busy policy makers and civil servants plan and develop strategies to encourage social inclusion in relation to gender and class. All the resources which GLAS has produced can be found on and downloaded from the project website www.linkinglondon.ac.uk/europe.

In Year 2 GLAS will carry on communicating its findings to as wide an audience as possible, whilst trialling some of the recommendations in partner higher education institutions, and planning the next project which we hope will build on and sustain the work of GLAS.

Table of Contents

1. PROJECT OBJECTIVES.....	6
2. PROJECT APPROACH.....	8
3. PROJECT OUTCOMES & RESULTS.....	11
4. PARTNERSHIPS.....	12
5. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE.....	14
6. CONTRIBUTION TO EU POLICIES.....	16

1. Project Objectives

The GLAS project's primary objective, overlaps with a key objective of the Lifelong Learning Programme of the co-funding Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), that is to "reinforce the contribution of lifelong learning to social cohesion and active citizenship". The GLAS project is doing this by looking closely at six core themes, described below, which have the potential to help achieve social inclusion in HE, in situations where gender and class could be barriers.

The second main objective of the project was to support the achievement of a "European Area of Higher Education". By working on a topic of European wide significance, GLAS has created opportunities for a greater appreciation and understanding of different institutional, regional and national strategies. The closer links which have been made between institutions have helped to promote and widen the appeal of European HE and increase the understanding and valuing of qualifications across different countries borders.

GLAS has started to specifically benefit staff working in higher education institutions, in both academic and administrative roles, by firstly identifying and naming an enduring problem which Higher Education has faced over many years and will continue to face in the current economic climate. That is: how to widen access and diversify Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) student populations with talented individuals who reflect the communities in which the HEI is located. By simply naming this issue GLAS has brought it into the consciousness of HE staff and policy makers, which has sparked discussion and a realisation that an individual's gender and social class can still remain a barrier to accessing learning opportunities in certain countries and contexts. In particular GLAS will focus on access to learning opportunities for lower socio-economic status individuals and mature individuals including EU migrant women.

GLAS has started to produce concise and easy to read reports which are an introduction to the core theme and explain how they can be used to achieve social inclusion, in particular when faced with barriers due to class, gender and age. The six core themes, which GLAS is focussing on, are:

- I. The accreditation of prior learning
- II. Work based learning
- III. Social mobility
- IV. Widening participation
- V. Civic and community engagement
- VI. Continuous professional development

In addition to accessible reports GLAS is providing staff with practical suggestions as to how to address these issues in the form of staff development resource packs, and, by way of example, case studies of situations where schemes to address the potential barriers of gender and class have worked well.

The people who are researching, writing and collating these resources in the GLAS project are themselves potential users of them. Therefore the GLAS resources can be thought of as being written by and for potential users, and in this way the users are intrinsically involved in the project. GLAS engaged additionally with other potential users through a stakeholder analysis which was conducted at the start of the project in year 1.

The GLAS project team see the potential impact of this work as helping to facilitate a cultural change within HEIs. The current culture being one in which the student is expected to "fit" into the often rigid structures and processes of higher education institutions, which in many cases have inadvertently created barriers to prevent certain groups of people from

participating in higher education. By raising the issues and adopting new approaches, potential users in higher education institutions will be encouraged to alter their current practice, which could therefore contribute towards a change of the existing “culture” within the institution.

Measuring cultural change, as a consequence of a two year project will be very difficult; however, we will work to validate the recommendations which we have made in year 1 by working with selected stakeholders more closely in year 2. In this way we will be able to ascertain the likely impact of the project in the longer term. These stakeholders are HEIs within the GLAS stakeholder network, who have already been receptive to GLAS.

Ultimately GLAS expects to benefit the Higher education sector as a whole, by providing a way of ensuring universities and colleges are open to a diverse range of individuals. As Page (2007)¹ states: “Groups that display a range of perspectives outperform groups of like-minded experts. Diversity yields superior outcomes.” GLAS will help to ensure that talent within communities is not wasted. The benefits of which are manifold to the individual, HEIs, communities and the European community as a whole.

¹ Page, S.P. (2007) *The difference: How the power of diversity creates better groups, firms, schools and societies*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

2. Project Approach

The GLAS project has been run, as intended, with central project management being done by Linking London in the UK. The management approach has been intentionally facilitative and respectful, replicating the previous operating style of the Lifelong Learning Network and as befits a project involving differing cultures and approaches to partnership and project working. Working in the area of inclusion, GLAS considered the setting of the correct working and profession tone to be vitally important to ensure the success of the project. The project has been careful to be as inclusive to the GLAS partners, associate partners and stake holders as possible, taking into account the different and changing economic situations that partners are facing.

Aware of the importance of the words which we use in education, the GLAS team opted for the words “project monitoring group”, rather than “project management group”, in an attempt to create a more inclusive and collaborative approach to our work, rather than a top down management approach. In addition, the writing style adopted in all communications within the GLAS project, and to the outside world has been intentionally jargon free and concise.

The team of project staff involved has worked towards the aims and objectives of the GLAS project using a variety of methodologies. There has been a conscious attempt to try a number of strategies, the intention being to critically assess the usefulness of the approaches with all project staff at the start of Year 2, and decide whether to continue with them until the end of the project, or to alter the approach slightly without changing the desired result.

To date the methodologies used in Year 1 have included the following list, which will be explained further below:

- a. Information sharing and exchange via e-conferences
- b. Face to face meetings with GLAS project staff in partner countries involving structured workshops led by experts, and a social event
- c. Regular email contact
- d. On-line sharing via Moodle and Moodle blog
- e. On-line stakeholder analysis survey
- f. Use of a collaborative quality assurance reporting process
- g. Creation of a bespoke GLAS project “glossary of terms”
- h. Active encouragement to individual partners to create a photographic diary of their involvement and personal journey in the GLAS project
- i. Partners encouraged to promote GLAS with their own host institutions, and via extended networks to raise awareness of GLAS and encourage the involvement of additional experts and potential associate partners.

E-conferences have been conducted via “Skype group video calling facilities” and have provided a cost effective way of regularly engaging with GLAS project partners. Conferencing suites within institutions were initially explored for this use, but found to be costly and the systems were incompatible.

Face to face meetings with project staff lasting at least 2 days have been a cost intensive, but essential component of the GLAS project. Face to face meetings have encouraged team building and bonding between the project staff. The depth of work achieved and discussions which have taken place during workshops could not have been replicated via e-conferencing or email exchange. These meetings have also included a social element which has provided an opportunity to develop more intangible benefits of the GLAS project, that of an appreciation and understanding of local culture and context, which has then informed the resources which the project has produced. These extra-curricular activities have also allowed for further informal discussion of the core themes and have often provoked alternative

strategies and ways of thinking about the project. They have also provided additional networking opportunities. Email contact has been highly useful method of communication when used appropriately. A reasonable timeframe (or *modus operandii*) for responding to each other via email was discussed and agreed during e- and face to face meetings.

Moodle has been a useful on-line repository for information and a collection of documents related to GLAS, which is password protected to control the distribution of resources and documents which are still in a “draft” form. Rules about document management and archiving were discussed and agreed early on in the project to allow for good document management. In addition the blog on Moodle has provided a quick and alternative way of making GLAS project partners aware of changes made to the shared site. When resources are finalised they have been transferred from the private Moodle site to the publicly accessible GLAS website www.linkinglondon.ac.uk/europe.

The on-line survey software, survey monkey, has been used to conduct a snapshot study of the views of the projects stakeholders who are the end users of the GLAS resources. The creation of the on-line survey was the first collaborative task for the partners in the GLAS project, which used the different approaches of Moodle, e-conferencing and email. It allowed the project staff to work on a tangible result quickly and set the ground rules for future working and was a useful exercise in understanding the differences and potential confusions over language use. It was useful then, that at the first staff meeting, the GLAS project team began creating a project “glossary”, which had the benefit of sparking initial dialogue and debate between countries and provided a framework within which to discuss the meaning of terms between different cultures.

The Quality Assurance system which has been adopted in GLAS has encouraged an open and frank sharing of thoughts on several aspects of the GLAS project. In the early stages of project development, the QA process was key in sharing information about the extent to which all partners had been participating in all aspects of the project and allowed the team to avoid making assumptions about the role of other partners. Quality assurance has also been about cooperative learning and process development, e.g. in terms of the methods employed to deliver the project.

The GLAS project has been evaluating the usefulness of the recommendations with stakeholders and will seek to obtain validation from them before the end of the project. By publishing the GLAS resources as electronic documents, as opposed to printed resources, this has allowed for on-going amendments and adaptations in response to feedback. This has involved linking the project’s evaluation plan with its strategy for wider dissemination, by encouraging feedback and comment, from potential users at appropriate opportunities. Feedback has been requested via the project website and during events to publicise the project.

GLAS produced a plan of how to communicate the resources and outcomes of the project as widely as possible at the start of the project and have returned to it quarterly to check its appropriateness. Approaches include keeping the GLAS website up to date, production of an information leaflet (500 copies); email distribution lists, high profile “celebratory” events to disseminate the resources and the translation of resources in appropriate partner country languages.

It is hoped that many of the strategies to raise the awareness of GLAS within partner institutions will help contribute to the projects overall sustainability by encouraging greater take up of the recommendations by staff who are not part of the project, but work in the GLAS partner institutions. This will encourage “buy in” with GLAS institutions and may embed the GLAS resources into existing systems thereby sustaining the work.

In addition, in order to add value to the work of GLAS and encourage wider use and recognition of the resources, in year 2 GLAS will carefully examine how marketing and communications strategies are currently used by to engage the target groups within partner

institutions, e.g. web pages advertising APL as route into learning. GLAS intends to engage with EU migrant workers and the lower SES groups in order to check appropriateness of these strategies and feed back to HEIs those comments direct from target groups.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

The GLAS project has produced a variety of outputs, in the form of resources; and outcomes, in terms of raising awareness; in Year 1 through the examination of four of the six core themes. The major achievements include:

- a. Creation of the GLAS Project website (www.linkinglondon.ac.uk/europe) and project information leaflet.
- b. Creation of the GLAS Project online collaborative Moodle site for GLAS partners only (password protected).
- c. One induction e-conference and three e-conferences on core themes.
- d. Four face to face meetings in GLAS partner countries (two in England, one in Spain and one in Portugal).
- e. Bespoke written resources for four of the core themes already covered (*This achievement is expanded upon below*).
- f. Analysis of a survey capturing the views of potential users of the GLAS resources from six different countries in the European Union.
- g. A high profile “celebratory” GLAS launch event at the House of Lords, in the UK parliament, attended by Baroness Perry of Southwark and the Head of Communication, Partnership and Networks from the European Commission representation in the UK.
- h. Paper presentation at the FACE conference (July 2012, Derry, Northern Ireland) on the progress of the GLAS project.
- i. Raised awareness of the issues of gender and class as barriers to accessing higher education amongst stakeholders.

The GLAS project plans to produce four main resources for each core theme (achievement “e” above), which will support the achievement of the project objectives. These four resources have been completed for each of the core themes of APL, WBL, Social Mobility and Widening Participation, and are:

- i. A report on the use of the core theme (e.g. APL) across all GLAS partner countries and how it can contribute to social inclusion and remove barriers posed by gender and social class when used appropriately.
- ii. A staff resource pack, to raise awareness, support and develop staff working in HE to use the core theme (e.g. APL processes) in a way which reinforces and encourages social inclusion, as identified in the report (i).
- iii. Case studies of good practice, examples of where and when the core theme (e.g. APL) has been used successfully to encourage inclusion in HE.
- iv. A recommendations for policy paper, aimed at senior managers of HEIs, civil servants and government policy makers to help suggest ways of embedding the core theme within policy and therefore workable strategies for socially inclusive practice within higher education.

In year 1 the project partners agreed to re-arrange the order in which the project approached the core themes and decided to merge the Social Mobility through Widening Participation into one. This was due to recognition of some overlapping of agendas and to enable the project to examine this merged core theme in Year 1. In addition this has allowed time for GLAS to refocus again on “Gender and Social class” as the final core theme and to separate the core themes which are “processes” from those which the project considered more “strategic”.

4. Partnerships

The GLAS project consists of a rich partnership of several different types of organisations located in four different countries across Northern and Southern Europe. By partnering together for these 2 years, GLAS has created a pool of experiences, knowledge and skills which have been vital for achieving the projects primary and secondary objectives in year 1. That is “re-inforcing the contribution of lifelong learning to social cohesion”, by the collective authoring and collating of bespoke resources and “supporting the achievement of a European Area for Higher Education” by forging sustainable links and sharing information across borders about different systems and approaches to higher education.

In response to Agency feedback to the initial application, GLAS has divided up lead responsibility for core themes amongst the partnership. This has contributed to the GLAS project successfully creating a mutually beneficial and inclusive relationship amongst partners. This was evident at the end of Year 1, with GLAS partners having described their experience of working together on the project as positive.

The GLAS partners have also been responsive to changing circumstances, staffing and institutional priorities, while ensuring that the project keeps on time and on target, which is a reflection of their dedication to the topic of social inclusion and the partnership working skills of the GLAS partners.

Partners agree that “added value” has come in the form of a greater understanding of the differing socio-economic contexts, the variety of education system structures (and therefore political history of the countries) and the breadth of stakeholders which each partner brings. This final point was evident in the stakeholder analysis which demonstrated that, to date, the APEL system in Spain has been developed further in the secondary school sector than in HE, which is different from the situation for the HEIs from Northern Europe who are in GLAS.

In particular partners report that one of the benefits from having the time and space to think about and consider their own HE systems from a broader perspective, is that it has allowed individual partners to reflection on their own strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, their involvement enables partners to incorporate ideas from other countries into their own plans and strategies. Our Spanish partners also report that the project and its results are an opportunity to design new HE strategies for social inclusion.

In addition partners have recognised “added value” in developing the relevant IT skills through working together via a Moodle site (Universitat Rovira i virgili provided a short training session on its use at the meeting in Spain), in the transfer of good practice (e.g. tax breaks offered by the Dutch government for APL use), exposure to different European languages and improvement in English language skills, as well as having exposure to and understanding new cultures and people.

Additional value added, in terms of exposure and understanding of second southern European country and HEI, has also been achieved through GLAS’s engagement with its associate partner, Universidade Aberta from Portugal. Fiscal constraints meant that the Portuguese could not be full partners. Instead they have been invited to participate in the e-conferences for the core themes and have hosted one of the face to face meetings on Work Based Learning at their headquarters in Lisbon. Part of this meeting was filmed by Universidade Aberta as part of a UAb TV programme (around minute 22 <http://vimeo.com/42617417>), which provided additional exposure for GLAS.

For our Dutch partners Zuyd their involvement in the project core themes to date (APL and WBL) has underlined the importance of ensuring the best possible match between demand and supply in fitting the needs of the industry and professionals they engage and design curriculum with.

Partners have also found the focus on social mobility and widening participation in year 1 to be useful as all are facing the demographic dip in the numbers of young people, making it all the more important for society, professions and HE alike that as many potential candidates as possible are encouraged to consider higher education.

In its role as the coordinating institution, Linking London has achieved its own European added value, by setting up a monitoring group for GLAS within Birkbeck College. Terms of reference were written, with the aim of keeping key college personnel informed on the progress of the project. This group has met four times in Year 1 and has enabled Linking London to develop different high level relationships with senior managers within Birkbeck, which for example has raised the awareness of the work of the EACEA and enabled GLAS to secure the senior “buy in” necessary for trialling GLAS resources within Birkbeck College.

Additional unforeseen partnerships have been made with unions in other countries, which as part of the dissemination strategy in Year 2 will be a method of better defining and reaching the under-represented social groups which GLAS is targeting. This has come about through trade union interest and attendance at the House of Lords event. The Trade Union Congress (TUC) in the UK has put GLAS in touch with a Dutch union Formaat, which is known by our Dutch partners. We hope to report more on this in the final report.

5. Plans for the Future

The partnership has agreed that GLAS will use the approaches which were most successful in year 1, throughout year 2. These are the skype group e-conferences to introduce the core themes and the face to face meetings of GLAS staff in partner countries. In year 2 GLAS project partners will examine the remaining two “core themes” of Community and Civic Engagement (CCE) and Continuous Professional Development (CPD), as methods of engaging with and modifying approaches to those groups who face barriers to their participation in higher education, and in order to promote social inclusion. Towards the end of the project, GLAS will re-examine the previous six core themes covered, again looking at them within the specific context of gender and social class as barriers to participation in higher education and lifelong learning. This will happen in the form of a dedicated e-conference and face to face meeting in London, UK.

This will allow for a re-testing towards the end of the project of the appropriateness of all the resources produced and give the GLAS partners time to make any required changes before the end of the project. GLAS will also seek feedback from the potential learners (e.g. mature women, EU migrant women and low socio-economic class individuals) by engaging with community and union organised groups in Year 2. This will be vital in order to test assumptions which the GLAS project partners have made as to the needs of these target groups, as GLAS partners are more likely to be middle class successful learners.

Throughout year 2, and in addition to the re-testing towards the end of the project, partners will have the opportunity using the interface of Moodle, to review the resources from Year 1. Amendments and additions will be made as necessary and revised resources will be made available on the project website. Previous recipients of the resources will be informed of a later version being made available. In addition GLAS partners will continue to promote and communicate the GLAS resources through dissemination events (which will also be used to evaluate and test the effectiveness of the resources), networking opportunities with other stakeholders and other EU projects, and via social media (twitter). In addition in the final months an international conference will be held in London to which large numbers of stakeholders will be invited.

The strategy for creating four different resources under each core theme was to enable GLAS to package the project resources in alternative ways, e.g. to group all the reports from the six core themes together and make this larger report document available on the project website. This re-packaging will take place in the second half of Year 2 and be communicated to stakeholders. Certain stakeholders will be specifically targeted, e.g. Human Resource professionals will be contacted and all six staff development resource packs will be offered to them. Similarly all the recommendations for policy papers will be grouped together and sent to selected senior managers in partner institutions and members of government in partner countries. All resources will be translated into the most appropriate languages for the partnership and to encourage wider dissemination across the EU.

As mentioned earlier, GLAS partners will work with specific stakeholders in year 2, identified through the analysis conducted in year 1, to “validate” the recommendations for policy. In this way, GLAS will be able to extrapolate and explore selected responses from the stakeholders as part of the analysis done in year 1. We will also seek to ensure that the recommendations for policy which GLAS suggests meets the needs of and are appropriate for stakeholders in order to achieve the long-term cultural change which the project is seeking to encourage. In this way, GLAS will be able to measure the likely impact of the project on the end users. GLAS partners will also undertake a “horizon scanning” exercise, which will scope out opportunities and existing frameworks in which to fit the GLAS resources, for example, in the UK this might involve linking with strategies employed by different types of providers of higher level learning such as further education colleges. GLAS will also further link up with

other projects working in the area of social inclusion, to prevent any duplication or reinventing of the wheel in a time of restricted resource.

During year 2, all GLAS partners will be encouraged to promote their involvement in the project to their whole institution, with the aim that the partnerships formed during these 2 years go beyond the duration of the project, and to see if work could be sustained by the institution. Clearly each partner will need to address sustainability as is appropriate to their own institutional context, but the project will seek to embed links between institutions, in addition to between the individuals involved in GLAS. This will be achieved through a series of targeted communications to senior members of staff and appropriate committees within partner institutions.

Finally, throughout the delivery of year 1 of GLAS, suggestions for follow on projects have been made by GLAS partners. Time has been factored in to allow the existing GLAS partners to discuss the feasibility and appropriateness of a further project to build on the successes of GLAS.

6. Contribution to EU policies

All partners in the GLAS consortium are faced with similar challenges; that of an aging workforce, an enduring recession, underpinned by widespread austerity measures being undertaken by governments in order to reduce fiscal deficits. Though with differing socio-economic contexts and slightly different regional and national priorities, all GLAS partners are committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for working class and mature people in order to make the most use of all talent within communities and to promote social cohesion. This fits directly with the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET2020²).

By raising awareness of the issues and recommending strategies for HEIs to open up opportunities to those currently under-represented in HE, GLAS aligns directly with the LLP objective “to reinforce the contribution of LL to social cohesion, active citizenship, intercultural dialogue, gender equality and personal fulfilment”. The mutual sharing of information on different systems in the EU has developed both GLAS project partners and users of the resources understanding and contributes towards the specific objective of the LLP Erasmus Social Inclusion Action of supporting “the achievement of the European Area of HE”.

Furthermore by creating a “safe cross-border project space” and engaging with the partners and stakeholders, GLAS is supporting an operational objective of the LLP Erasmus Social Inclusion Action: “to facilitate the development of innovative practices in education and training at tertiary level, and their transfer, including opportunity from one participating country to others”. In addition GLAS is connecting with a further LLP horizontal priority by promoting equality between men and women and contributing to combatting all forms of discrimination based in particular in the GLAS project on “sex and age”, as well as promoting an awareness of the culture diversity within Europe.

In November 2011 the GLAS project responded to a call for evidence from the House of Lords (UK Parliament) for the inquiry into the EU’s contribution to the modernisation of HE. GLAS partners submitted information on the project as well as noting that it was being co-funded through the LLP. A representative from GLAS will attend the debate in the House of Lords on the 11th October 2012. In addition at a national level, information has already been sent in the UK to BIS, the government department with responsibility for higher education.

Finally, looking ahead it is expected that the next project and proposed EACEA application would link GLAS with a pan-European credit network post-Bologna.

² http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/general_framework/ef0016_en.htm

