'What Works' to support equity, diversity and inclusion in creative higher education:

WIDENINGPARTICIPATION

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for government:

- This report urgently advises a revision of creative and cultural education provision. This includes primary and secondary education and local community cultural participation spending. We urge the Department for Education (DfE) to consider a widely adopted cultural education plan with targeted provision from the early years foundation stage (EYFS) to key stage 4.

- Effective widening participation requires engagement beyond higher education. A range of services, including secondary-level education, social care, including Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and creative economy employers are all important to widening participation. In addition to higher education's efforts, diversifying creative higher education is a societal and industry task.

- More clarity is needed on the decision-making process of young people deciding to apply to creative higher education. This will make interventions such as the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's (DCMS) Creative Careers programme more effective at reaching potential creative students and workers at the right points in their educational and working lives.

- Based on these points, this report recommends that DCMS and DfE co-convene a task force to build on the government's forthcoming review of creative education.

Recommendation for HEIs:

- Contextual admissions provide a useful intervention that acknowledges inequalities in the education system. They can be effective for widening participation in creative higher education and this report recommends HEIs and the Office for Students (OfS) develop a targeted widening participation framework for creative higher education.

- The current model for contextual admissions requires a reformed data regime to properly target those most in need. The literature suggests needs-based, rather than purely merit-based, interventions are most effective for widening participation.

- Following Boliver et al. (2022), we recommend a multi-stakeholder review, including HEIs, Office for Students, and DfE, of widening participation indicators. Effective practice can include higher education access to free school meal data and more direct recommendations from social workers, teachers and educators who can nominate individual students for widening participation intervention.

- HEIs need to offer more effective, targeted, support for both younger and mature students. When students reach higher education, there is evidence of several kinds of effective widening participation practice. However, specific targeting and tailoring interventions can be difficult. Moreover, this has not translated into creative higher education.

- Sharing effective widening participation practices for creative higher education is difficult because of data and research approach issues. We recommend Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO) takes the lead in developing a specific set of guidance for creative education. Examples might include insights on the impact of audition fees and guidance on how to remove bias in entry criteria for creative courses. This is especially important for conservatoire and specialist creative higher education institutions.

- Financial support, peer and community activities, and individual targeted learning plans have been effective for other subjects. HEIs offering creative courses must work to translate these effective practices into the creative higher education context, to reflect students' strengths and enable their potential.

- Following the model established by the Athena SWAN Charter, we recommend HEIs develop a framework that recognises and rewards good practice in widening participation across higher and further education.

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OVERVIEW

The purpose of widening participation (WP) is to increase access to further (FE) and higher education (HE) so that tertiary level education is representative of the wider population. The WP agenda has been a key factor in HE policy rhetoric for decades. It was accelerated through changes made to the UK's tertiary education system, and increased focus on access, by the New Labour government. The introduction of the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998 abolished student maintenance grants and introduced a new system of tuition fees and student loans (David, 2012; Mandler, 2020). In 1997/1998, only a minority of young people accessed HE, with significant under-representations across socio-economic status, geographical location, ethnicity and disability (Bolton, 2023).

A part of the multiple reforms to education made from 1998 was the requirement that higher education institutions (HEIs) commit to widening access for previously marginalised students (Heath et al., 2013). The Office for Fair Access (OFFA), established in 2004, required HEIs to specify their WP strategy to justify student fees. Each government since, irrespective of political party or Prime Minister, has supported HE expansion (Mandler, 2020).

Differences in HE policy and provision across the four nations have become more pronounced following the separation of powers (Bruce, 2012; Riddell et al., 2015; Donnelly and Evans, 2019). All devolved nations have different student fee regimes, with different models of WP.

In 2012, the cap on student tuition fees in England was raised to £9,000 per year for domestic students by the then Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government. Despite the fee increase, the number of applications to HE courses overall has continued to rise. However, notwithstanding enforced WP targets, there has been slow progress in increasing the number of students from marginalised backgrounds (Krstić et al., 2021; Boliver and Powell, 2023).

This is particularly pertinent to creative HE. Our papers analysing UCAS and HESA data demonstrated that HE is the most prominent pathway to employment within the creative economy. However, our review of the literature indicates critical issues with inclusive access to creative HE courses.

Inequalities of access to creative HE are an ongoing issue. In a 2011 analysis of WP policy in UK art schools, Burke and McManus (2011) concluded that admissions to arts courses were neither transparent nor fair; they reflected class-based and racial biases about both applicants and the quality of their submitted portfolio work; and that WP itself needed to shift its focus from individual to institutional change if creative courses were to successfully diversify their admissions.

Over a decade later, Broadhead (2022), writing on WP in arts HE, shared frustration at the lack of meaningful changes and continued in terms of student retention and degree completion (see also Caizley, 2020, on specialist music conservatoire admissions). More generally, HE has ongoing achievement gaps for underrepresented student groups (see TASO, 2023c and TASO, 2023b on ongoing disability and ethnicity achievement gaps).

This is a concerning legacy in the context of the exclusions and under-representations across the creative and cultural workforce, as addressed in the *Creative Majority* report (Wreyford et al., 2021). Contributing to this discussion is the backdrop of decreased value of creative arts-based subjects within the UK's state primary and secondary school education (Cultural Learning Alliance, 2021 and 2022). Ashton and Ashton (2022) compare the systematic devaluing and reduction of creative arts-based subjects in the publicly funded state education system in contrast to an increased investment in arts activities within private schools, which has led to a two-tier system of creative and cultural education provision (see also Bath et al., 2020, on music education).

It is not within the scope of this current paper to comment on curriculum reform at primary and secondary-level education, but **we strongly advise the UK government to reform its policy on creative arts-based learning within state education as a key functioning of the WP agenda of creative HE and the inclusive development of the future creative economy.**

Our analysis concurs with Rainford's (2017 and 2023) argument that WP should go "far beyond those departments tasked with access and outreach and has implications for staff across all academic and support service areas" (2017:45). This is a profound challenge, both for HE in general and for creative courses in particular.

The relationship between HE qualifications and career success is not straightforward. Ethnicity, gender, disability, social class and geography all restrict career success despite levels of qualifications for creative jobs (see Bull et al. (2022) on music and Martin and Frenette (2017) for US comparison).

Diversifying creative HE is only one part of the project for equity, diversity and inclusion in the creative economy, but it is an important one. Lack of diversity in creative HE has implications for the ongoing inequalities in the creative and cultural workforce. This is the starting point for the investigation into who participates within creative HE.

METHODS

As discussed in our introductory paper, this report applied a systematic literature review to the question of 'What Works' to widen participation in creative higher education. Search terms were inputted into the Scopus research database with results limited to journal articles published after 1998, the year of New Labour's initial HE reforms. Unlike other topics addressed in this project, the results for WP yielded high results (see Table 1).

Table 1

Search terms in Scopus	Number of results (journal articles only)
("What Works" AND internship)	13
(internships AND employment)	554
(what AND works AND apprenticeships AND employment)	37
(apprenticeships AND employment)	640
(widening AND participation) AND (higher AND education)	2707

The research team conducted an initial review of article abstracts from which relevant literature was divided into specified themes. Articles were grouped according to theme rather than discipline or geographical location. Different members of the research team then reviewed each theme, creating summary documents based on the 'What Works' framework.

This paper outlines three main areas of interest, drawn from the literature alongside written evidence submissions, roundtable consultation events and the existing creative industries research expertise of the project team.

First, we consider the impact of targeted access routes into creative HE through a review of the literature on identifying and measuring who is targeted and has access to a WP programme. Within this, we consider the impact of contextual offers. Second, we consider the literature on outreach programmes led by HE providers in partnership with other organisations. Finally, we consider the question of belonging and issues related to social and cultural norms associated with HE. These unwritten norms of HE can act as a barrier to the WP agenda. This is in terms of retention within HE, degree completion and progression into the workplace.

Within each section, we provide case studies that represent good practice and can be scaled up for further impact. We start the report with a summary of what doesn't work in relation to the WP agenda with a reflection on how certain barriers are pertinent to creative HE courses.

WIDENING PARTICIPATION – WHAT DOESN'T WORK

The WP agenda has been in operation within the UK's HE sector for decades. There have been multiple changes within HE policy since the introduction of the student loan system and tuition fees in 1998 and increases to the tuition fee cap in 2012 and 2017. Following 16 years of government-mandated effort to widen participation across all HEIs, limited progress has been made in real measurable terms (Henley and Barton, 2022; Zacharias and Mitchell, 2020; Dean, 2011).

Defining beneficiaries for WP interventions is challenging. **In the UK, there has been a substantial amount of activity in pursuit of WP, but there is also a lack of systematic evaluation**

or evidence of the effectiveness of these activities (Younger et al., 2019).

As a result, the project of WP, according to Boliver and Powell's (2023) recent summary, has made very slow progress in the most selective English universities. Much activity, as evidenced by the access agreements submitted to what was OFFA and is now the Office for Students (OfS), focused on defending entry requirements and raising the aspirations of those from marginalised groups that might meet them.

THE DEFICIT MODEL

The focus on 'raising aspirations' in the WP agenda has been extensively criticised (Rainford, 2023). A variety of disciplines, methodologies and research philosophies concurred that programmes designed on the basis that WP needs to correct student deficits do not work (McLellan et al., 2016; Breeze et al., 2020; Banerjee, 2018; Harrison and Waller, 2017).

A deficit model places the responsibility for exclusions on those who are excluded. Lack of uptake or participation is reframed as an active choice not to engage, rather than an acknowledgement of the multiple barriers and structural inequalities that create exclusion.

Dawson (2019) provides a useful illustration of the deficit model in practice based on her research into exclusion from everyday science learning. Dawson undertook research with a series of grassroots community-based groups based across London to examine their exclusion from publicly funded science-based institutions, including museums and galleries. The work unpacks the multiple, systemic, intersectional practices that operate to both exclude certain groups from participation and create a false narrative that such exclusion was an active choice not to participate.

The deficit model homogenises students (Thompson, 2017), rather than acknowledging or addressing the intersectional complexity of their individual lives. For example, Madriaga (2022) argues WP policy has been overly focused on proxies for class, ignoring issues of structural racism in education.

There has also been a failure to account for targeted marginalised groups such as care-experienced young people.

This is a group that cuts across socio-economic, gender, racial, geographical and disability characteristics and remains critically underrepresented across HE (TASO, 2021a, 2021b and 2021c; see also Baker et al., 2022).

Evans et al. (2017) suggest the discourse of 'raising aspirations' allows HEIs to believe that it is only the students' own ambition and awareness that prevents high-achieving young people from applying (Stone et al., 2022). Sociology of education literature is highly critical of the idea that children have low aspirations (Baker et al., 2014; Canovan and Walsh, 2020; Campbell and McKendrick, 2017). As St Clair et al. (2013: 719) note, **"Aspirations, even in these communities struggling with poverty, are very high – the missing element is the knowledge of how to make these aspirations concrete and obtainable."**

One main criticism of both the raising aspirations and deficit model is that it removes responsibility from HE to have internal reflections and make structural changes (Evans et al., 2017; Lambrechts, 2020; Thomas et al., 2021). Without effective monitoring and evaluation frameworks, many of the WP interventions have been folded into institutional marketing, which enables HEIs to maintain an illusion of meritocracy in their entry requirements (Evans et al., 2017; Boliver and Powell, 2023). TASO's (2023d) evidence toolkit website suggests "there is no evidence demonstrating a causal link between [these] activities and [WP] outcomes".

Overall, much of the rationale that frames the WP agenda is based on concepts of individuals adapting to the system. This is instead of HE developing systematic and targeted outreach programmes designed in partnership with multiple agencies and stakeholders.

Boliver and Powell's (2023) review of HEI WP policy commitments suggest a recent shift away from deficit-based approaches. Increasing levels of support and resources can be found for specific underrepresented demographics. The OfS, for example, offers briefings and guidance for several underrepresented groups on its website. However, as TASO's evidence toolkit suggests, we are far from a consensus on effective practice being settled.

FRAGMENTED DELIVERY AND THE NEED FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION

A second criticism of the WP agenda is its uneven and patchy delivery around the country (Davies and Donnelly, 2023; see also Davies, 2023). The 2017 Higher Education and Research Act and the creation of the OfS set out a series of conditions for HEIs as a registration requirement (OfS, 2023). Conditions A1 and A2 require that providers have in force an access and participation plan approved by the OfS. Providers must take all 'reasonable steps' to comply with the provisions of the plan. They are also required to publish their access and participation statement and update and republish this statement on an annual basis.

However, no clear model of WP has been suggested. **Individual institutions have been left to self-define and manage their WP strategy**. There have been attempts to create a coherent approach. The National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) launched in January 2017 and ran until 2021. It had the purpose of delivering a 'sustained, progressive and intensive programme of support' to pupils in years 9 to 13 living in areas with low levels of HE participation and where participation was lower than expected given GCSE attainment (Bowes et al., 2019).

There is insufficient data on the impact of the NCOP programme to get a 'What Works' assessment of increased access to and retention within HE for targeted stakeholders. Overall, the lack of a clear and consistent approach to targeting WP beneficiaries, and effective interventions, has resulted in multiple interpretations of the WP requirements and patchy delivery.

Underpinning these issues is the question of how to define, target and engage beneficiaries and what constitutes effective pathways into HE. There have been multiple interventions, and our search of the literature on WP yielded high numbers of results.

This is a global agenda, reflecting the trend for multiple national HE systems to want more diversity. The literature search produced case studies that reported on schemes and activities with findings based on staff and student reflections – for example, Ashworth et al.'s (2010) ethnographic study on disabled students' access to, and experience of, a creative arts module and McNeill's (2021) action-research project on a British art school WP programme. Formal evaluations are less prominent, and thus sifting and distilling 'What Works' for WP in creative education is a complex task.

The wider scholarly literature on WP impact identifies a tension between the desire for inclusiveness and the traditionally competitive criteria used for entry to HE, particularly in the context of those applying to vocational educational routes such as medicine and architecture (Farini and Scollan, 2021; Curtis et al., 2015; Boliver and Powell, 2021).

This is a particular issue for conservatoires, where entry requirements are often dependent on students having access to expensive lessons and instruments very early in life, long before they reach the point of auditions for entry. **HEIs are thus placed in the difficult position of balancing entry requirements with openness and inclusivity, against a backdrop of structural inequalities within secondary education** (Ashton and Ashton, 2022).

There are parallels here with our paper on apprenticeships. The ongoing issues of parity of esteem for different varieties of qualifications reflect an ongoing lack of institutional and organisational change to be more open and inclusive. The emphasis is still, ultimately, on changing individuals to fit institutions, rather than transforming the institutions themselves (Thomas et al., 2021; Kettley and Murphy, 2021).

There remains little concrete understanding of how specific initiatives have functioned to improve diversity over time. There is no standardised method of data collection or interpretation to solidly inform researchers seeking to understand 'What Works' in terms of widening participation in HE (e.g., Younger et al., 2019; Baines et al., 2022). TASO's evidence toolkit (TASO, 2023) is also an excellent resource on this issue.

Inconsistent practices make it difficult to compare progress between institutions. Even official data from the four nations is difficult to compare due to the differing HEI landscapes and modes of delivery in each country (Donnelly and Evans, 2019; Riddell, 2015).

A recent review of published research examining the impact of WP outreach across the UK identified only 26 papers for analysis (Heaslip et al., 2020). The paper's authors concluded that, with such little systematic evidence, it would be impossible to draw concrete conclusions as to whether outreach has had an objective impact on the structural factors that shape access to HE.

The uneven geography of WP infrastructure is an important reminder of the structural inequalities underpinning HE. As much as there are valuable 'What Works' insights in the literature, the focus must be on institutional change. McLellan et al. (2016: 60), in their account of setting up a WP programme at the University of Bristol, pose an apt question, asking how the university "would have to change in order to admit these [WP] students and provide them with a fulfilling and nurturing intellectual environment in which to engage fully with undergraduate study".

THEME 1: IDENTIFYING WIDENING PARTICIPATION BENEFICIARIES AND EFFECTIVE ACCESS ROUTES TO HE

There is very little reliable data and evidence on WP in relation to creative HE subjects. As HE institutions are each responsible for their own WP activities, creative courses have little empirical evidence on which to base their WP strategies. One limitation is that the impactful practices evidenced (e.g., Jackson and Price, 2019; McTernan, 2020; McNeill, 2021) can be difficult to scale and lack clarity on the drivers and mechanisms underpinning change.

TASO's (2023) WP evidence toolkit assesses 22 areas of WP practice. Three areas are specifically focused on WP for disabled students. Another 17 are more general, including aspiration raising, financial support, foundation years, mentoring and associated support such as role models and pre-entry tutoring. The remaining two – teaching employability skills and work experience – are covered in our subsequent paper on work-integrated learning (WIL). The rest of the current paper covers TASO's 20 areas with an additional focus on creative HE. TASO notes that across all the areas it has assessed, there is a need for more reliable data and better evidence.

Identifying inequalities and potential beneficiaries is dependent on quality data. What counts has generated significant debate.

The Scottish Government's Commission on Widening Access uses the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) to identify potential students from the most deprived backgrounds. Hardie and Olivier (2022) describe this area-based measure as "a very blunt tool" that "cannot distinguish between deprived and

non-deprived individuals living in areas classified as low/high deprivation". Scotland's outgoing Commissioner for Fair Access recently called for the introduction of a basket of measures rather than SIMD targets to give a better picture of each institution's progress towards WP.

The situation in Scotland's remote regions is indicative of the broader issue of how locales of disadvantage are identified by HEIs across the UK. Similarly to SIMD, participation of local areas (POLAR) data and, more recently, tracking underrepresentation by area (TUNDRA) are used by the OfS to identify areas of relative socio-economic disadvantage and low university admission rates (Boliver et al., 2022).

Universities have relied on this data to select schools to work with as part of outreach programmes and also to filter and contextualise admissions (Mountford-Zimdars et al., 2021). Due to the high level of social mix in some areas (notably so in London boroughs), POLAR and TUNDRA have been criticised as measures of socio-economic disadvantage, delivering too great a number of false positives (students identified as disadvantaged when they are not) and false negatives (disadvantaged students deemed not so and thus wrongly excluded from WP initiatives) (Atherton et al., 2019; Boliver et al., 2022).

Whether an applicant was in receipt of free school meals (FSM) is an individual measure of socio-economic disadvantage that delivers greater accuracy, reducing the number of false positives significantly and the number of false negatives to a more tolerable degree (Boliver et al., 2022a). Unfortunately, FSM data, used extensively by schools, has not been readily available to university administrators (Mountford-Zimdars et al., 2021). In terms of 'What Works', we recommend that FSM data is available to universities as part of a selection of measures.

Identifying what counts as talent: creative access and contextual admissions

While debates over data frameworks and targeting of interventions can seem quite technical, the philosophical question of what counts as merit and talent is also acute in the context of creative HE. Auditions or portfolio-based entry requirements reflect a different set of issues compared with WP in the context of A-level grades and the pathway into HE and, as discussed below, present

particular cost barriers for disadvantaged students.

The idea of inherent 'giftedness' has been found to actively obscure the cultural barriers to creative HE faced by WP students (Bhagat and O'Neill, 2011). It also reflects debates over the way talent is constructed and the negative associations placed on particular demographic groups as identified in the Burke and McManus (2011) study. They found a racialised devaluing of certain forms of creative interests, including liking hip hop music and certain fashion brands. This contributed to exclusionary recruitment practices that favoured classed concepts of taste over academic qualifications.

These issues are, of course, not limited to the creative industries. Yet, as *Creative Majority* demonstrated, the emphasis on the idea of talent and creativity in the context of closed hiring practices ends up excluding those who do not fit a white, male, middle-class and able-bodied norm (Wreyford et al., 2021 see also Brook et al., 2020).

Research that examines admissions processes across HE also reflects this problem. The application process can be difficult to navigate (Hayton et al., 2015). Admissions processes have, until recently, remained largely unchanged in the way they select candidates from the applications pool (McManus, 2006; Heaslip et al., 2020; Crockford, 2020).

Creating admission procedures that recognise diversity is controversial (Boliver et al., 2022a; Boliver and Powell, 2023). Bravenboer (2011) describes a "dynamic tension" between notions of "merit and potential" and fairness in university applications. Farini and Scollan (2021) suggest changes in the orientation of what counts as quality in admissions are needed, an idea underpinning much of the literature. There are some examples of taking applicants' context into account from creative HE.

Challenging the norms and assumptions of creative talent has been a key component of a successful WP strategy at Goldsmiths, University of London (Hayton et al., 2015). It guarantees an interview for all applicants from Lewisham, has adopted reflexive practices for admissions staff, including a workshop on biases in the admissions process, and ran a two-week pre-admissions summer school.

The Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (LIPA) reconfigured the idea of 'talent', as part of a broader WP programme. In particular, LIPA helped admissions staff understand the barriers

for WP students and worked to raise awareness that there is no compromise on quality for WP participants (Gammo-Felton, 2011).

The UK's HE conservatories across music, dance and drama present a significant barrier to diversity within creative HE. UCAS reports demonstrate the majority of conservatoires are made up of privately educated students from the most advantaged backgrounds (see data in UCAS Conservatoires, 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018), with serious under-representation of those from racialised minority backgrounds (HESA, 2023).

One positive change has been over funding for auditions. Prior to 2019, UK conservatoires offered very little (if any) financial assistance with audition fees and travel expenses. Since 2019, more financial support has become available. On the UCAS Conservatoires (2022) application help page, students who are struggling to pay audition fees are directed to the individual conservatoires for help and further assistance.

In 2019, the Leeds Conservatoire became the first UK conservatoire to abolish audition fees and offers refunds for travel expenses of thoseapplicants from low-income households (Leeds Conservatoire, 2019). In more recent years (from 2019 onwards), audition fee waivers have since become embedded across all UK conservatoires' WP and access policies.

UCAS Conservatoires (2022) also signposts students needing financial help to the charitable organisation *Open Door*[1], but this is not available for those seeking to pursue music at a conservatoire, as it offers financial help only to drama students.

However, signposting alone is not enough to make real progress on WP. Another cost is consultation lessons. Highlighted by Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance (TLCMD) in its auditions and application advice, "a consultation lesson is a one-on-one discussion between a prospective student and professor to assess suitability for conservatoire education" (TLCMD, 2023). The current fee for a consultation lesson at TLCMD is £72, with slightly higher charges of £90 payable to professors at the Royal College of Music (RCM, 2023). At present, none of the conservatoires in the UK offer a consultation fee waiver, a significant concern given its potential impact on aspiring musicians from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

[1] Open Door is an organisation that helps talented young people who do not have the financial support or resources to gain a place at one of the UK's leading drama schools. See https://www.opendoor.org.uk/

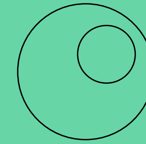
Looking at the more general context of diversity in music HE, Bull et al. (2022) found some evidence of positive impacts of contextual admissions for music undergraduates, with programme support from admissions staff. While the current model of contextual admissions is a relatively recent phenomenon (Mountford-Zimdars et al., 2016), they note that sharing of good practice, particularly for performance- and portfolio-based admissions systems, has huge potential for the sector.

In the literature we have reviewed, contextual admissions in creative HE are under-represented in the research. This reflects the ongoing lack of sector-wide monitoring and evaluation. There is, therefore, a rich opportunity in the context of performance or portfolio-based admissions for institutions to open up discussions of their criteria, which can be published and shared with relevant stakeholders, including potential applications, for increased transparency (Banerjee, 2018).

Mountford-Zimdars and Moore (2020), writing in the context of general WP policy, note that there is no single shared approach to contextual admissions across the sector and no consistency in the data and its use. Contextualising admissions requires additional considerations and responsibilities on the part of the institution (Boliver et al., 2022a; Mountford-Zimdars et al., 2021). They alone are not sufficient to provide significant institutional change with regards to WP (Budd, 2017).

Broader WP programmes (for example, access courses) use an element of contextual admissions (Barkat, 2019; Curtis and Smith, 2020) or are dependent on them when programmes finish. To ensure continuation and attainment or 'staying in', it is imperative that contextualised admissions are accompanied by a network of support and mentoring made visible and accessible to all applicants throughout their university experience (Boliver and Powell, 2021; Milburn, 2012). Without this whole institution approach, contextual admissions run the risk of creating negative experiences for WP students, which can lead to them leaving courses (Hagger et al., 2011; Dynarski, 2021).

Overall, WP for creative HE is not just about lowering grades and flagging applicants based on their backgrounds (i.e., through contextual admissions). As we have seen, there are a range of social inequalities influencing the WP practice of specialist institutions. The standard needed to access specialist conservatoires involves many years of training (whether this be in music, dance or drama). As a result, those institutions who are committed to achieving their WP targets should also ensure their WP programmes reach younger children and their families.



CASE STUDY: CREATIVE SHIFT, UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS LONDON

University of the Arts London (UAL)'s *Creative Shift* programme provides students from underrepresented groups with opportunities to develop their networks, working relationships and professional practice in the creative industries. This is achieved through working collaboratively with industry partners on live briefs, masterclasses, community networking groups, internships and talks.

It has a strong record of success. One student told the evaluation, *"I felt like I didn't belong at first because my peers on my course were not supportive and quite intimidating. Since joining Creative Shift, I found tranquillity in meeting like-minded creatives. I was also able to improve my skills through projects that reminded me of my ability and worth – that I deserved to be a student as much as anybody."*

Since 2019, *Creative Shift* has worked with an average of 400 students each academic year. Key industry partners include LinkedIn, Soho House, Eric, NOW, venturethree, Creative Access, Code First Girls, Hope & Glory, Depop, GUAP and Flannels.

Creative Shift takes a targeted approach, supporting students least represented in the creative sector to access and progress within the creative industries. This commitment is written in UAL's Access and Participation Plan. It also forms part of UAL's Anti-Racism Action Plan, which states the need to increase the visibility of racially minoritised student communities and people.

Retention and attainment data highlights a positive impact on reducing gaps for marginalised students who engage in *Creative Shift* activity. Retention rates for students participating in *Creative Shift* activities are 4 per cent higher than the overall rate at UAL in 2021-22. Attainment rates for *Creative Shift* students were 10% higher than the overall rate at UAL for 21/22.

The programme is led by students' interests and places emphasis on their strengths alongside what they need to thrive

in industry. The design and tailoring of programme activities are done with students' schedules and personal circumstances in mind to ensure that student-centred spaces are created.

Feeding into the wider remit of the academic enhancement team's curriculum work, *Creative Shift* aims to foster belonging and community through compassionate pedagogies. It is inspired by the West African philosophy ubuntu and the 'I am because we are' ideology, which is used as a model to support decolonial approaches to education. Students and staff are encouraged to value themselves and each other with compassion, empathy and support to encourage students to affect positive change in their respective communities and become change agents of the future.

Another student told the evaluation: *"I think Creative Shift gave me a wider idea of what working in a creative industry would feel like. By working with other students from different UAL colleges, it made me feel a sense of belonging. Even though others study different courses, I still felt as if I was part of the same community that we all settled into through ideas and different perspectives."*

THEME 2: OUTREACH AND PARTNERSHIPS

A common intervention referred to across the WP literature is an outreach programme. Outreach consists of multiple strategies implemented at university or college level. These include school visits, summer school programmes, outreach partnerships with industry, online learning and mentoring.

The dissemination of outreach programmes varies according to institution, and there is not enough comparative monitoring or evaluation by which to benchmark and reflect on impact. There is also a geographical and regional bias.

WP is *itself* unevenly distributed around the country (Davies and Donnelly, 2023; Davies, 2023). London has a strong WP ecosystem and exactly the sorts of partnerships and infrastructure needed to deliver effective WP, as evidenced by data on university entry from London applicants. Outside of the capital, schools lack those same resources and partnerships. For prospective students in disadvantaged areas at a distance from creative institutions, for example in rural areas, opportunities presented by outreach initiatives are limited (Lasselle and Johnson, 2021; see also Davies and Donnelly, 2023, and Davies, 2023, on regional inequalities in WP). Another route to engaging potential students not in an institution's immediate locale is through summer schools. The application process can, however, favour a self-selecting cohort of applicants who already have tacit knowledge and skills (TASO, 2021; IntoUniversity, 2022). The propensity to favour students already more inclined or able to find pathways to university may also compromise any understanding of an initiative's impact.

One common positive theme that spanned across the 'What Works' focus on creative education was the benefit of effective partnerships with industry. Relevant examples of effective partnerships are included as case studies throughout each research theme, including WIL and apprenticeships. For WP, partnerships between HEIs and industry-based creative and cultural organisations have enabled a collaborative outreach model that includes multiple stakeholders and agencies. This approach enables a wider reach for WP initiatives, including identifying beneficiaries.

The two WP examples we highlight as good practice are city-based (London and Birmingham). While we celebrate the impact of these particular schemes, the regional inequalities should be acknowledged.

Accelerate is an access and development scheme for young people into subjects linked to the built environment, including architecture, design and urban planning, managed by the charity Open City. It has partnerships with University College London, University of the Arts London and Kingston University. The partnership connects the agenda of making London more open and accountable to young people. Alongside making the built environment sector more diverse and equitable, participants discuss their own city and their role within it with the contributing HEIs and industry partners.

The music education charity Music Masters started as an immersive music education programme for primary schools. As its students have grown through secondary education and into HE, it has observed the need to expand its expertise to foster accessible pathways into music education. It has also identified a need to create inclusive-focused music educators, leading to a specialised HE programme in partnership with Birmingham City

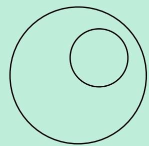
University (see case study on p105).

In both cases, the partnership is between a HEI and a charitable organisation linked to issues of equitable access and illustrates the barriers to inclusion within a particular sector of the creative economy. The charitable organisation creates a bridge between the HE provider, the student beneficiaries and the industry.

There are key learnings for fostering equitable partnerships with external organisations in the case of creative education for both WP and WIL, as discussed in our paper on that subject. The collaborative nature and opportunities that each side brings adds value to the objectives of the programme.

Efforts since the pandemic to bring more outreach and learning activities online may also be a useful way to reach remote students as well as those with disabilities, financial constraints or caring responsibilities. The balance between in-person and online learning must be maintained if initiatives are to have a meaningful and sustainable impact (Dodd et al., 2021; Pickering and Donnelly, 2022). Issues of regional disparity of opportunity must still, therefore, be addressed.

This is because recent research (TASO, 2023) finds limited causal evidence on 'What Works' to address disability inequality via online approaches. In addition, online or mass learning strategies can be at odds with calls to contextualise outreach for specific communities. The risk is they offer a top-down transfer of information, rather than extending real partnerships and relationships (Formby et al., 2020).



CASE STUDY: ACCELERATE: AN ACCESS TO THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT PROFESSIONS COLLABORATIVE PROGRAMME

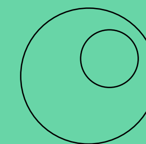
Accelerate is a design and mentoring outreach programme run by the charity Open City in partnership with The Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London; Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London; Kingston University; and the Architectural Association School of Architecture. It aims to support young people (16–18) from underrepresented backgrounds to pursue careers in the built environment industries by equipping them with the skills, portfolios, networks and confidence to make informed career choices.

Accelerate is funded entirely by external grants and sponsorship. The programme is structured around 10 skills development workshops delivered from October to May followed by 12 hours of mentoring at leading built environment practices across London, including Cullinan Studio, Frame Projects and Morris & Company. A public exhibition of student work is showcased at the end of the programme and participants receive continued support through education and practice via their alumni network.

During 2022-23, the programme supported 96 students from 25 boroughs across London, who worked with 25 professional mentor practices from multiple architectural and design agencies. Of those student participants:

- 90 per cent were from an ethnic minority background
- 39 per cent were eligible for free school meals
- 43 per cent were the first in their family to go to university
- 14 per cent lived in social housing
- 100 per cent attended non-fee-paying schools

75 per cent of the 2022 Accelerate graduates secured offers to study architecture and related subjects at university in the year following their participation in the programme. The organisation has announced that it will launch a programme in partnership with Birmingham City University in 2023.



CASE STUDY: MUSIC MASTERS AND BIRMINGHAM CITY UNIVERSITY

Music Masters is a charity committed to widening access to high-quality music education from early years to young adulthood. Under the tagline 'Every child should have music in their life', it delivers an immersive music-based curriculum starting in primary school and offers ongoing support and talent development. Predominantly London-based, it operates within communities facing systemic inequality and disadvantage. As part of its commitment to inclusion and diversity across the music sector, it provides a number of targeted interventions.

One of its programmes, Pathways, is designed specifically

to help promising and committed young instrumentalists in key stage 2 achieve their greatest potential while addressing the lack of inclusion and diversity in classical music. Key facts about the programme include:

- To date, 25 pupils have graduated from the Pathways programme
- 100 per cent of applying Pathways graduates have been awarded places at the junior departments of world-leading conservatoires, including the Royal College of Music, Royal Academy of Music, Guildhall School of Music & Drama and Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance
- Eight out of 25 graduates have received a music bursary or scholarship

"Pathways has opened up the opportunity to explore the National Gallery, Royal Academy of Music, Royal College of Music and Guildhall School of Music & Drama… It's a winning experience for them that they can't get another way, and for the parents, it opens up an opportunity to explore their futures… The confidence they have gotten is so huge. Without Pathways, I don't think they could've gained that." – Ning, parent of a participant in the Music Masters programme

Music Masters has also joined forces with Birmingham City University's School of Education and Social Work to establish Musicians of Change (PGCEi), a year-long programme for musicians that is committed to transforming music education. Musicians of Change provides students with a broad range of professional, practical and academic experiences supported by a world-class team of practitioners, academics and mentors. Places on the programme are heavily subsidised and full bursary support is offered to Black and ethnically diverse or disabled music educators currently underrepresented in the sector. Students gain an internationally recognised Level 7 qualification and a PGCEi in Group Instrument Learning teaching certificate.

"The Musicians of Change (PGCEi) is a real eye-opening learning experience. It is pushing me to be a better teacher and person, with lectures and reading material that focus heavily on the experience of students and improving the quality of music education for all." – Matt, a jazz and brass teacher

THEME 3: BEYOND ACCESS – BELONGING AND PROGRESSION

WP contains a tension between inclusive pathways into HE, including contextualised offers, and the discourse of competition that characterises traditional access routes to HE. It is important to acknowledge that access to primary- and secondary-level education across the UK is not equal. Therefore, meritocratic assumptions that underpin the current assessment frameworks should be questioned.

In this context, transition into HE for students who enter through non-traditional pathways is central to successful WP. Educational economists in the US have demonstrated the need for additional support (Dynarski et al, 2021).. Without this, well-intentioned outreach programmes that admit students who transition from non-traditional pathways into HE will struggle to make an impact.

Overall, there is evidence that interventions that provide pathways into HE do widen access. Examples include Curtis and Smith (2020) on the UK gateway to medicine courses and Li et al. (2023) on the success of Australian 'enabling' programmes. However, the ongoing participation of students from marginalised backgrounds is less conclusive.

Here, effective monitoring and evaluation of the impact of WP is essential. It must take into account degree completion and access to employment. This is a controversial agenda, with current government questioning the value of creative HE in the context of employment data (DfE, 2023). This should not distract from the need for better information on 'What Works' to support diversity.

Creative Majority (Wreyford et al., 2021) discussed the implementation of the 'belonging agenda' into certain areas of employment within the creative and cultural workplace (2021). This recognises that certain cultural and social norms have dominated creative labour markets, excluding marginalised communities. **Rather than the individual adapting to the dominant model, the institution must change to support an inclusive workplace.**

The belonging agenda emerged in the literature on WP. The issue of students' unequal access to networks and information is matched by the key issues around perceptions of institutions being welcoming or not (Thomas et al., 2021; Donovan and

Erskine-Shaw, 2020; Scanlon et al., 2020). For example, regarding ethnicity, several research projects have demonstrated how HE expects individuals to change and adapt to the institution, but the institution is unwilling to change itself (Lambrechts, 2020; Thomas et al., 2021; Arday et al., 2022).

Transition into and through HE is often perceived as a "fraught process for many students, but particularly for those from diverse backgrounds" (O'Shea, 2020: 96).. In her work on WP in HE, Thomas (2002: 431) provides a conceptual understanding of the practices of HEIs and the impact they have on student retention. In doing so, she states how "institutional habitus should be understood as more than the culture of the educational institution; it refers to relational issues and priorities, which are deeply embedded, and sub-consciously informing practice".

Access to certain norms, including cultural and social references, transport, housing and communication, is not universal. As we saw with audition fees to specialist creative institutions, the financial and social barriers to applications via auditions did not begin to be addressed until 2019. We also see this argument emerging in teaching pedagogy and the need to decolonise the curriculum to offer a less westernised and privileged knowledge bias (Arday et al., 2022).

A number of studies reflected on different interventions focused on the need for an effective transition to campus life and the development of the belonging agenda within HE. In Carrell and Sacerdote's example (2017), mentoring can be effective: "Overall, we find that the mentoring treatment is largely acting as a substitute for the potentially scarce resource of parental help or skill. This in-person help could be in part offsetting problems of procrastination, disorganisation or fear of failure. However, despite lots of looking, we cannot find much direct evidence that lack of organisation or lack of self-esteem play a direct role in explaining why mentoring works."

The root of effective mentoring (Raven, 2022; Pickering, 2021; Dodd et al., 2023) is with addressing the imbalance between the unequal resources of WP students and students from more privileged backgrounds (also in Dynarski et al.'s 2021 review of the literature).

There is also evidence of the specific need to support care-experienced students throughout their HE learning and beyond (Baker 2022). Care-experienced young people who may not

have access to family support or living accommodation during the summer holidays and immediately post-graduation require additional support to ensure retention, degree completion and pathways into employment.

Students from lower socio-economic groups are more likely to live at home while studying at university (Thompson, 2017). This indicates a need for WP initiatives to consider local communities but also to understand the particular needs of 'commuter students'. It can fragment the student experience and reduce the possibility of taking part in extracurricular activities. Providing term-time accommodation is one possible solution (Banerjee, 2018), as is helping with travel costs.

Rose et al. (2019) identify 'crunch points' in the application process, as well as more generally in terms of where information comes from and WP students' attitudes to more selective universities that are not local (see also Pickering, 2021, and Wayne et al., 2016, on transition points). Identifying these crunch points for creative HE is an important task for WP policy. Doing so will make interventions such as the government's Creative Careers programme more effective at reaching potential creative students and workers at the right points in their educational and working lives.

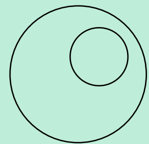
Money and debt are still an important consideration for many students (Budd, 2017). Although the rising costs of higher education to the individual have not deterred large numbers of students, there is evidence that subject and institutional choices, rather than the decision to attend HE at all, are being made on the grounds of debt and living costs (Evans and Donnelly, 2018; Shao, 2023).

Increased debt affects students' ability to go on to postgraduate studies and their choice of employment post-degree (Purcell et al., 2013). This is a particular concern for creative professions, where it can take longer to establish a career, and the rewards may not be great for many years.

Financial support works (Reed and Hurd, 2016; Dynarski et al., 2021). However, because much of the evidence is from the US, much more information is needed in the UK context – for example, information on who receives bursaries, whether the allocation is equitable and by what criteria, and if they are achieving the desired aims (Banerjee, 2018; TASO, 2023).

All of these programmes need to be properly resourced

within HEIs (McLellan et al., 2016; Kettley and Murphy, 2021; Breeze et al., 2020; see also educational economics papers of Carrell and Sacerdote, 2017, and Dynarski et al., 2021). **The need for proper resourcing within universities is especially acute for mentoring and peer-support programmes**. These programmes, for example, students co-designing inductions (Woods and Homer, 2022), need training so they can give accurate information. There are considerable risks for WP students if trusted sources, such as mentors, give inaccurate information (Breeze et al., 2020).



CASE STUDY: ARTS EMERGENCY

Social justice charity *Arts Emergency* was set up in 2013 by activist Neil Griffiths and comedian Josie Long in response to deepening inequalities in both creative HE and the creative industries.

People from privileged backgrounds are four times more likely to get a creative job, with people from less privileged backgrounds often struggling to get their first break in the creative industries. Many internships and training programmes rely on personal connections, are only advertised by word of mouth and are frequently unpaid or underpaid. *Arts Emergency* aims to create potentially life-changing connections for young people without existing networks.

Driven by a vision of giving everyone the chance to contribute to the culture in which they live, it worked with an initial cohort of 20 London-based students from marginalised backgrounds who were interested in pursuing a future in the arts. The support it offered focused on 1-2-1 mentoring and activities that could give the students' knowledge of pathways into the creative sector. The organisation has now expanded its programmes to Brighton, Manchester and Merseyside and, in 2022, supported more than 1,300 young people aged 16-25 in these areas. It has plans to expand nationally so more young people can benefit from its services.

Arts Emergency has cultivated an ever-growing 'alternative old boys' network' of more than 9,000 people who work in or have studied the arts or humanities or who are passionate about breaking down barriers to ensure everyone gets a fair shot at the future they want. This network powers the charity. Members volunteer to mentor and coach young people, offer work experience and paid opportunities, donate tickets to cultural events and more. In so doing, the network opens doors to industries including music, theatre, design and architecture – industries in which it is difficult for young people to gain a foothold without having connections.

Its long-term support system makes Arts Emergency unique. Young people in its community can access its programmes right up until they turn 26. This includes career clinics, CV reviews and exclusive opportunities to get hands-on experience in their chosen field of work so they can start building their own professional network, which can lead to additional opportunities and potential employment.

By February 2023, *Arts Emergency's* surveys of their community indicated that the majority (59 per cent) had gone on to HE following their mentoring experience. In terms of employment outcomes, 20 per cent were doing paid creative work and 23 per cent seeking creative work.

Arts Emergency has become a leading voice in highlighting the critical need for change in the creative and cultural industries and for workplace diversity and inclusive opportunities to be more than a tick-box exercise. By growing its network of like-minded people, empowering them to be advocates in their own workplaces and to take practical steps to make real change, such as offering paid traineeships, it knows the arts and humanities landscape of the future can and will look different.

CONCLUSION

Attendance and even graduation from university does not offer a complete solution to widening the participation of groups currently marginalised in the creative sector. Even if WP is successful at undergraduate level, there are still significant barriers to entry pathways into creative employment, as outlined in *Creative Majority* (Wreyford et al., 2021).

In addition, more students going to university has created an opportunity trap (Brown et al., 2011) where demand for limited jobs goes up and entry becomes more difficult (Budd, 2017). Additional

experience outside of HE, such as open-market internships, becomes a normalised pathway into creative and cultural work. This has widened social inequalities across the sector. We discuss this issue in our subsequent paper.

Even with progress at undergraduate level, lower socio-economic groups are underrepresented in postgraduate education (Budd, 2017), something that is now frequently required in competitive job markets. WP should not, therefore, stop at the undergraduate level.

Taking the individual as the starting point is a core theme in the WP literature. This manifests in the need for capabilities (Rose et al., 2019) or strength-based approaches (Dodd et al., 2023; Krutkowski, 2017; Whelan et al., 2023). These approaches aim to adapt to what WP students have to offer, rather than seeing WP students as a problem to be fixed.

This is reflected in the need for bespoke individualised programmes (Farini and Scollan, 2021). Purely information-based programmes, for example, which raise awareness of the range of degree options, are likely to be ineffective (Dynarski et al., 2021) as they are insufficiently targeted and individual (Carrell and Sacerdote, 2017). They also miss the contextual causes of lower rates of applications and entry (Rose et al., 2019) – for example, the types of information accessed, the advice from networks and when the information is given (Pickering, 2021).

There is some evidence for the successful use of technology-based approaches, such as lecture recordings (MacKay et al., 2021), learner-centred MOOCs run in partnership with community groups (Lambert, 2020) and reaching potential students through new online channels like vlogs (Hirst, 2022). However, the TASO (2023) overview in this area suggests the evidence base is mixed, particularly in the context of understanding online teaching practice during the pandemic. Moreover, Ross (2022) warns of the need for much more critical awareness of what the future of education is aiming to achieve with technology.

There is also potential to use creative activity itself in WP, for both creative HE courses and general HE WP. Creative activities at open days (Allison, 2016), in schools (Geagea et al., 2019) and to engage young people (Lewis, 2014); theatre workshops for cross-cultural communication in social work courses (Burroughs and Muzuva, 2019); and arts workshops to help refugee students integrate (Whelan et al., 2023) are all good examples. Yet there have been few formal 'What Works' evaluations in this area, and the mechanisms driving positive outcomes and how to scale activities needs further analysis.

A final concluding point returns to the broader theme of institutional change. For Breeze et al. (2020), it is also important to recognise how many of the issues WP students face are those that are common to all students. These include orientation to how things are taught, accessing timetables and rooms and finding a community. HE doing better for all students, particularly in terms of resourcing and individualised approaches, will mean better experiences for those from diverse backgrounds. This is in addition to the support we have outlined and is not a substitute for well-resourced, targeted interventions.

Our policy recommendations outline a key set of immediate interventions for government and HE providers to coordinate in the development of the WP programme across the UK. Other papers in this research series focus on specific initiatives linked to 'What Works' for apprenticeships and WIL. We conclude this paper with the statement that WP should operate throughout the individual student's HE experience, including equitable access, transition, experience of learning, degree completion and onward employment.

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