From Access to Achievement: supporting and retaining new students

Held at NATFHE Head Office
on Friday 6 July 2001
From Access to Achievement: supporting and retaining new students in higher education

A NATFHE Conference, held on Friday 6 July 2001

Introduction

How do higher education institutions increase participation by working class, ethnic minority and disabled students and make sure they don’t drop out? What resources are needed to increase broader participation and how do institutions prepare ‘non-traditional’ students for higher education? These were some of the questions discussed at a Guardian newspaper-sponsored NATFHE conference, attended by representatives from both the HE and FE sectors.

Retention and success

The conference chair, NATFHE general secretary Paul Mackney, opened the event by stating that the key focus of the day would be on retaining students and ensuring that they succeeded. ‘Too many students have had to work hard to get into university but find the experience bewildering,’ he said. It was necessary to look at what support students received in the first year at university and to raise the status of teaching and support in that crucial first year. It was also important to recognise the difficulties faced by mature students when it came to completing a three-year course.

Support for students was not the only issue and matters relating to teaching staff were also raised. For example, employment practices at universities needed to be examined - many part time lecturers cannot give students the support they need as they are only paid for limited contact time. ‘It is a false economy to have an employment system that leads to problems of student retention,’ said Mr Mackney.

He added, ‘There needs to be a re-examination of the mess we’re in over tuition fees and grants.’ Students coming from poorer backgrounds were affected by this issue, claimed Mr Mackney. ‘We want students to study according to their ability to learn rather than their ability to pay,’ he said.

Planning for wider participation

Geoff Layer of the Higher Education Funding Council for England’s Action on Access programme focused on strategic planning in higher education. Over the years there had been a shift in approach: the emphasis on developing aspiration and targeted admission routes had been replaced in the late 1990s by a move to require strategic planning for widening participation in institutions and to link with learning and teaching strategies. In the future, the issue of employability would become more central, he claimed.

He argued that participation in university was related to household income: evidence showed that the higher the income, the more likely it was that young people from that household would go to university. It was also clear that ‘A’ level performance reflected on later success: ‘The better you perform at ‘A’ level, the more likely you are to succeed within HE,’ he stated.

Mr Layer expressed concern about the level of unemployment among graduates from minority ethnic groups: evidence showed that they had far less chance of gaining employment once they had graduated than other groups. Higher education’s response tended to be that employers were to blame for inadvertently discriminating. However, he asked if HE had got its house in order itself and how many minority ethnic groups were represented in senior posts in higher education institutions.
Activists in HE had been attempting to make changes in institutions for many years often fighting against the tide of lowering resource and academic drift. This activist role was shifting towards a ‘planned centralist’ role, with funding strategies that focused on young people and those in particular postcode areas. There were also initiatives to fund summer schools and additional student numbers. ‘The government has a view that if you create opportunities, students come flocking in,’ said Mr Layer. However, evidence indicates that this was not the case.

The widening participation premium funding was geared towards institutional strategic plans for increasing student numbers from under-represented groups and to ensure that they succeeded in their courses. However, it was difficult to set targets for the recruitment and retention of students because there was a limited information base from which to set these targets. Performance indicators had been established and these were useful information designed to help the institution to plan. Mr Layer advised that the strategic plans needed to link in with other strategies, for example, disability and teaching and learning strategies.

Many HEs had HEFCE funded projects that were linked to the themes of the DfES’s ‘Excellence Challenge.’ These projects had a regional or sub-regional focus on raising aspirations. A key feature of these bids was a strong partnership element, involving schools, further and higher education as well as HE activists keen to see change. Despite the importance of these projects to institutions, many of them remained at the margins of the organisation. ‘They’re outside the committee structures. They’re dominated by people on fixed-term contracts, so at the end of the project people are looking around. The sustainability of the project is an issue,’ said Mr Layer.

Some of the key factors for the widening participation strategies, which needed to be submitted by the end of July, revolved around collaboration, with many HE institutions looking at ways of raising aspirations in schools. Examples were Merseyside, Leicestershire, Newcastle and Northumbria. Staff development and ways in which teaching and learning were being in London, for example, was providing students with addressed were also factors. ‘Are we addressing what students want or making them fit in with the curriculum?’ asked Mr Layer. Prominence also needed to be given to student support, Queen Mary College maths support. Other areas where student support was important are finance and issues around disability. Higher education institutions tended to neglect the area of employability, another important factor in any strategy. ‘It’s important that we learn from each other and try not to reinvent the wheel,’ concluded Mr Layer.

Making the transition to HE

Cal Weatherald, higher education development officer at NIACE, looked at the challenges for staff in FE and HE in tackling the transition of students to campus-based higher education institutions.

Since the Dearing and Kennedy reports there had been greater emphasis on diversity, funding, processes, partnerships and learners. ‘The learner will be at the heart of the learning process,’ said Ms Weatherald. It was important to understand students’ expectations and backgrounds. ‘There are many students with little prior experience of higher education. We need to focus on those who have little knowledge or understanding of the systems through which they’ll have to negotiate their way,’ she claimed.

According to Ms Weatherald, it was necessary to pay attention to the development of students, enabling
them to gain confidence. They not only needed to know about courses, but also about regulatory aspects of the HE experience that would affect their ability to succeed.

A number of local access research projects were being developed to facilitate the transition to higher education, such as through the North Wales Credit Partnership, the University College Worcester and the University of Coventry. Key messages to emerge out of the research were that students experienced a sense of powerlessness. Most students were not aware that support was available. The induction process sent what Ms Weatherald called ‘a clear message about the importance of developing an independent and autonomous learner’. Many students had already lived independently and it was important to ‘define independence more inclusively.’ It should be about academic skills, a secure framework of support, but also about planning, prioritising and negotiation,’ said Ms Weatherald. Students needed a sense that they had a rightful place in the institution; for example, all too often working class students had feared being ‘found out’. The time had come for a learner-centred approach: ‘Students’ needs are now high on the political agenda,’ claimed Ms Weatherald.

Many mature students were working to support costs; they were highly independent but as Ms Weatherald stated: ‘Some of their best efforts are frustrated by institutional processes.’ There was a lack of information, and practical steps needed to be taken to empower the learner in their first year and to find ways of helping students to sustain their independence.

The issue of timetables was another area that needed to be revised. Students, particularly mature students with children who needed to plan in advance, would benefit from having access to their timetable well in advance of the start of their course. The availability of reading lists was another issue. However, among Ms Weatherald’s greatest concerns was the lack of information for students regarding assessment. ‘Assessment must be presented as a human activity rather than a mechanical process,’ she added.

Empowering students to connect with the background from which they came was also vital, as many students felt a ‘cultural disjunction’ once they had progressed to higher education institutions; there needed to be a three-way relationship that connected institutions with learners, with learners’ backgrounds, their families and peer groups.

There were implications for the move from further education to higher education and strategic frameworks were very valuable in assisting this transition, with some universities offering successful programmes. Ms Weatherald concluded with a few words on monitoring, ‘Monitoring progress of students is important as they make their way through their journey.’

**FE’s role in preparing students for HE**

**Paul Smith of the National Learning and Skills Council (LSC),** whose role as a member of the Action on Access team is to support FE college-led widening participation projects nationally, focused on preparing adults to progress on to higher education, particularly ‘non-traditional’ students. ‘Why do we see some groups of students not represented in higher education? he asked. The answer may lie in what Mr Smith termed ‘individual inadequacies’ – a situation sometimes encountered where it was believed by some staff in HE institutions that people were unable to cope with higher education because they lacked the qualifications, knowledge and attitude expected. What do we do about this? We rescue these people. What we mustn’t do is change the systematic issues. We must make them conform!’ exclaimed Mr Smith ironically.
Further education access courses, he believed, were about providing a framework or ‘survival kit’ for those non-traditional students - they try to nurture and support students and encourage them to become independent learners.

The LSC was keen to make sure that providers listened to the learner and responded to their needs. It was interested in a more inclusive approach that offered more opportunities for first rung learning. It was also keen to raise performance standards.

Funding allocated through the LSC recognises the individual and those at a disadvantage, as well as the importance of providing high quality information and guidance. The LSC sought to make sure that provision was available where people wanted it and local initiatives were being supported financially to ensure this happened. A partnership approach was equally important to the LSC.

Managing diversity

Harinder Lawley, head of access development at the University of North London, stated that the university at which she was based took access very seriously. Its context, she claimed, was unique: it was a post-1992 institution; it was flexible and responsive; in fact it was ‘all the things you relate to new universities’, she said.

In 1999/2000, the majority of the university’s 19,000 students were women, and 40% were Black; meanwhile, 51% of the university’s staff of 1,217 were women and 15% were Black. The staff-student profile was therefore a good reflection of the London population as a whole. ‘We found data collection to be quite an important tool,’ said Ms Lawley. Quantitative and qualitative data had been put together and helped to encourage people to take action where it was needed, she claimed.

Ms Lawley highlighted the university’s new strategic plan that aimed to work for personal development and social justice. Part of the mission of the strategy was to move away from focusing solely on access to higher education and broaden the scope to include issues around employability, looking at ways of tackling discrimination against Black students in the workplace. ‘This is something we should all be doing in the sector,’ said Ms Lawley. ‘We want to incorporate equity and inclusion in all aspects of planning.’

The way to change traditional forms of education was to look at how to integrate diversity into the curriculum and build on the experience of students, setting up initiatives that targeted particular learners. Teacher education networks had also been established.

Positive action initiatives at the university included specialist careers advisers working with disabled students, aiming to make them ‘more employable’. ‘We need to offer generic support, but we also need more targeted support,’ stated Ms Lawley. It was important to listen to students’ voices and to acknowledge the fact that they were a mixed group of individuals.

Staff development was also key and a proactive approach was essential. This didn’t just mean teaching staff, but all staff, ‘so everyone understands what you’re trying to do,’ said Ms Lawley.

Universities also needed to work in partnership with other key players in the region. For example, the University of North London had worked with colleges and was now working with schools. ‘Disadvantage doesn’t start at 21; it starts when you are born,’ pointed out Ms Lawley. The aim was to
develop a community of learners. The university was also working with regeneration programmes and community partners, which frequently led to the development of new courses.

It was crucial also to recognise that students wanted different kinds of learning experiences and to identify difficulties they might encounter at the point of entry. Managing the transition to higher education was also important as was the transfer at the end of year 1 into year 2. ‘If students haven’t done as well as they expected, they may drop out,’ said Ms Lawley. Detailed support and advice would help students to succeed.

Next Ms Lawley tackled the issue of funding for widening participation. Five per cent, she claimed was not enough. ‘It’s not just about getting students into higher education, it’s about what happens afterwards as well,’ she declared.

Student loans was another key concern. ‘Students don’t like loans - the majority of students are from the state sector and student funding is a really important issue,’ said Ms Lawley. Students, she claimed, were angry about the £6 million that was being awarded to elite institutions.

Ms Lawley then focused attention on performance indicators and league tables. She said that it was not helpful to have performance measures that highlighted the differences between institutions that were not trying to achieve the same goals. ‘Performance indicators can reinforce negative attitudes,’ she said.

Investment in staff was also vital if the sector was to develop. ‘If we want to have a good higher education sector in the future, we need to recognise the professionalism of staff. There are better career structures in school,’ she stated.

Ms Lawley summed up. ‘Managing diversity is not an easy business, but it is challenging and interesting.’

**Student retention: the select committee report**

**Barry Sheerman MP, chair of the Commons Select Committee on Education and Employment**, described his hopes of becoming the chair of the new education and skills sub-committee, which would focus on specific areas.

The education and employment select committee had undertaken an enquiry into higher education, focusing on access and retention. Higher education was one of the most important areas of education and, claimed Mr Sheerman, ‘Teaching has been under-resourced for so long… We have to do something pretty dramatic about that.’

He stated that the select committee would continually refer to its report to establish what opportunities hadn’t been grasped. He was keen to look at the issue of pay: ‘We have to look at what we have to pay to recruit and retain staff,” he said, and commented that he wanted to look at what would add value to the sector and asked delegates to write to him and telephone him to inform him of the issues he should be considering.

More women were participating in higher education and getting more first degrees than men, he said. However student numbers from deprived backgrounds and working class families were low. It was necessary to raise people’s aspirations; many came from a background where ‘it’s a culture of never going to university’.
The reports on retention and access demonstrated that it was necessary to ‘get the right students with the right qualifications into the right course.’ Retention in the UK, said Mr Sheerman, was high and matched the best in the world apart from Japan. There was little evidence that the new basis of student support affected retention. Forty-five per cent of GDP was being spent on student support. ‘Going back to the old form of student support isn’t the way forward… Nobody’s offering an 18-year-old a subsidy to set up a business. People should make a contribution,’ he added.

The higher education sector, he assured conference, would develop and grow. This was vital for the future as universities were often the biggest employers in many towns. ‘Most of us haven’t even begun to realise how important higher education is,’ he said.

Funding needed to be injected into research and staff pay. He agreed with Harinder Lawley that the five per cent premium for students from particular postcode areas was insufficient and stated, ‘A 20% premium - that’s the sort of money you need.’

Better relationships needed to be established between higher education and comprehensive schools and colleges and ring-fenced funding was needed to build those relationships.

He expressed concern about the number of staff members on temporary contracts and said: ‘That’s not the way to do it.’ This practice affected the quality of teaching. It was essential to have high quality teaching in the first year along with excellent pastoral care.

He stated, ‘We will be an energetic and innovative select committee… We want to make sure the taxpayers’ money is well spent. We’d like to see the percentage of GDP spent on education go up.’ He added, ‘It’s about the quality and experience of the education learners get.’

Abolishing student support: the wrong decision

Paul Mackney responded to Mr Sheerman, pointing out that the select committee report had not taken the views of students into account. He added, ‘Though it was a brave decision to get rid of student support, I think it was a wrong decision.’ He stated that in the following year there would be a decline in funding of around four per cent. ‘We feel a bit betrayed by that,’ he said.

Workshops

Disability initiatives: implications and lessons for staff

The workshop, which was led by Mike Adams, Higher Education Funding Council for England National Disability Team and Paul Brown, Scottish Higher Education Funding Council national co-ordinator for students with disabilities, shared some of the principles behind the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, which amends the Disability Discrimination Act 1999 and became law in May 2001. It primarily covers services and facilities for students.

The new legislation safeguarded a whole spectrum of higher education experience, providing an emphasis on conciliation. The amendments would be interpreted by codes of practice, which were currently under consultation.
The workshop covered:

- the duties on institutions under the act to ensure students were not placed at a ‘substantial disadvantage’
- how the act made unlawful the failure to make reasonable adjustments or to ‘treat a disabled person less favourably’
- the Disability Rights Commission’s (DRC) powers to investigate further education and higher education institutions if it felt participation rates were low
- the learning communities that would be affected by the legislation: post-16 institutions in England, Wales and Scotland, practitioners, students and potential students
- the impact on physical access to premises, policies and procedures and the core business of an institution as well as on the curriculum, course content and validation, teaching arrangements, learning support services and materials and staff training
- justifications for treating a disabled person less favourably, such as standards of a ‘prescribed kind’, for example, where a steady hand was needed in order to undertake an operation and the disabled person did not have a steady hand and was therefore unable to carry out the operation
- criteria for judging reasonableness, including financial resources, where the whole budget of the institution would be examined, and the practicality of providing certain services - institutions would not, for example, be expected to provide occupational therapy
- the issue of redress, for example, the internal complaints’ procedure, conciliation by the DRC and injunctions
- implementation of the legislation - the majority of the legislation would come into force in September 2002, the duty to provide auxiliary aids and adjustments in 2003 and physical adjustments in 2004
- good practice examples of institutions with base-level provision and over and above base-level provision - institutions included the University of Greenwich, Cheltenham and Gloucester College and Anglia Polytechnic University
- the need for institutions to develop good practice thinking in every aspect of their work and to change the culture of the institution
- the anticipatory duty on institutions under the amendment, whereby institutions would be obliged to look at further developing work on access over time
- initiatives that are filling the gaps that are still prevalent among many institutions, such as workshops run by the HEFCE for managers of institutions
- a step by step guide to establishing whether the institution discriminates against a disabled person.

Further information is available from www.drc.org.uk.

**Partnerships in practice: problems, practicalities and perks**

The workshop was presented by Kate Corr and Vicky Parker of the Black Country Widening Participation Project at the University of Wolverhampton. The workshop aimed to provide an outline of a partnership project to widen participation in the Black Country involving a consortium of local further education colleges, adult education services, training and enterprise councils, careers advisers and employment services as well as Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton Colleges. Funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, the project carried out a needs analysis of students and explored obstacles to progression into further and higher education of students with no family history of higher education experience. This led to the establishment of a flexible access programme, Right Track, which is delivered in community settings through one-to-one support through a learning adviser or mentor.
The workshop sought to disseminate good practice arising from the project, in areas such as communication, changing personnel and working with different structures and strategies.

The presentation led to a discussion on issues such as:
- the benefits of working with a learning advisor group comprising tutors from further education and community/adult education and local education authorities
- the successes of combined open days, sharing teaching resources and learning about the issues involved in the transition from community venues to college and on to university
- the level of support the project received from people in authority in local organisations - the project had relied on co-operation, persistence and a variety of approaches to ensure work was carried out, ranging from telephone calls, publicity and raising the profile of the project
- the difficulties around trying to balance the running of the project with the need to meet target numbers particularly over a short period of time - it would take time to reach people, particularly as some of the work undertaken was ‘by word of mouth’
- funding more flexible courses and accommodating small numbers - this was acknowledged as a problem
- the issue of childcare and travel.

**Developing a foundation degree prototype for adult, part-time learners**

The workshop, led by Russell Moseley, director of Open Studies at the University of Warwick, looked at the issue of foundation degrees which are to be introduced in universities from October 2001. Participants focused on the lessons learnt from prototype projects that were used in the design of the new degrees and their role in promoting access to higher education.

A wide-ranging discussion took place, covering:
- how the foundation degree could attract a new kind of learner and whether they could meet the needs of adult returners as well as young people
- the level of demand for foundation degrees from both non-traditional learners and employers
- the impact of foundation degrees on access course provision and opportunities for new access provision
- the impact of the degrees on the relationship between further and higher education
- the position of ‘sub-degree’ provision, for example, the Higher National Diploma
- whether work-based learning needed to be integrated into the curriculum and assessment structure
- whether foundation degrees could offer progression to honours level
- the practical problems and opportunities involved in partnership programmes involving employers, NTOs and others
- how key skills could be incorporated into the academic curriculum
- the effect of the new degrees on inter-institutional differentiation in higher education.

**Staff development and widening participation**

The workshop, led by Jane Hoy, widening participation and learning development co-ordinator at Birkbeck College, University of London, looked at:
- ways in which teaching staff perceived widening participation and ‘non-traditional’ students
- the implications for staff development
- integrating support for student learning into the classroom and the curriculum.
FE to HE: what’s the difference?

The workshop was led by Jim Tate and Sue Hatt of the widening participation project in the South West. It looked at higher education providers’ role in offering support and guidance to a changing student body and ways in which students could best be prepared for the new educational environment.

One element of the workshop, led by Jim Tate reported information gathered from discussions with higher education staff and students throughout the South West. Among the issues raised by the staff and students were:

- the need to consider ongoing student orientation rather than merely the traditional ‘induction week’
  - student orientation needed to be seen as a continuum of preparation and integration
- how pre-entry information might address a more realistic criteria of selection for non-traditional students wishing to decide upon which higher education institution to attend;
- the need for a proper system of pre-entry guidance
- academic transition programmes and social transition support
- support for students in the measures they take to deal with their financial situation
- the need to acknowledge that higher education provision at further education colleges and academic partnerships for the provision of higher education at further education colleges played an important role in widening participation
- the way in which the development of higher education students studying at further education colleges had overtaken the bifurcation between higher education and further education in the structure of the National Union of Students.

More information on these discussions is available on the web at www.ex.ac.uk/wp.

The other element of this workshop, led by Sue Hatt reported back on research conducted at the University of the West of England which looked at student completion rates by age and mature student completion rates by qualification. Issues addressed included:

- a comparison of completion rates
- non-completers from A level and non-A level backgrounds
- the perceived skills deficit and different kinds of skills
- the ‘recycled’ student
- different entry qualifications
- the ‘currency’ of qualifications
- the importance of the first year
- timing issues
- the higher education culture.

Factors influencing student achievement and progression in the light of widening participation in FE and HE

Led by Hilary Comfort, FE lecturer, Leicester College, the workshop outlined a project funded by the Further Education Funding Council, which aimed to forward in order to obtain quantitative data and as a lead-in to interviews. The interviews followed the stories that learners wanted to tell and had been written up into case studies as bring students’ voices to the fore. The research focused on students drawn from ‘widening participation postcodes’ and led to case study examples of learners’ experiences.
A questionnaire was put part of the first phase of the project. The key findings demonstrated that learners had problems around information and advice, study skills and workload, student support, finance, family and culture and self-esteem.

Participants were invited to engage in the research by expressing their reactions to case studies. They were asked what they felt hindered student achievement and participation and what recommendations they could make to alleviate the situation.

Participants focused on a range of issues including:
- the lack of communication between further and higher education colleges generally, and the difficulties around varying teaching styles and expectations which led to students’ poor understanding of what higher education would be like
- lack of funding
- staff uncertainty regarding their own support role
- students’ inability to see the relevance of study to their own goals
- the poor status of NVQs and students’ perceptions of qualifications
- the lack of support and feedback mechanisms in higher education itself
- poor self-esteem
- jargon
- the need for an interactive style where schools and further education needed to prepare students for higher education
- the gender divide: young men were finding it harder to progress in higher education, with study at further education level being more acceptable
- subject-related factors, such as fitting the right person into the right course and providing adequate guidance on courses and the issue of gendered areas
- inappropriate advice - guidance needed to provide people with a range of options and choices in an impartial way
- the problem of students deciding to drop out of a course before seeking advice;
- the failure to intervene and identify students ‘at risk’ of dropping out
- the strong financial driver to keep numbers up and secure funding for the institution - this meant the needs of learners were often neglected
- funding for achievement, which meant that institutions needed to ensure that students were retained
- the need to be altruistic
- the hours of paid work that students undertook in order to support themselves - most students were working 27 hours a week
- the exclusion of students from induction, where they were based outside halls of residence
- the lack of peer support on modular courses and where students were based at home
- the possibility of introducing mentors to help the transition between further education and higher education.

**Partnerships for Progression**

Marie Ashton of the National Union of Students ran a workshop covering the Partnerships for Progression project, a mentoring programme that matches young people in school with voluntary student mentors from further and higher education. The project, funded by the Department for Education and Skills, aimed to widen access to post-16 education for 13 to 16 year-olds and to target under-repre-
sent groups, such as people with disabilities, people from socio-economic groups 3 to 5, young males, African-Caribbean males, people living in rural areas and Bangladeshi females. The workshop tackled a number of aspects of the project, including:

- an outline of the main activities involved in mentoring - interpersonal support, role modelling and sharing wisdom, for example
- the characteristics required in a mentor - such as the ability to establish an equal relationship with the mentee
- the benefits to mentors - including skills development, the opportunity to engage with young people and gain experience for a career in teaching, youth work, management or supervisory work
- the benefits to mentees - such as the opportunity to gain a realistic perception of post-16 education and a better understanding of the skills they need for tertiary education
- the benefits to student unions and student community action groups - including the chance to increase participation from minority groups and build links with schools
- findings of research carried out to inform the project - this revealed, for example, that students at institutions without widening participation funding had fewer opportunities to work with young people in the community.

More details about the project can be obtained by email from pfp@nus.org.uk.

**Working with selected under-represented groups to assist their progression into and through higher education**

Stephanie Clark, Ruth Sharpe, Alison Palmer, John Holmes and Ester Hill, led this workshop which focused on the Paving the Way project, a two-year Higher Education Innovations Fund widening participation project. The project, led by UCAS, in partnership with the University of Birmingham, the University of Central Lancashire, Queen Mary University of London and the College of Ripon and York, St John.

The aim of the partnership was to work with particular groups of people who were under-represented in their institution: young and mature people from local poor urban and rural communities, GNVQ/AVCE and young Asian mature students. It sought to progress these groups into and through the first year of higher education, through research with school, college and higher education students from particular social classes to identify existing barriers to higher education. Initiatives would then be developed to address these barriers.

The research, which involved data collection from some 800 students, revealed that barriers included:

- low self-esteem - some students lacked confidence in their work and results
- the applications procedure - some students felt the application form looked complicated and the timescale was too tight
- negative experiences at open days and interviews - universities lacked flexibility
- induction and enrolment - a major issue for students
- finance and tuition fees - guidance was needed on student funding arrangements
- stereotyping - for example, students felt higher education institutions catered mainly for young people without families, as class times were not helpful for parents and there was a lack of available childcare
- the negative experience of mature students - many felt they could not identify with other students, education institutions needed to provide more information on course content and student life
geographical isolation - mature marketing material failed to target them and there was a lack of specific mature student support

better information - higher students at Scarborough, for example, felt they had limited higher education options.

In order to address some of these concerns, the workshop looked at: decisions at 16; motivation to go into higher education; the choice of higher education institution; the perception of higher education; finance; culture and religion; the application process; qualification routes; confidence; further education and higher education links; higher education prospectuses; open days; the transition to higher education; and induction and the first year experience.
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