Did the awareness of Widening Participation in Higher Education actually influence the decision of potential students to pursue a law degree with a full time foundation year?

Student Number TU003491

Staffordshire University

Master's Degree in Higher & Professional Education.

Table of Contents:

List of tables

List of Figures

Preface, acknowledgement and dedication

In carrying out this research, along with the practical University experience I have acquired, I have been able to enhance my awareness of the students I teach, enabling invaluable development in my specialist area.

This study is based on a small scale research project designed to look at how the concept of widening participation influences students to pursue a law degree with a foundation year.

I am the award leader for the LLB (Hons) with a Foundation Year and I feel that I owe it to the students to understand to a greater degree some of the reasons why they choose the foundation route and also to consider some of the other influencing factors in their academic life.

I dedicate this work to all that have embarked on a new journey of discovery in Higher Education (HE), especially all those students who I have been fortunate to have worked with over the years.

One thing that I am extremely proud of at Staffordshire University is our dedication to widening access in higher education to those with a spark, irrespective of background, who, for whatever reason, may not have had the chance otherwise.

Widening access addresses the recruitment, retention and progression of students from groups that are traditionally under-represented in higher education. These include people from ethnic minority groups, from disadvantaged communities, people with disabilities, and those from families with no previous experience of HE. It is about increasing opportunities for people from a diverse range of backgrounds to benefit from HE and I, along with many others, aim to improve access to higher education for those with the potential to benefit from it.

It is my intention to encourage not only my own, but all higher education institutions to draw students of all ages and from all sections of the community.

As a widening access student, entering higher education was a daunting and challenging experience at first, but through commitment, hard-word and the support from family, friends and Staffordshire University, I was able to succeed.

No matter how difficult things became at times (and they did), a true belief in myself was what kept me going. I managed to overcome every hurdle and achieve all my goals of which I am very proud of. I enjoyed my experience so much that I wanted to help others achieve in the same way I had and that's why I followed the path I have now chosen.

I would like to take the opportunity to say a special thank you to Dr Valerie Hall for all her kindness, help and patience during my research.

Chapter 1

Introduction

For over a decade the State has attempted to increase not only the numbers of young people entering HE, but also the proportion from so-called "under-represented or non – traditional groups". These groups included students from lower income families, people with disabilities and some ethnic minorities. The main aim of this study was to examine whether the awareness of Widening Participation (WP) in HE actually influenced the decision of potential students to pursue a law degree with a full time foundation year. This paper is based around the results of a small scale research project designed to look at the impact of WP on Level 3 Foundation Year students (2012 – 2013) at the Staffordshire University School of Law. There were three main questions posed in the research proposal (Appendix 1):

- What was the proportion of non-traditional students on the Level 3 Foundation Law course?
- What were the motivating factors influencing their decision to enrol in the Foundation Year?
- What were some of the perceived barriers experienced by non-traditional students on the Level 3 Foundation Law course?

There was a primary focus on WP as a motivating factor and the general flavour of the project was based around the concept of non-traditional students. The study was relevant in order to meet the new and changing demands in Higher and Professional Education presented by widening access to non-traditional students. The author felt that it was necessary to develop a greater understanding of what motivated the students and their views about WP, in order to enhance understanding of the student learning environment.

The project employed both quantitative and qualitative methodologies for data collection. A mixed methodology was used for the empirical data collection. A questionnaire was used to gain an overall picture together with discussion about the comments written by students on the questionnaires. The findings allow for reflection on the type of learning experience these students may have and could possibly show a departure from the traditional view of the student experience. Chapter two provides some background to the concept of 'Widening Participation' and looks at the State's desire to open up access to HE to people who traditionally may not have had the opportunity to attend. The paper will present the findings of the project by the use of tables and diagrams and these will be discussed in depth in Chapter Four.

The findings and discussion provide an opportunity to critically reflect on the institutional practice in the Staffordshire University Law School and consider new theories about the student experience. The paper also builds on previous studies that deal with the concept of the 'New Student' and applies valid research methodologies in the context of the author's own professional practice.

In conclusion the paper will consider some of the limitations of the study, suggest some further areas of research and finally provide some recommendations for teaching and learning in the Law School.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter examines the concepts surrounding the area of WP in HE. The chapter is based on a desktop literature review of Government papers; Government funded organisational publications such as Action on Access and Aimhigher; acknowledging that the latter has now concluded; academic peer reviewed articles; web - based newspaper articles and policy documents from Staffordshire University. This chapter provides a discussion about the controversial topic of positive discrimination in WP. The chapter critically analyses the arguments surrounding how successful WP has been nationally, juxtaposed with the discussion over allocated funding. There will also be an examination of factors concerning the need to transform HE at Staffordshire University to meet the needs of diverse students in a changing context. Throughout the study the author will reflect on his own experiences and interweave examples from practice in the Law School; examining what WP means to day-to-day teaching in the Staffordshire University Law School. The chapter will compare the actual reality for students with the rhetoric espoused in the literature; as they overcome barriers such as funding, lack of information, emotional and cultural pressures. The fundamental argument of this paper is that although the University faces challenges by the new funding regime and winding down of schemes such as Aimhigher and Action on Access; there must be a concerted drive to continue and build on the excellent ideas and processes that were successfully used to introduce and develop WP.

Stevenson and Lang (2010) carried out a meta – analysis of research carried out into WP with the aim of identifying areas of success and barriers. Stevenson *et al.* (2010) found that despite governmental commitment to WP, students from the lowest social classes remain highly under-represented in HE. Those who do participate are less likely to continue after their first year, while those who complete their degree are

likely to graduate with a lower class degree than their middle and higher social-class contemporaries. Forsyth and Furlong, (2003; cited in Stevenson *et al*. 2010) used a self-completion questionnaire followed up by face-to-face interviews with a sub-sample of forty-four qualified but particularly disadvantaged young people. The majority of disadvantaged young people in the study entered the labour market rather than HE as a result of their lack of qualifications obtained at school. Of those who did enter HE, few successfully gained access to the courses at the most 'desirable' institutions or on the most prestigious courses. Moore and Dunworth (2011) take a different perspective and their argument claimed that the proportion of young people living in the most disadvantaged areas that entered HE has increased by over fifty per cent over the last fifteen years and over thirty per cent in the last five years.

Figure 1 Trends in young participation for England
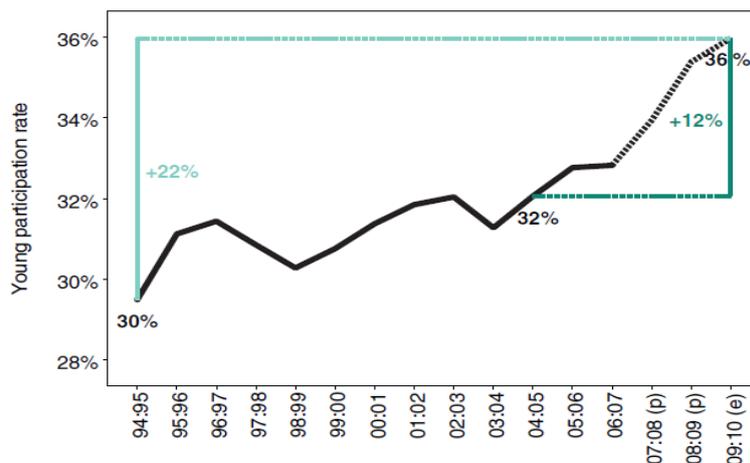
Figure 1. Source Corver (Hefce, 2010)

Figure 1 is a diagram taken from Corver, (2010, p. 4) the contents of which Moore and Dunworth (2011) used to support their argument. In addition Corver (2010) used extensive analysis and drew upon data sets provided by the Higher Education Statistics Agency, Learning and Skills Council, Scottish Funding Council, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, Welsh Assembly Government, UCAS, National Statistics' Postcode

Directory and 2001 Census to provide a very detailed assessment of participation in HE.

On closer examination of the competing perspectives it could be argued that Forsyth and Furlong (2003) used a very small test population that was based in Scotland, in contrast to the material used by Moore and Dunworth (2011). However Singleton (2010) makes a much broader point that marketisation has been applied to HE but broadening access to HE in terms of absolute numbers may not have the effect of extending access to all groups equally.

Moore *et al.* (2011) examined data from various Aimhigher projects and found that in a study where young people were matched with a learning mentor in Aimhigher schools, eighty percent of mentees stayed on in education Post 16 compared to seventy two percent on average for partner school students. Forty six per cent of students who were mentored in Year 11 progressed into HE and just under half went into further education. Moore *et al.* (2011) claimed progression from further to higher education improved over the period of Aimhigher funding; from 2006 to 2009 applications to HE increased in the same period; their research pointed to a lot of positives in increasing WP and signposted tactics and strategies that can be very useful for Staffordshire such as the mentoring programmes, summer schools and awareness raising events.

Gilbert's (2009) work on Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, examined leavers from the local authority's WP cohort over three years 2004-06. The 2006 leaver WP cohort had a positive correlation with participating in HE at eighteen, although the differences between the cohorts was reasonably small (23.6% compared to 20.2%). The more deprived the young person's postcode area the greater the impact of being part of the target cohort. So it can be argued that positive action in the manner demonstrated by the various organisations did make a positive impact on widening access. However in stark contrast to these findings Willetts

(2008), alluded to the "rather disappointing record of Aimhigher", which he said had "not yet succeeded in spreading university opportunities on the scale that we might have hoped". Neil Harrison (cited in Grove, 2012) argued that there was strong evidence for Aimhigher's success and claimed the application rate among eighteen-year-olds from the twenty per cent most deprived neighbourhood's in England was raised from 19.6 per cent in 2004 to 28.3 per cent in 2009, according to the latest official figures from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service. Since then the rate climbed further, to 31.7 per cent in 2010 (Grove, 2012).

Tolley and Rundle, (2006) found that that some higher education institutions (HEI's) were not meeting the needs of many black and minority ethnic groups (BME); that BME participation was grouped largely in post-1992 universities and based predominantly in London; BME students achieved lower class degrees and most students did not achieve the initial career jobs they desired. In addition, the review of policies revealed that BME needs were, in general, subsumed into WP agendas. Arguably Staffordshire is a Post-1992 University, however it can be demonstrated that Staffordshire's ability to welcome and embrace diversity resulted in a high number of BME, disabled and female students and this will be made clearer in the research findings. The University has consistently met or exceeded all WP benchmarks (Staffordshire University, 2011). Callender and Jackson, (2008) carried out a survey of two thousand prospective students from across all social classes. Their study revealed that students from low-income families were more likely than their wealthier peers to perceive the costs of higher education as a debt rather than an investment

David *et al.* (2008), undertook an analysis of WP in HE as part of the Teaching and Learning Research Programme which comprised of seven projects. The findings demonstrated Government policies on WP led to increasing opportunities for learners from diverse families and disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, but did not result in fair or

equal access to equal types of HE that led to equal benefits in the graduate or professional labour markets.

Harvey (2010) explored issues surrounding HE participation rate of care leavers. In finding rates of access in this group to be particularly low, Harvey (2010) concluded that properly supporting care leavers from pre-entry right through the transition to study and into employment was absolutely vital. HEFCE funding for the Action for Access national coordination team ended on 31 December 2011 (Action for Access, 2012).

Social and Cultural Identities

Crozier *et al.* (2008, p.23) employed a mixed method of research; questionnaire and ethnographic semi-structured interviews with students from four UK HEIs. The authors found that the non - traditional students not only had to manage their social and cultural identities in university but also in their home communities, which caused tension between the demands of home and family and required the development of complex coping strategies. Family expectation or tradition of HE involvement is particularly significant in encouraging young people to undertake HE. Some families have inaccurate perceptions of HE and its benefits and may not support young people's aspirations to HE (McDonald Ross, 2003). This mirrors the theories alluded to by Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) and the complex social theory of cultural capital. Cultural capital could be described as the qualitative dimensions of family role and environmental factors that influence a student's feelings about higher education and in due course, that person's ability to succeed (Reahy *et al.* 2005). There were both racial and gender based elements to this, with students moving "in and out" of different identity constructions between university and home. Crozier's (2008) research is of particular importance as it provided information that can be considered by recruitment and admission planners. Currently over forty per cent of students studying at

Staffordshire University hail from the thirteen thousand most deprived Super Outputs Areas in England (Staffordshire University, 2011). There are obviously clear links to student retention and WP with a strong need for staff to make extra efforts to facilitate the non-traditional learner's integration in to a perceivably intimidating and frightening social environment (Gravells and Simpson, 2009).

Evans and Storan (2007) outlined policies designed to develop and embed increased access for disabled learners into HE as part of the Action on Access mission. Wilson and Elliot (2008) suggested that, despite the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and other disability related legislation, students with hidden impairments were not receiving the appropriate information, advice and support during the transition phase to enable them to experience HE in a comparable way to their non-disabled peers. Such research is again highly relevant for the teacher at HE as extra vigilance is required so as not to confuse students being overawed by the unknown with the presence of a hidden disability.

One area of WP that remains clearly uncontested is the apparent lack of access of non - traditional learners to the so called selective universities, the traditional seats of learning where the elite and ruling classes have historically been groomed to take positions in Government, Law and run the Corporations (Lampi, 2012, p.5). The Public Accounts Committee (2009) stated that the 'Russell Group' of universities; the sixteen self-selected major research intensive universities in England, in particular generally performed poorly in relation to WP. Harris (2012) wrote that the admission of young people of talent from less advantaged backgrounds to the UK's most selective universities was making proportionately little or no headway. Harris' OFFA (2010) report to the Government on access to elite institutions, demonstrated the most advantaged twenty per cent of young people were still seven times more likely to attend an elite university than the most disadvantaged forty per cent. At some institutions, privileged students are fifteen times more likely to attend.

Independent school pupils are over twenty times more likely to enter a highly selective university than state school children entitled to Free School Meals (FSM). The Sutton Trust (2010) report outlined the fact that independent school pupils are fifty times more likely than FSM pupils to gain a place at Oxford or Cambridge. At the most selective universities of all, including Oxbridge, less than one percent of students are FSM pupils compared with nearly half the intake from Independent schools.

This gap between the most privileged students and the rest has remained constant during the last decade despite increasing access efforts (Lampi, 2012). Loveys (2011) identified that five elite British schools are sending more pupils to Oxford and Cambridge than all of the country's comprehensives and colleges combined, the hundred elite schools – three per cent of the national total – accounted for thirty two per cent of admissions to Oxbridge. This evidence strongly points to meaningful WP and it's lack of effectiveness in terms of increasing access to HE for students from non-traditional backgrounds; the chance to benefit from top rated, research institutes, the cultural experiences and networking opportunities accessed by privileged learners (Sutton Trust 2010).

The controversial topic of Positive Discrimination

Clayton (2012) describes how positive discrimination has been practised in various US universities and has been the focus of long-standing legal and political debate. An example within Europe is France's leading university for the social sciences, Sciences Po, which since 2001 has run a programme called Conventions Education Prioritaire, in which individuals from working class or unprivileged backgrounds who would not ordinarily be selected are admitted. This programme accounts for about ten per cent of its intake.

The area of positive discrimination would be hotly contested in the UK, however Clayton (2012) interestingly points out that applying lower entry requirements to disadvantaged students is compatible with selecting

students with the most academic potential to the extent that students' qualifications reflect their school's ability to get them through an exam rather than their own ability to study at university. This debate links into the findings about the Russell Group of universities and their apparent lack of WP. Cable and Willetts (BIS, 2011; cited in Clayton, 2012, p.415) made a thought-provoking comment about the concept of student admissions in highly selective English universities. Their observation considered the argument that selective institutions may want to consider admitting more students with high potential from disadvantaged backgrounds; on the basis of lower entry qualifications than they would normally apply. Cable *et al.* (2011) qualified the statement with a proviso that institutions' procedures were fair, transparent and evidence-based.

It might be interesting to speculate on the French example and the comment made by Cable and Willetts (2011) will positive discrimination force the selective institutions to embrace widening access and would this course of action lead to a massive social paradigm shift in British education? The subject will no doubt be the cause of much research and debate. The author does tend to agree with Clayton's (2012) comment about selective school's ability to get privileged learners through an exam.

Contrasting arguments on widening participation

Tax payers contributed £392m of WP funding to HE institutions. Despite the substantial amount of expenditure, progress in WP had been slow (HOPAC, 2009, p.1). Prior to 2012 The Funding Council's method for allocating WP funding to universities was based on the number of students a university recruited from underrepresented groups, rather than funding WP activities directly. The formula reflected the additional costs of recruiting and supporting students from under-represented groups, so universities with more of these students received more funding (HOPAC, 2009, p.12).

In the HE White Paper, Students at the Heart of the System (2011), the Government outlined its continued commitment to improving social mobility and WP through fairer access to HE. The rhetoric contained in the Government's new plans alluded to the provision of more generous support for low income full-time students. Plans were announced for the creation of a National Scholarship Programme; by 2014, the National Scholarship Programme is planned to provide £150m to help improve access to higher HE amongst the least well-off young people and adults (BIS, 2011)

Aimhigher was a Government programme designed to encourage students from schools from lower socio-economic groups to progress to HE (Aimhigher, 2012). Activities included visits to universities; academic staff working with schools and colleges; regional and local collaboration; students working as mentors in schools; potential students and their teachers accessing university laboratories and equipment; summer schools and one-day master classes given by university staff (Richardson, 2010). HEFCE and OFFA (2013) stated that to make significant progress in WP universities should target focus on individual learners over a number of years. Interventions are reported to be most effective when they start early, and are then delivered consistently throughout time at school and college.

Burke *et al,* (2011) questioned the motives and the ethics behind WP as a policy. They put forward an argument that opening up access to HE is a method by which the potential and current labour force can be upgraded and exploited by Corporations. The idea is critiqued that WP can be used to keep the UK competitive in the global economy; rather than developing an individual's mind to higher forms of knowledge traditionally gleaned from a HE experience.

In clear contrast to Burke *et al*.'s (2011) argument, Universities UK (2009; cited in Browne, 2010) described HE as a major part of the

economy, larger in size than the advertising industry, and considerably larger than the aerospace and pharmaceutical industries. Using financial data from 2007/08 (Universities UK, 2009) Browne (2010) demonstrated that HE generated an income of £23.4 billion a year, with an outcome estimated at £59 billion. BIS (2011) Students at the Heart of the System reinforced the consensus that improving access and WP were worthwhile investments. Browne (2010), citing research carried out by the former Department for Education and Skills (2002) argued that graduates generally earn more, and pay more tax over their lifetime than non-graduates. Aston and Bekhradnia (2003; cited in Singleton, 2009) pointed out that such claims rely on speculative predictions that are impossible to measure accurately.

Thus there can be seen to be an emergence of a central argument contained in the literatures; has WP been developed to serve the individual's personal academic development or the interests of the State? There is an argument made out that non-traditional learners tend to apply for overtly vocational courses in subjects such as media, tourism, business studies or information technology out of a desire to quickly pay off debts accumulated during their studentship. Courses in politics, philosophy, the classics and humanities, appear to remain options of choice for the more privileged learner (Forsyth and Furlong, 2003).

Widening participation in terms of transformation

This paper makes the point that it is very important to cut through the political rhetoric and seeks to address how we need to transform HE to meet the needs of diverse students in a changing context. There is an obvious need for diversifying HE provision and improving access (BIS, 2011). HE institutions need to devise new methods of funding outreach activities. Options include working in partnership with local businesses and neighbouring institutions such as Staffordshire working with Keele or Derby Universities.

A major factor to consider when confronting the problems around funding for WP is the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT). HEIs will need to respond more flexibly to individual learners' needs (Cullen, 2007; Cooke, 2008; JISC, 2009). BrowseAloud is an assistive technology that adds text-to-speech functionality to websites. By reading parts of web pages aloud, BrowseAloud assists people who find it difficult to read text online, including those with literacy difficulties, dyslexia, mild visual impairments and non-native speakers (BrowseAloud, 2012). The implications for the use of such technology are clearly obvious in the context of WP. Reading support for online content can help underrepresented groups by initially providing clear information about HE, ensuring candidates receive comprehensive careers and funding information, prior to applying to university. Digital technologies that help to break down traditional barriers experienced by non – traditional learners would help retain students by providing continued support throughout their time in HE. With smartphones, tablets and other forms of technology at their disposal, today's students want a flexible approach to learning, where they can access resources or catch up on lectures at any time of the day or night (educause, 2005). HEIs need to capitalise on this paradigm shift and take advantage of the role of technology in widening access and improving the student experience at home and internationally; the latter needs to be at the core of Staffordshire University's use of good practice for delivering courses online (Staffordshire University, 2012).

Non - traditional students should be advised and encouraged to consider QAA and the Access to HE Diploma, a qualification that enables individuals without A-levels or the usual equivalent to enter HE. Access to HE courses needs to become even more accessible; providing a clear avenue to HE for adults returning to education; working with private providers to validate degrees and providing a fully flexible, high quality education that fits around students other work and life commitments. Redecker *at al.* (2011) predict that learning strategies will be personalised, tailor-made

and targeted; collaborative and networked; informal and flexible. The author has practical experience of the benefits of partnership with Further Education Colleges (FE) and has been involved in opening up HE provision to FE. It is important to drive widening participation by maximising on the role of HE in FE colleges and raising awareness of HE study in FE. There is a focus by the author on forming even greater links and personally attending the Local FE Colleges; work in this area is due to be implemented from January 2013. The aim is to encourage FE students to look at various alternative routes into HE alongside the traditional ones, therefore keeping their options open at every level. The author is also keen to encourage Mature Students back into HE and work closely with those who have not been involved in education for many years.

The author has used podcasting to create feedback for students in the Law school and has recently created a podcast that contains an overview of the history of policing in the UK. Reflecting on this practice gives one a clear vision of how the use of podcasting and vidcasting can support WP. Information about HE and important facts about life at University can be disseminated to non - traditional potential applicants via schools and Further Educational Institutes using podcast, YouTube and streaming facilities. Stoof et al. (2002) introduced the concept of the Virtual Campus allowing for students to learn anytime, anyplace, anywhere. The recognition of the immediate need to utilise the package of technologies available is of great importance to ensure that Staffordshire University remains at the cutting edge of providing quality learning. It may be feasible to develop a Virtual campus of Staffordshire University and provide a real flavour for potential applicants to visit and experience life at the University, in a safe and informative manner. Virtual worlds allow learners to assume different (cultural) personalities and create new living environments. The personal feel of the virtual environment may increase the empathy and understanding of other cultures, life-styles and outlooks on life (Redecker et al. 2011).

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the conflicting arguments presented in the literatures about WP, which, as the author discovered is a complex and diverse subject that links directly into how culture and society shapes the learner's life chances and opportunities. As teachers it is imperative that we remain positive and put the learner first. Every opportunity should be taken to improve all citizens' chances to learn, develop their mind and progress in life. The author's view is one of championing WP and taking the positive aspects and applying them in day-to-day practice in the Law School. The encouragement of non-traditional learners is central to the production of an educated and prosperous society. Teachers need to take advantage of the exciting new technologies for learning to support WP. The debate on positive discrimination in HE needs to be dealt with objectively; emotion and traditional views may have to be set aside for the betterment of society as a whole. From outreach work to dealing with admissions, clearing and student retention, there must be a continued effort to support and mentor all our leaners but teachers should take some extra care to bear in mind some of the feelings of the non – traditional learner.

The use of secondary data in the literature review provided a wide-ranging spectrum of analysis. The literature review has highlighted the continued need to scrutinise WP. This area of study was considered as an appropriate focus for this small-scale research project. Accordingly, the rationale and research questions outlined in Chapter One support a mixed method approach to investigate the consequences of WP in the Staffordshire University Law School further. This is now discussed in the following Chapter when the author considers the appropriateness of research paradigms and research methods to this study.

Chapter 3

Research Methods and Findings

Increasingly, students studying in HE are undertaking degrees with a Foundation Year (FY). This approach attracts people from a broad range of backgrounds, particularly people from low participation neighbourhoods, students from non-traditional backgrounds (HEFCE 2008) and provides an alternative route for those without A-levels (Ooms *et al.* 2012; Leese, 2010; Winter and Dismore 2010). There is limited research about how WP has actually influenced the decisions of young learners to pursue a degree with a full time foundation year. The review of the data gathered by the questionnaire (Appendix 2) will attempt to ascertain what are the motivating factors and the social influences that play a contributory role in respondents' reasons for entry into HE. The research pays particular attention to the student's exposure to WP policies such as raised awareness at FE level, Aimhigher activities and Government rhetoric.

The research topic was considered to be ethically viable considering current Staffordshire Graduate scheme and may be of interest to recruitment teams and staff involved in university-based widening access activities.

Method

The survey in the form of a pen and paper questionnaire asked the respondents to consider a number of factors influencing their choice to enrol on a course with a foundation year and looks at their attitude to a number of influencing factors. One of the survey's key strengths was the high number of completed responses coupled with the fact that it was completed early on in the teaching block. The latter may give the advantage of eliciting responses early on in the academic lifecycle. Booth (2009) alluded to the shift from pedagogic teaching and learning to more

andragogic adult learning in HEI, this study wanted to capture the students' views at the beginning of their student experience while their motives were still fresh in their minds and before they became fully embedded in HE.

The data used in this paper has been collected as part of a study to evaluate WP in the LLB (Hons) Law with a Foundation Year award at Staffordshire University. The study commenced with a distribution of 63 questionnaires to each student on the award. The questionnaire was designed to collect data on the status of each student such as age, gender, disability and ethnic group. The questionnaire used in this study was handed out near the end of a lecture and collected in after completion before the students left the lecture theatre. The author used this method of delivery and collection to facilitate a high return rate. The potential impact on the study, by using his method will be discussed in chapter four.

The weakness of the data set is that it does not include family background information on each student such as parental occupation or family income or whether the student was in paid employment. The latter are very important factors that impact on cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) and finance becoming more visibly a factor in students' engagement in HE (Yorke and Longden, 2008; Brooks, 2012).

The case study used a mainly quantitative approach but did collect some qualitative data using the questionnaire that was handed to all FY students after a lecture. The initial data collection took place towards the end of the first teaching block. The response rate was 96% (n=63).The questionnaire had been constructed to be simple, two sides of A4 paper to be completed by pen and paper method.

Table 1. The six elements forming the basis of the student questionnaire.

Motivating factors

Alternative forms of assessment

Being informed

Knowledge of Widening Participation

Family influences

Perceived barriers

Table 1 sets out the main areas examined in the study and provides a flavour for the paper's discussion. The questionnaire was designed to be easy to complete within a short space of time and these factors may account for the high completion and return rate.

Table 2. Questions making up the student questionnaire.

1. How would you describe yourself?

2. What were the motivating factors influencing your decision to enrol on the Foundation Year?

3. Did it make a difference that any of the following forms of assessment are used compared to traditional exams?

4. Did you feel that you were fully informed about life at Staffordshire University?

5. Please state your age category

6. Staffordshire University Widening Participation policies influenced my decision to study in the Law School on the LLB with a foundation Year

7. Are there any reasons for this view?

8. Has any other member of your immediate family been to University before?

9. Were any of the below factors perceived barriers?

10. Do you have a disability, including hidden disabilities?

The questionnaire contained ten questions, six of which allowed the students to provide written reasons or comments about their answer. *Table two* set out the individual questions.

Two out of the ten questions consisted of Likert items and statements which the student was asked to evaluate according to subjective criteria; the level of agreement or disagreement was measured. The format used the five-level Likert item: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree. For each Likert-style question asked, a

supplementary open ended question was included inviting the students to explain their views further. Four of the questions were multiple choice in which the student could tick all factors that applied. The respondent was provided a space to comment further and on question three was asked an open question 'why?' The questions concerning gender and disabilities were dichotomous, where the respondent had two options. The qualitative responses have been transcribed from the questionnaire and are discussed in chapter four.

Question two was a multiple choice question and really formed one of the most important questions in the study. This question asked the students to indicate the motivating factors influencing their decision to enroll on the Foundation Year. The respondents were given sixteen factors to choose from and the option to explain further.

Findings

The population of interest for this study was all undergraduate students enrolled on the LLB (Hons) with a Foundation Year. The survey sample consisted of 57 respondents from a total group of 63 forming the cohort commonly referred to as the FY. The sample was evenly split in relation to gender with 28 males 49.1%, 27 Females 47.3% and 2 students who did not state their gender. The age of the students overwhelmingly were represented in the 18-24 category at 96.5%. Only two students in the FY were older than 24 and 12% of the students reported disabilities; however there was no opportunity in the questionnaire to explore this area further.

Ethnic breakdown
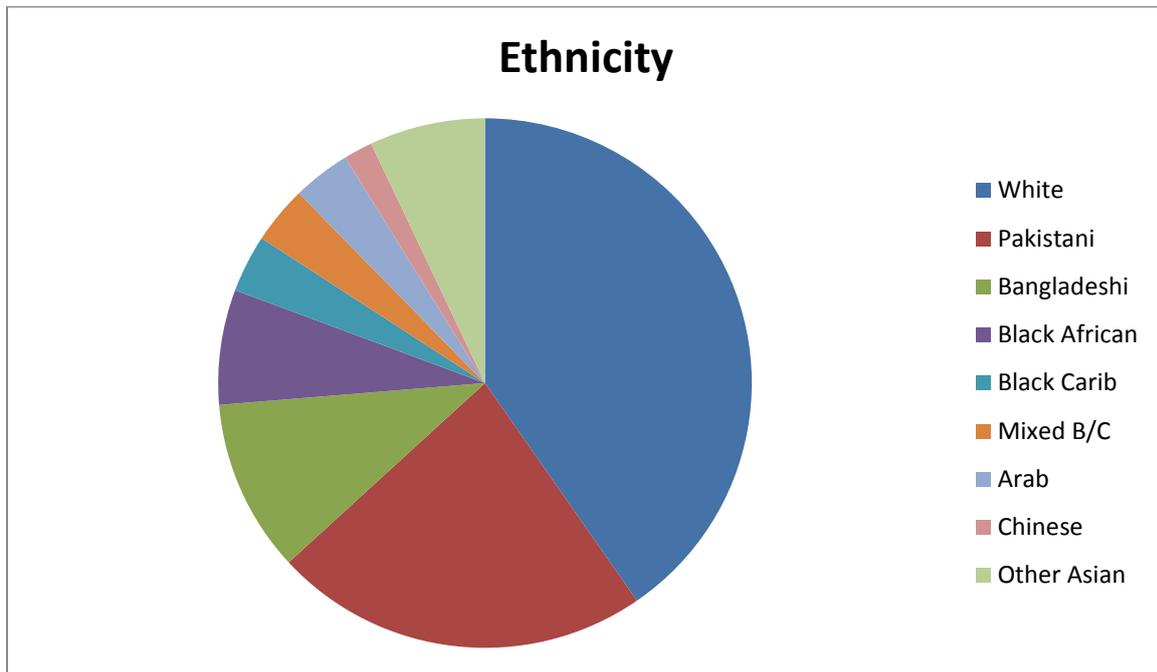
Figure 2. Pie chart showing the self-defined ethnic breakdown of the Foundation Year Students.

Question 1 asked the students to define their ethnicity and *Figure 2.* is a pie chart used to provide a visual breakdown of the self-defined ethnicity of the cohort. A full list of the choices available is contained in Appendix 2. The respondents were also offered an option to write in their own self-definition if nothing listed was felt suitable. One student did write in their nationality.

The FY was split roughly 40% white and 60% BME students. Table 3 below highlights the actual breakdown of the group.

Table 3. Self defined ethnic breakdown

White	40.3%	(N=23)
Pakistani	22.8%	(N=13)
Bangladeshi	10.5%	(N=6)
Black African	7%	(N=4)
Other Asian	7%	(N=4)
Black Caribbean	4%	(N=2)
Mixed Caribbean and white	4%	(N=2)
Arab	4%	(N=2)
Chinese	1.75%	(N=1)

**Motivating Factors influencing the students' decision to enrol**
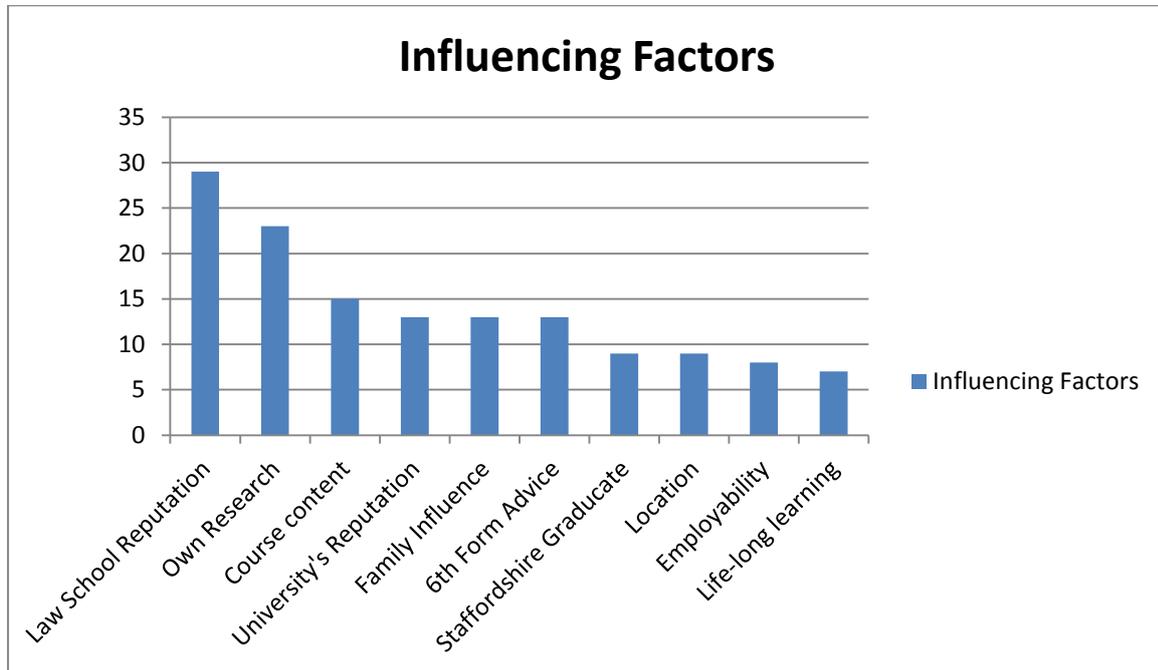
Figure 3. Graph showing the relevant motivating factors

Figure 3 is a graph showing the factors that students listed as being motivating factors in their decision to enrol on the LLB (Hons) with a Foundation year at Staffordshire University. The students had the option of ticking all the factors that they felt applied to them. Responses varied with some students listing several reasons whilst others only listed a few. The data showed that the overwhelming factor was the reputation of the Staffordshire Law School 50.8 % followed by the students' opportunity to conduct their own research 40.3%. The study indicated that 26.3% of respondents felt that the course content was important and factors such as the University's overall reputation, family influence and advice received by sixth form tutors was shown to be of a similar level of influence at 22.8%. The Staffordshire Graduate scheme, location and employability came next with 15.7% and 14% respectively. The study showed that 12.2% of students indicated life-long learning was a relevant aspect however the remaining factors such as parking facilities, transport,

student accommodation, and location were not seen as important factors. Interestingly advice from FE institutions and financial concerns were not recorded as relevant influencing factors.

Alternative forms of assessment compared to traditional exams
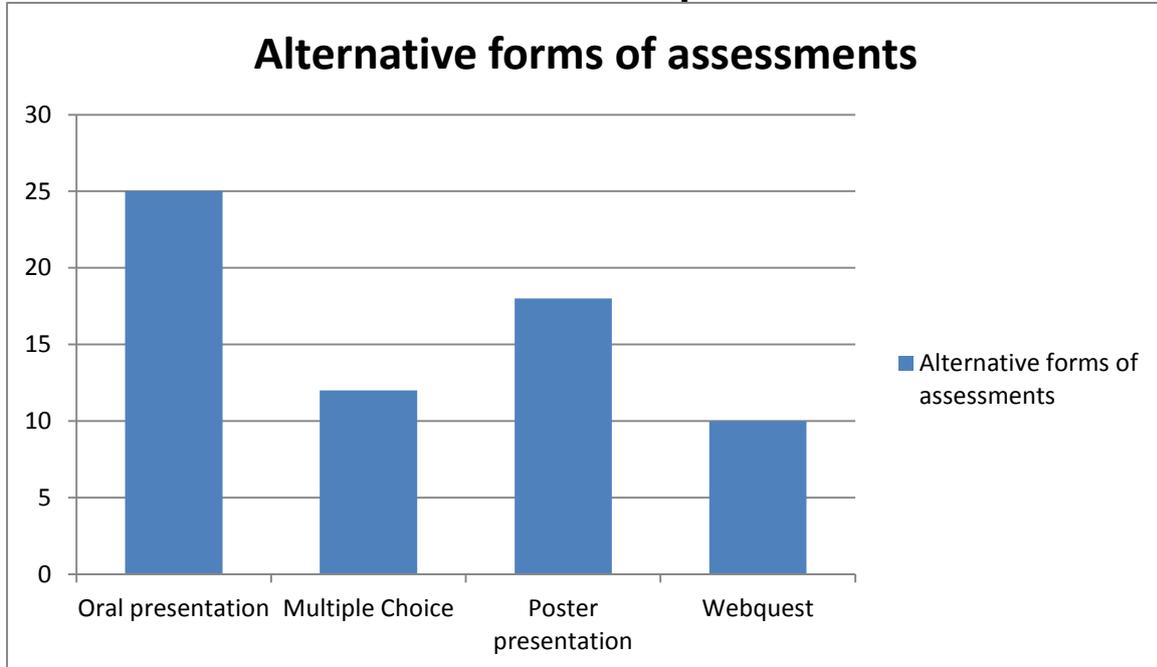
Figure 4. Responses to different forms of assessment

Question 3 was worded as follows:

Did it make a difference that any of the following forms of assessment are used compared to traditional exams (tick all that apply)

Written examination, Reflective Diary, Oral Presentation, Online Discussion, Project, Assessed essay, Role Play, Group Project, Portfolio, Questionnaire, Dissertation, Poster Presentation, Class Participation, Practical Session, Self-assessment, Multiple Choice, Web-quest, Negotiated assessment, Problem-based learning, Attendance.

Figure 4. is a graph showing the responses to the different forms of assessment highlighted in the questionnaire. The question then invited the respondent to answer '*Why'?* The highest response was seen in the area of oral presentation. The study showed that 43.8% of students ticked this area with 31.5 % providing a written answer to the question '*Why'?* 31.5% of students ticked the Poster presentation box, 21% ticked the multiple choice box and 17.5% ticked Web-quest.

Table 4. The written responses to Question 3

- Enjoy the challenge of different types, once employed it isn't all going to be written exams. Practical ones help you prepare as well for the future.
- Familiar with oral presentation and poster presentation
- Presentations in general make me nervous
- Never done oral presentations before
- I think it is better
- Familiar with oral presentations
- More pressure is applied as you are not aware if you have presented correct.
- I do not like exams as they make me nervous and often tend to panick
- Presentations in general make me nervous
- Yes because it slowly eases us into the course
- It did make a difference, except the poster presentation which was my least favourite
- I don't test well
- I prefer all of the last different forms of assessment apart from my least favourite being the oral presentation
- I don't like examinations, don't do well
- I don't like written exams
- No difference
- Familiar with oral presentations
- It was varied and the oral presentation allowed me to grow confidence
- Because they are easier and gets things out the way quicker.

Table 4 provides the detailed response of the students who took the opportunity to provide a written answer to the qualitative element to Question 3. The comments provide an eclectic flavour of reasons to explain why this question produced the highest number of written responses to any other. The issues raised in Question 3 will be analysed in the discussion section of this paper.

Informed about life at Staffordshire University

Question 4 asked the students' if they felt fully informed about life at Staffordshire University and used the five-level Likert item.

Table 5. Response to being informed about life at Staffordshire University

Very well informed	21%
(N)	(12)
Good understanding	49.1%
(N)	(28)
Some understanding	19.3%
(N)	(11)
Poorly informed	3.5%
(N)	(2)
Not informed at all	0%
(N)	(0)

Approximately fifty per cent of respondents indicated that they had been fully informed about life at Staffordshire University. 21% felt very well informed and 19.3% felt that they had full understanding. Two students felt poorly informed. *Table 5* provides the written responses by students.

Table 6 . Written responses to question 4

- Poor night life – poorly developed area
- Still felt like I needed more info prior to starting eg. Module content for reading up on.
- Yes I was given booklets, talks and other similar forms of information some not sometimes helpful.
- People from Staffs coming into 6th form to talk about the uni
- I know everything there is to know
- Good information from all different forms of real life
- Excellent communication from lecturers

Widening Participation as an influencing factor

Question 6 was of particular interest for the purpose of this paper as it used a five-level Likert item to examine how the policy of WP had influenced the students' decision to study in the Law School on the LLB (Hons) with a Foundation Year.

Table 7. Responses as a percentage of students

Strongly agree	3.8%
(N)	(2)
Agree	38.6%
(N)	(22)
Neither agree nor disagree	48%
(N)	(25)
Disagree	3.8%
(N)	(2)
Strongly disagree	2%
(N)	(1)

Table 7 shows that 48% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement in Question 6. The findings indicated that 38.6% of the respondents agreed with the statement and 3.8% of students either strongly agreed or disagreed. One student (2%) strongly disagreed. This question elicited very few written responses from the respondents. *Table 8*. below lists the replies from the students. Only 12.28% of students provided a written response.

Table 8. Students' written responses to the influences of Widening Participation

- I do not know what this is
- No
- No awareness of the policy
- None
- Lack of understanding of what widening participation is
- I do not understand what widening participation policies are
- Did not know it existed

Other members of the students' immediate family with experience of University

Question 7 was a question probing cultural capital and asked the respondent to indicate if other members of their family had been to university before. The options presented included: *No 1, 2 or more and 3 or more.*
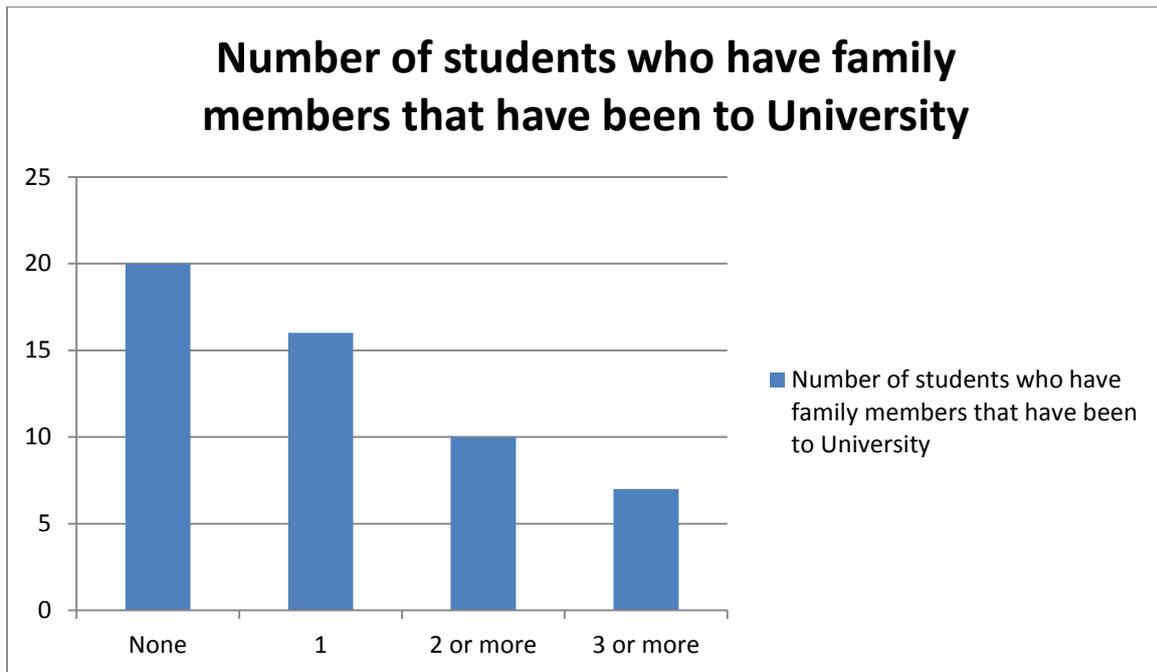
Figure 5. A graph showing the number of students who have family members that have attended university.

Figure 5 shows the number of students who had immediate family members that had been to a University. One of the weaknesses of the study was that there was no definition of immediate family. One student's interpretation could be different to another's. The findings revealed that 35.08% of students were the first people in their family to go to University, 28.07% had one other member, 17.54% had two or more and 12.28% reported three or more family members go the University.

Perceived Barriers

Question 8 provided the students with a multiple choice of eight areas of potential factors that could be seen as barriers to their experience at the University. The options included *Disability Access, Disability Awareness, Language, Culture, Age, Gender, Transport and Child care.* There was no option on this question to write any additional comments. *Table 9* below sets out the student's responses.

Table 9. Perception of barriers.

Disability Access	0
(N)	(0)
Disability Awareness	5.26%
(N)	(3)
Language	1.75%
(N)	(1)
Culture	5.26%
(N)	(3)
Age	8.77%
(N)	(5)
Gender	1.75%
(N)	(1)
Transport	24.56%
(N)	(14)
Child care	1.75%
(N)	(1)

The level of response to this question was relatively low. The results show 24.56% of respondents indicated that transport as a perceived barrier to life at university and this was by far the biggest concern. Age with 8.77% and Culture with 5.26% were highlighted by eight respondents. The remaining options were only chosen by one respondent each and disability access was not highlighted at all.

The next chapter will analyse the results and provide an in-depth discussion around the findings.

Chapter 4

Discussion

For over a decade the State has attempted to increase not only the numbers of young people entering HE, but also the proportion from so-called "under-represented or non – traditional groups". These groups included students from lower income families, people with disabilities and some ethnic minorities. There is limited research about student awareness of WP and how the government policies in this area actually influenced their decision to pursue a degree with a full time foundation year. This study sought to review the data gathered by a survey of the 2012/2013 LLB (Hons) with a Foundation Year at Staffordshire University; to ascertain what were the main motivating factors and the social influences that played a contributory role in the respondents' reasons for entry into HE. The research focused on the students' subjective experience in choosing to undertake this particular academic route.

HEFCE and OFFA (2013) stated that to make significant progress in WP, universities should direct focus on individual learners over a number of years. Interventions are reported to be most effective when they start early and are then delivered consistently throughout time at school and college.

The main aim of the study was to examine whether the awareness of WP in HE actually influenced the decision of potential students to pursue a law degree with a full time foundation year. The continued policy of widening access to people who would have been considered to be non – traditional students is very important and relevant to the Staffordshire Law School. Staffordshire University together with many other HE institutions is required to work towards widening access and student retention within the context of the closures of Aimhigher and Action on Access and reduced funding (HEFCE, 2012). It was considered therefore that this

particular area of the study was very relevant. It was felt that the study could provide a real practical flavour of why students make the choices they do. As the author is the Academic Award Leader for the Foundation Level award it was considered important to use the findings of the study for reflective practical purposes such as supporting student recruitment and tapping into potential marketing opportunities for the School of Law. The study also examined how the experience of the Staffordshire students compared to that of students in the rest of the UK; again this was considered important to consider how WP had impacted locally as well as nationally.

The study revealed that 96.5% of the students were in the 18-24 year old category. The impetus to WP is over decade old which might indicate that WP had been an active factor throughout their learning careers that is not to say however that individuals were aware of this. The study also looked at the first generation of students to come through under the new funding regime. The findings in this study mirror those published by HEFCE (2010) that demonstrated significant increases in young people participating in HE. HEFCE (2013) suggested that the full effects on WP may take some time to emerge, and alluded to the possibility that a range of factors may impact on potential students from disadvantaged backgrounds in the coming years.

The cohort was virtually split evenly with 28 males 49.1%, 27 Females 47.3% and two students declining to give their gender. These figures are in slight contrast with the national figures and the work of Cover (2010) for HEFCE that suggested more females were entering HE than males. UCAS (2012) announced that the application rate of 18 year old men in 2012 had decreased and the difference in application rates between men and women had increased. The national picture for first year students is 57.5% female and 42.5% male. Cover (2012) also alluded to findings that showed that since the mid-2000s the participation rate of young men had increased (Cover, 2010, p.2). It is interesting to see the balance present

in this study; this may be an anomaly or may reflect a result of some of the directed efforts by Aimhigher to target males in schools and further education (May, Sluis and Woodfield, 2012). This area is difficult to deal with as there could be speculation as to why this particular cohort is comprised the way it is. Further research with future cohorts over a number of years would provide a clearer picture.

The overarching theme of the study was concerned with the impact that WP had on motivating the students to take up full time study on the foundation year. In order to examine the potential influence of WP, it was considered important to obtain an overall snapshot of what broadly motivated the students. With this in mind the study used a very basic pen and paper questionnaire (Appendix 2) that took only a few minutes to complete. The result was a 96% (n=57) return rate. To critically analyse such a high response rate one could examine recent similar studies and compare the levels of responses.

Winter and Dismore (2010) looked at the experiences of foundation degree students progressing to an honours degree at Plymouth University. Six hundred students were contacted by email and invited to participate in an online questionnaire about their prior academic and social experiences. The question format was a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'I totally agree' to 'I totally disagree'. The questionnaire was accessible for sixteen weeks in early 2008 and the response rate was 16%. The authors could not explain the reason for the low response rate and suggested time constraints or lack of interest in the subject matter. On reflection it is apparent that however well designed or relevant a study may be, a poor response rate can introduce uncertainty, bias and result in the study being of little relevance (Smeeth and Fletcher, 2002). The author chose to design a questionnaire that was simple to complete and was not time consuming.

Yorke and Longden (2008) in a large scale study for HEFCE on the first year experience of HE in the UK used a mixture of pre-tested demographic and Likert-type items. The test was conducted in class time and took approximately twenty minutes to complete. Spaces were provided for students to add written comments, but the time constraint was such that these would at best be brief. The number of usable responses was 7109, which represented a response rate of around 95 per cent (Yorke and Longden, 2008, p.7). Leese (2010) focused on the early experience of students who had entered an undergraduate course in a post-1992 university that was committed to WP. Data was collected using an online questionnaire with a response rate of 52% (n=180).

Yorke and Longden's (2008) study resulted in a high return rate and was conducted during class time. The author wanted to achieve a similar high number of responses and felt that this method would work. The questionnaire used in this study was handed out near the end of a lecture and collected in after completion. It can be suggested that many of the online questionnaires in similar studies resulted in low completion rates.
One could argue that this questionnaire lacks depth and certainly detail; probing questions were sacrificed in an attempt to encourage the students to participate. The questions were contained on both sides of an A4 sheet of paper and took approximately ten minutes to complete.

The survey did however provide some fundamental information about the cohort as a whole and provided some areas for discussion on the main purpose of this paper. Bowling (2005) argued that the mode of questionnaire administration had significant effects on data quality.
Bowling examined how the administration of the questionnaire influenced the validity of the results of research and argued that the data collection process that involved an interaction between the questionnaire, the respondent and the researcher could make a difference. In this study the

author handed the questionnaire out and collected them in at the end of the lecture. Bowling (2005) claimed that the response rate could be influenced by the setting the questionnaire was administered in. If one critically analyses the high response rate, it could be argued that the respondents were influenced by the fact that they felt obliged to complete and return the questionnaire by being in the 'in class' environment. One could further argue that the method used garnered responses from students who would normally not participate. One could speculate that the latter may have improved the sampling factor and helped to ensure completeness of coverage of the target population. The study may have elicited responses from those students who could prove to be very informative and reflect a true flavour of the 'New Student', a phrase coined by Leese (2010).

Table 1 provided a framework within which the main themes of the study could be introduced. The motivating factors and knowledge of WP elements formed the bedrock of the study. In order to it examine such factors in depth and to consider widening participation within a wider framework, the decision was taken to examine the students' views on alternative forms of assessment, being informed about what to expect from the first year of HE and how families influenced decision making. This study will discuss the results of the findings in the same order as they appeared on the questionnaire.

Ethnic Breakdown

The study showed that 60% of the foundation cohort were BME students, with 40% of students self-defining themselves as white. In comparison with national data, this result presents a different overview, and one can make some interesting comparisons nationally.

White 79.4

All students

8.7

6.8

C 0.9

M 3.0

O 1.1

- Black
- Asian
- Chinese
- Mixed
- Other
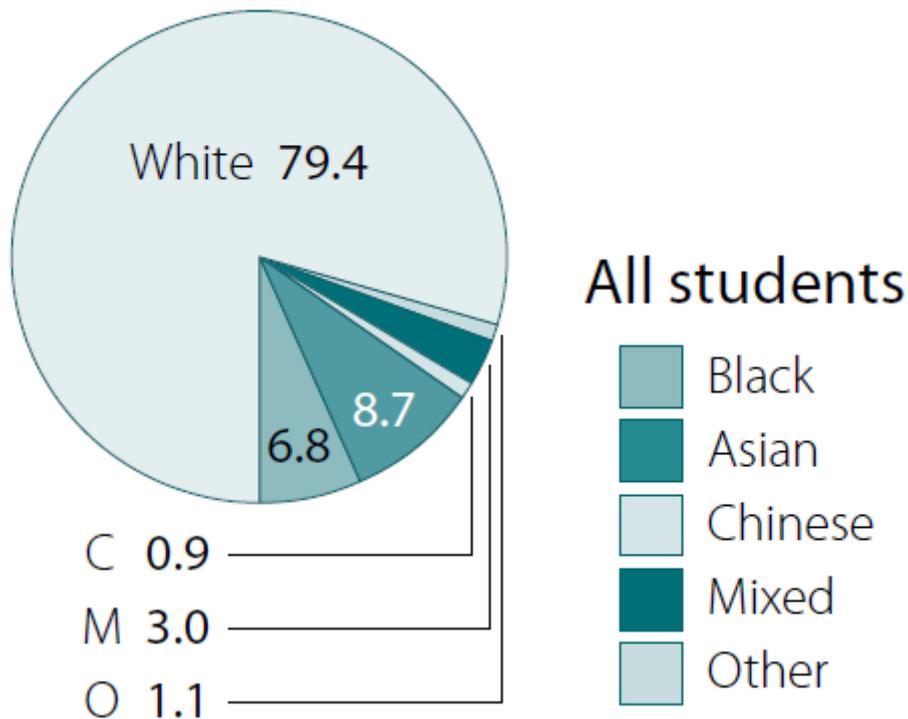
Figure 6 A pie chart showing the ethnic breakdown of students in England 2010/2011 Source EUC (2012)

Figure 5 shows the ethnic breakdown for all students in England for the period 2010/2011. The Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) report (2012) analysed student data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) covering gender, ethnicity, disability and age for the 2010/11 academic year. This study compared the data in the report with the data from the Staffordshire Foundation Year to show some significant differences in the ethnic make-up of the cohort.

The HESA figures are different for first year full time students showing 84.1% white and 15.9% BME. The Staffordshire cohort in this study was significantly different compared with the national figures. Figure 1 showed the self-defined ethnic breakdown of the Foundation Year. The

Staffordshire foundation year is comprised of 23% self-defined Pakistani students compared to a figure of 8.7% of students nationally who define themselves as Asian. The Staffordshire foundation year cohort is made up of 41% of students who describe themselves as other Asian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi. Students self-defined as Black Caribbean, Black African or mixed black and Caribbean make up 15% of the cohort compared to a national figure for England of 6.8%.

This study revealed some very significant differences in the ethnic make-up of the foundation year cohort showing a significantly greater inclusion of BME students; a figure of 60% at Staffordshire compared to a national figure of 18.4% (ECU, 2012). One could speculate about the significant difference in the ethnic make-up of the cohort, however there are a number of important factors to consider that might provide some possible reasons for this situation.

Firstly there are only a small number of English Universities that offer an LLB with a Law Foundation year. This study identified seven Universities in England that offered a full time LLB with a Law Foundation year and two that offered the LLB with a generic skills based foundation year. It is important to highlight the difference between foundation degrees such as those discussed by Chipperfield (2012) and Winter and Dismore (2010). The latter dealt with foundation degrees in the sense of vocational work based degrees linked to industry and often involving day release from work to undertake the attendance at university. The LLB with foundation year is not to be confused with these work based degrees also referred to as Foundation degrees.

This study established that there was a spread of Universities across England that offered the Foundation Year in a form of an access course. Winter and Dinsmore (2010) claimed that foundation degrees attracted people from a broad range of backgrounds, particularly low participation

neighbourhoods (HEFCE 2008) and provided an alternative route for those without A-levels. It could be argued that the same sense of access to an LLB applied to the students who enrolled at Staffordshire.

The Staffordshire School of Law considers applications from a variety of backgrounds as each applicant is assessed individually. However, a typical 'A' level offer would be grade 'D' from one 'A' level. Applicants who are under the age of twenty on commencing the Foundation Year are also required to have GCSE English Language at grade C or equivalent, or must re-sit this successfully during the Foundation Year in order to progress onto the LLB. Mature students are considered on their individual merits on the basis of their application and an interview (Staffordshire University, 2013).

Staffordshire is located in the Midlands and many of the other Universities offering the Foundation Year are located in Southern England and Northern England making Staffordshire a natural choice for students in central England. Cities in the Midlands such as Birmingham (30.53% BME), Leicester (34.91% BME), Walsall (16.33% BME) and Wolverhampton (23.01%) have a higher number of BME potential applicants than other regions in England (Rogers, 2011).

The application rate for 18 year olds from the most disadvantaged areas in England has decreased slightly in 2012. There has been a larger decrease in the application rate from the most advantaged areas. Both of these decreases follow a trend of annual increases since 2006 (UCAS, 2012).

Taken together, various factors concerning accessibility may have created the make-up of the cohort. For a greater understanding of how and why the students came to Staffordshire one needs to discuss the findings highlighted in the area of influencing factors.

Influencing Factors

Figure 3, the graph showing the factors that students listed as being motivating factors in their decision to enrol on the foundation year. The responses indicated that the reputation of the actual Law school was the prime motivating factor in their selection. One could consider this to be a very important factor both for recruitment and marketing purposes but also to provide an insight into how people think (Mahon and Mitnick, 2010). Presented with the fact that 50.8% of students indicated 'Reputation' as the reason for enrolling at Staffordshire, the Staffordshire Law School has the opportunity to build on this knowledge and potentially work on this strength.

Croxford and Raffe (2013) demonstrated in a study that spanned the period 1996–2010, that students based their choice of university on prestige and continued to choose universities based on reputation, rather than the quality of teaching or the cost of courses. Croxford and Raffe (2013) questioned the belief that students picked institutions based on factors that universities can control such as price and degree content. Croxford and Raffe (2013) concluded that factors beyond the control of an individual university such as their history and their past reputation were more influential than content, quality and price of their programmes. Further work needs to be done on looking at what the students understood to be 'a good reputation' and what sources of information they used to form their opinion.

Interestingly the next leading factor was the idea that students had the opportunity to conduct their own research (40.3%). One can speculate that this may be a desire for the students to transition into independent adult learning, where the student gets the opportunity to manage their own learning activities. For many students this may be the first time they feel the sense of some control over their learning with the move from

pedagogy to andragogy. The study indicated that 26.3% of respondents felt that the course content was important.

Respondents reported that family influence and advice received by sixth form tutors appeared to play an important role with both factors recorded at 22.8% respectively. This area can be discussed in conjunction with the number of students with other family members who had been to University. The study revealed that 28.07% of respondents had at least one other family member who had been to a University and 12.28% reported that three or more family members had attended. Bourdieu and Passeron, (1990) alluded to the impact of cultural capital and the socialisation of potential students by family and siblings. Ferlander (2004) suggested that non-traditional students had less 'contacts' that could provide useful and accurate information regarding HE opportunities. Callender and Jackson, (2008) discussed the attitude of working class parents to debt and Brooks (2012, p.4) claimed that higher fees have an impact on the choice of institution and degree course and on geographical mobility. She theorised that this impact would disadvantage those from lower income backgrounds; leading to the choice of lower status institutions close to home as a way of reducing the cost of study. Atherton *et al.'s* (2010) study showed that a number of parents believed that advising their children to go on to higher education when they would incur such a large debt was not the best advice or helpful. Percy and Hudson (2007) discussed the theory that students' attitudes to higher education fees were intrinsically linked to family background and cultural attitudes to debt. There may be evidence of this phenomenon in the case of Staffordshire. The study established that roughly a third of the FY cohort had a close relative who had attended a University although the study did not establish where. It would be interesting to examine the type and location of the HE institutions attended by the relatives and look for more detailed trends.

Where the students come from
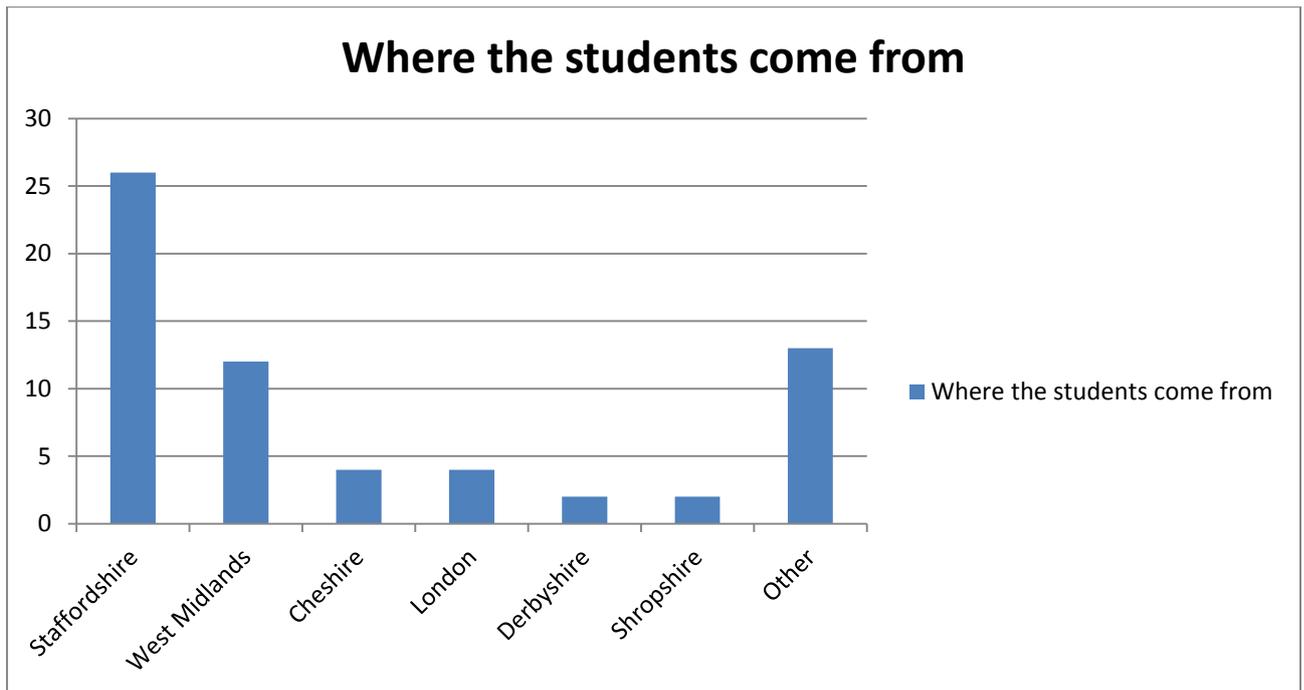
Figure 7. A graph showing the breakdown of where the students come from on a county – wide basis. (Source Staffordshire University, 2013)

Figure 7 shows the main areas in England where the Foundation Year cohort come from. The numbers do in fact tend to support Brook's (2012) argument that non-traditional students tend to choose local Higher Education institutions. This argument was supported on a local level by the findings of Suckling, Copley and Materson's (2010) study of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent's Aim-higher evaluation report 09/10. Suckling *et al.* (2010) also found that students in Staffordshire were concerned about debt, failing at great financial expense and the employability of degrees. The figures in this study show that 41.26% of the foundation year cohort came from Staffordshire. A more detailed analysis reveals that 34.92% come from the Stoke-on-Trent conurbation, an area that suffers from high deprivation which is indicated by high unemployment (Suckling, Armitage and Hardy, 2009).

The West Midlands metropolitan area provided the next greater number of students with 19.04%. This may not be surprising as Staffordshire is part of the West Midlands region of England. Figure 7 shows the neighbouring counties of Cheshire (6.34%), Derbyshire and Shropshire both with 3.17% as the largest suppliers of students outside Greater London with 4.76%.

Lawton and Moore (2011) explored Year 12 decision making over progression to HE, taking into account background factors and possible changes in university fee structures. The study focused on students in receipt of the Education Maintenance Allowances (EMA) a means tested scheme which offered financial support to low income families. English students are no longer eligible for the EMA however Lawton and Moore (2011) found that students were more likely to try and find ways to minimise cost in order to ensure they could still attend university. A common tactic used by students was to stay at home in order to decrease their debt (Lawton and Moore, 2011, pp.7-9)

Lawton and Moore's (2011) study provided some support for the findings of this current study in that 26% of the EMA group rated 'minimising costs' as their top priority when choosing a university. Table 9 (37) showed the students' responses to the question about potential factors that could be seen as barriers to their experience at the University. Transportation emerged as the most significant concern with 24.56% of respondents citing this factor. A comparison with Lawton and Moore's (2011) study shows some similarities with 32% of potential students placing 'finding a university to travel to from home' in their top three priorities. Aston and Bekhrandnia, (2003) concluded that students were becoming increasingly concerned that the rate of return they will secure from entering higher education is very much dependent on the institution they attended. A study carried out by OFFA (OFFA 2010/03) showed that

while participation among the least advantaged 40 per cent of young people had significantly and steadily increased across the sector as a whole since the mid-1990s, it had remained almost flat at the most selective third of institutions.

Assessments

Question 3 in this study received the highest number of written responses by the students and *Table 5* lists all their comments. It appeared to be an emotive area within the study and one could speculate over why, after all the assessment process is fundamental to the learner's educational experience and many students feel strongly about this area Henry (2012). Sabur (2013) argued that exams suited students who were good at memorising and regurgitating, but traditional exams did not encourage creative and original responses. Sabur (2013) questioned issues relating to how students did not get to see examiners' comments or receive feedback.

Teaching on the foundation year used a variety of assessment methods. Students were assessed on presentation skills, role play, creativity in the form of a poster design, computer based multiple choice questions and written assignments. The area of oral presentations elicited a number of responses from the students ranging from like to dislike but the overall feeling was that the students preferred the different types of assessment in preference to the traditional exam scenario.

Henry (2012) examined the phenomena of assessments in UK Universities and pointed out that more and more Universities were using coursework, and non – traditional assessment methods in preference to written exams. The reliance on constant assessment was seen to be strongest in former polytechnics and 'new universities'.

This study's findings concurred with other literatures Gibbs and Simpson, (2005) in that research indicated that students prefer coursework, regarding it as "fairer" than exams and there is evidence to suggest that coursework marks are a better indicator of the long-term learning of course content than exams.

Information

Approximately 50% of respondents indicated that they had been fully informed about life at Staffordshire University. The study indicated that 21% of respondents felt very well informed and 19.3% felt that they had full understanding. Two students (3.5%) felt poorly informed. Overall this area received positive feedback and written comments included "Yes I was given booklets, talks and other similar forms of information some not sometimes helpful"; "People from Staffs coming into 6th form to talk about the uni"; "Good information from all different forms of real life"; "Excellent communication from lecturers". This study will allow for reflection in this particular area and provide feedback to the organisation.

Widening Participation as a motivating factor

The discussion now moves to the fundamental theme of the influence of the concept of WP on the students and what the term really meant to them. Question six presented the students with a statement for their consideration;

Staffordshire University Widening Participation policies influenced my decision to study in the Law School on the LLB with Foundation Year.

The response indicated that 48% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, 3.8% of students disagreed and one student strongly disagreed with the statement. This question elicited only seven written responses from the respondents and gave the impression that many students were unaware of the concept of WP. Using a critical

lens, one could argue that the questionnaire could have included a definition or explanation of what WP meant in every day terms. Responses took the form of "I do not know what this is"; "No awareness of the policy"; "Lack of understanding of what widening participation is"; "I do not understand what WP policies are"; "Did not know it existed".

The already highlighted limitations of the study in relation to the lack of depth due to the brevity of the questionnaire meant that the students were not asked about their knowledge of AimHigher, Action on Access or other activities designed to open up access to HE. In Lawton and Moore's (2011) study, Aimhigher was shown to be a much more significant influence for students in receipt of EMA, with 43% stating that Aimhigher activities had moderately or strongly influenced their future plans. This figure for non-EMA students was considerably lower at 19% (Lawton and Moore, 2011, p.7).

In a joint report HEFCE and OFFA (2013) found that attending a summer school was associated with elevated rates of entry to HE, with participants on average being twice as likely to apply, and be accepted, as non-participants. The report also alluded to the existence of evidence that the kind of outreach delivered through Aimhigher was successful in raising learner aspirations and encouraging applications to HE (HEFCE/OFFA, 2013, p.7).

The current study revealed that 38.6% of respondents indicated that they agreed with the statement, although there were no written responses to elaborate on what was known or what had been done in the past. A possible criticism of the study is that it has created many unanswered questions such as did the respondents experience summer schools, mentoring, master classes and other outreach activities?

Nidirect (Nidirect, 2013) the official government website for Northern Ireland citizens has recently created several short three minute videos for YouTube. Each video deals with a different aspect of WP. The videos dealt

with WP in general, disabilities and dyslexia and tended to be aimed at people in Northern Ireland who could be described potentially as non – traditional students. There does not appear to be similar material aimed at English students on YouTube.

Shaw (2013) claimed prospective students were keen to engage with their university through social media channels. Shaw's survey with the Student room found that one fifth of students polled stated that universities did not make enough use of social media in recruitment, which meant they currently didn't expect or look for information there.

Findings from the study indicated that just over half the foundation year group stated that they were not particularly influenced by the concept of WP. Because the questionnaire did not probe into detail about outreach activities the students may have been involved in, it was difficult to explain the high number. One could speculate that the respondents might not be aware of the actual term 'widening participation' as it is used in academic and political terms. One could also speculate that students would not see a national policy as being relevant to them on a personal basis or prompting them to consider it as an influencing or motivating factor for entering HE.

Thinking critically one could say that the use of the term 'widening participation' in Question 6 may have been somewhat restrictive. With hindsight, the use of 'inclusionary policy' or 'widening access' may have helped the respondents get a better understanding of the point of the question. The term WP has been quoted in the media and the vernacular of government for over ten years. Leese (2010) warned of the use of language that excluded students who lacked the specialist vocabulary within institutional systems and possibly subject areas. This leads on to the final area of the study remaining to be discussed.

Perceived Barriers

The rationale behind Question 8 was to tease out by use of multiple choice, areas that the respondents saw as barriers to their experience at the University. The options included Disability Access, Disability Awareness, Language, Culture, Age, Gender, Transport and Child care. The results indicated that by far the biggest concern was transport with 24.56% of respondents citing this factor as their primary area of concern. The overall level of response to this question was very low, with factors such as culture and disability awareness only mentioned by three respondents each. Age was considered to be a potential barrier by 8.77% of the respondents leaving the other factors being highlighted by only one (1.75%) respondent each.

The issue surrounding transport supports Leese's (2010) argument about the 'New Student' spending less time on campus. An examination of the Foundation Year cohort showed that 52.63% of respondents lived at home and travelled into the university (Staffordshire University, 2013). A study by Wilson (1997) supported this study and found that the extra financial cost of travelling in terms of time and money limited the extent to which students could become involved in social activities at the university. The idea of transport as a perceived barrier links back to the findings of Brooks (2012) and Lawton and Moore (2011) who noted that many students particularly those who could be described as non – traditional, stay at home for reasons such as an attempt to decrease their debt, being near to part-time work or providing care for others in their household.

The discussion section broke down the findings of the study and looked at the results comparing the evidence gleaned from the Staffordshire Foundation cohort. The paper made comparisons with national figures and with findings from other similar results. In the final chapter the conclusion

draws together the main arguments for the study and reflects on how to move forward using the data.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This study was based on a small scale research project designed to look at how the concept of WP influenced students to pursue a law degree with a foundation year. The project was relevant to the author for many reasons. Firstly, as a self-defined non - traditional student the author felt very passionate about widening access to people who find themselves at University with little or no knowledge of that environment. Furthermore this project was very relevant to the author's own personal and professional practice. As the author is the award leader for the LLB (Hons) with a Foundation Year, it was felt that the study would provide some important insights into the reasons why people chose the foundation route and also to consider some of the other influencing factors in their academic life; important for maintaining an innovative approach to teaching and learning in a world dominated by austerity and changing technologies.

The Author had the opportunity to reflect on the findings and had the chance to reflect on his practice in order to improve his own and the Law school's performance in the areas of admissions, pastoral care and continued development of the students.

The study clearly showed that 60% of the Foundation Year was BME students and this was a significant difference compared to a national figure of 18.4% (ECU, 2012). This may have been an anomaly; further research of past cohorts and a new study may be able to expand on this theme. It is too early to claim the WP policies have resulted in such high take up by BME students, however the Staffordshire School of Law enjoys a richly diverse group of learners and this can only be seen as a positive thing.

Such diversity can bring challenges for teaching; Crozier *et al*. (2008) found that non - traditional students were under great pressure to

manage their social and cultural identities in University and in their home communities. Crozier found that these students had to deal with greater tension between the demands of home and family and coping in the University environment. The study revealed that 35.08% of students were the first people in their family to go to University and provides areas for reflection on the understanding of the student learning environment and the provision of support networks to mitigate some of these additional pressures.

The study also built on the work of Leese (2010) and the idea of the 'New Student' who balances part time work with studying at University. A student who has chosen to live at home, work locally and travel into a local University mainly to attend lectures and tutorials; spending very little time in the University environment. The figures in this study show that 41.26% of the Foundation Year cohort came from Staffordshire and 52.63% of respondents lived at home and travelled into the University (Staffordshire University, 2013). The findings allow for reflection on the type of learning experience these students may have and could possibly show a departure from the traditional view of the student experience.

Contested notions of assessment proved to be the area that elicited a high number of responses and comments from the students. It was clear from the discussion section that many students were uncomfortable with the traditional written exam style of assessment and the literature (Henry, 2012; Sabur, 2013) suggested that many Universities in England and Wales had changed their assessments methods to continuing or alternative styles of assessment. The study may be used as a reflective tool for the Staffordshire Law School to consider some issue around workable assessment solutions for the future.

The main aim of this research was to examine whether the policies and concepts of WP actually filtered down to potential students. This particular area of the study had some limitations. It could be argued that the author

sacrificed depth and probing questions in return for a simple questionnaire that yielded a very high return rate and provided quantitative responses in a number of basic areas. This linked in to the initial methodology of the study. The paper highlighted areas for exploration as this was, of necessity, a small-scale study. The fact that the results indicated that 48% of respondents appeared to be neutral on the whole concept of WP should not be interpreted as a negative. In the discussion section the author considered limitations around the use of the wording of the question and lack of probing around some of the activities the students may have been involved in prior to attending University. Things done or decisions made by potential students that fall within the ethos or spirit of WP may not be referred to by those individuals as 'widening participation'. The actual framing of this question may have affected the responses as warned by Leese (2010) warned of the use of language that excluded students who lacked the specialist vocabulary.

The State has a desire to widen access and improve student retention with the goal of improving economic success and enhancing social equity (Evans and Storan, 2008). HEIs are now responsible for driving this agenda, devising and implementing their own widening access initiatives. The results in this study provide some practical information that may assist Staffordshire in this process. The data showed that the overwhelming factor for choosing Staffordshire was the reputation of the Law School 50.8 %. The study has already identified the fact that many of the foundation year students are from Staffordshire and bearing this in mind the University could consider building on the outreach work already undertaken with a particular focus on sixth form colleges, FE institutions and schools within Staffordshire.

The study has identified many gaps and poses questions about life as a 'New Student'. Further investigative research needs to be conducted with students in relation to the influence of particular widening access activities such as summer schools or mentoring projects. Also the impact of part-

time work, the provision of childcare and travel to and from the University are all factors that impact on the teaching and learning experience.

A final reflection to consider is the need for teaching staff to have awareness of how non – traditional students have to manage their experience in the University environment and how they may need to adapt by providing additional staff development opportunities to support and raise awareness.

Recommendations

1. The Law school to ensure that staff involved in teaching and learning have a raised awareness of the additional issues faced by non-traditional students.
2. A consideration of assessment methods used in the Staffordshire Law School in order to reflect the national trend.
3. Some of the key findings of the report to be presented to Faculty Management Team for their consideration.
4. A presentation of the findings to the staff on the Foundation Year Award to enable them to reflect on their teaching and learning.

Word Count 13,511

References

Action for Access (2006). Policy That Works: Widening Participation to Higher Education. Available [online] from http://www.actiononaccess.org/resources/publications (Accessed on September 20 2012)

Action for Access (2010). The Frank Buttle Trust Quality Mark: A Practice Guide. Available [online] from http://www.actiononaccess.org/resources/publications (Accessed on September 20 2012)

Action for Access (2012). Widening Participation and Disability – Disability Focus Guide. Available [online] from http://www.actiononaccess.org/resources/publications (Accessed on September 20 2012)

Aimhigher (2012). Aimhigher Catalogue: Aimhigher Resources for Practice. Available [online] from http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk (Accessed on September 17 2012)

Aston, L. and Bekhrandnia, B. (2003). Demand for graduates: a review of the economic evidence. Oxford: *Higher Education Policy Institute.* Available [online] from http://www.hepi.ac.uk/files/demand_for_graduates.pdf (Accessed on 5 March 2013)

Attwood, R. (2010). Participation is widening, just not at the elite end. *Times higher education.* Available [online] from www.timeshighereducation.co.uk (Accessed on September 20 2012)

Bourdieu, P. and Passeron J. C. (1990) *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture.* Thousand Oaks, CA. Sage.

Bowling, A. (2005). Mode of questionnaire administration can have serious effects on data quality. *Journal of Public Health* Volume 27, Issue 3 pp. 281-291. Available [online] from http://jpubhealth.oxfordjournals.org/content/27/3/281.full?sid=b3ac837a-c6f5-45f0-8967-a878674ebc56 (Accessed 26 June 2013)

Brooks, R. (2012). *What have we learned to date to inform access, retention and success under the new funding regime in England? A literature synthesis of the Widening Access Student Retention and Success National Programmes Archive.* [online]. York: Higher Education Academy. Available from: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk//resources/detail/WP_syntheses/Brooks (Accessed 13 March 2013)

Browne, J. (2010). *Securing a sustainable future for higher education: An independent review of higher education funding and student finance* (The Browne Review), Available [online] from www.independent.gov.uk/browne-report (Accessed on September 18 2012)

BrowseAloud. (2012). Available [online] from http://www.browsealoud.com (Accessed on September 20 2012)

Burke, P. J. and Hayton, A. (2011). Is widening participation still ethical? *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning* (13), 1. Available [online] from www.srhe.ac.uk/downloads (Accessed on September 17 2012)

Cabinet Office. (2011). Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers: A Strategy for Social Mobility. Available [online] from http://www.dpm.cabinetoffice.gov.uk (Accessed on September 18 2012)

Chipperfield, S. R. (2012): The effect of group diversity on learning on a university-based foundation course, *Journal of Further and Higher Education,* 36:3, 333 350 Available [online] from http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2011.632817 (Accessed 4 March 2013)

Clayton, M. (2012). On Widening Participation in Higher Education Through Positive Discrimination. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*. 46,(3).

Cable, V. and Willetts, D. (2011). *Guidance to the Director of Fair Access.* Available [online] from:http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/higher-education/docs/g/11-728-guidance-to-director-fairaccess. (Accessed on 11 November 2012)

Callender, C. and Jackson, J. (2008). Does the Fear of Debt Constrain Choice of University and Subject of Study? *Studies in Higher Education.* 33 (4), pp.405-429

Cooke, R. (2008). On-line innovation in higher education' Report to Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills. Available [online] from http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.dius.gov.uk/policy/documents/online_innovation_in_he_131008.pdf (Accessed on July 16 2012)

Corver, M. (2010). Trends in young participation in higher education: core results for England, HEFCE Available [online] from https://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2010/201003/ (Accessed on November 27 2012)

Croxford, L. and Raffe, D. (2013). Differentiation and social segregation of UK higher education, 1996-2010 *Oxford Review of Education*, Volume 39, Number 2, 1, pp. 172-192(21)

Crozier, G. (2008). The Socio-cultural and Learning Experiences of Working-Class Students in HE: Full Research Report – ESRC End of Award Report. Swindon: ESRC

Cullen, J. D. (2004); Modelling Advice and Support Services to Integrate Virtual Component in Higher Education (MASSIVE). The Tavistock Institute. Available [online] from http://www.tavinstitute.org/work/journals/reports. (Accessed on July 27 2012)

Cullen, J. D, Begoña Arenas, M., Haywood, J. and Haywood, D. (2007). MASSIVE, Peer review Handbook. Modelling Advice and Support Services to Integrate Virtual Component in Higher Education (MASSIVE). The Tavistock Institute. Available [online] from http://virtualcampuses.eu(Accessed on 19 July 2012)

David, M. Parry, G. Vignoles, A. Hayward, G. Williams, J. Crozier, G. Hockings, C. and Alison Fuller, A. (2008). Widening Participation in Higher Education. A Commentary by the Teaching and Learning Research Programme. London: TLRP/ESRC. Available [online] from http://www.tlrp.org/pub/documents/HEcomm.pdf (Accessed on 19 July 2012)

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2011) Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System. Available [online] from www.bis.gov.uk (Accessed September 20 2012)

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills [DBIS].(2011). Findings from the public consultation on statistics that measure the progress of children from disadvantaged backgrounds to higher education. London: DBIS

DfES (2003). *Widening participation in higher education*. Available [online] from http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/hegateway/uploads/6820-DfES-WideningParticipation2.pdf (Accessed on June 2013)

ECU (2012). Equality in higher education: statistical report 2012 Available [online] from http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/equality-in-he-stats-2012#sthash.FYIANqgb.dpuf (Accessed 13 March 2013)

Educause (2005). 7 things you should know about…Podcasting. Available [online] from www.educause.edu/eli/ (accessed 18 July 2012)

Elliott, T., and Wilson, C. (2008) The perceptions of students with hidden disabilities of their experience during transition to higher education. Ipswich, UK: Aimhigher of East England.

Evans, R. and Storan, J. (2008). Looking to the future of widening participation. Available [online] from http://www.actiononaccess.org (Accessed on September 21 2012]

Forsyth, A. and Furlong, A. (2003). Access to Higher Education and Disadvantaged Young People. *British Educational Research Journal*. 29 (2), pp.205-225.

Gibbs, G. and Simpson, C. (2005). 'Conditions Under Which Assessment Supports Students' Learning' *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education,* Available [online] from http://www.open.ac.uk/fast/pdfs/Gibbs%20and%20Simpson%202004-05.pdf (Accessed on 26 March 2013)

Gilbert, S. (2009). Widening Participation Evaluation Report, Aimhigher Stoke-on-Trent. Available [online] from www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner (Accessed on September 17 2012]

Gravells, A. and Simpson, S. (2009). Equality and Diversity in the Lifelong Learning Sector. Exeter: Learning Matters.

Grove, J. (2012). Wrong statistic blamed for Aimhigher's fall. *Times higher education*. Available [online] from www.timeshighereducation.co.uk (Accessed on September 20 2012)

Harris, M. (2010). *Fair-Access-report- OFFA*. Available [online] from http://www.offa.org.uk (Accessed on September 22 2012)

Harris, M. (2012). We must maintain our two-pronged assault on social immobility. *Times higher education.* Available [online] from www.timeshighereducation.co.uk (Accessed on September 22 2012)

Henry, J. (2012). No-exam university courses fuel rise in first class degrees. *The Telegraph*. Available [online] from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/9700573/No-exam-university-courses-fuel-rise-in-first-class-degrees.html (Accessed 20 June 2013)

Higher Education Funding Council for England [HEFCE]. (2010). Trends in young participation in higher education: core results for England, Report 2010/03, HEFCE: Bristol

JISC (2009). *Effective Practice in a Digital Age* Available [online] from http://www.jisc.ac.uk/publications/programmerelated/2009/effectivepracticedigitalage.aspx (Accessed on July 16 2012)

JISC (2012). *Enhancing Practice: exploring innovation with technology in further education*. Available [online] from http://www.jisc.ac.uk/publications/programmerelated/2012/enhancing-practice.aspx (Accessed on September 20 2012)

Lawton, J. and Moore, J. (2011) University Choices of Year 12 Learners. *Aimhigher Greater Manchester* Available [online] from http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/Documents/aim_higher/AHGM_University_Choices_Year_12.pdf (Accessed 15 June 2013)

Leese, M. (2010): Bridging the gap: supporting student transitions into higher education, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 34:2, 239-251. Available [online] from http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03098771003695494 (Accessed on 1 February 2013)

Loveys, K. (2011). Oxford University: Places come from the top five comprehensives. Daily Mail. Available [online] from http://www.dailymail.co.uk (Accessed on September 24 2012)

Mahon, J. F. and Mitnik, B. M. (2010). Reputation shifting, *Journal of Public Affairs,* Volume 10, Issue 4, 280-99. Available from www.wileyonlinelibrary.com. (Accessed on 13 May 2013)

McDonald Ross, G. (2003). *The Future of Higher Education - 2003 White Paper*. Available [online] from http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/pdf.html/prsdocuments/381 (Accessed on September 19 2012)

Moore, J. and Dunworth, F. (2011). *Review of Evidence from Aimhigher Area Partnerships of the Impact of Aimhigher*. Available [online] from www.aimhigher.ac.uk/ (Accessed on September 17 2012]

National Audit office (2002). *Widening Participation in Higher Education* Available [online] from http://www.nao.org.uk/publications (Accessed on September 20 2012]

National Audit office. (2008). *Widening Participation in Higher Education* Norwich: HMSO. Available [online] from http://www.nao.org.uk/publications (Accessed on September 20 2012]

OFFA. (2012). *Access agreement and widening participation strategic assessment monitoring*. Available [online] from http://www.offa.org.uk (Accessed on September 17 2012]

Ooms, A., Burke, L. M., Marks-Maran, D. J., Webb, M. and Cooper, D. (2012): Students' perceptions of foundation degrees, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 36:3,403-421. Available [online] from http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0309877X.2011.632821 (Accessed on 20 September 2012)

Percy, P. and Hudson, T. (2007). Moving on: The Creative Way. London: University of East London. Available [online] from http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/LLN/CW_Why_level_three _vocational_learners_in_creative_areas_choose_not_to_progress.(Access ed 18 May 2012)

Public Accounts Committee (2009). Widening Participation in Higher Education: Fourth Report. Available [online] from http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmpubacc /226/22605.htm#n4. (Accessed on September 20 2012)

Reay, D., David, M. E. and Ball, S. J. (eds.) (2005) Degrees of Choice: Social Class, Race and Gender in Higher Education. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.

Redecker, C, Leis,M., Leendertse, M., Punie, Y., Gijsbers, G.,Kirschner, P., Stoyanov, S. and Hoogveld, B. (2011). The Future of Learning:Preparing for Change. European Commission Joint Research Centre. Institute for Prospective Technological Studies. Available [online] from http://ftp.jrc.es/EURdoc/JRC66836.pdf (Accessed on July 20 2012)

Richardson, H. (2010). National university access scheme under threat. BBC. *BBC*, Available [online] from http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-11765120 (Accessed on September 20 2012]

Sabur, R. (2013). Are university exams inherently unfair? *The Telegraph.* Available [online] from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/universityeducation/student-life/10056578/Are-university-exams-inherently-unfair.html (Accessed 15 June 2013)

Shaw, J. (2013). University recruitment: one fifth of students say social media doesn't work. *The Guardian* Available [online] from http://www.guardian.co.uk/higher-education-network/blog/2013/apr/17/university-student-recruitment-social-media (Accessed 13 May 2013)

Singleton, A. D. (2010). International Population Studies : Educational Opportunity : *The Geography of Access to Higher Education*. Farnham, Surrey, GBR: Ashgate Publishing Group, Available [online] from http://site.ebrary.com/lib/staffordshire/Doc?id=10406792&ppg=38 (Accessed on November 27 2012)

Smeeth, L. and Fletcher, A. E. (2002). Improving the response rates to questionnaires Several common sense strategies are effective *British Medical Journal* 324(7347): 1168–1169 Available [online] from http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1123146/ (Accessed 26 May 2013)

Staffordshire University (2010). *Access agreement monitoring return academic year 2010-11: Milestones and targets.* Available [online] from http://www.staffs.ac.uk (Accessed on September 18 2012)

Staffordshire University (2012). *Access Agreement for Students Starting Their Course in September 2012*. Available [online] from http://www.staffs.ac.uk (Accessed on September 18 2012)

Stevenson, J. and Lang, M. (2010). Social class and higher education: a synthesis of research. *The Higher Education Academy.* Available [online] from http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources (Accessed on September 21 2012)

Stoof, A., Martens, R., L., Merriënboer, J. J. G. and Bastiaens, T. J. (2002). The boundary approach of competence: a constructivist aid for understanding and using the concept of competence. *Human Resource*

Development Review, 1(3), pp. 345-365 Available [online] from http://revica.europace.org (Accessed on July 14 2012)

Suckling, S., Armitage, D. and Hardy, S. (2009). Aimhigher Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent evaluation project: interim report, 08/09. Stafford: *Aimhigher Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent*. Available [online] from http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/aim_higher/AHSST-Evaluation_Interim_Report_2008-2009. (Accessed 17 May 2013)

Suckling, S., Copley, D. and Materson, D. (2010) Aimhigher Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent evaluation project: interim report, 09/10. Stafford: Aimhigher Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent. Available [online] from http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/aim_higher/AHSST-Evaluation_Interim_Report_2009-2010. (Accessed 17 May 2013)

Sutton Trust (2010). *Responding to the new landscape for university access.* Available [online] from www.suttontrust.com/ research (Accessed on September 20 2012)

Sutton Trust (2012). *The Social Mobility Summit.* Available [online] from http://www.suttontrust.com (Accessed on September 18 2012)

Tolley, J. and Rundle, J. (2006) A review of Black and Minority Ethnic Participation in Higher Education. London: *Aimhigher*. Available [online] from http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk (Accessed on September 18 2012)

UCAS (2012). UCAS End of Cycle report 2012 Available [online] from http://www.ucas.com/data-analysis/key-analysis (Accessed 3 May 2013)

Willetts, D. (2008). Speech in House of Commons debate on the Education and Skills Bill. Hansard: HC Deb, 14th January 2008, c753

Winter, J. and Dismore, H. (2010). Investigating the experiences of foundation degree students progressing to an honours degree: an integrated approach. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 34:2, pp253-270. Available [online] from http://eprints.soton.ac.uk/344548/ (Accessed on September 18 2012)

Yorke, M., and Longden, B. (2008). The first-year experience of higher education in the UK - Final report. York: *Higher Education Academy.* Available [online] from http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/. (Accessed 20 May 2013)

Appendix (1):

Research Proposal Form (Please expand boxes to suit).

Working title for proposed research study.	The impact of Widening Participation on Level 3 Foundation Year students (2012 – 2013) at Staffordshire University School of Law.
What research questions do you plan to investigate? (Provide a framework of between 3 and 5 questions)	1. What is the proportion of students from non-traditional backgrounds on the Level 3 Foundation Law course? 2. What were the motivating factors influencing their decision to enrol in the Foundation Year? **3.** What are some of the perceived barriers experienced by non-traditional students on the Level 3 Foundation Law course?
Key texts, web & other relevant resources:	Clayton, M. (2012) On Widening Participation in Higher Education Through Positive Discrimination. *Journal of Philosophy of Education. 46,*(3)*.* Corver, M. (2010) *Trends in young participation in higher education: core results for England*, HEFCE Available online at https://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2010/201003/ [Retrieved November 27 2012] Crozier, G. (2008) The Socio-cultural and Learning Experiences of Working-Class Students in HE: *Full Research Report – ESRC End of Award Report.* Swindon: ESRC

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2011) *Higher Education: Students at the Heart of the System.* Available on-line at www.bis.gov.uk [Retrieved September 20 2012]

Gilbert, S. (2009) *Widening Participation Evaluation Report, Aimhigher Stoke-on-Trent.* Available on-line at: www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner [Retrieved September 17 2012]

Moore, J. and Dunworth, F. (2011) *Review of Evidence from Aimhigher Area Partnerships of the Impact of Aimhigher.* Available on-line at: www.aimhigher.ac.uk/[Retrieved September 17 2012]

Reay, D., David, M. E. and Ball, S. J. (eds.) (2005) *Degrees of Choice: Social Class, Race and Gender in Higher Education.* Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.

Stevenson, J. and Lang, M. (2010) Social class and higher education: a synthesis of research. *The Higher Education Academy.* Available on-line at http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources [Retrieved September 21 2012]

	Sutton Trust (2010) *Responding to the new landscape for university access.* Available on-line at www.suttontrust.com/ research [Retrieved September 20 2012] Tolley, J. and Rundle, J. (2006) A review of Black and Minority Ethnic Participation in Higher Education. London: Aimhigher. Available on-line at: http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk [Retrieved September 17 2012]
What approach do you intend to take in order to carry out your research? (i.e. positivist, interpretivist, action research)	It is intended that the research and data analysis are subject to the positivist and interpretivist approach However when dealing with concepts such as Widening Participation. Action research is being used as a means of informing practice within the Law School It is intended that both approaches can be blended in this study to provide some holistic material that can be fed back to the management team in the Law School.

What methods do you intend to employ in order to collect data?	The intention is to employ both quantitative and qualitative methodologies for data collection. A mixed methodology will be used for the empirical data collection. A questionnaire will be used to gain an overall picture, and a more open-ended analysis will be achieved through individual and group interviews.
Where do you intend to carry out the research?	Staffordshire University Law School. Stoke-on-Trent campus. Leek Road. Stoke-on-Trent.
What ethical issues do you anticipate encountering during your work?	The questionnaire element of the data collection will be completed anonymously. Students who take part in an interview will be asked to sign an informed consent form that explains what the research is for, what the aim of the research is, the fact that participation is voluntary and they are free to withdraw from the study at any time. The research will comply the BERA ethical guidelines. The students who take part in an interview will be given a participation number to ensure their anonymity. In the case that individual difficulties come to light related to issues and events at university, the appropriate referral to counselling or other support services will be provided.

What barriers to success do you expect to encounter?	It could be anticipated that participating students consider themselves to be too busy to provide accurate replies. Potentially the study could encounter low return rates for questionnaires. There is also a danger that the author could be too subjective due to close involvement. The researcher needs to maintain an objective relationship with the students. The data will be strengthened with questionnaires and interviews to ensure transparency in the process and with the coding of the data.

Appendix 2

Widening participation – Level 3 Foundation Year Students (2012-2013)

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my survey. There are nine questions and the survey will take approximately 5 minutes to complete.

The following questionnaire is for academic research purposes only. All information provided will be treated with the utmost confidence and no names or personal information will be revealed in the research. The statistical results will form part of a research project exploring Widening Participation for Foundation Year Students in Staffordshire University Law School (2012-2013). A copy of the signed ethics statement can be found within the Law School and also online.

Obviously for the integrity of the results, we would prefer that you complete as many questions as you can, however you are free to withdraw from the survey at any time. If you do not feel comfortable completing a question, please move onto the next question.

Thank you, Dave Tapp

---

1) How would you describe yourself?

White ☐	Arab ☐	Asian or Asian British - Pakistani ☐	Other White Background ☐
White-Scottish ☐	Other Ethnic Background ☐	Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi ☐	Black or Black British - Caribbean ☐
Irish Traveller ☐	Chinese ☐	Other Asian background ☐	Black or Black British - African ☐
Gypsy or Traveller ☐	Not Known ☐	Mixed white and Black - Caribbean ☐	Mixed – White and Asian ☐
Information Refused ☐	Other Mixed background ☐	Mixed white and black - African ☐	Other Black Background ☐

If **'not listed'** selected please explain further**?**

2) What were the motivating factors influencing your decision to enrol on the Foundation Year? (tick all that apply)

Financial ☐	6th Form advice ☐	Life-long learning ☐	Staffordshire Graduate ☐
Family/Friends ☐	F. E advice ☐	Employability ☐	Student accommodation ☐
Own research ☐	location ☐	Parking facilities ☐	Law School reputation ☐
Other ☐	Course content ☐	Transport ☐	University reputation ☐

If **'Other'** selected please explain further**?**

3) **Did it make a difference that any of the following forms of assessment are used compared to traditional exams? (tick all that apply)**

Written examination ☐	Assessed essay ☐	Dissertation ☐	Multiple Choice ☐
Reflective Diary ☐	Role-play ☐	Poster Presentation ☐	Web-quest ☐
Oral Presentation ☐	Group Project ☐	Class Participation ☐	Negotiated assessment ☐
Online Discussion ☐	Portfolio ☐	Practical Session ☐	Problem-based learning ☐
Project ☐	Questionnaire ☐	Self-assessment ☐	Attendance ☐

Why?

_____

4) **Do you feel you were fully informed about life at Staffordshire University   (Please Circle)**

Very well informed	Good understanding	Some understanding	Poorly informed	Not informed at all

Are there any reasons for this view?

5) **Please state your age category (Please Circle)**

18-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65+

6) **Staffordshire University Widening Participation policies influenced my decision to Study in the Law School on the LLB with foundation Year (Level 3) (Please Circle)**

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Are there any reasons for this view?

7) **Has any other members of your immediate family been to University before?**

No	1	2 or more	3 or more	More than 3

Please feel free to explain further if you wish to?

8) Were any of the below factors <u>perceived </u>barriers? (Please Circle)

Disability Access	Disability Awareness	Language	Culture	Age	Gender	Transport	Child care

9) Do you have a disability, including hidden disabilities? (Please Circle)

Yes	No

Gender: *(please circle)*   Female   Male