



Ethnicity, Education and Employment



Ethnicity, Education
& Employment

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EUROPEAN UNION
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CONTINUUM
WIDENING PARTICIPATION

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Appendix F: UEL Case Study Report



Ethnicity, Education and Employment



Ethnicity, Education
& Employment

University of East London

Final Report (August 2006)

Maki Kimura and Tony Hudson



EUROPEAN UNION
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1 Introduction

This is the UEL case study report for the Ethnicity, Education and Employment (EEE) project. In accordance with the overall aims of the project, this case study looks at the perceptions of students, graduates, university staff and employers about the effectiveness of policies and strategies at UEL aimed at supporting (Minority Ethnic) student participation in Higher Education (HE). The case study was conducted through both desk research and fieldwork including: the analysis of institutional policies; the analysis of institutional statistics; interviews with Senior Managers, non-senior managers, students and employers; focus groups with students; and participant observation.

The following report is an analysis of the findings; section 2 describes UEL's institutional profile, and aims to portray the institutional characteristics of UEL in order to make comparison possible with other institutions participating in the project. Section 3 explains the methodology used in UEL case study including the target groups in the study. Section 4 is an analysis of the institutional student statistics relating to ethnicity; and section 5 is a study of the institutional policies and practices on Widening Participation (WP), Graduate Employability, and Equality and Diversity. Sections 6, 7, 8 and 9 cover the analysis of interviews with Senior Managers, non-senior managers, graduates, and students. Section 10 briefly illustrates the employers' view on graduate employability. Sections 11 and 12 present the institutional findings and recommendations developed from the desk based research and fieldwork results. These recommendations are based largely on the findings from the qualitative interviews, especially those with students, given the focus of this project on qualitative student centred research.

2 Institutional Profile

2.1 Key Features of the Institution

2.1.1 Main characteristics

The University of East London is a new university (designated in 1992); although it has over a hundred years of educational and community tradition. It is a multi-site campus with sites at Barking, Stratford and Docklands in East London¹. In 2004/5, the approximate total student population was 17,650; with 9,700 out of 11,900 undergraduates from the UK/EU². Of the 8,800 home undergraduate students, 53% of them were from East London and the Thames Gateway, 36% were from the rest of London and the Home Counties.

2.1.2 Mission/Objectives/Policies

UEL's vision is to be a leading UK regional university and it is fully committed to achieving the Government's 50% Widening Participation (WP) target through liaising with local partners. It has a flexible student-centred framework, which is concerned to develop the employability of students, their ability to plan and monitor their own learning and to provide a learning environment which values and celebrates diversity³. The UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-5 states that developing student employability is one of the central concerns of the University, and keeping reasonable retention and completion rates is considered to play a crucial role in meeting these objectives. Various initiatives and policies which have been developed to address these priorities include: Skillzone, a study skills, information resource and guidance centre located in each of the libraries; National

¹ Barking Campus will be closing down in Autumn 2006.

² UEL Institutional Data

³ UEL Teaching and Learning Strategy 2002-2005 p. 4

Mentoring Consortium, Refugee Research Centre, LONDON EAST Research Institute, working on urban regeneration, the Rix Centre for Learning Disabilities, Race Equality Policy, the Religion, Cultural Diversity Policy & Procedures, and Employability Works! a series of careers and skills events for students.

2.1.3 Local/Regional Context

UEL is located in East London and the Thames Gateway, which is an area of rapid economic regeneration and social renewal; however, local people are often excluded from the new employment opportunities. The London Region as well as East London are characterised by marked contrasts in economic performance. Unemployment in London is still relatively high (4.7% compared to 3.7% nationally)⁴. Minority Ethnic (ME) groups who constitute 25% of the overall population in London (5% nationally) experience significantly higher unemployment rates⁵. At particular risk of non-participation in the labour market are those from Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean backgrounds, with unemployment levels of over 40 to 50%⁶. Although ME communities may be as well qualified as the White population, people from ME groups with higher level qualifications are more likely to be unemployed than White people qualified to the same level⁷. The Stratford and Docklands campuses are located in the London Borough of Newham, which is one of the most deprived areas in England. In addition, these boroughs have low participation in higher education, some local ethnic communities' participation rates in higher education (HE) are less than 8%; examples include: people of White working-class origin in Barking and Dagenham; of African-Caribbean and Bangladeshi origin in Tower Hamlets and Hackney; of Pakistani origin in Newham and neighbouring boroughs; and of Indian origin in Newham⁸.

2.1.4 Student Intake

The diversity of the student profile at UEL largely reflects the multicultural and socio-demographic characteristics of the local community, as well as UEL's continuing commitment to Widening Access. Groups which are traditionally under-represented in the HE sector constitute a significant proportion of the student population at UEL. For example, Black-Caribbean men constitute 1.3% of the sector-wide population (2003/4)⁹ yet make up to 8% of the home undergraduate students at UEL¹⁰. HESA data shows that UEL recruits significantly more mature students and students from ME backgrounds than comparable institutions¹¹. The non-traditional qualifications are the common entry qualifications, with 4% of its first year undergraduate intake from Access courses and an additional 18% entering through other routes such as the Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning (AP(E)L) scheme or professional qualifications; or without formal education qualifications (2004/5).

⁴ The London Development Agency :Understanding London's Sub-Regional Economies February 2003 p.4

⁵ The London Skills Commission: Framework For Regional Employment and Skills Action October 2002 p.24

⁶ Labour Force Survey 2000

⁷ The London Skills Commission: Framework For Regional Employment and Skills Action October 2002 p.24

⁸ UEL Widening Participation Strategy 2001-2004 p.3

⁹ HESA, Table 10b – First year UK domiciled HE students by qualifications aim (#12), mode of study, gender and ethnicity, 2003/4

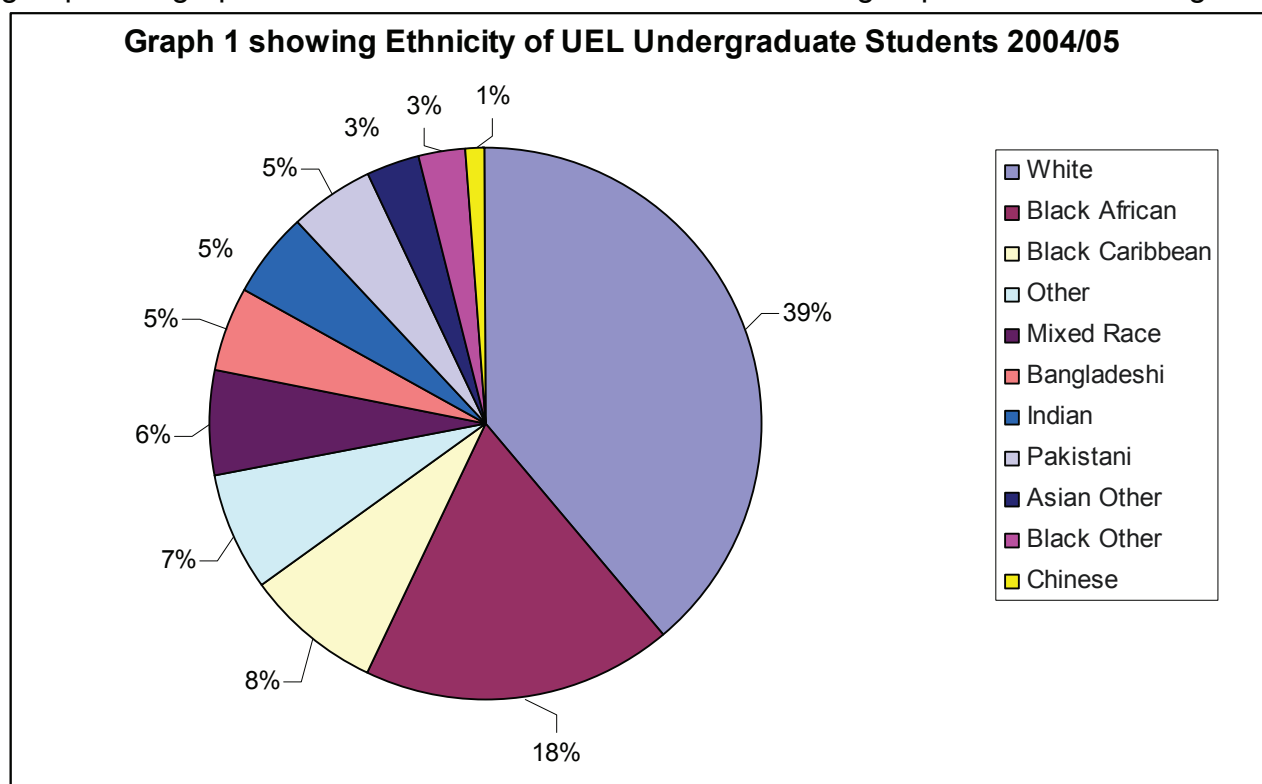
¹⁰ UEL Institutional Data

¹¹ UEL Widening Participation Strategy 2001 -2004, p.3

2.2 Student Statistics ¹²

2.2.1 Ethnicity Profile (2004/5)

In 2004/5, more than 60% of students entering undergraduate courses come from ME groups. As graph 1 shows the Black African and Caribbean groups were the two largest



ME groups. Representation of ME groups such as Black Caribbean, Black African, Asian Pakistani, and Asian Bangladeshi, and Mixed Race are much higher at UEL than the sector level¹³. Different schools within UEL have very different ethnicity profiles, for example, in the School of Architecture & Visual Arts only 38% of undergraduate students are from ME backgrounds, while 80% students in Business School and School of Law are ME students. More than half of Asian students are under 21, while over 70% of Black and White groups are mature students. Only 44% students enter through 'A' Levels; non-traditional entry routes, such as with other professional qualifications (19%) or access courses (5%) are other common entry routes. However, more Asian students (54%) come through 'A' Levels than Black (30%) or White students (35%). Black students are more likely to come through access courses (around 10%) than their Asian (3%) and White (4%) counterparts.

2.2.2 Entry Statistics (2004/5)

UEL accepted 3,450 applicants from total of 15,312 UCAS applications, 50% of whom entered through clearing¹⁴. Of the 1,100 full-time young entrants for undergraduate courses, 97% come from state schools or colleges, 42% from Social Class IIIM to V, and 20% from low participation neighbourhoods¹⁵. 12% of full-time mature undergraduate students; 11% of young part-time students; and 8% of mature part-time students come

¹² Unless stated otherwise, data obtained institutionally provided by UEL Strategic and Planning Unit (SPU).

¹³ Table 10b - First year UK domiciled HE students by qualification aim, mode of study, gender and ethnicity 2004/05 <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/holisdocs/pubinfo/student/ethnic0405.csv> accessed 22/05/06

¹⁴ HE institution: applications and accepted applicants 2005

<http://www.ucas.ac.uk/figures/ucasdata/heinst/2005.html> accessed 24/05/06

¹⁵ Table T1b - Participation of under-represented groups in higher education: Young full-time undergraduate entrants 2003/04 http://www.hesa.ac.uk/pi/0304/t1b_0304.xls accessed 24/05/06

with no previous HE experience and from low participation neighbourhoods¹⁶. UEL meets all its benchmarks for WP.

2.2.3 Output Statistics

The majority of students from ME backgrounds obtain Lower Second class degree classifications, though more than half of students from White groups (except Other White background) obtain Upper Second class degree or higher, and only 37% of White students obtain Lower Second. In 2001/2, the institutional employment rate for UK/EU full-time, first degree graduates was 57%, the unemployment rate was 15%, this is significantly higher than the sector rate of 6%. This meant that UEL fell short of its benchmarks. However, in 2003/4, the employment performance indicator improved dramatically and was only 0.4% below the benchmark of 88.8%. The female graduate unemployment rate is lower than that of males. School of Health & Bioscience graduates have the highest percentage of those who are in employment, full-time or part-time (61%), followed by graduates of Architecture & Visual Arts (60.3%). The Schools of Law, Computing & Technology and Education and Business School have less graduates who are fully or partially employed (37% for Law and 43% for other Schools), but they all have significant numbers of graduates who take up further study (Law 32%, Computing & Technology and Business School around 20%, and Education 17%). Where employment by ethnic group is concerned, high unemployment rates are observed in Asian Other (15 %), Pakistani (14%) and Bangladeshi (14%), followed by Black Other (10%)¹⁷.

¹⁶ Table 10b - First year UK domiciled HE students by qualification aim, mode of study, gender and ethnicity 2004/05 http://www.hesa.ac.uk/pi/0304/t2b_0304.xls accessed 24/05/06

¹⁷ This figure includes postgraduate students. What Do UEL Graduate Do 2003/4 additional information provided by the Employability Unit.

3 Methodology

3.1 *Methods applied in case study*

In the context of the diverse UEL student profile, the focus of our research was on exploring how the institution responds to provide an environment to accommodate diverse student needs. The research looks at the impact of institutional practices and initiatives upon students' experiences in HE and also on their subsequent life/career choices. The research has been carried out using a combination of various research methods, both quantitative and qualitative, but with particular emphasis on exploratory, student-centred interviews. Semi-structured interviews with key personnel in the university were also conducted; they included senior management, teaching staff, and support staff.

3.1.1 Desk research

There were several strands to the desk based research. Institutional policy documents were analysed, as were public documents and reports produced by UEL. Data about the staff and students at UEL was analysed; this came from a variety of sources including UEL Strategic Planning & Quality Enhancement Unit, the institutional data base "*Proclarity*", and publicly available data from HESA and UCAS. Below are the lists of documents consulted:

A range of policy documents were analysed including:

- UEL Widening Participation Strategy 2001-2004
- Widening Participation Annual Monitoring Report 2002
- Annual Monitoring Statement 2003
- UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002 – 2005
- UEL Race Equality Policy and Procedure 2002
- Innovation and Renewal Strategic Plan 2002-2007
- Annual Monitoring Statement 2003
- Skills Curriculum and Implementation Plan (Skills Curriculum Level 1, Approved April 2004)
- UEL Skills Curriculum (Issued April 2005)

UEL publications and reports including:

- UEL WP Annual Monitoring Report 2001
- First destination Report 2002-3 and 2003-4
- UEL Race Equality Scheme Annual Report 2004
- UEL Student Satisfaction Survey 2004

3.1.2 Fieldwork

One method used was participant observation whilst attending various meetings and events including:

- UEL Open Day June 2004
- Employability Works Event, Feb 2005, June 2005, Nov 2005, Mar 2006, June 2006
- Employability Seminar, Feb – Mar 2005
- Employability Works Event, organising party meeting Feb – May 2006
- Equality and Diversity Training, Dec 2004
- Equality and Diversity Training trainer, Feb 2005

- Meeting with Community and Education Partnership, in External and Strategic Development Services in UEL, Oct 2005

However, the major part of data collection was through interviews with Senior Managers, graduates, students, teaching and supporting members of staff, giving a range of views on the experiences of students at UEL.

3.2 Role of Advisory Board

An Advisory Board was set up in order to¹⁸;

- Assist the research team in developing a coherent theoretical framework and rigorous methodology.
- Assist in the further development of key themes and issues shaping the research.
- Facilitate and support dissemination of research findings and recommendations across the HE sector.

Academics and practitioners with diverse (research) expertise and experience were invited to be Advisory Board Members. They were consulted about issues both specific to the UEL case study and in general related to the entire research project. The Advisory Board met twice a year at the University of East London and meetings lasted approximately two hours. The Membership of the Advisory Board is as follows;

- Prof. John Brennan (CHERI, Open University)
- Dr Yasmin Gunaratnam (Freelance Researcher)
- Dr Barnor Hesse (Dept. of African American Studies, Northwestern University)¹⁹
- Dr Ian Law (School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds)
- Ms Sandie Miller (Final Year Student, BA in Psycho-Social, UEL)
- Ms Sinead Theresa Fiona McCarthy and Ms Deirdre M Okelly (Staff Members of Student Union, UEL)
- Prof. Gavin Poynter (School of Social Science and Cultural and Media Studies, UEL)
- Dr Bobby Sayyid (School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds)
- Prof. John Storan (Continuum, UEL) – Chair of Advisory Board

The first Advisory Board Meeting took place on 6th December 2004. In this first meeting, it was suggested that students be invited to the Advisory Board, so that student perspectives could be reflected more in the research design and procedures. Given this, Staff Members of the Student Union who closely work with students and a final year student were invited to become Members of the Advisory Board and attended the second and the third Advisory Board meetings, which were held on 21st June and 9th December 2005.

3.3 Target Groups

To explore the issues pertinent to the project design, the UEL team consulted senior management, teaching staff, and staff from Careers and other Students Services.

It was decided to focus the student part of the research on students from three different programmes, Media and Advertising, Psychosocial Studies, and Information Technology. This was because these were all courses with more than 20 students on the programme;

¹⁸ Ethnicity and the Labour Market (Ethnicity, Education and Employment Project), Advisory Board – Terms of Reference

¹⁹ Corresponding member of Advisory Board

they represented a range of different disciplines; and both vocational and non-vocational courses. These programmes also had varying levels of ME student participation and the lecturers were willing to act as gatekeepers in the project. Students active in extra-curricula activities, such as student societies, employability seminars, or mentoring schemes were also approached. Other groups involved in the project were local employers and graduate students from 2001/02 who attended employability seminars at UEL between January and March 2005.

3.3.1 Student Profiles in Media and Advertising

Over the past five years the programme has had an intake of 40-60 students per year. In 2001/02 and 2002/03, the programme had a large proportion of White students in their first year (54% - 2001/02, 55% - 2002/03). However, for the past couple of years, the student profile has more closely reflected the multicultural character of the university²⁰. In terms of gender balance, in 2001/02 female students were dominant in all ethnic groups (of the first year students), but in 2004/05 the number of male students exceeded that of female students, except in Black groups²¹. One of the unique features of the student profile of Media and Advertising is that most of students, regardless of their ethnicity, start the course before the age of 21 and study full time. Also, the great majority of students enter from an 'A' level route.

3.3.2 Student Profiles in Psychosocial Studies

The programme admitted an average of about 60 first year students for the past five years. The ethnic profile of the programme shows the diverse student cohort, with a significant Black population²². A significant majority of students from all ethnic groups are female²³. Apart from the Asian group, around 70-80% of students are over 21 on entry²⁴. In the past couple of years, there has been an increase in students, particularly Black and White groups, entering via non traditional routes, such as access courses. However this is not the case for all groups as Asian students are more likely to have 'A' Levels or higher education qualifications on entry.

3.3.3 Student Profiles in Information Technology

The programme has had a large proportion (80-90%) of ME groups for the past few years, made up of roughly equal numbers of Black and Asian students. Black Africans are the dominant African group. The majority of Asian students enter before the age of 21, whereas Black and White groups have significant numbers of students entering the programme aged over 21. There are more male students than female in all ethnic groups. More students come via the 'A' Level route, but for all groups except Asians, other entry routes are also common. A Full-time mode of study is popular during the first year, but there are more part-time students in the second year and above. After the 1st year, the programme is also offered via a part-time evening mode.

²⁰ First year student profile for 2003/4 was; Asian – 15.5%, Black – 28.8%, White – 42.2 % and Mixed Race - 13.3%. For 2004/5; Asian – 16%, Black – 30%, White – 32%, Mixed Race – 14% and Other 8%. From Institutional Data, accessed August 2005.

²¹ For Black groups, female students take up 73.3% of the group. From Institutional data, accessed August 2005.

²² For example, the percentages of Black students (the first year) are; 2001/02 – 45.2%, 2002/03 – 41.9%, and 2004/05 – 50%. And in general there are more students from Black African group than Black Caribbean group.

²³ For example, in 2004/05 of the first year students, 100% - Asian, 89.6% - Black, 76.4% - White, 100% - Mixed race and 80% - Other.

²⁴ From Institutional Data accessed August 2005

3.4 Challenges

During the first phase of research, one of the difficulties the project team experienced was gaining access to institutional information and data. This is partly due to concerns with confidentiality, but mainly due to insufficient communication within the University. This was partly because the University was in the process of transition, with many new policies and initiatives introduced and Schools, as well as Services, being restructured; this caused much of the information and data to be dispersed.

The second challenge that the team faced was in recruiting students for interview. The graduate students, although difficult to arrange access to practically, were interested in the research project because they were job hunting themselves and the employability aspect of the research appealed to them. Recruiting current students however proved to be an extremely difficult task. On reflection, the timing of recruiting could be one of the reasons. At the same time, it needs to be stressed that those students in the target groups often had a double or triple burden of study, work and family commitments and did not have time to participate in the research. Many felt that their experience did not represent a typical student experience and therefore that the project team would do better to talk to a typical student. Given such circumstances, and to acknowledge the time that the respondents spent with the research team, the team decided to offer USB memory sticks as tokens of appreciation.

The style of the consent forms used with participants, particularly students who were unfamiliar with the norms of social research proved another challenging area. There were concerns that although participants had signed the consent forms they were not giving fully informed consent as they were not fully aware of the potential ramifications of their participation in the research. Furthermore, the research team found it really difficult to raise the issue of ethnicity with students when their concerns were more about something else, such as how to balance work and study, or family and study. Sometimes, respondents seemed uneasy discussing the topic. Even when these difficulties of recruiting and conducting interviews were resolved, the time consuming task of transcribing remained a challenge.

Lastly, given the diverse culture of the university, making a clear distinction between home and international students and placing research focus only on the former proved to be irrelevant in our institutional context. This is because, although there were many issues that separate home and international students, there were also other issues that affected both home and international students equally, such as racism or financial issues. In addition, when discussing the issue of ethnicity or the diversity of the student body, many respondents viewed the overseas students as belonging to same ME groups as British ME groups.

4 Statistical Analysis on Ethnicity

	UEL		Sector *	UEL		Sector *	
	Count	%	%	Female %	Male %	Female %	Male %
Asian or Asian British	614	15	6	14	17	5	8
Indian	202	5	3	5	5	2	3
Pakistani	160	4	2	4	5	1	2
Bangladeshi	169	4	1	4	5	0.5	1
Other Asian background	83	2	1	2	3	1	1
Black or Black British	1077	27	5	25	30	5	5
Caribbean	326	8	1	9	7	2	1
African	627	16	3	13	20	3	3
Other Black background	124	3	0.4	3	3	0.4	0.4
Chinese	50	1	1	1	1	1	1
Other ethnic group	82	2	2	2	2	2	3
Mixed	169	4	-	4	4	-	-
White and Black Caribbean	41	1	-	1	1	-	-
White and Black African	39	1	-	1	1	-	-
White and Asian	21	1	-	0.5	1	-	-
Other Mixed background	68	2	-	2	2	-	-
White	1730	43	73	46	38	74	72
British	1313	33	-	35	29	-	-
Irish	52	1	-	1	1	-	-
Other White background	365	9	-	10	8	-	-
Information Refused	64	2	-	2	1	-	-
Not Known	230	6	8	5	6	8	8
Total	4016	100	100	100	100	100	100

* In sector level data, Other Ethnic Group includes all Mixed groups and White is not broken down.

Sector Data from <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/holisdocs/pubinfo/student/ethnic0405.htm>

As table 1 demonstrates, UEL recruited significantly more ME students than the sector level average. Black African and Black Caribbean were the two groups which were most significantly different at UEL from the sector level average. Also all Asian Indian, Asian Pakistani, and Asian Bangladeshi groups had higher percentages of representation in UEL. The gender balance shows almost the same trends as

the national level data, except for Black Africans, where men were relatively over-represented at UEL. Asian and Black African women were under-represented compared to Asian and Black African men, White women were relatively overrepresented compared to White men.

Table 2 : Ethnicity breakdown of qualification levels at entry (%) (2004/5) (Undergraduate, Home Students)									
	Post Grad	Graduate	Other Prof. Qual.	A Level, Higher	Access	Other	No Formal Qual.	Not Known	Subtotal
Asian	3	5	17	58	3	9	1	6	100
Bangladeshi	2	3	15	67	2	7	1	5	100
Indian	4	5	20	53	2	8	1	7	100
Pakistani	2	5	15	59	4	9	2	5	100
Asian Other	4	5	16	52	2	12	1	7	100
Black	3	6	24	36	8	15	1	7	100
Black African	3	7	25	33	8	15	1	7	100
Black Caribbean	3	3	23	44	7	12	1	7	100
Black Other	1	7	24	29	11	17	1	10	100
Chinese	3	6	20	53	3	8	0	7	100
Mixed Race	0	9	18	47	6	9	0	6	100
White	6	10	18	44	4	13	1	5	100
White British	7	8	19	49	5	8	1	3	100
White - Irish	7	16	15	34	5	16	1	7	100
Other White Background	4	15	14	26	2	28	0	9	100
White - Prior 2001/2	3	5	17	46	8	13	0	11	100

Over half of all Asian groups entered with 'A' Levels, whereas less than half of students from all other groups did (see table 2). Nearly a quarter of Black students entered with other professional qualifications, while amongst White and Asian groups, less than 20% entered with professional qualifications. More students from Black backgrounds entered through Access Courses than White or Asian groups. Asian groups were least likely to be admitted through Access Courses.

	UEL total	Architecture & the Visual Arts	Computing & Technology	East London Business School	Education	Health & Bio Sciences	Law	Psychology	Social Science, Media & Cultural Studies
Chinese	1	3	1	1	0	0	0	1	1
Bangladeshi	4	2	6	6	7	6	6	2	5
Indian	5	3	8	10	6	5	8	4	5
Pakistani	5	2	8	9	7	3	10	3	4
Asian Other	2	4	4	4	1	3	3	3	2
Black African	17	7	25	31	13	20	28	8	17
Black Caribbean	8	6	7	8	8	7	12	11	11
Black Other	3	1	3	3	2	3	5	4	4
White British	31	46	15	9	46	37	14	46	31
White - Irish	1	1	1	0	2	2	0	2	1
Other White Background	9	12	7	9	2	5	4	9	7
White - Prior 2001/2	0	7	8	3	2	4	3	3	5
Mixed Race	6	5	6	5	3	6	8	5	7
Other	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Subtotal	99	99	99	98	99	101	101	101	100

Different Schools had different ethnic profiles as table 3 demonstrates. Computing & Technology, Business School and Law had higher percentages of both Asian and Black students relative to UEL as a whole, while Asian and Black students were less represented in Architecture & the Visual Arts and Psychology. Despite the lower representation of Asian groups in Architecture & the Visual Arts, the Chinese group was well represented. For Computing & Technology, Business School, and Law, it was only Black African students who had a higher level of representation than the UEL average.

Table 4: Ethnicity breakdown of first destinations (%) (2003/04)					
	Employed	Futher Study	Still Seeking	Other	Unknown
Asian or Asian British	65	13	11	7	3
Black or Black British	61	16	8	9	6
Chinese or Other	65	20	5	5	5
Mixed	61	15	11	6	8
White	76	8	4	6	6
All ME Students	63	15	10	8	5
Whole University	66	14	8	7	6

Six months after graduation, White graduates were more likely to be employed than their ME counterparts. Asian and Mixed graduates were considerably more likely to be unemployed than other groups, and Black and Chinese graduates were more likely to be pursuing further study.

5 Policy Documents Analysis

5.1 Mission

UEL's vision is to achieve both national and international recognition as the leading university that successfully supports social inclusion and widening participation agendas. This distinctiveness is underlined by its aim to be an inclusive regional university valuing diversity; to emphasise student centred learning; to develop students' employability; and to contribute to social, cultural and economic development through its research and scholarship²⁵.

The document 'Strategic Plan: Innovation and Renewal 2002 – 2007' identifies strategic challenges that UEL needs to meet as a London University. These are²⁶:

- providing an opportunity for Londoners to access higher education, whatever their formal educational starting point;
- ensuring student employability in the new economy via acquisition of appropriate knowledge and skill sets;
- supporting new economy business development and supporting the sustainability of the manufacturing sector, local government and key public services, particularly health and education;
- contributing through research to the evolution of London's business and community life;
- developing the inclusivity of UEL and ensuring the quality of our work;
- working in close partnership with local colleges, universities and other key agencies.

These key strategic challenges are reflected in UEL's various lower level strategies and plans, such as the Learning and Teaching Strategy, which addresses its key themes as²⁷:

- Ensuring fair access to higher education
- Maintaining and improving retention rates
- Enhancing the employability of graduates
- Developing a flexible learning offer
- Staff recognition and reward

Various initiatives have been introduced to realise the UEL vision and to respond to these themes and challenges. These include:

- Skillzone (a study skills, information resource and guidance centre in all libraries)
- New Beginnings 1 & 2 (short pre-entry subject specific and study skills accredited courses)
- Development of Foundation Degrees and Level 0 programmes
- Provision of structured AP(E)L
- Development of a Skills Curriculum
- New Dimensions (Recruitment Agency offering work placement and training)
- National Mentoring Consortium

²⁵ UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-5, p.4, Annual Review 2002/2003 (<http://www.uel.ac.uk/annualreview2003/vision/index.htm>, accessed 22/06/05), UEL Strategic Plan *Innovation and Renewal*, 2002-2007, p.11

²⁶ UEL Strategic Plan *Innovation and Renewal*, 2002-2007, p.8, UEL Strategic Plan *Innovation and Renewal*, 2002-2007, p.18

²⁷ UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-5, p.5,

- London East Research Institute (working on urban regeneration)
- Health for Asylum Seekers and Refugees Portal (HARP)
- The Rix Centre for Learning Disabilities
- Hot Hatch at the Knowledge Dock (a small business incubation centre)

The following sections will review four main policies and strategies produced by the university that are particularly pertinent to the research. These are Widening Participation, Retention, Equality and Diversity and Employability. Each of these will be reviewed, looking at their aims and objectives in relation to the degree to which they have been implemented.

5.2 Widening Participation

In 2001, it was reported that 56% of UEL's first year students were bilingual. Although such cultural and linguistic diversity is a rich contribution to the education discourses of the University, it also means that academic programmes and student services need to be designed with multi-lingual students in mind. The diversity of the UEL student population is also demonstrated by the facts that only 55% of students enter with 'A' level qualifications, and 65% of students enter as mature students. The student profile of the university has caused a re-examination of conventional approaches to programme planning, delivery, induction and retention, student support and employment outcomes in the university. Research carried out in UEL suggests that a significant proportion of student withdrawals happen in the first semester of the year, and that 95% of students who successfully pass Semester A complete the academic year²⁸, this therefore shows the importance of ensuring students from a wide range of backgrounds can access the necessary support during the first Semester.

5.2.1 Aims and Objectives of the UEL Widening Participation Strategy

The UEL Widening Participation (WP) Strategy, which was submitted to HEFCE in September 1999²⁹ aims to:

- Encourage widening participation by under-represented groups;
- Raise aspirations;
- Ensure that all students have the best possible chance of succeeding in their studies.

This is very much in line with the University's overall mission, which includes a commitment to³⁰:

- Developing national and international reputation of innovation in widening access and participation,
- Regeneration of the region,
- Continuing to be committed to promoting cultural diversity,
- Enhancing students' employability.

²⁸ UEL WP Strategy 2001- 4, p.7

²⁹ UEL WP Strategy 2001- 4, p.1

³⁰ UEL WP Strategy 2001- 4, p.2

5.2.2 Action Plan 2001- 4

Although the UEL WP Strategy has not changed significantly, the way in which it delivers its objectives has changed from 2001 to 2004. Within a unique institutional context, the aims of the WP Strategy include developing projects and programmes that can enhance student retention rates and graduate employability³¹. Given this, the WP Action Plan 2001 - 2004 aims “to ensure that all students have the best possible chance of succeeding, and the widening participation premium is being used to pilot and evaluate new innovative student support structures which cover the life cycle of the student experience”³². This can be broken up into five phases; pre-entry guidance; aspiration raising; preparing for higher education; on-course support; and employment.

5.2.3 Activities and Progress

The activities since 2001 to support widening participation include, the establishment of Skillzone, the 24-hour or extended opening of Learning Resource Centres, the provision of structured AP(E)L, and the development of Foundation Degrees and Level 0 courses³³. Each of these activities will be discussed in more detail below.

5.2.3.1 Skillzone

Skillzone, established in 2001, forms a central part of UEL’s WP Strategy³⁴. It uses the WP Premium Funds to provide a range of learning support services to students. Skillzone also aims to improve retention and completion rates³⁵. It aims to address student needs at four different stages of their university lives: 1) pre-entry guidance and support; 2) Induction and Retention; 3) Developing Employability; and 4) Employability and Careers.

It organises training and support including group teaching sessions; one-to-one tutorials; workshops and short courses; as well as providing resources (books, software, CD-ROMs, videos and worksheets). Units are skills focused and are flexible allowing students to use the service intermittently. The largest group of students who use Skillzone are non-traditional students, but students who study at Skillzone also include those who entered through an Access Course, A-level students who do not have any essay-writing experience, or mature students who have been out of education for many years³⁶. The original Skillzone was set up on the Barking campus, but smaller versions of Skillzone were set up in Docklands and Stratford respectively in 2002 and 2003. The initial focus of the project was on disadvantaged adults learners in the London Thames Gateway region, particularly Asian women, African-Caribbean men, and White working-class groups³⁷.

Over the years, Skillzone activities have been extended, liaising with course teams, and become more visible through the university’s various strategies, such as the Teaching and Learning Strategy 2002–2005 and Innovation and Renewal Strategic Plan 2002-2007³⁸. Tutors refer students to Skillzone, as well as students referring themselves, and as the profile of Skillzone has been raised, the work of Skillzone is regarded as substantial rather than merely remedial³⁹. The Skillzone project plays a central role in the delivery of UEL’s

³¹ UEL WP Strategy, p.7

³² UEL WP Strategy, Appendix E, p.1

³³ <http://www.uel.ac.uk/Skillzone/diary/about.htm>

³⁴ Widening Participation Annual Monitoring Report 2002

³⁵ UEL WP Strategy 2001- 2004, p.7.

³⁶ UEL WP Strategy 2001- 2004, Appendix?, pp.2-3

³⁷ UEL WP Annual Monitoring Report, 2001, p.7

³⁸ UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-5 indicates the significant role that the Skillzone plays in enhancing students’ study and employability skills, ensuring fair access to HE, and maintaining and improving retention rates. UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-5, p.6, p.11, p.19 and p.21. Similar references are made in *Innovation and Renewal* :Strategic Plan 2002-2007, p.19 and p.27

³⁹ UEL WP Strategy 2001-4, Appendix?, p.3

WP strategy, which is managed by a senior member of staff, who is a member of the Corporate Management Team with the responsibility for regional partnerships, outreach and WP in the curriculum across the University⁴⁰.

The Annual Monitoring Statement 2003 indicates that Skillzone has specialist staff to support the following areas of work⁴¹:

- Enterprise Zone – giving learners vital skills for self/employment
- Information Skills – advice and training in online information retrieval
- Careers Advice Service – information and advice on effective job searching
- English & Learning Skills – developing English academic and study skills
- Get Your Degree To Work – how to gain skills and knowledge from your part-time job/volunteer work
- New Beginnings – short courses for adults in the region who wish to move on to higher level training
- Make Your Experience Count – UEL credits.

One of the key activities of the Skillzone is managing the New Beginnings courses; these are a series of validated programmes for pre-entry support, which attract around 80 students a year⁴². New Beginnings 1, a free short course programme of advice, guidance and confidence building for learners, started in 2000 and finished in December 2003 due to the end of the time limited by external funding. New Beginnings 2 are accredited subject-specific courses providing support to students, which cover study skills for degree level study and technical skills to support students in the transition from FE to HE. Students acquire 20 credits at level 1 to prove that they have an ability to study at undergraduate level⁴³. Full access to university facilities is provided and arrangements are made for students to have a computer, printer and modem at home to facilitate learning and preparation for HE⁴⁴.

5.2.3.2 Learning Resources at Barking and Docklands campuses

The Widening Participation Premium also funds the 24-hour opening (term-time) of the Learning Resources Centre at Barking and Docklands campuses, with extended evening and weekend opening hours at Stratford campus during term time⁴⁵. This enables many of UEL's students, who are often balancing work, study and family commitments, to access the library at whatever time is most convenient for them.

5.2.3.3 Development of Foundation Degrees and Level 0 Programmes

Foundation degrees are vocational qualifications aimed at meeting the needs of both employees and employers in the modern and rapid moving workplace⁴⁶. 'Innovation and Renewals: Strategic Plan 2002-2007' highlights UEL's commitment to support the development of Foundation Degrees with partner FE colleges⁴⁷. Through the development of these degrees, UEL ensures that these programmes present the best vocational pedagogy. It also ensures that there is a smooth transition for those who aspire to progress to a full Honours degree or other further professional qualifications upon their graduation⁴⁸. A full Honours Degree will be attained after 12 -15 months further full-time

⁴⁰ UEL WP Annual Monitoring Report, 2001, p.19

⁴¹ UEL Annual Monitoring Statement 2003, p.4

⁴² Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-5, p.11

⁴³ UEL WP Strategy, Appendix (number unknown) p.1

⁴⁴ UEL WP Strategy, Appendix (number unknown), p.1

⁴⁵ UEL WP Strategy, p. 8

⁴⁶ <http://www.uel.ac.uk/courses/choosing/foundation/index.htm> (accessed 24th June 2005)

⁴⁷ *Innovation and Renewals: Strategic Plan 2002-2007*, p.18

⁴⁸ *Innovation and Renewals: Strategic Plan 2002-2007*, pp.18-9,

<http://www.uel.ac.uk/courses/choosing/foundation/index.htm>

study, with the option of studying part-time over a longer period. UEL provides a number of Foundation degrees which include, Foundation Degrees for Teaching Assistants; Health and Social Care; Healthcare Science and Creative Technologies; with other programmes also in development⁴⁹. Partner FE colleges include: Barking College, Newham College of Further Education, Redbridge College, Bexley College and Lewisham College, the last two in collaboration with the University of Greenwich⁵⁰.

Level 0 programmes have been developed to provide a solid foundation to existing programmes in Schools where no equivalent pre-entry programmes are offered by the School or local post-16 providers⁵¹. Some of the existing programmes include Media and Creative Industry Foundation Course and Information Communication Technologies Level 0.

5.2.3.4 Structured AP(E)L provision

UEL recognises that learning has many different forms which take place throughout life⁵². In order to meet the diverse needs of students and local communities who wish to achieve formal assessment and accreditation of their employees' skills and prior learning, the University is committed to developing "new tailor-made approaches to implementing A(E)L system"⁵³. This will assist those who seek an opportunity to study at UEL to be considered for admission through their prior experience and learning in addition to any qualifications they hold.

The University now applies A(E)L (Assessment of Prior and Experiential Learning), where APL (Assessment of Prior Learning) and AEL (Assessment of Experiential Learning) are integrated. The A(E)L Coordinator discusses the source of credit with the potential applicants. This is done by assessing their skills and experience through either or both of the following assessments⁵⁴:

- The accreditation of previously acquired certificates/qualifications (APL), which includes, NVQs, HNCs, HNDs, UK and Overseas Degrees, Post-graduate Certificate/Diploma, and other HE short courses/certificates or incomplete first degrees/post-graduate degrees for exemptions, credit-transfer, and direct entry.
- The assessment of experiential learning, which is the process by which prior and/or learning experience, such as work experience, voluntary work or home work is given an academic value (APEL).

In addition, for a mature applicant, other learning experiences are also assessed (A(E)L). After assessing possible credit value, the A(E)L Coordinator also advises the applicant on possible entry routes, and on further practical issues such as how and where to submit their application (via UCAS or directly to the University)⁵⁵.

The University webpage also contains the Guidance Toolkit, which was developed by the A(E)L Unit and the Learning Development Services. This aims to provide an idea for those with substantial experience how such experience can be assessed towards access to a degree programme at UEL⁵⁶.

⁴⁹ <http://www.uel.ac.uk/courses/choosing/foundation/index.htm>

⁵⁰ <http://www.uel.ac.uk/courses/choosing/foundation/index.htm>

⁵¹ *Innovation and Renewals: Strategic Plan 2002-2007*, p.19, Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-5, p.11

⁵² http://www.uel.ac.uk/apel/staff/policy_procedure.htm

⁵³ Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-5, p.11, http://www.uel.ac.uk/apel/staff/policy_procedure.htm, *Innovation and Renewals: Strategic Plan 2002-2007*, p.19

⁵⁴ http://www.uel.ac.uk/apel/general_info.htm

⁵⁵ http://www.uel.ac.uk/apel/general_info.htm

⁵⁶ <http://www.uel.ac.uk/apel/toolkit/index.htm>

5.2.3.5 Other initiatives and services related to WP

These include:

- Maintaining a vibrant disability service⁵⁷
- The National Federation of ACCESS centre at Stratford campus, where student study support needs are assessed
- Maintaining a strong Student Finance Unit⁵⁸
- Developing distance learning projects
- Responsive curriculum in the School of Education⁵⁹
- Education & Community Partnerships
- Continuum (Centre for Widening Participation Policy Studies)

All these areas of work that are laid out in the WP strategy and related documents show UEL attempt to create an environment that is accessible and welcoming to a diverse student body through both the schools and services.

5.3 Retention Policy

There is no cohesive retention policy, but retention and completion is one of the key foci of UEL WP Strategy and the Learning & Teaching Strategy As described as above, Skillzone has been developed partially to meet this purpose. A study has been conducted to investigate the factors affecting student progression and achievement, the results of which indicate that the first semester of the first year is crucial in determining student continuation⁶⁰. UEL improved its continuation rate from 77% (1996/7 entrants) to 80 % (1998/99), but the latest HESA data shows that UEL still suffers from a high drop-out rate of 27%⁶¹.

5.3.1 Annual Plan on Student Progression and Achievement

This is formulated to identify and promote areas of good practice to support students in completing their studies. UEL has had the plan since 1997⁶² and it states that any strategic focus on improving student retention has to be multi-dimensional, including pre-entry guidance. Following the findings of an institutional study, one key target of the retention strategy is a focus on embedding support mechanisms into the first semester of the first year. In January 2000, a one-day conference was held to disseminate the evidence of internal and external good practice and findings from the research conducted at UEL⁶³. Learning Support Services as well as other services pursued a range of strategies, and a Quality Improvement in Learning and Teaching Project made twelve recommendations to tackle the issues, some of which are incorporated in the Teaching and Learning Strategy 2002-5 for rapid implementation⁶⁴. Enhancing employability through programmes with a significant vocational focus is considered to have a favourable impact on retention. Therefore, many of the targets of the Employability Action Plan are also considered to be relevant to the improvement of the retention rate⁶⁵.

⁵⁷ UEL Annual Monitoring Statement, 2003, p.10,

⁵⁸ UEL Annual Monitoring Statement, 2003, p.15

⁵⁹ UEL WP Strategy, Appendix?, p.2

⁶⁰ UEL WP Strategy 2001- 4, p.7

⁶¹ Fazackerley, A. (2006) 'Access initiatives reach an impasse' In *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 21/07/2006, Issue 1752, p6.

⁶² UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2002-5, p.11

⁶³ UEL WP Strategy 2001- 2004, p.7

⁶⁴ UEL Learning and Teaching 2002-5, p.11

⁶⁵ UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2002-5, pp.12-3. Theses are; the introduction or extension of 1) level one skills units, 2) personal development planning, 3) work-related learning units.

5.3.2 Personal Development Planning (PDP)

Both 'UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-2005' and 'Innovation and Renewal: Strategic Plan 2002-2007' propose the introduction of Personal Development Planning for all undergraduates⁶⁶. Under this system, students are provided with support to plan and record their own development through a personal tutor. This is guided by a HEFCE initiative which expects all HEIs to provide PDP for undergraduates from September 2005. UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2002-5 states,

All students at undergraduate level will create Personal Development Plans as a permanent record of their experience and a summative CV on completion of their course to enhance employability and career planning. Templates will be designed and staff development undertaken to achieve a phased implementation over three years⁶⁷.

Personal Development Planning (PDP) Policy states the importance of PDP for retention, progression and employability as follows⁶⁸:

- a means of valuing and assessing prior experience and achievements and having them valued and discussed with tutors;
- it helps students to draw links between their previous experiences and HE, and to consider what skills and attributes they have which may be transferable;
- a means for focusing attention on the student's own achievement and requirements.

5.3.3 Skills Curriculum

Skills Curriculum was introduced as part of PDP in 2004, and was developed through a wide ranging consultation, including student views as well as comments from academic and support staff, employers and external examiners⁶⁹. 'UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2002-5' discusses the importance of extending the provision of study and key skills provision in level 1 units as 'skills units'. These aim 'to develop study skills, employability skills, skills audits and CV development' and are expected to 'ensure structured links with the Skillzone and Learning Support Services'⁷⁰. The Strategy stresses the critical role of good co-ordination of student services and enhanced provision (by the academic School)⁷¹.

Under the Skills Curriculum, a series of Skills Modules are offered at various levels:

- Skills for Academic Learning – Level 1;
- Employability (Professional Practice) - Level 2 or 3; and
- Research Skills – Level 2 or 3.⁷²

In September 2004, all Schools had implemented Level 1, skills modules⁷³, further development was made on Level 0, 2 and 3 and the full programme was in operation by the academic year 2005/6⁷⁴.

⁶⁶ UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2002-5, pp.11-12, *Innovation and Renewals*: Strategic Plan 2002-2007, p.19

⁶⁷ UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2002-5, pp.11-12

⁶⁸ Personal Development Planning Policy, May 2004, www.uel.ac.uk/qa/manual/pdp.htm (accessed 27/06/05)

⁶⁹ UEL Skills Curriculum, Issued April 2005

⁷⁰ UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2002-5, p.11

⁷¹ UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2002-5, p.11

⁷² UEL Skills Curriculum, Issued April 2005, p.1

⁷³ www.uel.ac.uk/qa/manual/pdp.htm

⁷⁴ UEL Skills Curriculum, Issued April 2005, p.1

The Skills Curriculum is developed in order to lay a foundation where students will develop their skills throughout their study. Skills in all other modules will be built on this set of skills, which students 'practice', 'develop' and 'refine'. The Skills Curriculum requires that this needs to be communicated to students explicitly through Indicative Learning Outcomes and should be articulated in the module specifications⁷⁵.

5.3.4 English Language Support

One of the services that Skillzone offers is English and Learning Skills development and support⁷⁶. They run a range of classes and seminars on all three campuses in the University. These include:

- Master classes in English and Communication Skills to groups and individuals as part of validated programmes;
- Lunch time academic and English support seminar programmes, on Academic Writing Skills and Skills for Academic Success;
- Academic study support by drop-in such as subject related modules and additional study support (10 week per semester) as well as bookable individual tutorials.

Providing materials that can help students develop English, academic writing and study skills, and generally improve the quality of work they produce, is an important part of assisting students who do not speak English as their first language to achieve as highly as they can and to remain in higher education⁷⁷.

Skillzone also helps in diagnosing student's needs and monitor student progress as well as producing end of semester reports. They work to integrate learning development within courses and provide a referral system. The Skillzone tracks the progress of students with an end of year assessment called 'decisions'. This is one measure of how many of the students they support successfully finish the year⁷⁸. Various academic Schools also provide their own in-house English support tutors, but this is an erratic and very limited service.

5.3.5 Development of Distance and E-Learning

As a part of multi-mode delivery, distance learning based on the web has been explored in the Learning Development Service. E-learning has been attracting attention as a means to improve retention. They are considered as effective because of:

- 24 hour access to materials;
- better communication between learners and with their tutors;
- motivation of learners through new approaches to teaching e.g. use of multimedia simulations
- tracking of student participation to allow early intervention⁷⁹.

The pilot of WebCT has been successful and its use is growing in the University. The UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-5 aims to maintain this growth⁸⁰. UEL E-learning Strategy 2004-2008 clearly indicates that the University's use of the Virtual Learning Environment, such as WebCT, is an important way to help with the retention of students

⁷⁵ UEL Skills Curriculum, Issued April 2005, p.4

⁷⁶ International students will be provided English support from English Learning Centre, separately.

⁷⁷ UEL WP Strategy 2001-4, Appendix E, p.2; Annual Monitoring Statement 2003, p.7; <http://www.uel.ac.uk/els/docs/wedo.htm>

⁷⁸ UEL WP Strategy 2001-4, Appendix (number unknown) p.2

⁷⁹ http://www.uel.ac.uk/lds/e-learning/about_e-learning.htm

⁸⁰ UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy, 2002-5, p.5

both on campus and on distance learning programmes⁸¹. Learning Development Services work with Learning Support Services to develop a strong “linkage between electronic courseware and electronic print-based learning resources provided by Learning Support Services”⁸².

5.3.6 Finance

Most of the students at UEL work during the course of their studies. Various funds are used to maintain a strong Student Finance Unit which gives advice and assistance to students with financial problems. In 2003-4, there was also a target of achieving a closer correlation between student retention and support from the hardship fund⁸³.

5.4 Equality and Diversity

5.4.1 Race Equality Policy

UEL's has an extremely diverse profile of students and staff with 60% students and 20% staff coming from ethnic minority groups. The University Charter for inclusivity states that:

*We are committed to working together to build a learning community founded on equality of opportunity – a learning community which celebrates the rich diversity of our student and staff populations. Discriminatory behaviour has no place in our community and will not be tolerated. Within a spirit of respecting difference, our equality and diversity policies promise equal treatment and opportunity for all regardless of gender, sexuality, race, colour, disability, religion, age, and ethnic or national origin. We call on all members of our community to make a personal commitment to these aims*⁸⁴.

The Race Equality Policy and its associated Action Plans are designed to promote equal treatment and opportunities for all members of the university community regardless of race, colour, religion, and ethnic or national origin⁸⁵. The policy is complemented and strengthened by policies such as the Equal Opportunities Policy Statement; the Religion and Cultural Diversity Policy & Procedure; the Anti-Harassment Policy & Procedure; and the Inclusive Language Policy & Procedure⁸⁶.

To achieve the aims of inclusivity at the University, the Equality and Diversity Unit was set up in February 2002, funded in accordance with UEL Human Resources Strategy. Its establishment is also in line with the recommendations and guidelines outlined in reports such as the MacPherson Report, Equality Challenge Unit Report and the Mann Weaver Report⁸⁷. Staff within the Unit made up what was the largest unit of its kind in the country⁸⁸, consisting of a Head of Unit, an Equality and Diversity Officer, a Unit Administrator, two equality & diversity advocates across the schools and services, and an event organiser⁸⁹. They work on various initiatives and events to promote equality and diversity including, staff development, local action plans, data monitoring, and policy review. The unit aims to maintain the diversity of the students as well as promote staff diversity to reflect student profile. They have established a close working relationship with the Student's Union and

⁸¹ UEL E-learning Strategy 2004-2008, version 3.6 December 2004, p.4 and p.11

⁸² UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-5, p.14

⁸³ Annual Monitoring Statement 2003, p. 10

⁸⁴ <http://www.uel.ac.uk/equality/index.htm>

⁸⁵ UEL Race Equality Policy and Procedure, 2002, p.1

⁸⁶ UEL Race Equality Policy and Procedure, 2002, p.9

⁸⁷ Inclusivity 2003, p.2, UEL Race Equality Policy and Procedure, 2002, p.2

⁸⁸ Inclusivity 2003, p.2

⁸⁹ UEL Race Equality Policy and Procedure, 2002, p.2. But currently only one Equality and Diversity Officer and one Administrator & Event organiser is in post.

emphasise the importance of feedback of both students and staff across the University. The Unit also publishes a magazine "INCLUSIVITY", which is widely available across the University⁹⁰.

The University employed a number of specialist staff to counsel and provide support to Black and minority ethnic students (suspended in 2004). Academic staff also have a range of research interests in the field of diversity⁹¹.

5.4.2 Implementation

Regarding implementation, the Equality and Diversity Committee replaced the Equal Opportunities Advisory Group in 2002⁹². The committee is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor with the Secretary and Registrar as the Vice-Chair; its other membership includes a further four members of the Corporate Management Team, individuals with expertise in various aspects of race equality, such as the Adviser to Asian Women and the Director of the National Mentoring Consortium⁹³. It holds several meetings in each academic year co-ordinating policy initiatives and reports to the Corporate Management Team⁹⁴. The Board of Governors also ensures that its own actions promote equality and diversity. Overall responsibility in support of maintaining and promoting equality and diversity lies with the Vice-Chancellor, with the Corporate Management Team, and also closely supported by the Secretary and Registrar⁹⁵. The Director of Personnel Services is responsible for equality of opportunity in employment, for developing policies which meet legislation and best practice, and for monitoring the impact of these policies on different minority groups. Heads of Schools and Directors of Services are also responsible for implementing this Policy and for designing and maintaining a local equality action plan. All staff and students need to be aware of the racial equality policy and ensure that their actions are in line with the policy⁹⁶.

Equality and Diversity Action Plans for each school and service were drafted in Spring 2003. These assess the impact of policies and procedures with regard to employment and service delivery, contractor/partnership functions and the promotion and development of good practice. These action plans operated initially for a two year period until October 2004 and are monitored and reviewed annually by the members of the Corporate Management Team, the Equality & Diversity Unit and the Equality & Diversity Committee. The action plans are specific, measurable, and achievable with realistically timed targets and outcomes.

An annual report is being devised by the Equality & Diversity Unit which will provide information on how the University has promoted equality; valued and celebrated diversity; whether the targets have been met, and whether any good practice has been developed. This report will also be submitted to the Board of Governors, the Vice-Chancellor, the Corporate Management Team and the Equality & Diversity Committee⁹⁷.

⁹⁰ <http://www.uel.ac.uk/equality/index.htm>

⁹¹ UEL Race Equality Policy and Procedure, 2002, p.3

⁹² Race Equality Scheme, First Annual Progress Report: 2002-2004
<http://www.uel.ac.uk/equality/progressreport/index.htm>

⁹³ Race Equality Scheme, First Annual Progress Report: 2002-2004
<http://www.uel.ac.uk/equality/progressreport/index.htm>

⁹⁴ http://www.uel.ac.uk/personnel/EqualityDiversity_Policy.htm,

⁹⁵ http://www.uel.ac.uk/personnel/EqualityDiversity_Policy.htm

⁹⁶ http://www.uel.ac.uk/personnel/EqualityDiversity_Policy.htm

⁹⁷ UEL Race Equality Policy and Procedure, 2002, p.5

5.4.3 Monitoring

As part of the action plan, UEL carries out monitoring on student admissions and progression, and on staff recruitment, induction, training and career progression by racial group. The monitoring involves collecting, analysing and assessing data to measure performance and effectiveness over time. The results of this assessment are used to set targets for UEL corporate action plans⁹⁸.

The impact of policies and procedures on both staff and students is monitored. In relation to staff members the following areas in employment as well as career development and promotion are monitored by ethnic group:

- the selection and training of interview panel members;
- job applications and success rates;
- type of contract (permanent, temporary or fixed-term);
- grade and type of post;
- length of service;
- induction, training and development;
- the results of training and career development programmes or strategies that target particular racial groups;
- promotion;
- discipline and grievance.

In relation to students, the following stages of the student admissions process as well as student achievement and progress are monitored by ethnic group:

- choice of subject;
- home or international status;
- entry routes;
- student numbers, applications and admissions, transfers and drop-out rates for each course;
- degree classifications;
- work placements, including success rates, satisfaction levels and job offers connected to placements;
- student success rates in finding employment after obtaining qualifications from the university;
- the results of programmes targeted at people from specific racial groups;
- racial harassment complaints;
- disciplinary actions and complaints.

The monitoring information is regularly reviewed in order to evaluate the progress made to meet UEL's race equality targets. The monitoring and assessment of the impact of policies and procedures on the university community is partially made available on the web-site and also through a series of annual Equality & Diversity Reports. Furthermore, UEL tries to ensure that this policy and procedure will be available in Braille and on cassette⁹⁹.

5.4.4 Staff Profile Statistics

Equal Opportunities Monitoring Statistics of the staff profile in Oct 2003 showed a stark contrast to the diversity of the student body. Only 26% of all staff are from non-White

⁹⁸ UEL Race Equality Policy and Procedure, 2002, pp.4-5

⁹⁹ UEL Race Equality Policy and Procedure, 2002, pp.4-5

backgrounds. The proportion is even smaller amongst Academic staff (18%), and at Management level (3 %). With an increasingly diverse student body senior managers are aware of the importance of diversifying the staff profile.

5.5 Employability Policy and Practice

During the period 2000-1, there were numerous activities on employability; these included: Employability Conference (June 2000); Employability Project Group, HEROBC (the Higher Education Reach-Out into Business and the Community) Fund allocation (1999-2003), On-line help for Employability (www.ueljobhelp.uel.ac.uk), Guidance toolkit, Skills Park, Working your way through College, the Graduate Project, or MA/MSc/PGDip by Work-based Learning¹⁰⁰. Most of these initiatives have been discontinued now (August 2006) because they were often funded from short term external funds; however other similar activities still take place.

UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-05 indicates that developing student employability is one of the key concerns of the University. Furthermore, enhancing “the employability of students by the embedding of key skills and by providing increased opportunities to engage in work-related and work-based learning” is set as one of the aims of this strategy¹⁰¹. The University not only focuses on supporting students in acquiring employability skills but also offers students and graduates the opportunity to develop business ideas¹⁰². The Corporate Management Team approved an Employability Action Plan, which is being implemented by the UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-05. There have been five main areas of activity developed¹⁰³:

- Level one skills units
- Personal Development Planning
- Work-related learning units
- Careers Conference days for level 2 and 3
- Careers liaison

Employability skills are embedded in the curriculum with the support of Skillzone, and work-based learning. A successful MA/MSc/PGDip by Work-based Learning has been running for 4 years and the University introduced a Graduate Certificate in CPD by work-based learning. This will be expanded to undergraduate level¹⁰⁴. In addition, in June 2004, the first careers conference ‘Employability Works!’ was organised by Skillzone and Student Services. The day was designed for UEL students, offering them help and advice in finding a job through workshops, presentations and one-to-one sessions on Interview Skills, CV Clinics, and Business Start-up. Businesses also attended in order to recruit UEL students and graduates¹⁰⁵.

In November 2004, a Head of Employability was appointed to enhance the graduate employability. Under the new Head, the Employability and Career Unit has been re-organised with many new initiatives taking place, including the provision of Employability Seminars (Pilot) (Jan –Feb 2005) and ‘Employability Works!’ events in Feb and June 2005. The Skills Module for Employability was also introduced at Levels 2 and 3 from 2005/6.

¹⁰⁰ <http://matrix.uel.ac.uk/employability/internal/news.htm>,

<http://www.uel.ac.uk/employability/internal/initiatives.htm>

¹⁰¹ UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-05, p.4

¹⁰² <http://www.uel.ac.uk/employability/index.htm>

¹⁰³ UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-05, p.12

¹⁰⁴ UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-05, pp.6-7

¹⁰⁵ <http://matrix.uel.ac.uk/employabilityworks/index.htm>

The appointment of the new Head of Employability to work with the Learning and Teaching Sub Committee has assisted the University in developing more consistent and centralised practices on employability.

As UEL promotes self-employment and entrepreneurial skills, this has had an impact on both curriculum and teaching methods. Schools are currently considering introducing level 3 work-related units with the specific aim of enabling students to plan for self-employment¹⁰⁶. UEL's strong interest in developing the entrepreneurial skills of students can also be demonstrated by the launch of HotHatch and Athena initiatives at Knowledge Dock, part of External and Strategic Planning Services. These are business generator units providing entrepreneurs at an early career stage with the environment to stimulate, support and develop their business.

In 1992, a pilot mentor scheme for ME undergraduates was established at UEL, which grew into the National Mentoring Consortium (NMC) in 1994. Now the NMC is a nationally recognised organisation providing the expertise, training and employer contacts for its mentoring schemes. It works with over 300 employers and 16 Universities in the UK. In the Ethnic Minority Undergraduate Scheme, students are linked with mentors who are professionals in their work to obtain support and experience; it is a one-to-one relationship, which allows students to improve their skills to prepare for employment. The scheme lasts for 6 months, from October/November, after training and induction events, to April. Mentor and student meetings are held once a month, often at the mentors' workplace. All participants are awarded certificates upon successful completion of the scheme¹⁰⁷. The NMC also organises an annual Graduate Careers Day, which around 40 employers and 2,000 students attend¹⁰⁸. Following the success of the scheme, a mentoring scheme for students with disabilities is now being piloted at UEL¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁶ UEL Learning and Teaching Strategy 2002-05, p.13

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.uel.ac.uk/nmc/mentoring/index.htm>

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.uel.ac.uk/nmc/careersday/index.htm>

¹⁰⁹ <http://www.uel.ac.uk/nmc/disability/index.htm>

6 Senior Management Interviews

16 interviews were carried out with Senior Managers in UEL, who represented the most important managerial positions in the university, on both the academic and service sides. Most of these interviews were digitally recorded and consent forms were signed by the interviewees. Interviews with the most senior managers were conducted by two researchers, whilst other interviews were conducted by one researcher. Interviewees were asked a set of structured questions, which covered the following topics: their perception of the institution (UEL and respective School/Department); Widening Participation Policy and Practice; Minority Students and Widening Participation; and Graduate Employability¹¹⁰.

6.1 The Perception of the Institution and Widening Participation

All Senior Managers shared the view that UEL has a diverse student community with students from many different cultural backgrounds. It was also widely accepted that most students were so-called non-traditional students, who were, for example, mature; from lower socio-economic backgrounds; come from the local area, or were studying part-time.

The profile [of the students] in general is that we do have a very significant proportion of students for whom English is not necessarily their first language –they are multilingual. Secondly they come from typically one of six inner or outer East London boroughs, so they are often typically local students. And thirdly they will be first generation entrants from diverse ethnic, social groupings and backgrounds within the community. And I would suggest that is approx 55-60% of our student population. Add to that the percentage of the student who are perhaps from White backgrounds from lower socio-economic groups and I think that the vast majority of our students come from ethnic and other socio-economic groups that are typically underrepresented in HE. (Senior Management Interview 9)

Many Senior Managers felt that UEL offers access to HE for these students who otherwise would not have an opportunity to progress to HE. This suggests that they tend to share the view that UEL is a successful example of a Widening Participation Institution.

The main targets... I mean that we have such a good record in widening participation in terms of students that I don't think we have many targets apart from doing what we are currently doing and serving those students well. (Senior Management Interview 12)

It is absolutely the par-excellence of WP institution- we have the high numbers of working class students, we have very high numbers of Black and ME students – it very much reflects the locality we are in... (Senior Management Interview 4)

All Senior Managers felt that institutionally this awareness of (the importance of) Widening Participation was also very high. This claim was supported by various Widening Participation initiatives and practices taking place in different Schools. These included:

- A pre-degree programme for performing arts developed at Stratford Circus for mature students (Innovation and Cultural Studies, now Social Science and Culture and Media Studies);
- Extended degree (Year 0) programmes developed with schools and FE colleges (Innovation and Cultural Studies, now Social Science and Culture and Media Studies and Business School);

¹¹⁰ See Appendix A for interview questions.

- Developing a law degree for the Muslim women together with Azhar Academy (Muslim Girls Secondary School & College in East London);
- Skillzone (External and Strategic Development Services);
- Making sure that the diversity of the students (by gender, ethnicity, and disability for example) were represented in the School advertisement (School of Education);

In contrast to those Senior Managers who predominately identified WP as Widening Access to HE for students from non-traditional backgrounds, other Senior Managements interpreted Widening Participation more broadly¹¹¹.

I think first a little bit of description [...] that we have tried to ensure that [...] there is seamless access that there aren't obstacles into HE for applicants who may not know much about HE but are ready and have the capacity to join. [...] Point 2 is that [...] our extended degrees allow us to provide access to HE for people who are just entering in a way their post 16, post compulsory studies. [...] Third is being sensitive to how different communities enter into HE and how mature students and other groups of applicants may arrive into HE. So that means building up links with community organisations as much as with educational institutions. (Senior Management Interview 9).

Having students from non-traditional backgrounds, and thus a diverse student body was recognised as one of the positive characteristics of the University. However, many Senior Managers also considered that having a majority of students from non-traditional backgrounds, who were therefore not familiar with the HE environment, did pose a huge challenge to the University as the institution was required to meet these diverse student's needs. Many Senior Managements felt that the main concerns of most students at UEL were getting good support to progress; moving onto successful employment; time management to balance study, work and family care; and financial issues. These issues, particularly, around student's financial situations not only affected the student's individual performance, but also the university retention rate, which is a measure of the university's performance for HEFCE. This has recently become more serious concern given the introduction of fees from the academic year 2006/7.

We measure the average time a student here takes to complete their degree and of course it's a three year degree and you expect to complete it in three years. Well in fact the average is something like 3.6 years. And what often happens is a student will drop out for a semester while they raise some cash and then they'll come back in and we're quite comfortable about that but actually our funding councils regards that as a failed student. (Senior Management Interview 2)

I think student debt is one of the biggest contributors to student dropout. (Senior Management Interview 4)

In order to meet diverse student's needs, developing more creative assessments, which can satisfy the different learning styles of students, was considered important.

The easiest thing to do is to set a load of exams, but that is only appropriate for certain students if that is what their learning style is, if they have a very good memory capacity then they will be ok in exams, things like online multiple choice, using work based stuff to be assessed, coursework is ok, but it is a huge amount of marking and the harder it is to make the longer it takes for students to get their feedback, and the longer it takes

¹¹¹ A few Senior Managers also considered that Widening Participation was strongly linked with Graduate Employability, which will be discussed later.

for them to get their feedback then the less use it is to them. (Senior Management Interview 11).

In addition to university's responsibility to its students, as stated in the University mission, many Senior Managers believed that the University has a broader socio-economic role in the local community, helping the regeneration of the area and actively participating in the local economy. Given such a unique regional context, they believed that the role of the University is to provide the local community with basic as well as higher order skills. Many Senior Managers felt that the University is serving its purpose well.

Yes; it [UEL] is a degree awarding body; it educates 150,000-170,000 students a year. It's providing a local sort of skills base and enabling people to acquire the qualifications needed to move forward in the employment market and that is increasingly important as being a graduate is becoming increasingly a requirement or a number of jobs now. (Senior Management Interview 4)

We see ourselves being here to serve a population in the six key London boroughs that surround us [...] that's a population of about 1.2 million people that we're serving. [...] Economic regeneration is what is particularly important theme for a university like this to be involved in because [...] there are far too many people in those six boroughs who are not economically active and [...] it means that there's lots of poverty and things and therefore paying attention to getting more jobs in this part of London to getting more people enabled to have those better jobs are parts of what we do. (Senior Management Interview 2)

Although its locality and local commitment is one of the University's strengths and unique features, many Senior Managers also pointed out its national and international characteristics. This was stressed as one of the positive factors that the University could further develop into a nationally and internationally recognised HEI.

Student profile of UEL is about representative of its community. I think my school which is more international and probably a smaller geographical base within the region. We have a very high proportion of students who come from Newham, Tower Hamlets and Inner East London and they are therefore disproportionately like to be of Black or Asian origin, I would guess. That's the home based students and then we have a higher proportion of international students. (Senior Management Interview 3)

I think it [UEL] has a very important role as a regional; and international provider of education. So it meets in effect the needs of two different but interlinked constituencies. I think it is distinct because its student population is fairly distinct compared to the average university [...] And so as a regional and international provider of education the challenges facing those students are greater than for the average university –they have tougher challenges to overcome. (Senior Management, Interview 8)

6.2 Minority Ethnic Students and WP

As discussed above, many Senior Managers acknowledged the diversity of the student population, particularly the high percentage of ME students at UEL. However, in terms of engagement with these ME students, some Senior Managers said that their Schools did not necessary provide services specifically to ME students.

Specifically? [...] I don't know how we do it superficially; we try to cater for all demands without distinguishing really. (Senior Management Interview 7)

In some Schools, that had many international (ME) students, the provision for ME students was a difficult issue. International students require a different kind of support to home ME students, as they have issues such as settling in London or feeling isolated without friends or families, which were often dealt with International Office in the University. However, they also faced some similar challenges with home ME students, such as lack of familiarity with British HE, the language barrier, or the possible racial and ethnic stereotyping. Despite the similarity of some of the issues that these students faced, they were often dealt with by different services due to the separate funding and support structures for ME home students and international students.

Although not specifically targeted for ME students, Senior Managers cited Year 0 programme, skills modules for Level 1, and personal tutor systems as examples of efficient provisions to serve ME student's needs, particularly for those without traditional academic qualifications.

First of all we have a year 0, so the student can start from 0 and progress to 1 rather than 1 progressing to 2. Secondly we have had, even before it was university policy, very well imbedded skills modules for level1. [...] But I think a lot of attention to skills for the more than typically needy students, but actually that can also of course be somebody who is White and middle class and more privileged and if they lack the skills that would still benefit them. So in WP we have to be very careful about not privileging one group and depriving others, we need to privilege that group and it's an opportunity for others if they also require that type of support (Senior Management Interview 3).

As demonstrated in the above quote, in addition to the difficulty in differentiating home and overseas ME students, one reason that there was not more support or provision specifically for ME students was the concern that such provision could cause disadvantage or discrimination for other groups. Furthermore, some Senior Managers believed that targeting particular groups often missed the point:

When people have this issue [of ethnicity], they always think what can we do for ME students, basically what they should be saying is whatever they do for those students is good for everybody. So basically what they should say is what is our service about? What are we trying to deliver to our students and if they do that, the fact that the students are from a particular ME group will be taken up in that because you will be looking at what will make our students successful.... When you try and create a particular strategy to encourage different groups you kind of miss it and in a good business you actually start with your customer and how you are going to attract them and look after them [...] (Senior Management Interview 14).

However, some provision did exist, such as the Race and Welfare Offices in the Student Union and The National Mentoring Consortium specifically for ME students. In addition, some Senior Managers referred to the institutional practices such as the celebration of ME community events; the recognition of key religious and cultural days; and catering for various (religious) dietary requirements on campus, and they saw these as an expression of University's commitment to meet ME student's needs.

For example, this coming academic year we have a programme already set up on all the various religious and cultural festivals that take place and we bring in entertainers from those various groups to meet our staff and organise entertainments and also there's briefing materials there as well so people can fine out more about different religions, cultures and festivals. (Senior Management Interview 12)

However, not all of them were necessarily impressed by ME community events organised by the university.

There is all the celebration of ethnic minority events that we try to do etc, I'm never quite happy about that, I think it should happen but it seems a bit... (Senior Management Interview 7)

However, the careful planning of academic programmes to be aware of other religious and cultural calendars was often considered to be very important if the academic school was committed to equality and diversity, although it was difficult to organise school calendar taking all cultural events into account.

We try not to have, certainly on [programme name]; we try not to have assignments handed in when students might be fasting. If students need to take time off for specific days in their own cultural calendar then they can do. (Senior Management Interview 11)

Another area that Senior Managers raised was the development of a curriculum that critically explores the social and cultural aspect of all the diverse lives of their students and avoids being Eurocentric.

I think there is awareness in the institution about the danger of having euro-centric curriculum for instance, so there is that awareness. There are attempts to make sure that the curriculum and syllabus has that awareness of the whole of your student body. (Senior Management Interview 4).

There is sensitivity in terms of the development of our programme curriculum. In other words many of our staff are very committed to developing programmes that explore critically contemporary social and cultural life. Inevitably to do that effectively you have to explore questions of race, gender, the development of international and domestic social, political, cultural and economic circumstances. (Senior Management Interview 9)

In short, most Senior Managers acknowledged the importance of cultural sensitivity in all areas of teaching and student services, but a few Senior Managers were critical of the university not giving the right message to students through the cultural attitudes embedded in teaching and services.

Maybe it's just on this site and the people I've met here... I've felt that people's attitudes towards the students were maybe colonialist – you know –really do gooding. And because of that... and also the body, I don't know about the teaching body because I don't know the statistics, but if I look at the service I inherited – all female, all White until this year when they had xxx [name deleted] come who is Asian, but you have a body of people who are supposed to work with people who to me were not culturally sensitive, not necessarily maliciously, but they are not culturally sensitive. (Senior Management Interview 14)

In relation to this issue, some senior managers suggested that a fair representation of ME staff in their School could be a positive message for ME students.

It is also about having diversity in staff and we have a target to increase our ME staff by 5% - we actually do quite well I mean have a look at the photos of the staff outside the office (Senior Management Interview 11)

In order to identify student's needs and to provide better support, Senior Managers utilised personal tutors, seminars, student support office. Various student committees also gave students an opportunity to raise their concerns.

We have a student experience committee, and I don't think that that's common across the university. It is there to debate student experience as opposed to curricular matters which go through other committees. The student experience committee is student reps. And it's their chance to say what they think is wrong with the building, the food, its provision, all those sorts of support mechanisms, anything else that is actually outside of our control. (Senior Management Interview 7)

Yes we have very active student programme committees and we meet regularly with the student representatives, and we make a big fuss. The difficult thing for us is part-time students because they can't necessarily come in for meetings so we do that by e-mail usually. (Senior Management Interview 11)

6.3 Graduate Employability

When asked about graduate employability and the role of the university, many Senior Managers expressed the opinion that graduate employability was the key concern of the university.

It's absolutely fundamental, there is I guess FE is important as well, but in the London labour market we are in desperate need of higher level skills. The industries such as banking, the finance services, companies I was talking about earlier [...] or the creative industries, leisure and tourism they are all needing people with higher level skills. And so it's the job of HE very largely to work to support those things and to provide opportunities so that people when they enter the labour market have the basic knowledge and skills from which to operate. (Senior Management Interview 3)

Well it's fairly obvious that people need to get a job and people need to start thinking about getting a job when they set foot in the institution and the old model I mentioned before will not work. So it's got to build into the curriculum, they have to start thinking about it sooner and acquire skills early on in their programme that will be useful in the labour market and as long as that is done in the right way there is nothing in conflict with having a good academic experience and work. (Senior Management Interview 12)

However, compared to the success in WP, many Senior Managers accepted that the institution faced a challenge in achieving better graduate employment and employability. This demonstrates that many Senior Managers equated WP with Widening Access and did not necessarily link the issue with all phases of student experience at HEIs. However, some others considered that Widening Participation and Graduate Employability were closely linked agendas.

Well I think if you open the door at one end you've got a responsibility for what happens at the other end. (Senior Management Interview 12)

It's that they are on a steep learning curve it's all very well being able to get into an institution, but you need to be able to get a job at the end and our job is to train them for that. (Senior Management Interview 11)

A few Senior Managers argued that these two initiatives were more than linked, and that actually they were the same issue. For these Senior Managers, consistent strategies and practices across institutional services to cover and support different phases of student's experiences were what the institution should provide if they were to claim success in WP.

I think it is about our students and I don't think that they are two separate issues actually – I think that for our student body and our student profile that WP and employability are part of the same issue. (Senior Management Interview 4)

Successful WP policy means that a student from this university could go to any employer and they would be thought as well of as anybody from another institution. (Senior Management Interview 14)

Over the last year we put in place a retention and achievement policy that came into effect in September [2004] and that was intended to ensure that students and every opportunity we could give them and they had a personal tutor and we set out a personal development plan [...] It means that the students who saw their personal tutors regularly put together a portfolio which hopefully will help them to reflect and to develop the sort of CV that will get them into jobs. It's planned on that basis (Senior Management Interview 3).

Initiatives and practices identified by Senior Management that have enhanced work on graduate employability were as follows:

- Work placement opportunities;
- The appointment of the Head of Employability;
- Employability Works events (Skills and job fair);
- Personal tutor and Personal development plan which enables students to develop a portfolio and eventually CVs;
- National Mentoring Consortium;
- Working with local recruitment and training organisations such as New Dimension and London First;
- Appointment of an employability tutor in the School;
- Developing links with employers;
- Entrepreneurship Centre;

Senior Managers recognised the importance of graduate employability to the institution; however some of them felt that this view was not shared by members of teaching staff.

That's a challenge because you know, in a real sense they [employment indicators] don't but they do, and for many academics, they choose not to engage with such things [graduate employability]. (Senior Management Interview 2)

I think there are still quite a lot of staff who think that it [graduate employability] is not really their responsibility and it is because of the expectations of particularly the people we are now marketing our courses at, I think we are doing them a disservice if we don't get more involved. (Senior Management Interview 7)

Even amongst Senior Managers who considered Graduate Employability as absolutely vital for the University, there were some who expressed ambivalence towards the way that personal and professional development profiling was being planned in the institution.

I think it will come under some unit in the 3rd year I think that's the idea of personal and professional development profiling and plans and so forth. But its not something that employers would want to see credit rated, I mean [...] people in the legal professional are not going to be thrilled to look at somebody's CV and see that they got 20 credits in their final year for leaning how to attend an interview – your know this is not great but its something we want to do for them some other way. (Senior Management Interview 7)

In addition, there were a few others who argued that Employability should not be the only focus of the University in terms of measures of outcomes.

I don't think it is just a straight forward answer saying HE is all about employability I think that diminishes the importance of HE, so I think it is an intellectual and human

development that one should expect HE to at least provide the opportunity for someone to achieve. If you do that well then actually you do create someone who has the confidence and the skills to get a decent job. (Senior Management Interview 9)

6.4 Gaps in Awareness and the Future of the University

Many senior managers agreed that the university needed to have a more focused or coherent strategy for the successful development of WP and Graduate Employability policy and practice.

We need to be a bit more focused and a bit clearer about what we are doing. I feel we are still trying to do everything and I think that is probably something that is common across the sector because we have had so many new initiatives that is probably no time to sit down and work out what we are really doing with WP and what we are really offering people. (Senior Management Interview 7)

It was also felt that success could only be achieved through partnership between colleges, schools, employers and UEL. Funding was the one of the areas that many saw as a possible constraint in achieving the goals.

Well I think funding is an issue because it is more expensive to provide the range of facilities and services that are needed for a student population where there is no history of university where there isn't parents at home who can support you through university – a lot of our students themselves are parent and have caring responsibilities and so for all of those funding is a real issues. (Senior Management Interview 4)

A shortage of human resources was another serious concern for Senior Management in achieving their strategic aims and objectives.

Energy, staffing levels really, typically I'm always short staffed, there is not a shortage of initiatives there is a shortage of people to do them. (Senior Management Interview 3)

Some of these challenges had arisen because University had recently been in the process of major institutional change, which had aimed to reorganise services for students more coherently.

In general, the level of commitment to WP and Graduate Employability was high amongst Senior Management, although the interpretation of the link between these two policy initiatives varied. They were also extremely aware of the distinctiveness and the diversity of the UEL student population. However, compared to the marked awareness of the diversity of the student population, there was less awareness that the staff profile did not reflect the student population. Only three Senior Managers mentioned the issue of the numbers of ME staff and only two of them raised concerns about how this might have an impact on the University culture. Student diversity was often categorised singularly as diversity with few staff recognising that there were many differences within the diverse community of students, although there seemed to be a growing interest in the difference in performance between different groups. On the contrary, the different needs of full-time and part-time students seemed to be well acknowledged. Senior managers were very concerned about developing initiatives and policies around WP and graduate employability, however they were much less concerned about the dissemination, implementation and monitoring of these policies as the quotes below illustrate.

We just do it!!! There are no specific dissemination routes [for Diversity and Equality policy]. (Senior Management Interview 11)

I think it is mostly ad hoc below the strategic levels already mentioned –other than the annual monitoring statement which obviously pulls together all the activities that are going on and report them back to CMT, then to our board of governors and then to HEFCE. (Senior Management Interview 4)

7 Non-management staff interviews

12 interviews with non-management staff were conducted between September 2005 and January 2006. These included teaching staff in the School of Social Science, Media and Cultural Studies and other staff who work in student support roles including English language support, E-learning and careers. Semi-structured questions were asked about their views of the institution, the students, their awareness of WP, Employability and Equality and Diversity policies and practice; and effectiveness of university practice¹¹². Interviews were digitally recorded with permission from the interviewees.

7.1 The view on HE and UEL

In concurrence with senior managers, most non-senior management staff interviewed agreed that UEL has a diverse range of communities and that it is working towards becoming an inclusive institution. A lecturer who studied at UEL when it was a polytechnic considered that the institution gave him, someone from the working class background, an opportunity to change his life. Many others also thought that UEL still has the same mission, giving opportunities to the local community to encounter a range of different experiences.

I think its overall aim is still pretty much the same as it was back in the 70s [...] which is to give and local community, to change their life course. It is what we were talking about before you switched your machine on about emancipation. I also think perhaps something that is new in that project is the engagement of the university with the massive regeneration that is going and which increase in pace with the Olympics coming here. (Non-senior management interview 1, academic)

You know, whether we, we saw ourselves as a university focussing on this specific region or at least London/Thames Gateway or, or whether that was unnecessarily limiting. Um, but clearly we need, UEL needs to be responsive to the local community because, you know, most of our students come from, you know, broadly speaking the local area. I mean, London's a big place, obviously, but most of our students have parents, I suspect, who live in London or, or the, the, the near, Essex communities and so there is a need to be response, um, responsive to, to their needs. (Non-senior management interview 4, academic)

Many staff pointed out that the university was often disorganised, with various different policies implemented rapidly and without thorough planning. It was felt that this was partly due to the legacy of the previous senior management systems and partly due to the recent restructuring of the schools. The lack of effective communication channels to inform staff about the changes, resources and the social infrastructure available to support students was often mentioned as an area of concern.

But I think the problems that UEL has at the moment is that it's constantly in a state of evolution, it's constantly going through major changes, particularly for me as a tutor in relation to the academic framework the new building programme, these are all changes which are being implemented very quickly, and I think at some point you know, we need just to stop and catch our breath because I think what it does do is tend to destabilise staff in that. [...] We seem to be implementing policy at a rapid rate, but we're not very good at, ah, locating that policy at the individual level. Um, the communication channels by which people can learn about the change doesn't seem to be very effective. (Non-senior management staff interview 7, academic)

¹¹² See Appendices B and C for interview questions

However, some staff stressed that their colleagues were very committed, and that they still believed in the importance of getting an education per se, which was contrasted to other universities where it was felt that a business mindset was predominant. These were the reasons that these interviewees remained committed to teaching and learning in the university, despite all the challenges they face in the institution.

I think, I suppose, if I'm talking about the work, I very brutally use the word like chaotic, um, but that it's hearts in the right place.[...] . I think a lot of universities, we live in quite a business mind and environment, but we don't have to worry about budgets and things, but I think lot of universities dominated by that kind a business mind. (Non-senior management interview 3, academic)

I think, um, quality [I can talk about] is often about the quality of the particular degree programme and...and I think that's almost entirely determined by the, commitment of the staff group and its cohesiveness and how coherent the programme is, how experienced the staff are, how enthusiastic they are, whether they're interested in undergraduate teaching, you know, and I think the xxx studies area has...has got most of those positive qualities. I think it's got a committed staff group; it's got a history of being interested in undergraduate teaching, um. (Non-senior management interview 6, academic)

Some academic staff felt that the University was not offering enough appropriate support and guidance to its students. An hourly-paid lecturer raised the issue that they were not paid for the extra support that they gave to students, and as another lecturer pointed out it is often the first year students who are taught by hourly paid staff. As the first year is when students need the most support, these lecturers considered that they should be taught by full-time, experienced academic staff.

[Students are working during the day and cannot see their tutors during their office hours] so people lie myself hourly paid lecture not really being paid for [other activities support them.] I was sitting here until 10 o'clock at night supporting student in the tutorials because [...] you know they're here they want some help, support, you help them. Or emailing [...] (Non-senior management interview 2, academic).

I suspect there are and here we come down to the kind of budget decisions that Schools make, I suspect there are key, level one programmes that have been delivered by hourly paid temporary members of staff, should be being delivered by core contract members of staff. (Non-senior management interview 1, academic)

7.2 The view of students

Most interviewees were aware that students come from a variety of backgrounds with a large proportion of ME students, even compared with other new universities in London. They were aware that students often come from deprived backgrounds and that they often have pragmatic reasons for entering HE: they see education as a way to improve the quality of their lives. However, they also acknowledged that there are a few students who attend university principally because they are interested in pursuing academic study.

We have students with these massive social problems. [...] and many of us who have, have come from different countries, African, Caribbean, whatever, and they don't always have the same support, family support, it's much more difficult for them, much more difficult for them. [...] it strikes me as we... there are quite a range of needs, and some of our students, as I say, they're very... They're here for very pragmatic reasons [...] We do still, we still, I mean, it maybe an increasing minority of students who are doing this degree for very academic reasons and why they, well, some of them say they

*are... Have done it to get away from all that sort of, practical and employment things.
(Non-senior management interview 3, academic)*

Many teaching staff identified that many of their students from non-traditional backgrounds lack the study skills they need to succeed in the institution. As they come from various learning and training backgrounds, they are rarely equipped with basic study skills that are required to pursue academic study. Although non-senior management staff agreed that HE is a place to study independently, they still think that UEL students, who usually arrived at the university without much preparation for HE programmes, needed to be motivated and require more one to one support than students at other institutions. Staff observed many cases where their students face all sorts of different life problems such as ill health, financial difficulties, and family responsibilities, which have affected their ability to study effectively. Some staff also perceived that some of these students have very low esteem and doubt their own ability to succeed in HE.

Yes so she [one of students in the interviewee's class] was suffering from poor health. And from [other class] as well I have students who are coming in and saying 'ah he couldn't come in as he had some sugar level went up and he was in the hospital', another one had some problems with the heart. Somebody else had some problems with legs. [...] Different people, different scenarios, different cases but yes I would say [there are a lot of example of students suffering from ill health.] (Non-senior management interview 2, academic)

They have been scaffolded throughout their educational experience and suddenly here they're expected to, to manage their own time, to manage their own personal resources and they do find it quite difficult. So there's quite a transition for students from being a supported learner to an unsupported learner and, and that can be quite problematic. (Non-senior management interview 9, academic)

I'm always saying to [...] to students that you're doing the intelligent thing because sometimes people come in with the lack of.. a poor self esteem. (Non-senior management interview 10, support)

Many students at UEL have to work full-time even if they are full-time students too, and some academic staff felt that they are not same as full-time students decades ago. This affects the way in which teaching can be delivered and the amount of work that staff can realistically expect students to do.

A lot of our students aren't rich to begin with and have a variety of other responsibilities including, you know, many of them have families to look after and so there's a lot of pressure on students both in terms of money and in terms of time very often. You know, it's all very well the likes of us academics saying, you know, these degree credits are calculated on the basis of you doing at least 200 hours of work... [...] per, per module but, but if you have, um, a screaming child that needs attention, then, you know... [And some students, although they are studying fulltime, they also] work 20, 30, even more hours a week in, in paid employment. Sure. Yeah, the average fulltime student is no longer a fulltime student, as somebody said. (Non-senior management interview 4, academic)

In terms of student's expectations of HE, a few teaching staff were aware that students have huge expectations of HE and believe that they can be transformed completely by their HE experience which can often lead to unachievable goals. Students also expect a lot of support from academic staff and a style of teaching and learning more similar to school or FE level.

I think that there are a sizable percentage of students, although I don't know how big, who have a very kind of naive idea about what university will be. They think that is just some kind of other, magical kind of place, where other, kind of magical things happen; and that they will be transformed. And you know I think that most students are transformed, indeed if they are not transformed in some way we are not doing our job, but I think that they are not... at the end of the 3 years as it were, if you could take them back to themselves at 1st year induction, and if they could hear what they said about what they expected, where they ended up three years later is not where they thought they were going to go... (Non-senior management interview 1, academic)

I think they would be much happier if they had like much more flexibility to see the module leader or the person who is charge of somebody else who has given them extra help and support and extra explanations and course work support as well ...(Non-senior management interview 2, academic)

7.3 Awareness of institutional policy and practice

7.3.1 Widening Participation

Many non-senior management staff agreed that WP is a key responsibility for UEL to the local community and felt that this view was widely shared by colleagues.

(Your view that the university is responsible for local community and WP, do you think that kind of view is shared by your colleagues as well?) I, I think so, certainly speaking for the, xxx studies. People here... You know, the, relationship between the local and the global is, is certainly something that comes out in, in conversation and, and in teaching. (Non-senior management Interview 4, academic)

Plenty of staff in the institution actually do believe, they believe that it's the job of an institution like this to help people from poor, disadvantaged backgrounds to climb the ladder and to get to have a chance. A lot of people believe that so there is this quite a strong element of wanting to widen participation for the good of, you know, the people in the areas. (Non-senior management 5, academic)

Together with many other initiatives, the university's focus on the development of e-learning was considered by some members of staff a key strategy to widen participation. However, others thought that such a move was more business driven and does not always work effectively; they often felt that more one to one support is necessary for students.

This [the link between learning technology and WP] is a very, very simple one. I would say ... I would say tracking. [...] Especially with large courses, we don't necessarily notice our students fade away. This gives me something that's very quick, very easy, that I can look at and say who's there and who's not there. And I'm often looking at who's not there. [...] Whereas, I think, otherwise, we may not notice necessarily, until they fail an assignment. [...] Through technology, we can aid, we can really improve retention and progression. I think it genuinely does. (Non-senior management Interview 11, support)

I think it's exactly that what's happening. [E-learning is now more driven by business minds rather than moving towards inclusivity.] And even big companies, they like to send their employees on evening courses because they don't have to release them from work, that's one thing. Secondly, [...]... you know for the business environment it's cheaper to do the e-learning. [...] But the quality of this learning or what they gain isn't going to give them the experience that we were just talking about. Because I feel that what students require is much more one to one attention not less. E-learning goes into exactly the opposite direction. (Non-senior management interview 2, academic)

Whilst most staff admitted that the university was making an effort to widen access to HE some members of staff were more critical about the institutional practice, as they see the diverse student community as a mere reflection of the local area. Some others also felt that the university was not supporting students enough, institutionally, once they arrived to allow them to progress successfully through their programmes. Many explained that this was partly due to the lack of resources.

The sceptical, I mean a sceptical view of that [the university is making an effort to widen participation] would be to say, that is actually simply reflecting the fact that the reality is that only students from a poor background used to come, therefore may [...] get the best of a job and turn it into a virtue if you like, you know, there wasn't any choice really, we weren't turning away people from Eton and whatever in favour of people from, you know, Tower Hamlets, there's no question of us deliberately choosing whatever, this was the only choice, so I mean, I think perhaps some of management has been simply been making a virtue of necessity. (Non-senior management interview 4)

We do not support our students properly here and that is one thing that I feel quite bad about and I try as best I can, there's only one of me [...] So basically, one think that's special for you is not just opening a door but continuous support for students. (Non-senior management interview 9)

I'm sure the university would say in general, yes it is keen on all this sort of thing but it's all, but they will always say, but we are constrained by money problems, we always have to be more and more efficient and find, you know, teach with less money per student and all that sort of thing. So whatever it might desire or want or feel it should be doing, it also has to think of the money, it's not a choice, it's a very practical proposition. (Non-senior Management Interview 5, academic)

In informal meetings conducted with those who liaised with local communities to widen participation, it was pointed out that more structural and top-down support was needed from the University as most outreach work was a bottom-up operation. These practitioners often felt that their activities were marginalised; they said they needed more resources to support their activities as well as university-wide recognition of them.

7.3.2 Employability

In terms of employability, most non-management staff agreed that this is one of the key missions of the university. They recognised that in a society where the institution you study at matters more than what you study, UEL graduates still have some disadvantage, and the university has a responsibility to equip students with better employability skills to attempt to alleviate such a disadvantage. However, the disagreement amongst academic staff lay in how this should be achieved, and whether, or how, the employability agenda should be implemented. Along with some senior managers, a few academic staff emphasised the point that employability should not be the only the purpose of HE.

I think it [HE] has multiple purposes. I think, I think there's self-fulfilment in being a student. I think we overlook it in the focus on employability. We don't look so closely at personal growth, but I think it is about personal growth too. Certainly, it is about employability. It is about providing students with happy learning experiences, happy and effective learning experiences. (Non-Senior Management Interview 11, support)

There was a major debate as to whether employability should be embedded into the curriculum. Some believed that employability should be part of the curriculum:

I was one of the group who constructed the skills agenda for the university which of course is... includes employability and research at levels 2 and 3. So I do think it is important. [...] But for an institution like UEL, where the name doesn't have the cache, does not have the kudos that Oxford or Cambridge or whatever has then what the actual programme of study that the student takes delivers in terms of their ability to gain a job afterwards is crucially important. (Non-senior management interview 1, academic)

However, others thought that the implementation of employability modules in each programme has required them to remove some of the programme contents and that this is a very difficult balance to strike.

I would think we're, we're, that we would pretty much agree that the employability is an important issue. Exactly how it's implemented might cause a few arguments. You know, for, for instance, just, just to take one example that, that we've had in the last year, that the university has decided that there will be essentially employability modules. [...] And in, in one case, we are not teaching a particular module in the second year this year because that space has now been taken up by, by employability and I'm going to try and work out with the module leader of that module how to, to in effect merge two previously separate modules to try and get the best of, of each so that the students don't miss out on, what was going on in, in the module that's been moved which, ironically, was one that's about the workings of the IT industry... (Non-senior management interview 4, academic)

Yeah and I don't know that, sort of, making core modules on employability is always the way to do it really. And I, well, maybe we'll find out. We are planning to run some sessions this semester on career planning and, for all first years. But I mean, I, I can imagine we'll just make it voluntary, I mean, and I think students will be quite interested in most of those things. (Non-senior management interview 3, academic)

Even those academic staff who disliked the employability modules recognised that many students main priority in attending university is to get a better job; but they felt that it is a challenge to academic staff to teach employability modules when many have no experience of professions outside academia.

(Why you are not happy about employability modules to be made compulsory?)

I suppose, but maybe that's part of it, it just feels a bit beyond our expertise, I suppose. [...] So it's [graduate employability] something we've taken quite seriously but I'm not sure being forced to do this particular thing is that helpful. (Non-senior management interview 3, academic)

This is why some academic staff resented being forced to deliver employability modules without any structural support from the university. In their view, it is more useful to provide careers days centrally organised by professionals rather than through academic schools by academics.

One of the problems that we are encountering at the moment is that across the university we have to do employability modules... which has brought in suddenly and, um, so in every school in different programmes, so you've got schools and within schools the programmes and within the programmes module leaders... who are creating their own materials to teach how to write a CV, how to apply, and they are all going to be doing it differently. [...] Now there's nothing wrong with having different – I think there are a number of different ways of writing a CV [...] but why can't they do it centrally and say "Here. Six different kinds of good CVs" and across the University everybody's going to be saying "this is a good CV" (non-senior management interview 8, academic)

Some academic staff members believed that one of the reasons their students find it difficult to find employment is due in part to discrimination.

I see students and the students still keep in contact with me after they've left the university and they are finding it difficult to get jobs and I, for me, that is because I think an element of it is racism in this country. We have a lot of students from ethnic backgrounds who are wonderful people, talented people, have done extremely well, and I would have no hesitation in employing them myself and I'm absolutely amazed that they find difficulty in getting jobs. And my only conclusion can be that they're not getting jobs because there is still an inherent racism within this country. (Non-senior Management Interview 9)

7.3.3 Equality and Diversity

Quite a few members of staff felt that diversity is one of the characteristics of the University that they appreciated.

This is my second time of working and teaching at UEL, I came back because I wanted to be here, the experiences I'd had the first time around were all very positive. I totally agree with what UEL is trying to achieve in terms of widening participation, and I particularly enjoy working with the wide cultural mix of students here. And that was one of the key reasons why I wanted to come back because, I feel we have a very sort of cosmopolitan which leads to a very interesting student mix, which makes the teaching very, very, pleasurable. (Non-senior management staff interview 7, academic)

However, many have also pointed out that diversity was often only applicable to the student body, and staff tended to be more White. A member of academic staff suggested that there was a shared awareness (in his School) around this issue, but it has been hard to recruit ME academics with equivalent experience and publishing records to non-ME applicants.

Well, mind you, that is a, you know, clearly we are largely a, Black and ethnic minority [unclear], a student group, and a largely White staff group [laughs], certainly in this school, so on that one it's obviously a problem, Again a fairly complicated one to solve, quickly anyway. But certainly something that we have our eye on. [...] I mean, again, well [sighs], certainly in this school you would, you would not get a lecturing job now unless you are very far advanced in PhD and publications. Because of the RAE anxiety about where [...] you already need someone who, you know, [are already established] and that's supposed to have got, you know, you either need to be extremely dedicated and ought to have had some advantages. And that probably does favour certain groups can think of people I'd want to employ now, who would enhance the profile, the staff profile but they haven't got that kind of, those kind of publications, they don't come from that kind of background where that was... and that's frustrating. (Non-senior management interview 3, academic)

Furthermore, some raised the question of whether diversity was being implemented at the management level, but they also thought that diversifying management poses some questions about institutional consistency.

It depends what you mean by diversity of course, it has a diverse student body; that is undoubtedly the case; it has a diverse range of kinds of programmes that are tough. Does it have a diverse management? No it has one VC, it has one governing body. The issue then becomes what is the relationship between the diverse voices, expressions of interests, aspirations that the students, and staff group have, but the staff is by no means as diverse as the student group. [...] the institution can't be diverse in what it does, as I say you can't have a range of V Cs, a range of governing

bodies.... So ideally there is a uniformity that is an enabling kind of containment to ensure that one particular vision doesn't aggressively dominate others. (Non-senior management interview 1, academic)

Even though the university has a diverse student body, quite a few teaching members of staff were conscious that students tend to work together with those from the same or similar backgrounds, and they questioned how much real interaction between students from different backgrounds is taking place. These staff argued that many students do not actually go beyond such cultural boundaries.

You know, what I was saying about students interacting with each other, I think it's interesting when you go into, say, seminar groups and obviously students will go and sit with their friends, yeah, so they tend to cluster in, in the same groups week after week and it's always a, a question, do, do you want to break this up just for the sake of causing interaction or is that going to cause more problems than it, than it solves? Um, I, I'd be interested to know to, to what extent there is real interaction across the different social groups... (Non-senior management interview 4, academic)

7.4 Working as Practitioners

In general, non-senior management members of staff had similar views on the university and students to Senior Managers on many issues such as the institutional responsibility to local community and the diverse student body from non-traditional backgrounds. Although these members of staff appreciated such a dynamic institutional profile, as practitioners who have to deliver teaching under a specific policy framework, they were overall more critical (than Senior Managers) of the extent of policy implementation and practice taking place. While Senior Managers focused more on the success in Widening Access, teaching members of staff directly faced the challenges of delivering programmes to these Widening Access students with insufficient study skills. Not only is meeting their student's needs of flexible timetable difficult, but also retaining students in their programme has become one of the greatest concerns for them. In addition, teaching members of staff in particular felt that the range of their job has been ever expanding and they did not feel able to guide students on issues such as employability, which they did not feel were expert at. This can also be due to the lack of clarity about the notion of employability, which does not seem to be communicated well to teaching members of staff. Effective communication, as well as support provision for them is considered as vital in order for them to offer efficient support to students. Considering the issue of diversity, those teaching members of staff who were keen on embedding diverse perspectives in their teaching were more concerned about the impact of staff ethnic profile on students. However, there have not been any measures suggested to tackle this situation.

8 Graduate Student Interviews

The Employability Unit at UEL provided training for three days a week over three weeks targeted at graduates (2003/4 cohort) who were still looking for a job. A researcher from the team joined the seminar in the last week of the programme and conducted participant observation. During the observation, the researcher had opportunities to speak informally to seventeen graduates in the programme. Eight of those in the group agreed to be interviewed individually. Although the graduates were informed of the research project during the programme, as they were not informed from the beginning, interviews were conducted informally, with the interviewer taking notes during the meetings. In the given circumstances, with some established personal relations between the researcher and the respondents, the researcher did not feel it is appropriate to use consent forms or recording devices. Typed notes were produced after every meeting. Most interviews took place at Tower Hamlets College where the last week's training was taking place, as some of the participants in the programme continued to use the services at Tower Hamlets College.

8.1 Reasons for entering HE

Many came to HE because they wanted to study specific subjects, such as medicine, bioscience, or law which can only be studied at HEIs. Also, most of them believed that having a degree was important for their career development. However, some of them did not actually plan to start a degree programme in HE. These graduates found that a degree programme was accessible to them by following college tutors' advice.

8.2 Reasons for choosing UEL

Convenience in terms of geographical location, or the timing of application, was often given as the reason for choosing to study at UEL. Some graduates said that UEL was not their first choice of institution, but as it had offered the programme that they wanted to study, such as physiotherapy they chose to come. However, for some graduates UEL was the third or lower of their choices. Those who came to UEL for an open day felt the atmosphere of the University was very friendly and organised compared to other universities they had visited, thus they chose to come to UEL. Unfortunately, some graduates found out later, once they had started studying at UEL that the University was not as friendly or organised as they had expected. One exceptional case was a graduate who chose UEL over Cambridge, as she thought the latter would be too traditional and not innovative, and she was very happy about her choice.

8.3 Routes into Higher Education

The pre-entry qualifications of the graduates were diverse including A-levels, Access Courses in FE, International Baccalaureate, Diploma, and other professional qualifications. Many graduates also had educational experience outside Britain at various levels. Those who came through Access Courses felt that the course had prepared them well for the degree programmes and they felt that those who did not go through Access Courses on their programmes experienced considerably more difficulties during the degree.

8.4 Reasons for choosing the course

Graduates chose the subject of study in which they were interested. One graduate said that he wanted to combine his professional interest (the medical related area) and personal interest (sports), which was why he chose physiotherapy. Another graduate who was a qualified teacher before she came to Britain more than 20 years ago chose a single honour in Psychosocial over combined honours Psychosocial and Education as suggested by her tutor, as she wanted to study something completely different. A few graduates made the decision based on the subject being something they did well in school.

8.5 Experiences of HE at UEL

8.5.1 Overall experience

Some graduates felt that UEL was not very well organised in terms of room bookings, organising timetables for modules, for example, module clashes often happened, and different assignments were due on the same day. They pointed out that there seemed to be a lack of internal communication between (teaching) staff. One graduate indicated that some of her fellow students dropped out from the programme due to the lack of support in study and computer skills, and many of them were not aware of the support available. Some graduates felt that UEL does not have the atmosphere of a university.

8.5.2 Administration, Finance and Facilities

Although they made some positive comments about administrative staff, many graduates believed that the administrative support was appalling. They gave examples of losing exam records, wrongly claiming that fees have not been paid, and accusing students of forging the signatures and comments of essay markers. A mature graduate pointed out that opportunities to get grants were inadequate. Many graduates complained that library facilities were insufficient, with either no copies of relevant books at all or only a single copy for all the students in the programme. Many also pointed out that computer facilities and IT support could be improved. Many felt it would be helpful if the access to computers and learning resources could be extended until November when they graduate. Those whose degrees involved lab work commented that safety issues were not raised sufficiently, and one graduate often felt her working conditions were not safe enough and nor was safety monitored enough.

8.5.3 Course Design and Support

Most of the graduates commented that the fact that many students were working during term time and also had family commitments was not always acknowledged by the University; or at least not reflected in course design, for example reading week does not correspond to school half terms. Graduates felt that special needs for particular groups of students, such as English support, as well as academic writing skills support should be provided more. Some stressed the importance of raising awareness of employability and careers or the need for more focus on vocational skills in the programme; however, there were others who opposed a move to a vocational focus. For those graduates who had enrolled on a top-up course, there was no support in preparing for the degree programme such as training and guidance about exams, and what to expect from the degree programme.

8.5.4 Contact with Teaching and Support Staff

Many graduates felt that teaching members of staff were not very approachable. Some pointed out that the staff profile does not reflect the student profile (in terms of ethnic and other diversities) they felt this could affect student's performance and that the institution is not providing any role models for many of its students. Some indicated that it had become a student responsibility to make the effort to reach academic (or support) staff. However, if they did manage to contact them, the graduates felt that they were generally supportive. Some felt that teaching staff have huge workloads and did not have enough time to support or help students. They anticipate that this is a growing tendency as the number of students increases. Some of the graduates had not known who their personal tutors were, and some tutors were very inflexible about the timings of meetings.

8.5.5 Equality and Diversity

Some graduates said that they had been satisfied with the diversity of the university environment and that they had felt comfortable studying there. However, others pointed out that there was some institutional racism in the university and felt that having ME Staff was only tokenism. Some graduates felt that overseas students are exploited as they are not getting the service or support, such as English language support, that they have paid for.

8.5.6 Social Activities and Experiences

Many graduates said that they did not experience much outside their studies. Some graduates felt that there were not enough social activities on campus that they could enjoy, such as gigs in student bars. Some felt that they are not well informed of the activities taking place on campus, such as the Student Union, and the work of student representatives. Those who were involved in social activities, such as acting as a student representative, felt they had achieved something in addition to their academic study.

8.6 Preparedness to Employment

Many graduates thought that their course had not prepared them well for employment and they stressed that awareness should be raised amongst students during their programme that a degree is not enough to get a job. All agreed that the Employability programme, which stresses the importance of employability skills, should be provided while students are on the degree programme. However, in terms of the best timing, some said that they would prefer to have the programme organised alongside their academic programme, but others expressed their preference for the employability programme to be delivered after they finished their exams. Many pointed out that good support from the Careers Service (now Employability and Careers Unit) was vital in enhancing graduate employability. Most indicated that confidence building and practical advice such as the preparation of CVs and covering letters, and filling in application forms was most useful in preparing for the job market.

Graduates had chosen different career options depending on their subjects of study (but sometime not directly related to their study), such as studying for a PGCE, or working for the Metropolitan Police, with young offenders, or in the public sector. They said that attending the Employability Seminar helped them to focus on their career and being more confident. For those who pursued more vocational courses, attending the employability seminar helped them to be more aware of their wider career options than they were initially.

9 Interviews with Current Students

After consulting with programme leaders and lecturers, researchers visited lectures to recruit students for interviews. Twenty four interviews were conducted in total 15 with students from each of the target programmes, as follows: ICT – 5, Psychosocial – 8, Media and Advertising – 2. Two focus groups with students in Media and Advertising were also held. Nine further interviews were conducted with students from various programmes recruited at different events such as induction week events, work placement or employability seminars. These included students from Business Administration and IT, Economics, Life Science, Social Work, Business Information System, Accounting and Finance, ICT & Accounting, Development and Sociology, Education and Community Development. Consent forms were used and interviews were digitally recorded when the respondents gave permission¹¹³.

9.1 Motivations for attending HE

The motivations for going to HE and the way UEL students arrived in the institution were diverse. However, most students stated that they came to HE in order to gain better career opportunities. Some of them said they aimed to get ‘a’ degree, but many said that they wanted a degree in a subject that they liked or they enjoyed.

I think I've had it [a career change] for a very long time even before I started the course. Yeh...hey....its been on my mind for a very long time but in the future I want to set up my own IT company anyway, I'm trying to acquire as much knowledge as I can in IT.... (Student Interview 3, 2nd Year IT, male)

I certainly thought myself that myself that the minimum education I should have is at least a degree. [...] Just no matter what I got a degree, I got one. [...] Then obviously you much more do better in something you wanted to do. (Student Interview 12, Final Year, Psycho-social, female)

One student, whose interview was not recorded, said that entering HE for him was a means to obtain a better job, career, social position, and to pass something on to the next generation. He explained that to give something to someone, you have to obtain things for yourself first, as you cannot give anything that you do not have (Student Interview 9, 3rd Year IT, male).

Also, for some, entering HE was a turning point that changed their life in a broader sense and not just enabling them to have a better professional career.

I always wanted to do HE, but I couldn't. Because after I finished my AAT [Association of Accounting Technician], I started ACCA [Association of Chartered Certified Accountant] but I dropped it because I couldn't cope with my children, so I was in a kind of blocked away, I went to do my English course, and that English teacher, she is the one who advised me to do a degree rather than waiting around and wasting my time. She said, even hey I told her that I couldn't work because of the children and she said why not go and do that with a degree while you're raising a children [sic]. That how I started it (Student Interview 22, ICT & Accounting, 1st Year, female)

For those who came from vocational backgrounds, their NVQs and some experience in the field meant that getting a degree was the logical next step.

¹¹³ See Appendices D and E for discussion guides for student interviews and focus groups

Because I've done voluntary work for many years, in social care sector and as I said I've done NVQ [...] and because my parents were quite unwell and I need to look after them, I need a flexible job, so I took a flexible job in social care, and it just seems like a natural progression to go on and do a social work degree, because I used to work with people who access social workers, who are social worker input [?] and I thought I can do that um, so I applied to do a social work degree. (Student Interview 15, final year, social work, male)

Some students, particularly mature students, explained that they got to know about a first track access course (New Beginnings 1 and 2) or short summer courses at UEL, and whilst they were attending these programmes they found that they had an ability to study. These students often had negative experiences in their earlier educational careers when they were made to believe they were not bright enough or they were not encouraged to stay in education by their parents or teachers. For them, entering HE happened as the end result of doing short courses in a HEI.

Whole thing [applying to HE] was totally bizarre. It was as if somebody else is doing it, actually. Because by that I did fill in my application, and I went to the Open Day, and the end of that Saturday, I've been offered the place. [...] On Wednesday the idea, I think the idea was planted before, but only on that Wednesday that I've given any serious thought to it at all or begun to think about it, and by the Saturday I was about to become a degree student. [...] And so it wasn't a planned departure in my life, it was something that sort of happened. But that I took the advantage of the possibility. (Student Interview 16, 2nd Year Psychosocial, female)

I was drifting so I actually went on a, in fact, I went on, it was called, New Beginnings One course.[...] But then I enrolled in New Beginnings' Two which you get your 20 credits and debate with your teacher how to go to university, don't they? And I really enjoyed that and, she gave me the, the lecturer or, they're not lecturers, the teacher, or whatever, she really was very encouraging and she made me feel that I had what it, you know, what was needed to go to university as a mature student. (Student Interview 7, Final Year, Psycho-social, female)

9.2 Reasons for choosing UEL

The geographical location (locality) was one of the reasons often given for choosing UEL, particularly by those who had care responsibilities.

***[Have you ever thought of going to anywhere else?]** Not really no, because I live in Newham and have been in East End for towards 30 years [...] And I was working and obviously I had children although they were older children, but I didn't feel that I wanted to involved myself in travelling or whatever. I had enough on my plate without that, so I didn't really consider. (Interview 16, 2nd year, Psychosocial, female)*

Well I thought about the UK universities so to speak I mean at that time I was think my I was mainly focusing on Cambridge University and Oxford and that sort of thing, otherwise they are the best. But when I thought about it deeply because I have a family and so on I realised I could not afford to go to one of these places, so that is how I chose UEL because it was close to me. (Student Interview 18, Final Year, Psycho-social, male)

Many students also explained that they chose UEL because it offered the course they want to study such as: Media and Advertisement, Psychosocial Studies, Accounting (with professional accrediting), IT, Development, Economics, and some combined honours courses such as Business Administration and IT.

I was looking for IT courses that would focus [application] and theory combined and wasn't too software and programming [...]. I didn't want it to include too much programming and technical stuff... [...].even though I just wanted to pick up some practical skills... [...] And the business school I liked because it wasn't so much business management, it was more a sort of overall business course. [...] And I other places in London I, are all too all are managerial and the IT courses were too technical. So, it seemed like a good, a good pick. (Student Interview 8, Second Year, Business Administration and IT)

Well [...] one of the lecturers talked about the course before I decided to come here and I went to other universities as well [...] and I spoke with the contact person for the course which was really, really interesting because it sort of...it is advertising but it also had a social side to it like we study a bit of [topics like] 'race' and class. It is not just commercial advertising. [Focus Group 2, Second Year, Media and Advertising, female]

One student said that UEL offered a programme that partially qualified her as a chartered accountant, and she would therefore be exempt from sitting exams for the first two parts of accreditation.

The structure of the financial accounting as, what they call this? BA Accounting & Finance, it's structured in such a way that when you are doing it you're completing ACCA [Association of Chartered Accountants] at the same time and the Government is helping you with the funds. So as soon as I finish my degree I'll have my honours, at the same time [...] I will be partly qualified, I will be left with five subjects now . (Student Interview 21, Second Year, Accounting and Finance, female)

UEL was recommended to some students by their friends who had previously studied there and who said that the university had very good programmes.

I thought I would do something pure psychology, I did but then my friend said that this is kind of psychology thing, it is mixed. And she [her friend who were then at UEL studying psycho-social degree] said, 'do it, it is interesting' so I thought 'alright, I will do it'. But I wasn't 100 per cent sure exactly what I want to be so I thought at least it opens up more doors to you. (Student Interview 12, Final Year, Psycho-social, female)

Some students chose UEL because it provided flexibility in entry requirements and start dates, such as a February start, providing funding for the course or operating various inclusive admission policies particularly for mature students.

I didn't actually do my GCSEs in England here [...] I left my result back in Nigeria so when I came here and I wanted to do IT, I was expecting them to say to me right you need to bring in your GCSEs, your A 'levels but I didn't actually have them here, but they said to me you know I'm a mature student, so I was just being interviewed, [...] and they said to me alright, ok – I should do a test, a little test. I did a test and they said to me, after the test they said to me they said to me alright, ok you've been given a place – I said alright, you know and that was it really. (Student Interview 3, Second Year, ICT, male)

Another decisive factor was the organisation and structure of the programmes. For example, in some UEL courses, student are not required to sit exams, whereas equivalent courses in other universities do require exams, or UEL offers a course in three years whilst other institution offers it in four years.

The exam, but that the reasons why I liked UEL social work programme, because they won't be exams. So they aren't any. (Student Interview 15, Final Year, Social Work, male)

When I wanted to start to study, I knew I wanted to study Development. Third World Development. And the options were going to central London to SOAS or coming to here. SOAS worked out at a four years degree. [...] And here was a three year degree. And I really feel in a rush! Four years was like too long. I mean, too much time to invest to get a degree. (Interview 23, Second Year, Development and Sociology, female)

9.3 Routes into HE

Students came to UEL through a variety of educational routes. Some applied through UCAS but most came through clearing, access courses, the New Beginnings 1 and 2 courses, international qualifications, vocational qualifications, and through work experience, or any combination of these.

Because I applied very late, I just went through clearing. [...] Through UCAS I applied for all degrees to do with Business Studies. So I couldn't get in, I couldn't do what I wanted to do through UCAS anyway. (Student Interview 12, Final Year, Psychosocial, female)

What, because I'm a mature student, what, what happened was, I was doing a GCSE in sociology at the Adult College and they were running their course here, called New Beginnings. [...] That's it, one of the tutors from UEL came to the college to do a talk and my tutor suggested I go and see what it's all about. [...] I came here, well, at Barking, the campus, we had to come for six weeks you see and if you passed that you got 20 credits [...] which got, got you into the university. (Student Interview 14, Final Year, Psychosocial, female)

9.4 Experiences at UEL

The attitudes the students had to their experiences in UEL varied according to their pre-entry expectations. Many students felt their courses were very challenging.

The course is very challenging and can be very difficult at times because of the number of hours we need to put in with regards to studying. I've had a few problems in regards to studying because I am someone who has other things doing and it becomes so much of an issue when I have to put a lot of effort into the work I am doing. [...] I feel you know we're actually rushed; there are certain modules that we do that we are actually rushed into. For example next week we are going to hand in an assessment, and then I think the week after next week we are having an exam. (Student Interview 3, 2nd Year IT, Male)

I think when I get my degree I'll get it that it'll be worth as much I'm worth, so I've got a degree and I've been to the programme and I know it's challenging, and I've done the work I know a lot of it challenging that why we have complaints that we have, we feel it's too challenging, especially this year, so I know that to achieve that degree in end of it, it's going to be, it's going to be worth something. (Student Interview 15, Final Year, Social Work, Male)

Some said that they were satisfied with their experience at UEL because it had given them a completely different perspective on the world.

I think I made the right choice because I feel, you know, it's made a big difference in many ways in my life and my outlook on things has changed and I think it's that type of degree, it does change your outlook, you know. (Student Interview 7, Final Year, Psychosocial, Female)

Good support from tutors and student services were also vital factors for students to have had positive experiences at UEL. Some students had moved from other HEIs, expecting that the level of support in UEL to be much better than at their previous institution. There were students who specifically chose UEL because the university was well known for giving support to learners who return to education, and these students were satisfied that teaching members of staff were very helpful.

It [UEL] is a good place to learn, it is very diverse and they support you quite well [...] and [I] got support from the teachers but I get good support from xxx my counsellor and you know I have found you know more support since my illness than xxx University, definitely. When I was at xxx I had to go to hospital, my sister was desperately trying to get to tell the university and she couldn't get through, you know [...] you know my personal tutor, not here but at xxx, she was desperately trying to get hold of them and they never phoned her back so... (Student Interview 13, Final Year, Psychosocial, Female)

The reason why I came here is, as a matter of fact I had, it was recommended by a friend of mine who was finishing Masters, how the teachers are very supportive with the students and I was scared that because I haven't learnt for a long time I wouldn't even be able to you know write an essay or whatever but my friend you know said that is what UEL is very good at, helping you prepare how to write an essay and you know so I should choose UEL and she had an experience, she did her [degree at UEL and] Masters at xxx and she saw the difference, how they are not supportive. (Student Interview 24, First Year, First Year, Education in the Community and Development)

No. Actually I have been having, very helpful teachers to be honest they are very good. Yeah, very good. They may not be to me, I don't know. [My personal tutor is] xxx and xxx is my lecturer. They have been so helpful to me; I've got nothing to complain about. (Student Interview 19, Final Year, Psychosocial, female)

Several of the students felt that the range of different learning methods available helped them, and in particular they liked WebCT as a resource for personal study whenever they wanted to work.

I would check Web CT because, obviously, your, your modules come up on there anyway, so you, you can check for your lecture notes and, and hand outs, but [...] you know, like, like the student office, bits on there and you can click into that and see if there's any notices come up which can tell you about any forthcoming, talks or notices or stuff, like, you know, don't forget that the last hand-in date is for so and so, or like, in extenuating circumstances, when all that changed, that they put that all on the notice board and that. [...] You can get your lecture notes, you can print them up before the lecture. I, I like that, because I like do my reading and then get the lecture notes to see, see what the lecture is going to be about and then I like to make notes. (Student Interview 14, 3rd Year, Psychosocial Studies, female)

Web CT system. The web CT we use is very, very useful. It's very, very useful. It's very good. I mean the, you... xxx University they have got same system but it's, it's, it's in a different way. It's, it's not, it's not um very helpful. It's not very... The web CT is very, very good. Yeah. It's one of the very good options. [...] I like web CT. I log in every day, even here. (Student Interview 5, Second Year, IT, male)

However, there were some students who were frustrated with UEL's service provision. They raised issues related to course provision including: the amount of information on the course outline; the programme structure; problems with the personal tutor or tutorial support systems; the lack of support for February and second year intakes; and the way

that students get feedback on work submitted. Some students felt that information on the university website was a bit misleading with not much information on each module. Even though they had been offered interviews, they often had not had the opportunity to find out more about the courses.

I mean I, I had different image from this course before going to, to the course. Yeah. And I, I wasn't expect what ... It, it was in, into the course itself. I mean they said look this is the uni so this is the modules you're going to do. Yeah. But I wasn't... I mean there was, there wasn't enough information about the modules, about the, about the uni's. I think they can, they can put more, more than as they've already put the information about the course itself. So I... No, it wasn't what I, I expected [...] I went straight to year two and the, the person I had an interview with her she, she... It was, it was like a job interview. I mean she, she ask me what I've done before. She, she ask me about the programming I've done. Not about, about, about the course I've done before and she, she rather ask me questions about my past. Not what I'm doing in the future, what I'm looking for. [...]... I think she wasn't in a, in a position to give me those information. (Student Interview 5, 2nd Year, ICT, male)

Some students suggested that the programme structure could be organised more effectively to meet the needs of the students' lifestyles. For example, those who were attending part-time courses were often working full-time and would prefer more weekend or intensive evening classes. Others felt that they had different learning styles that could have been accommodated more easily through a flexible programme. Students stated that most classes were auditory teaching with relatively low standards of presentation. A student with dyslexia felt that he had not received the extra support he needed when he took small tests. This student said that although he received extra support for exams taking them in a separate room, similar kind of arrangements were not made for the tests, despite the fact that he had raised the issue with his tutor.

And also physically I mean, five days a week, when do you get time to sit and read and you have to have, you know, we are all mature, we have a life outside university. So the last year's too heavy. [...] I haven't got a family, but I like to socialise, but I can sacrifice social life, but a lot of students haven't even got the luxury of, you know haven't got the social life, they've just got family which is more important. [...] I do believe, that the placements should be 100 days each and it's should be two placements... The first year and the second year. And the third year should be, and also I found that the fact for we're off for five months in the summer, it's too long, it should be stretched out a bit more, because we are wasting a lot of time... (Student Interview 15, Final Year, Social Work, Male)

It should encompass, even if it means doing different modules over longer periods of time, so that, one, we're getting more. Because we're cramming one module in every 12 weeks. That's a lot. [...] Some kind of provision needs to be made that we're not being stretched so thinly as we are at the moment. I think by splitting the sessions up slightly more, making them slightly longer than just 12 weeks, structuring the lectures so that we're getting everything we need earlier to do the coursework, and then just the nitty-gritty bits coming later, would be much better. (Student Interview 6, 2nd Year, ICT, Male)

Those who had started in February or moved to UEL from other HEI with direct entry, felt that they could have been provided with more support to enable them to settle into the university environment smoothly. A student who started in February suggested that if they had been given more academic support and familiarisation with the UEL environment, then they could have performed better. The lack of support in terms of the personal tutor system was often raised. The problem seemed to be that even when students were

assigned a tutor; he/she was not necessarily a suitable person to give them advice. This issue was particularly serious for students on combined honours degrees.

I did [have a personal tutor] but I found it is very unhelpful and I felt him a bit patronising and then it put me off I just never had, but I never went to the personal tutor.[...] He never contacted me, no. [since last year] (Student Interview 12, 3rd Year, Psychosocial, Female)

It's very hard to know what you get at UEL because you have a sort of barbarous and then you have personal tutors who have nothing to do with the course whatsoever. So, [...] my personal tutor I've only ever met once. [...] Yes, I've only ever met him once and he doesn't even teach on my programme at all. (Student Interview 8, 3rd Year, Business Administration and IT, Female)

The timing and way of obtaining feedback on work was one of the key concerns of many students. Students wanted to receive feedback that was both constructive and was provided in time for them to learn from it, before handing in the next piece of work.

The coursework I have got back has been okay, but, out of the, one, two, three, four, five, pieces of coursework that I've done, and the exam, I've only actually had one piece back. [...] And, in fact, one piece of coursework was due the week before, two weeks before the exam. So, I'm sitting in an exam. Am I writing things correctly, because I haven't had coursework back giving me constructive feedback? And I find that absolutely atrocious, that we're waiting... I'm still waiting for coursework that was submitted in April, the beginning of April, whenever it was. We're now June, and I'm still waiting for it. It's not just [...] helpful at all. (Student Interview 6, 2nd Year, IT, Male)

They don't really tell you, okay, you haven't made this, you have not going to explaining this point, but in future it would be better if you do... They don't, they don't give you that. So we don't know how okay, if we're okay, there's only maybe one or two... a course work for module, but if they give me a proper feedback like explaining how I can improve, the next module I can, like, go back to this feedback and based on the feedback I can do it better. But it didn't really tell you that. They say, though, satisfactory, non-satisfactory, or need to be improved, but how? (Student Interview 22, 1st Year, ICT & Accounting, Female)

In addition to issues related to the academic programme, many students raised concerns around the insufficient provision of books and computers; the lack of information on student services; and transport issues. Many students said they needed more books in the library as they often only had a few copies of key textbooks. Some students had had very good experiences with support staff, receiving very helpful and friendly support, but others felt that they had no information on who to consult if it was not an academic matter, or they would have to wait a long time. There were other students who were frustrated by poor administrative support, giving examples such as coursework handed in often going missing. (Student Interview 10, 3rd Year, Economics, male)

That's why. And no one, no one asked me look you straight in year two. You haven't been here so we need to um explain more about the, this university, procedures, departments, if you need this help, that help. But others they've, they've been that induction course. I haven't had and I, I have to be honest. I haven't had time to ask someone give me a student handbook. I'm sure they've got something like a student handbook. (Second Year, male, UEL, Student interview 5)

Yeah. I'll tell you the people who I go to [...] if I ever have a problem I go to the combined honours office. [...] Um, yeah, she's [a female staff member at the office]

really good. But sometimes I feel that they've got so much work to do that it takes them a long time to sort something out and get back to you.
(Student Interview 8, 3rd Year, Business Administration and IT)

With multiple roles in their lives, which required them to be able to move around rapidly, transport issues were a shared concern amongst many students. With the campus move, for example, those students who had started at the Barking Campus had their courses moved to the Docklands Campus and then faced problems as most of them lived in Barking and the transport links between Barking and Docklands are very poor. Students who drove into the Barking Campus also foresaw problems as parking at the Stratford and Docklands Campuses is restricted for students.

You see, that was a problem for me because all my lectures are at ten, now, I drop my son off at, um, at school at ten to nine and I could not actually get to Docklands for ten o'clock by public transport. I was not guaranteed to get there for ten o'clock so I always had to ensure that I had a lift off somebody one way or another and sometimes it was a nightmare. And...but I always got there for ten o'clock, you know. [...] My husband used to take me sometimes if he could. If there was problems, I'd... a couple of students who used to come through, and I'd, you know, I used to ring them up, sometimes at the drop of a hat and say, oh, gosh, can you pick me up. (Student Interview 7, Final Year, Psychosocial, female.

At the moment the very good experience is a good car park, the car park because my mind is rested, I've got a car park, I park, I'm concentrating, it's a free park, I'm concentrating on my education.[...] My concern when we were moving to Stratford when there is no car park, we have children, you understand. So when I finish I want to be able to go and pick my ... and there is no car park you know. Stratford, if I can park somewhere for maybe two/three hours I have to go and put money in again, that's sort of, that doesn't give us the peace of mind as mature student you know, it doesn't help. (Student Interview 24, First Year, Education in the Community and Development)

For most students, their experience of the University was limited to attending lectures, seminars, and handing in course work. They did not expect to have other experiences outside their academic programmes (except for those who are in student societies).

Sometimes I wish I was a 20 year old and I could sit in the bar afterwards. I used to think, oh, I quite...I want that for my children. I want them to experience university as a young person but, for me, it was a case of you go there, I never had any sort of fun time at university in the respect that I never socialised. I was either at lectures, at seminar or in the library and I never did anything else. I used to talk, you know, to...to some of my friends but it was never, oh, let's go and meet for a coffee. [...] There was no...there was no social life whatsoever. (Student Interview 7, Final Year, Psychosocial, female)

Yeah, I don't stay here long, it's, I just, um, come, especially for the lectures and tutorial, so I don't get to see the other side of this... of the university, um, I'm always coming in a rush, going in a rush, no I don't really know (Student Interview 22, First Year, Accounting and IT, female)

However, for those who had had an opportunity to be involved in extra-curricula activities, such as a student society, they considered their experience very enriching. A student who ran a student society said that he had some depressing experiences in first two years in UEL and that was why he sought spiritual guidance and founded the society. Although the experience was initially a bit embarrassing, as he was teased by fellow students whilst handing out leaflets, he felt that running a society was an inspiring experience and that he gained managerial skills, which he felt were equivalent to work experience. He was also

happy as he believed that the society enriched the university culture. (Student Interview 10, 2nd Year, Economics, Male, recording declined)

9.5 Preparedness for Employment

Students had mixed opinions regarding their preparedness for employment. A student in Social Work was very confident about his employability. There were also some students studying IT who expressed confidence their ability to get a job upon completion of their degrees. However, these students were often rather over optimistic. Many others expressed their concerns that their programmes were too theory based and not very practically oriented. Although they felt that getting a degree could be useful for their career development, these students were not very sure if what they had studied would help them to get a job.

[But do you feel that you actually studying in this programme and studying university environment would help you to get better opportunity to have a better job?] 50% positive because these days you can find very good managers they don't have any academic background. But 50% yes. Not 100%. Yeah, most definitely I'll get better job if I finish this course. **[And you feel that the course itself provide enough information to get better job you feel or not?]** No. I think, I think that the way it is, and this is not the East London University that is the problem. It's the university's problem. I think they are very, very far from reality, from the real world. (Student Interview 5, ICT, male)

Quite a few students were aware that work placements could improve their employability. Those who did not have work placement opportunities on their courses often looked for opportunities by themselves. Those who took part in work placements were satisfied with them and felt that it had helped them in developing their careers.

I am thinking about getting experience working wise. Because I have done work with elderly people, I have just done work, kind of young people as a home carer and I have just recently applied to Barnardos to work with children. [...] And then another thing is two experiences I want to get is working in a prison environment and working in a residential home. (Student Interview 12, Final Year, Psychosocial, female)

[And what is your experience of this project based work placement?] Really good. I'm really, really glad I did it. I'd recommend it to other students. Otherwise, I'd be just doing, um, I've, I've got an admin background. Secretarial. So, I probably would have just been doing sort of admin, temping, throughout the summer. So, to get this opportunity... You know, the money's not very good. So, it was, better in the long run for me. (Student Interview 8, 3rd Year, Business Administration and IT, female)

Some students felt that a whole year work placement during their degree, thus extending it to 4 years, was too large an amount of time to commit because they needed to start earning as soon as possible (Student Interview 20, 3rd Year, Business Information System, male). Most students thought that the University and the individual programmes should have raised their awareness about the importance of employability, however, the extent to which they thought that employability skills training should be included in their programmes varied. There were some who believed that the employability programme should be part of their curriculum.

[Do you think that the employability training like the one you had should be part of your curriculum?] That's what I'm not sure. I'm not sure. But because of the teaching department I think they should be able to give us something that will help us in line of teaching actually. Help to apply for jobs in teaching, how to apply for, or how to

... make, go for interview in teaching because it's new to most of us who wants to go into teaching although I haven't gone into primary teaching right, so how am I going to you know get into it? You know get into so I'm looking for a job as a teaching assistant, how am I going to write a supporting statement for concerning, you know that, that part so I think, I think we should have [that part should be part of curriculum.] (Student Interview 24, Education in the Community and Development, First Year, female)

Others preferred not to spend time on job applications and CV writing during their classes, although they also thought that obtaining information and practical knowledge on their relevant industry was an important part of their curriculum.

Well I really expected to find more support in terms of, as I said, linking my profession to the development world. But I didn't find anything of that. I mean, for example, as charities or NGOs or initiatives. I thought lecturers and the university system were going to allow me to – to make that pace that step. But I didn't find any real or realistic support in that sense. [...] It's – it's [the actually programme] just theory. I mean, it's just lectures and lectures. But I don't find the – I mean, I really think the lecturers should be the link from the lecture to the practical way. For example, with collaborating in an NGO here in London [...] That's something I miss a lot. Yes. (Student Interview 23, Second Year, Development and Sociology, female)

Growing numbers of student have started to realise that it is transferable skills in addition to the degree which lead to a job.

I was actually surprised to know that it's not your degree that gonna gets you into work. I used to think yeah that I've got a degree that I can get into any work that I want, but he's like you can have a highest degree, but that's not what they are looking for, they are actually looking for a certain skills that I didn't know that I will need to have that in order to get into work. A lot of Black people or Asian, they don't really know that. [...] So, I think that why they [the employers] tend to chose [non Black or Asian candidate], not like the being racism or anything like that, that was the fear, I used to fear that that the way of racism, but now I've been to this training [organised by a Mentoring Scheme], is like open another door for me. (Student Interview 17, Second Year, Media and Advertising)

9.6 Discussions on Diversity and Ethnicity

Most students agreed that UEL is a diverse institution. Many felt that this was a positive aspect of the university or that the diverse culture made them feel very comfortable.

I mean, you know, it's so obviously different and I used to find you can't mention the difference [...] You walk into UEL and there are a mixture of faces, a mixture of accents, um, and it's made me realise, you know, be careful with assumptions and, um, you know, I used to think, and now if I see a White person at university I think they're probably not from this country because I used to think if they're White, they're English. And that was it. And then I realised that's very narrow, um, so, yeah, it's done that. , (Student Interview 7, Final Year, Psychosocial, female)

Yeah, they did say that, but, um, some universities I have, um, I have been in, it's quite different from UEL, that UEL is like more, more into multicultural. [...] It's probably [other universities], like, xxx University, it's, it's, yeah, that's a modern university as well, Greenwich, but, um, I don't know, somehow I feel more friendlier here. Like feeling, it's like just a sense of feeling [...] (Student Interview 22, 1st year, Accounting and IT, female)

For some students, such diversity made them think about their identity. One student explained how she had chosen to come to UEL for the same reasons that she had chosen to live in East London for past 20 years, because of this diversity:

The conclusion that I came to, was that I was somebody, I was, I was a first generation of British, my parents were refugees, um and I grew up, sort of not ever really feeling that I quite belonged um, that certainly that I wasn't an English, I wasn't really anything because I have no roots in country at all, so I didn't feel myself, there is nothing English about me, apart from the fact that I was geographically born here. And I think what happened was when I was having to move, was that I, I felt that Tower Hamlet was a place full of people who didn't belong, and that's why I felt comfortable, because I was one of those many people who didn't really belong. (Student Interview 16, Psychosocial Studies, 2nd Year, Female)

However, others said that the diverse culture of the University did not necessarily give any added value to their experiences at UEL. One student felt that she was more comfortable staying within her own community whilst on campus, rather than mixing with people from other groups.

Obviously when you are with friends, you don't always talk about work, that is the last thing you talk about and you know it is just they tell youobviously she was Asian and so I could get a lot from her because I am Asian, I have got to go into an Asian family.[...I feel that I have got a lot in common with Asian] That doesn't mean I won't talk to someone who is White or Black but it just makes it comfortable because you know, you know a lot of things about them, because they are like you, not personality wise but cultural similarities. It is like I speak the language with them whereas I couldn't speak it when I was speaking with somebody else. (Student Interview 12, Final Year, Psychosocial)

There were quite a few students who felt that the campus was segregated by ethnicity.

Yeah, in particular in my degree it is all people from around the world. I mean, diversity is absolutely – yeah. [...] Yeah. [Experiencing diversity is a positive thing.] [...] It's – it's – but I mean – I think it's – hmm – more a personal background, because until I came to London I had never had the opportunity to – to – to work together with so many different cultural backgrounds. So yeah, for me it is a bit of a challenge. But – and you see enough how people get in groups with the most similar to them. You know? [...] Yeah. Quite a lot. But I mean, I guess it is part of human behaviour. (Student interview 23, Second Year, Development and Sociology, female)

Some people, I'm afraid, leave university without the slightest idea of how they can actually interact and mingle with different people with different cultures, they have just been brought up within one culture... so you have these people who are like mainstream and those who are trying to be a bit more liberal and other stuff – you have that split my argument is that. (Student Interview 18, Psychosocial, Final Year, male)

The challenges of 'diversity' were raised by two students (both of whose interviews were unrecorded) one student expressed the opinion that due to his background as an ME student his year tutor had lower expectations of him. His friend also felt that she had been treated in a similar way by her lecturer. Their attitudes were not hostile but these students had got the message that because they were ME students academics had the attitude that 'if you can do this, that's fantastic, but if you cannot do it, do this instead'. Also another student disclosed an incident where he was (racially) assaulted in the student bar on campus. Although he reported this to the police, the university and the student union, no action was taken and he felt unsupported. This student believes that his attacker was a

member of a well known right-wing extremist group, and he felt disappointed that the university allowed extremists of any kind to operate in the university.

9.7 Meeting Diverse Student Needs

Many of the students came to HE in an attempt to enhance their job prospects, although there were some students who saw HE as an opportunity for broader personal development. With increasing pressure on universities to meet the government employment indicators, valuing all students' different experiences and expectations of HE remains a challenge for the University. With increasing numbers of students coming from non-traditional backgrounds with financial and family pressures, many students struggle to balance their time for study, work and family care. Students arrive at the University from various backgrounds with different needs and concerns. Most of them, as they come from family backgrounds where studying at HE is uncommon, are grateful for the opportunities afforded by being in HE. However, if they could get more support in study skills or other student services institutionally, they felt that they could perform better. This may be part of the reason that some academic staff, as discussed earlier, were critical of students requiring spoon feeding, which academics felt is not supposed to be the teaching and learning style in HE.

However, many interviews demonstrated that students struggled or failed due to insufficient support or lack of information about the support available. Therefore, more individualised and consistent support, both academic and non academic, could improve their experiences considerably. At the same time, as many students were not familiar with the HE context, they were not sure of the kinds of support that were available, and it seems that the lack of information about the services available also affected student retention. Students, particularly those from non-traditional backgrounds, tended to think that their problems were specific and that they would not be able to get any help because they were not typical students. Graduates who were unemployed more than a couple of months after their graduation were particularly critical about university's provision in relation to career development. Many were resentful that they could only develop their self-confidence and come to realise that a degree was not sufficient to get a job by attending specially designed Employability Seminars. The student interviews which were conducted later show that there was a growing awareness amongst students that a degree was not sufficient to get a job. Despite these improvements, there were some students who were over-confident about their employability without good reason, and were not aware of the need to equip themselves with transferable skills.

The diverse culture of the University is well recognised, but many students did not question the possible difference between the idea of diversity and the practices within the institution. Although students felt that the diverse culture of the university was positive, many admitted that they tended not to interact with students from different backgrounds. As increasing numbers of students come onto the campuses just to attend their classes and lectures, there are fewer opportunities for them to interact at a social level and to increase their understandings about difference and diversity. If the university wants to take its social role more seriously, it needs to consider what its responsibility is in offering students a chance to broaden their horizons.

10 Employers' Perspectives

The Employability and Career Unit at UEL organises the 'Employability Works' Job fair in June each year. Exhibitors were approached during the events in 2005 and 2006, and were asked simple questionnaire style questions to explore their views on graduates and graduate employability. Questions asked included: their purpose for attending career fairs; skills and qualities they required from potential graduate employees; and their impression of UEL students. 13 exhibitors in 2005 and 17 exhibitors in 2006 answered the questionnaire¹¹⁴. These exhibitors represented a wide range of industries, including the public sector, retail, banking, hospitality & catering, transport & communication and the police and armed services.

The skills and qualities that each employer required from potential (graduate) employees differ slightly depending on the nature of jobs. However, many employers agreed that certain skills and quality were transferable and vital to any job. These included: leadership and managerial skills; good educational history and grades; communication skills; presentation skills; team working skills; IT skills; a good personality with a positive attitude and behaviour; determination; reliability; responsible attitudes; flexibility; problem solving skills; good time keeping; career focused; willing to learn; motivation and focus. As for more industry specific skills and qualities that employers required, each different industry pointed out different skills and qualities such as: customer and community focus (retailer and public sector); analytical skills (science related sector); honesty (public sector); target driven (banking); entrepreneurship spirits (enterprise agencies); sales oriented (insurance); eagerness to work with people (public sector); and fitness (Defence).

Some employers came to the events with current vacancies intending to recruit graduates, but most employers attended the events in order to raise the awareness about the various job opportunities that they could offer. Employers usually had a wider range of job opportunities within their organisation than students and graduates expected. Employers felt that students were not necessary aware of all the opportunities provided by different employers. Some employers underlined that it is in the University's interests rather than theirs to develop the contacts between each other. This was because they felt that they were helping the University by attending these events, raising the awareness of employability skills amongst students and graduates, and recruiting graduates, thus improving UEL's employment figures. On the other hand, other employers stated that they were attracted to the diversity of students at UEL, as the University can offer them with potential employees from diverse communities. For these employers, maintaining a good relationship with UEL is regarded as being for their own benefit.

Quite a few employers shared the view that UEL students were in general very friendly and enthusiastic about employment. More positive comments were given on UEL students on their preparedness for the labour market in 2006 than 2005, such as students were well prepared with their CVs; communicated well with employers; were very motivated and interested; and looked confident. However, there were fairly critical comments towards students as well. Many employers noted that students often try to find out what the employers offer them, rather than to sell what they can offer to the employers. Also, employers pointed out that many students ask inappropriate questions or had not really prepared any questions to ask to the employers. Employers felt that students were more interested getting any job and earning money, often asking about the salary in the first question, rather than showing enthusiasm for the particular opportunity. In addition,

¹¹⁴ See Appendix F for interview questions

employers believed that some students were unrealistic expecting that they could get a job of their dreams with their degree. Another concern raised by employers, particularly those in the public sector, was that students often do not have a clear idea of their immigration status and work entitlements.

In order for students to increase their employability, in addition to improving the points mentioned above, employers felt that students needed to present themselves as motivated and interesting with some experiences and interests outside their studies, such as work placements or volunteer activities. Also, students needed to be more confident with a clearer knowledge of their skills and ideas. In addition, a good preparation to familiarise themselves with the industry context or the future employers as well as the knowledge of the job application procedure was considered very important. Employers suggested that by having work experience and improving the way they presented themselves, UEL students could do much to improve their employability.

Amongst those employers who had not recruited UEL students previously, there were those who said that they met extremely talented students during the events and would seriously consider their applications. There were others who said that they had previously received applications from UEL graduates, for example, for their graduate schemes in previous years, but that they were rarely successful. They explained that the reason for UEL graduates being unsuccessful was that they did not have the qualities to make them outstanding in a nationally competitive graduate scheme. In addition, one employer noted that this was not necessarily specific to UEL students, but when they tried to recruit from ME groups, many tended not to pass the multiple choice exams, although they are provided with textbooks and other study materials to prepare them for the exams. This employer expressed his impression that these groups did not seem to take the exams seriously and were not well prepared.

In terms of the University's involvement for enhancing graduate employability, employers gave positive feedback on events such as these career fairs. However, some gave critical but constructive feedback on UEL students, suggesting that the University should prepare and equip them better. Others found UEL students exceed their expectations, and expressed their interest in the opportunity to recruit from diverse community groups. However, one exhibitor, which helped single and young parents to go back to work, pointed out that given that UEL has lone and young parents studying, that the university should provide a better service and events for these students with less business focus and a more family element.

11 Key Institutional Findings

- Students come to HE to improve their career prospects. However, many also hope to change their lives more generally by broadening their horizons.
- One of the main reasons for choosing UEL was its accessibility in terms of geographical location and the provision of a variety of flexible entry routes.
- Many students come from non-traditional backgrounds and in this sense UEL has been successful in widening access. However, many of these students do not have the study skills they require and they struggle to progress through lack of sufficient study support.
- With many students from non-traditional backgrounds, it is considered that auditory and non-interactive teaching styles are not very effective learning environments for them. Less frequent formal assessment and less text-based assessment are thought to be more appropriate methods of assessment.
- Many non-traditional students see themselves as atypical students, despite the fact that the majority of students at UEL now have multiple responsibilities of work, family care and study. These students feel that programmes are often not structured flexibly enough to accommodate their needs. Students also feel that their personal circumstances are not taken into consideration enough.
- E-learning facilities such as WebCT have been useful as a tool to facilitate widening participation and many students find it useful; however there is a danger of over-reliance on this technology when many students need more IT training and more general face to face learning support.
- Many students feel that a degree is the key to a good job, and they lack an awareness of the transferable skills they also need to demonstrate in order to obtain a job. Many students also lack self confidence and have low aspirations; however, awareness of the importance of employability skills is steadily growing as it becomes part of every programme curriculum.
- Staff understand the importance of employability, however, there is still confusion and concern about whether and how the employability agenda should be integrated into the curriculum. There are also mixed feelings amongst students who feel that an employability module in their programmes means that they are deprived of an opportunity to learn more subject specific knowledge.
- Both staff and students note the positive diverse culture of UEL. However, it is also pointed out that some segregation occurs both in the classroom and on campus, raising a concern about the extent of interaction between different groups. The difference between the student and staff (ethnic) profiles is also raised, suggesting that the university is not sending the right message with its staff recruitment.
- Quite a few students, as well as members of staff feel that there is some degree of disorganisation and poor communication at UEL, which is not helpful for student learning as students tend to get contradictory messages or not get information at all. These gaps are often covered by the good will of individual members of staff.
- Many initiatives on WP and Graduate Employability are taking place in UEL, but they are often decentralised and ad hoc. These initiatives are given as examples of the institutional commitment to WP, Graduate Employability, and Equality and

Diversity. However, the institution still needs to measure the effectiveness of these initiatives and to address the issue of consistency throughout the university.

12 Institutional Recommendations

- Better provision and embedding of study skills into the curriculum and assessment of its effectiveness.
- Increased provision of one-to-one support including the personal tutor system, the delivery and effectiveness of which should be closely monitored.
- A more comprehensive induction should be provided to all students at whatever stage they enter the institution, it should include an introduction to WebCT; UEL IT services generally; and information on the student services available. Programmes should provide more detailed information on courses at the beginning of the year
- Ensure students have access to work placements both within and outside the curriculum, and raise awareness that transferable skills, in addition to a degree, are vital to increase student employability.
- Introduce more creative teaching and learning styles and assessment methods, including more interactive teaching and oral assessment.
- Facilitate better communication between and within different services and schools to enable more efficient student support on all issues. A more centralised system for the various initiatives would help to clarify their aims and objectives and the areas of responsibility for each service.
- The provision of excellent student services including learning resource centres and catering are vital for student success. Better stock control in the libraries, the later opening of catering facilities, and the provision of good access to campuses, including parking facilities will help students overcome some barriers to learning.
- Better integration of part-time and hourly paid teaching staff, with extra payment provided for student support activities outside teaching contract hours. Ideally, first year students should be taught by full-time staff who should have more time to support them.
- Increase the diversity of the staff profile to reflect the diversity of students.

Appendix A : Senior Management Interview Schedule

Project description

The focus of this enquiry is initially to obtain a better understanding of the ways in which minority ethnic students and other stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of institutional strategies and measures designed to promote student success, and, secondly, to comment on the relationship between perceived learner needs and institutional provision for minority ethnic students in higher education.

Opening Questions

1. Please tell us a bit about your department/school?
2. How does it relate to the institution as a whole?
3. What do you see as being your role within the School and in the wider institution?
4. In your view, what is the purpose of HE?
5. How do you feel UEL meets this purpose?
6. How would you describe UEL in relation to other HE institutions?

About UEL/School –perceptions of the institution

1. What is your understanding of the student profile of UEL in general and your School in particular?
2. What would you say are the key concerns of most students?
3. As an HE institution what do you feel UEL and your School offer students that other institutions/schools may not?
4. What would you say are the primary strengths of UEL as an HE institution? What about your School specifically
5. What would you identify as being the main areas needing improvement institutionally and at School level?
6. How possible do you feel this is? How could/would it be done?

WP policy – Awareness of Policy and Practice

1. What would you say are the main targets of UEL's WP strategy currently?
2. How would you define a successful WP policy?
3. How does WP policy apply to your School specifically?
4. What WP initiatives are currently in place and/or being developed? In the institution/School
5. What kind of funding is there for WP? Is it separate/included in other areas, formal/ad-hoc?
6. In your view, is this adequate? If not, how is this addressed?
7. What kind of awareness do you feel there is about WP throughout the institution? For Example?
8. How is policy disseminated within the university (your School)?
9. How is policy implemented?
10. What kinds of forums exist to oversee their implementation?
11. What kind of monitoring takes place?
12. How is this recorded?
13. What would you identify as the main areas for improvement within UEL, in order to successfully widen participation? Is this do-able? How?
14. To what extent does WP strategy feed into and inform practice?

15. How would you say WP policy integrates with funding issues for students?

ME students and WP

1. How are the needs of ME students met within UEL?
2. In your opinion, is this adequate?
3. How are these needs identified?
4. How are they monitored?
5. Are you aware of any WP initiatives within UEL/your School regarding ME students specifically?
6. How effective do you feel WP policy is when applied to ME students?

Graduate Employability – Awareness of the issue

1. What would you say is the role of HE in employability?
2. What kinds of initiatives are taken (in UEL/ your school) to increase graduate employability?
3. How do you feel WP strategy/policy relates to graduate employability?
4. What are UEL's (or School's) employability indicators?
5. How in your view, does WP strategy/policy translate in the labour market?

Closing questions

1. How would you further develop (UEL/School) WP and Graduate Employability initiatives in future?
2. What would your goals/targets be?
3. What do you think are the potential constraints in achieving your goal?
4. How will you address these constraints?
5. Are there any other ways they could also be achieved?
6. What do you think HE institutions should offer to students?
7. Do you think WP and Graduate Employability initiatives are the most effective measures to achieve this? If not, why?
8. What other measures do you feel might be effective in improving the levels and quality of HE attainment and employability, for ME students and students in general?
9. Is there anything else you feel is relevant?
10. Are there any issues you feel we haven't covered?
11. Are there any questions you would like asked about WP and employability that you feel are not currently being addressed?
12. Given the nature of our research, once we have begun our analysis, we may feel it necessary for us to conduct follow-up interviews with you. Would this be ok with you?
13. Are there any questions you would like to ask us about our research?

CLOSING

We very much appreciate your participation in our enquiry and hope that your contribution will enable us to produce original research which will inform future policy and practice, both at UEL and more widely.

Appendix B: Academic Staff Interview Schedule

Opening Questions

Subject of teaching
Admin responsibility

The View on HEI

The image of UEL/the school
The purpose of HEIs
The mission of UEL

The view on Students

The student profile of UEL
The student profile of the School
What are the student needs?
What are the student expectations?

Awareness of WP, Employability and E & D policy and practice

Why these issues are important for HEI
What their views on these issues
Probe: Do they agree that these are the core mission of HEIs?
Policy and practice at University Level
Policy and practice at School Level
Probe: Are they adequate? Are staff aware of these?
Is UEL really an institution of diversity
Probe: If yes, give examples, if no why? Ask whether they are aware of discrepancy of staff profile and student profile.

Effectiveness of University Practices

Does UEL offer services to students that university should offer
Probe: if yes, some examples, if no why? How is the monitoring taking place?
Does UEL support students so that they can perform fully?
What UEL can offer to students that other institution cannot?
How UEL can improve its services to students (and staff and other community) ?

Appendix C: Support Staff Interview Schedule

Opening Questions

The job role

The View on HEI

The image of UEL
The purpose of HEIs
The mission of UEL

The view on Students

The student profile of UEL
The student profile of the School
What are the student needs?
What are the student expectations?

Services provided by UEL

Does UEL offer services to students that university should offer
Probe: if yes, some examples, if no why? How is the monitoring taking place?
Does UEL support students so that they can perform fully?
What UEL can offer to students that other institution cannot?
How UEL can improve its services to students (and staff and other community) ?

Awareness of WP, Employability and E & D policy and practice

Why these issues are important for HEI
What their views on these issues
Probe: Do they agree that these are the core mission of HEIs?
How do you think the inclusivity UEL? Is UEL really an institution of diversity?
Probe: If yes, give examples, if no why? Ask whether they are aware of discrepancy of staff profile and student profile.

Appendix D: Student Interview Schedule

Narrative Inducing Questions for students

I would like you to tell me about yourself and your experiences of education. Start wherever you like and please take your time. I'll listen first and won't interrupt. I'll just take some notes.

- What kind of experience did you hope to have in HE (UEL)?
- What do you want in the future?
- What are the factors that have influenced your experiences at UEL (HE)
- In what ways does your course (or life at UEL) prepare you for employment?)

Appendix E: Student Focus Group Questions

At start

Completion of socio-demographic information questions with asking their availability for interview.

Questions

- Things student like about UEL and dislike about UEL (as general discussion-starter question)
- What they expect from UEL or from their programme, whether these have changed before and after coming to UEL.
- Prompt: what kind of support, if any, could better support their learning process
- About diversity and difference at UEL.
- About ethnicity – how they define, and how they think that would have an impact on their experience of HE.
- Their future career aspirations.

Appendix F: Employer Interview Questions

Exhibitor Interview Questions at “Employability Works”

1. Name of the Organisation (and time spoken)
2. About their organisations (if necessary)
3. What are they looking for when they attend career fairs?
4. What skills and qualities do you require from potential graduate employees?
5. Impressions of UEL students (Have they spoken to students?)
6. What can students do to increase their employability?
7. Whether they have been recruiting UEL students.
 - a. If yes – What are the strengths of UEL students?
 - b. If no – What was the reason, and whether they consider recruiting them again?
8. Do they have a diverse range of employees? For example?