

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

Report by - **JAYNE CLAPTON** - 2010 Churchill Fellow

**To investigate sustainable outcomes for students of low socio-economic backgrounds in Australian Higher Education - Netherlands, UK, Ireland, Finland**

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Signed: **Jayne Clapton**

Dated **27<sup>th</sup> April 2012**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Social Inclusion has been a major focus in the European Union for over a decade and its countries' practices and research offer a breadth of knowledge that is only limited in Australia to date. Receiving this Churchill Fellowship presented an opportunity to undertake a Project that, through targeted visits and conversations, enabled me to engage with European experiences in order to perceive the requirements to build Australian capacity and sustainability. The goals of the Project, therefore, were to:

- explore various policies, programmes and practices within the European Union that have enhanced access and widened participation to Higher Education;
- identify key considerations for retention and creating sustainable graduate outcomes; and
- discuss significant factors by which to create an inclusion framework for systemic change and measuring success in the Australian context.

I would like to acknowledge a range of people and institutions that contributes to the opportunity to undertake this Project.

For the awarding of the Winston Churchill Fellowship, I am grateful to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust in Australia. I am deeply appreciative of the Trust and its Fellows; and I look forward to my ongoing relationship with the Trust and will endeavor to encourage more people to seek this life changing opportunity. I also am very thankful of the support that has been offered to me.

To the students, staff and colleagues of Griffith University, I thank them for the opportunities, support and encouragement offered to me during my academic career. The privilege of working at Logan Campus where over 35% of students come from LSES backgrounds laid the firm foundations for this Project. I am particularly appreciative of Professor Debra Henly and Professor Alf Lizzio for their references for my application; and to the University for granting me leave of absence for which to undertake the Fellowship.

I am extremely grateful to all of the Institutions that I visited; and to all of the staff and colleagues that met with me. I experienced warm hospitality at all places, along with an unconditional sharing of knowledge, insights and experiences. Such was the significance of the encounters that it is true to say that undertaking the Project represents just the first step in ongoing relationships and networks.

To my friends and family, I am thankful for their ongoing love and support of me for my continuous educational journey, and their encouragement to apply for and undertake the Fellowship.

Especially I acknowledge:

- my brother Wayne (2000 Churchill Fellow) and his wife Kay for their encouragement to prepare the Fellowship application,
- my husband Bob Harriman who accompanied and supported me throughout the journey,
- our son Luke, daughter-in-law Henna and granddaughter Iida for their help and assistance, especially in experiencing Finland and gaining the deep cultural understanding that now provides such enlightenment,
- our daughter Kate who assisted in the Netherlands visit,
- our daughter Sarah for sharing some of the English experience, and
- our son Innes and daughter-in-law Gitti for 'keeping the home fires burning' and looking after everything at home in our absence.

Lastly, but most profoundly, I am thankful to my parents, Kev and Ruth Clapton, for their lifelong commitment to supporting education in our family. As people of LSES backgrounds, and hence at a significant personal cost, they instilled into my brother and me the value of education and the belief that human potential, opportunity, talent and skill are the most significant precursors for educational success. Although my father is now deceased, it is appropriate to acknowledge that my parents' beliefs and values have been rewarded with both their children not only reaching academic success, but also being Churchill Fellows.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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### **PROJECT:**

*To investigate sustainable outcomes for students of low socio-economic backgrounds in Australian Higher Education - Netherlands, UK, Ireland, Finland.*

By visiting four European countries, I undertook visits and consultations to examine specific points of interest which included:

- investigating the nature and impact of social inequality and social transformation (eg Netherlands),
- exploring strategies of outreach, accessibility, space, support and research (eg UK);
- discussing programmes that enhance and support student diversity (eg Ireland);) and
- understanding the interplay between political support, cultural context and educational success (eg Finland).

Over a six week period, I visited 7 universities; and met with a range of personnel that included university leaders, outreach staff, academics, policy makers and researchers. From these visits, I was able to ascertain how the Social Inclusion in Higher Education agenda was operationalized across the various institutions; explore a wide diversity of practices and programmes; identify the importance of context, messages, accessibility, position and support; and consider types of research and scholarship in terms of effectiveness, implications and limitations.

In conclusion, I highlight 5 significant aspects that I consider important and which I believe are necessary to contribute to sustainable outcomes for students of low socio-economic backgrounds; and which will require ongoing deliberation. I identified these as:

1. Beliefs and embeddedness
2. Collaboration
3. Engagement, Support and Incentives
4. Outcomes and Feedback Loops
5. Evidence and Research

Undertaking such a project has provided a profound opportunity from which to potentially influence change in the Australian context. Therefore, from the deliberations of this Project, I have prepared 10 recommendations to bring about improvements of the agenda in Australia.

Since completion, I have shared my learning with academic colleagues through seminars, planning meetings and conferences. Three academics of institutions I visited came to Australia in September 2011. As well as presenting at a national conference on Social Inclusion in Higher Education, they also made themselves available to meet with other university staff to discuss their programmes and research.

In the near future, it is also my intention to speak with socially disadvantaged communities and agencies (through outreach programmes and information sessions); provide feedback to different government agencies and hopefully contribute to government decision making. I will continue to research this area and contribute to further knowledge through publications, seeking grants and furthering international collaborative relationships

## PROGRAMME

<b>Date</b>	<b>Institution / Place</b>	<b>Appointments</b>	<b>Role / Centre</b>
3 - 9 May 2011	Vrije Universiteit (VU) 'Free University' Amsterdam NL	Dr Frans Kamsteeg	<u>Researcher</u> of Higher Education including in South Africa Department of Culture, Organisation and Management
		Prof Jos Beishuizen and colleagues	<u>Professor</u> of Education Centre for Educational Training, Assessment and Research, VU University Amsterdam Faculty of Psychology & Education,
11 - 16 May 2011	University of East London (UEL) London UK	Ms Thais Bishop	<u>Manager</u> Children's Garden Early Childhood Ctr Docklands Campus
		Dr Marcia Wilson	<u>Senior Lecturer</u> and Sport Sciences <u>Programme Leader</u> Stratford Campus
		Mr Ray Wilkinson	<u>Director</u> , External and Strategic Development Services (ESDS) Docklands Campus
		Ms Gail May and Ms Maggie McLinden	<u>Heads:</u> Education and Community Partnership in ESDS Docklands Campus
		Mr John Lock	<u>Director</u> 2012 Office External & Strategic Development Services Docklands Campus
		Prof John Storan	<u>Centre Director</u> Continuum Widening Participation Centre for Widening Participation Policy Studies - the centre is the first research centre of its kind in the UK (2003). Docklands Campus
24 - 26 May 2011	Sheffield Hallam University Sheffield UK	Dr Colin McCaig (Visit Coordinator)	<u>Senior research fellow</u> Centre for Education and Inclusion Research (CEIR)
		Pro Vice Chancellor Philip Martin	<u>Pro Vice-Chancellor</u> for Student Experience, Learning and Teaching
		Ms Helen Kay	<u>Equality and Diversity lead</u>
		Mr Clive	<u>Director</u> of Student and Learning

		MacDonald,	Services (SLS)
		Mr Dave Berry	<u>Manager</u> Aimhigher South Yorkshire Team
31 May 2011	Higher Education Academy York, UK	Prof Liz Thomas	<u>Senior Adviser</u> for Widening Participation at the Higher Education Academy, and <u>Lead Adviser</u> Working with Institutions for Action on Access.
1 - 3 June 2011	Lancaster University Lancaster UK	Dr Ann-Marie Houghton (Visit Coordinator)	<u>Director</u> Researching Equity, Access and Participation (REAP) Dept of Educational Research
		Dr Steve Dempster	<u>College Dean</u>
		Ms Hanna Morgan	<u>Researcher</u> Centre for Disability Research
		Dr Rod Kemp	<u>Manager</u> , Well Being, Equality & Diversity
		Dr Steve Weatherhead	<u>Clinical Tutor</u> , School of Health & Medicine
		Ms Pam Pickle	<u>Careers Advisor / Manager</u>
		Ms Leanne Bates	Widening Access Recruitment
		Mr Rory Daly	Aimhigher – Lancaster
		Dr Jo Armstrong	<u>Researcher</u> of Gender & WP, REAP team
		Mrs Jackie Gregory	Aimhigher – Cumbria
7 - 10 June 2011	Trinity College Dublin Ireland	Dr Julie Byrne	<u>Acting Director</u> The National Institute for Intellectual Disability (NIID)
		Ms Zoe Hughes	<u>PhD student</u> – (NIID)
		Ms Cliona Hannon Dr Lisa Coady and colleague	<u>Director</u> Tertiary Access Programme
		Ms Karen Campos McCormack	<u>Equality Officer</u>
15 – 17 June 2011	University of Jyväskylä Jyväskylä, Western Finland	Dr David M. Hoffman (Visit Coordinator)	<u>Researcher</u> Finnish Institute of Educational Research (FIER)

## **PROJECT**

### ***Background***

Before reporting on my Project, it is useful to consider the context in which this Fellowship has been undertaken.

Since the election of the Labour Government in 2007, Social Inclusion became an overarching social policy focus in Australia. Within this commitment, the Australian Government has determined that by 2020, at least 20% of undergraduate students in Higher Education must come from low socio-economic (LSES) backgrounds. Hence, the Australian Social Inclusion agenda for Higher Education aims to widen participation, decrease social inequality and increase employability and productivity of graduates.

This is not the first time there has been a government commitment to an inclusive Higher Education agenda. Initiatives in recent decades have led to marked improvements in the access and participation of previously under-represented groups, eg females, people with disability and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. However, it seems that for a variety of reasons (such as a change of government, fees and the economic climate, and / or a change in ideology<sup>1</sup>), previous advances in the participation of students from low LSES backgrounds have not been sustained; and the participation rate has remained somewhat stagnant at around 17%, with many institutions even falling well short of this figure. It is timely to broaden our understanding, enhance our knowledge and plan strategies that will contribute to ongoing, sustainable outcomes for these students. Examining intersections between factors such as culture, class, 1st in family, gender, age, career choices, flexibility, resources and access to lifelong learning will result in an enhanced perspective of Australia's new Social Inclusion agenda in Higher Education

### ***Study Tour***

I chose the sites for my visits on the basis of Higher Education inclusion research and practices being undertaken at the institutions. Some choices were also informed by the reputation of the institution in regard to specific work. Sites and geographical location in regard to LSES populations were also considerations, as were cultural structures of different higher education systems.

Across the institutions, I met with a range of personnel which included:

- Outreach and access practitioners
- Support staff
- Strategic leaders
- Academics
- Institutional data analyst
- Pro Vice Chancellor *Student Experience*
- Researchers of:
  - *Inclusion and transformation*
  - *Sociology of Higher Education*
  - *Widening Participation*
  - *Higher Education Policy*
  - *Programme Evaluations*

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<sup>1</sup> This claim is also potentially relevant if there is a change of government in the near future. See, for example, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/libs-to-exclude-social-inclusion-portfolio/story-e6frgcjx-1226236848356> (date accessed 25/4/2012)

## Vrije Universiteit<sup>2</sup> ('Free University') (VU) – Amsterdam, Netherlands

The Dutch Higher Education system, as summarised in the extracts below, is a binary system in which school students make definite choices as to whether to study at a Polytechnic college or a university.

*The education system in Holland is known for its high quality in education and research and its international study environment. In addition, with 1,560 international study Programmes and courses it has the largest offer of continental Europe.*

*Holland has two main types of higher education institutions: research universities and universities of applied sciences. Research universities focus on the independent practice of research-oriented work in an academic or professional setting. Universities of applied sciences offer professional Programmes in the applied arts and sciences that prepare students for specific careers.<sup>3</sup>*

*The Netherlands higher education system is a binary system, composed of Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs (WO which is more research-oriented and traditionally offered by universities) and Hoger Beroepsonderwijs (HBO - professional higher education, traditionally offered by hogescholen). WO Programmes provide education and research in a wide range of disciplines : language and culture, behaviour and society, economics, law, medical and health sciences, natural sciences, engineering and agriculture. In addition, there is the Open Universiteit (OU - Open University) which offers fully recognized university degree Programmes through distance education. Internationaal Onderwijs (IO) (international education), generally conducted in English, is mainly designed to meet the needs of foreign students. Since September 2002, the higher education system in the Netherlands has been organized around a three-cycle degree system consisting of bachelor, master and PhD degrees. At the same time, the ECTS system (European Credit Transfer System) was implemented as a mean to quantify all higher education study Programmes.<sup>4</sup>*

VU has its foundations in the values of the Dutch Reformed Church. In fact it was initially funded by fundraising of the community<sup>5</sup>. VU is located in East Amsterdam near the business centre which includes the World Trade Centre offices.

I had two specific reasons to visit VU:

1. To have conversations about non-traditional education pathways, especially in regard to mature –age entry and refugee opportunities; and
2. Because of the strong links between VU and South Africa, to discuss with a sociologist about higher education transformation in South Africa, and what could be learnt from there to inform this project.

In regard to the first reason, I met with Prof Jos Beishuizen and colleagues, of the Centre for Educational Training, Assessment and Research. Of particular interest is the Summer School conducted as a pre-entry programme to tertiary study for first generation students, minority students and mature age students. By using a narrative / life-story approach, participants experience both social and academic integration, and actively engage in a reflective process in which they consider the transformation of their identities as they enter higher education and establish peer relationships.

In regard to the second reason, I had an enlightening conversation with Dr Frans Kamsteeg, a Researcher of Higher Education (including in South Africa) in the Department of Culture,

<sup>2</sup> See <http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=nl&tl=en&u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.vu.nl%2Fen%2F&anno=2> (date accessed 12/10/2011)

<sup>3</sup> Extract from <http://www.nuffic.nl/international-students/dutch-education/education-system> (accessed 11/10/11)

<sup>4</sup> Extract from <http://www.euroeducation.net/prof/netherco.htm> (accessed 11/10/11)

<sup>5</sup> See <http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=nl&tl=en&u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.vu.nl%2Fen%2F> (accessed 26/10/2011)

Organisation and Management at VU. The conversation revolved around issues of 'enforced transformation' that have been enacted with the dismantling of Apartheid. Whilst opening up equal opportunities for access to Higher Education has been a cornerstone of the new era, in practice, experiences are impacted by residual structural elements that are proving difficult to remove and hence are continuing marginalisation. These include issues such as curricula structures, assessment structures, the dominance of the institutional use of the Afrikaans language, and the continuation of excluding protocols, traditions and practices within institutions. Therefore how entrenched cultural values support, constrain or impede transformation provided an insightful foundation. This conversation, along with the Finnish experience at the end of my Programme, became useful 'bookends' for my topic being explored and for which I was very grateful to have.

Dr Kamsteeg also highly recommended that I read Jonathan D. Jansen's book: *Knowledge in the Blood: Confronting Race and the Apartheid Past*<sup>6</sup>: and consequently I found this one of the best books I have read about Social Inclusion in Higher Education; and I too, highly recommend it.

### **University of East London<sup>7</sup> (UEL) – London, England**

As the name suggests, UEL is situated in East London. Significantly, this is also the area where the London Olympic Games will be held in 2012. UEL comprises two campuses with quite different histories<sup>8</sup>: Stratford and Docklands. Stratford Campus<sup>9</sup>, commenced in 1898, was granted university status in 1992 through the merging of different Further Education institutions; and is situated in a vibrant multicultural area within the town centre of Stratford, a major community and transport hub.

Docklands Campus, on the other hand, is a new development still in progress. In fact, Docklands is the first new campus that has been constructed in England in over 50 years<sup>10</sup>. The development of Docklands Campus has had two significant infrastructure drivers. These are (1) regeneration and renewal funding for the re-development of the Docklands area; and (2) the construction of nearby amenities for London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. As well as the obvious Olympic Stadium and Athletes' Village, the latter includes amenities such as the London City Airport at the side of the Thames River, redevelopment of waterways for water-sports etc, new housing and accommodation structures, new shopping and business facilities, supplementary sporting facilities for training and a light rail system that connects to the inner City and the contemporary business hub of Canary Wharf. Characteristics of UEL are outlined in the extract below:

*The [University of East London](http://www.uel.ac.uk/) is a dynamic university recognised for its teaching and research excellence. It offers a wide range of degree programmes and short courses, flexible study options, excellent facilities, an exciting London location and strong employment prospects, with one of the highest graduate employment rates in London. [Students](#) come from 120 countries worldwide, making UEL an internationally diverse and exciting place to study.<sup>11</sup>*

As a University set within this context, it is not surprising that the business of the University of East London is guided by very intentional strategic leadership and development, particularly with external partners<sup>12</sup>. Therefore, it was a privilege for me to meet with University leaders

<sup>6</sup> J. J. Jansen (2009). *Knowledge in the Blood: Confronting Race and the Apartheid Past*. Stanford University Press: Stanford, California..

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.uel.ac.uk/> (date accessed 12/10/2011)

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.uel.ac.uk/about/history.htm> (accessed 26/10/2011)

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.uel.ac.uk/campuses/stratford.htm> (accessed 26/10/2011)

<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.uel.ac.uk/campuses/docklands.htm> (accessed 26/10/2011)

<sup>11</sup> Extract from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/may/10/universityguide-uni-east-london> (accessed 27/10/2011)

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.uel.ac.uk/engagement/opportunities/index.htm> (accessed 26/10/2011)

responsible for the strategic development of the University; and to glean from their perspective, what it means for a University to be of the community within which it is situated<sup>13</sup>.

UEL's performance within the Widening Participation agenda in the UK has been exemplary, often being regarded as leaders of research<sup>14</sup> and the development of knowledge and practice in terms of outreach, building aspirations and providing a supportive learning environment<sup>15</sup>. Such has been the history of success at UEL, it is also apparent that some of their activities have become quite entrepreneurial and enterprising. The development of the Knowledge Dock<sup>16</sup> to connect business opportunities with University resources (including students) is one example; as is the establishment of a shop in Thurrock to build aspirations in a significantly under-represented area in Higher Education<sup>17</sup>. However, it is also the work being undertaken between Widening Participation and Sport that is very noteworthy. UEL is utilising this opportunity to strengthen the communities in which it is situated; provide amenity to sporting teams, including international teams; create a new space for sporting opportunities, eg for people with disability; provide support services such as through exercise science and other health Programmes; and to build international relationships.

Through its Steiner-based Early Years Centre, The Children's Garden<sup>18</sup>, UEL is also committed to providing excellent care for children, and fostering good intergenerational attributes. Although an award winning facility, however, research opportunities connecting a children's service on campus with the Widening Participation agenda have not been explored to date.

### **Sheffield Hallam University<sup>19</sup> (SHU) – Sheffield, England**

Sheffield Hallam University is one of two universities located in Sheffield, in Yorkshire, England. Whilst the University of Sheffield is an older 'red brick' university and member of the elite Russell Group institutions in the UK, SHU gained university status in 1992, after previously being the Sheffield Polytechnic. Sheffield city and its surrounds have a long industrial history, particularly in steel manufacturing (eg cutlery); however these industries have been affected over time with changes to production techniques and economic pressures. An intentional re-generation and renewal strategy has been to invest in Higher Education, from which SHU has experienced significant growth as stated in the extract below:

*With approximately 30,000 [students](#), Sheffield Hallam is one of the largest universities in the country, and is one of the biggest provider [sic] of health and social care and teacher training in the UK. It's based on two campuses, one in the bustling city centre and the other out in the leafy suburbs. Investment of £115m over the past 10 years has provided the university with modern, well-equipped teaching facilities. Sheffield Hallam takes its links with business seriously and has the highest number of placement courses of any English university. Sheffield has great facilities and good transport links. It claims to be the greenest city in England, and is within easy reach of Leeds, Manchester and the Peak District.<sup>20</sup>*

<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.uel.ac.uk/engagement/> (accessed 26/10/2011)

<sup>14</sup> See for example, about Continuum at: <http://www.uel.ac.uk/continuum/> (accessed 26/10/2011)

<sup>15</sup> The supportive learning environment not only included relational and spatial aspects, but also financial support. UEL has a bursary system that encourages student success. For example, for all first year students who pass their first semester (equivalent full time), they are eligible for a £500 bursary which they can use towards textbooks, travel and accommodation. This also provides a key retention strategy inasmuch as academic staff can also stipulate the conditions for assessment and success. For example, students may be required to attend a minimum number of face to face sessions and mentoring meetings with academic staff as well as tutorials and lectures.

<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.uel.ac.uk/knowledgedock/> (accessed 26/10/2011)

<sup>17</sup> See [http://www.uel.ac.uk/news/press\\_releases/ThurrockShop.htm](http://www.uel.ac.uk/news/press_releases/ThurrockShop.htm) (accessed 26/10/2011)

<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.uel.ac.uk/studentervices/supportingyou/nursery.htm> (accessed 26/10/2011)

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.shu.ac.uk/> (date accessed 12/10/2011)

<sup>20</sup> Extract from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/may/10/universityguide-sheffield-hallam-uni> (accessed 27/10/11)

As a post 1992 university, SHU has a major commitment to education, particularly of students from LSES backgrounds. This commitment was evident in the range of interviews I undertook. Topics of conversation included improving the student experience, the importance and interpretation of good institutional data for strategic decisions in regard to LSES students (eg with male engineering students), targeted support services, coordination of outreach, research about inclusive practices and Higher Education policies. It was a valuable time to have in-depth discussions about Higher Education policies with my host, Dr. Colin McCaig. These policy discussions enabled me to map the recent and contemporary policy contexts of the UK Higher Education system/s; and to understand how different social policies both interact with and impact Higher Education.

A striking feature of the visit to SHU was the friendliness and genuine concern for each other and students shown amongst the range of colleagues I met. This friendliness appeared more than about individual relationships, rather it seemed a cultural characteristic of Sheffield people.

### **Higher Education Academy, York University (YU) – York, England: Interview with Professor Liz Thomas**

The Higher Education Academy (HEA), situated at York University, is a national and independent organisation, funded by the four UK HE funding bodies, subscriptions and grants. The HEA provides expertise and resources to support the higher education community in order to enhance the quality and impact of learning and teaching.<sup>21</sup> Prior to changes from July 2011, the HEA covered 24 subject / disciplinary areas. Since these changes, Academic Leads have been appointed to each area. My visit to the HEA was to meet with Professor Liz Thomas, currently the Academic Lead for Retention and Success; and also a world renowned researcher of Widening Participation, being the Director of the Widening Participation Research Centre at Edge Hill University. Her biography reads as follows:

*Liz has fourteen years' experience of undertaking and managing widening participation, student experience and retention and success research, and is committed to using research to inform policy and practice at all levels. She has a strong commitment to institutional transformation to support diverse students to access and succeed in higher education, and has developed and contributed to a number of evidence-informed change Programmes engaging institutional teams in planning, implementing and evaluating change.*

*Liz is currently directing a 3-year research and evaluation Programme to improve student retention and success on behalf of the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. She has recently undertaken a review of widening participation strategic assessments prepared by all English higher education institutions, and contributed to a similar review in Wales in 2009, and she has researched male student engagement in academic development and pastoral support services. A work for 2012 includes a formative evaluation of the National Scholarship Programme, and a summative evaluation of the National STEM Programme. Liz is renowned internationally for her research on widening participation and student success, and has undertaken research, consultancy and keynote addresses in Europe, the US and Australia.*

*Liz is author and editor of ten books on widening participation and enhancing the student experience, including Institutional transformation to engage a diverse student body (2011, Emerald Publications, with Malcolm Tight); First Generation Entrants in higher education: an international analysis (2006, SRHE and Open University Press, with Jocey Quinn); and Improving student retention in higher education: The role of teaching and learning (2007, RoutledgeFalmer, with Glenda Crosling and Margaret Heagney). Liz is also editor of the journal Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning.<sup>22</sup>*

This was an extremely fruitful time in which we discussed topics informed by her research. These included:

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/> (date accessed 12/10/2011)

<sup>22</sup> Extracts from [http://www.fyhe.com.au/keynote\\_speakers.html](http://www.fyhe.com.au/keynote_speakers.html) (date accessed 15/4/12)

- The gendering of the Widening Participation (WP) agenda and a perceived implicit bias towards females – gleaned from such aspects of participation in Programmes, participation in research, tendency to seek support, study patterns and time management, and the predominance of female academic and support staff working with WP students.
- Patterns of male students' experiences and what constitutes success for male students – also how individual perceptions of success may differ from institutional definitions.
- Institutional relationships between marketing, recruitment and outreach.
- The predominance of contract Project staff.
- How sustainability encompasses the need for HE institutional research to provide evidence and to support an educational imperative for WP, rather than just being project focussed.
- A research focus that looks at outcomes of improving humanity and citizenship, more than merely Programme evaluations.
- Family perceptions
- Needs of mature age students and possibilities of 'return learners'.
- Need to look at Assessment policies.

### **Lancaster University<sup>23</sup> (LU) – Lancaster, England**

Lancaster University, opened in 1964, is a Top 10 UK university. The majority of its students are 18-23yr old. The collegiate structure dominates LU's operations; and hence the student experience is defined by both academic and collegial relationships.

*Lancaster is a collegiate university with eight undergraduate colleges on campus (and a ninth for graduates). All [students](#) are members of one or other of the colleges which, as well as providing accommodation, also have their own bars and common rooms, and an instant sense of community and belonging. Academic staff are also affiliated with a college and often have an active role. The campus is located outside Lancaster and students make up about a fifth of the town's population.<sup>24</sup>*

LU's commitment to WP is based more upon of a notion of providing an inclusive environment which then supports and accommodates a diverse range of students, including LSES students, rather than actively outreaching to these particular groups. In other words, if LSES students are enrolled at LU, they are well supported to achieve successful academic results through a universal commitment to inclusivity that provides an enhanced student experience. Included in this commitment are spatial elements such as a new student learning support centre, and attention to student gathering spaces on campus. The opportunity to attain a Lancaster Award<sup>25</sup> which includes participating in extra-curricular activities exemplifies another aspect to this approach. A contextual feature that stood out at LU was a sense of trust that the institution portrayed to its community, eg in its provisions and support. I didn't notice posters about expected behaviour, rather there was an implicit trust that students would do the right thing (eg in terms of behaviour and responsibility in particular spaces).

LU, with a commitment to excellence, therefore strives to be a significant leader in HE. As a good corporate citizen, LU has been supportive of WP activities and collaborative outreach Programmes, such as Aimhigher. It also has a commitment to WP and Widening Access research through the Researching Equity, Access and Participation (REAP)<sup>26</sup> Research entity.

At LU, my visit was co-ordinated by Dr Ann-Marie Houghton, who arranged for me to meet with a wide range of academic, research and programme staff. With the national Aimhigher Programme about to disbanded soon after my visit, I had discussions about what could have been done to have sustained such a successful outreach programme. Aspects identified included:

- The Programme being too 'target-oriented', rather than research-supported.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/> (date accessed 12/10/2011)

<sup>24</sup> Extract from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/may/10/universityguide-lancaster-uni> (accessed 27/10/11)

<sup>25</sup> See <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/careers/award/> (accessed 15/4/12)

<sup>26</sup> See <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fass/projects/reap/> (accessed 15/4/2012)

- Temporary and contract staff are common – which decrease the need for ongoing institutional commitment and professional development.
- Time spent ‘doing’, delivering and spending; rather than reflecting.
- Relied heavily on the skill base of individuals

### **Trinity College<sup>27</sup> (TCD) – Dublin, Ireland**

Founded in 1592, Trinity College Dublin is Ireland’s premier university. As stated below, TCD is committed to inclusivity and equity of access.

#### *Mission*

*Trinity College builds on its four-hundred-year-old tradition<sup>28</sup> of scholarship to confirm its position as one of the great universities of the world, providing a liberal environment where independence of thought is highly valued and where staff and students are nurtured as individuals and are encouraged to achieve their full potential.*

*The College is committed to excellence in both research and teaching, to the enhancement of the learning experience of each of its students and to an inclusive College community with equality of access for all. The College will continue to disseminate its knowledge and expertise to the benefit of the City of Dublin, the country and the international community.<sup>29</sup>*

The Trinity Access Programmes (TAP) have operated since 1993 and thus supported a range of non-traditional learners such as mature age students, ethnic minority students and students from low socio-economic backgrounds. With both university and corporate support, the TAP operate in partnership across the education sector to widen participation. As well as providing support, staff of the TAP undertake research and have created a substantial evidence base for the practices<sup>30</sup>. Opportunities for peer support through the relationships and the provision of meeting space, are also significant aspects of these programmes.

In 1998, the National Institute for Intellectual Disability (NIID) was established at TCD. NIID is internationally well known for its commitment to, and promotion of lifelong learning for people with intellectual disability. From this commitment, NIID offers a range of activities as listed below. In the Certificate in Contemporary Living undertaken by people with intellectual disability, participants study alongside postgraduate Disability Studies students. Access to lifelong learning and widening participation to all, encompasses such Programmes as:

- The Certificate in Contemporary Living, an inclusive education programme for students with intellectual disabilities
- Development and implementation of inclusive research practice
- Analysis and commentary on relevant legislation and policy
- Parent/family education
- Consultancy and partnership with service and advocacy agencies
- Public Education<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.tcd.ie/> (date accessed 12/10/2011)

<sup>28</sup> See <http://www.tcd.ie/about/history/> (date accessed 15/4/2012)

<sup>29</sup> Extract from <http://www.tcd.ie/about/> (date accessed 15/4/2012)

<sup>30</sup> See for example, research outlined at [http://www.tcd.ie/Trinity\\_Access/research/](http://www.tcd.ie/Trinity_Access/research/) (date accessed 21/4/2012).

Topics of research include: “What Happened Next? The Employment and Further Study Experiences of Trinity Graduates of TAP 2002-2008”; “The TAP Effect: Intergenerational Progression of the Immediate and Extent Family Members of TAP Alumni”; “Ten Years On: The Experiences of Mature Students in TAP and TCD.”

<sup>31</sup> Extract from <http://www.tcd.ie/niid/aboutus/> (accessed 18/4/12)

## University of Jyväskylä<sup>32</sup> (JU) - Jyväskylä, Western Finland

Finland is renowned as one of the world's leading education nations. It is well recognized that part of this success is due to the high regard that teachers are held within the society; and that they are required to have a Masters degree to be a classroom teacher. In 1863, the first Finnish Teacher College (Seminary) was founded in Jyväskylä; and in 1864, the Teacher College became the Jyväskylä College of Education. In 1944, a Master of Education was authorized. The Jyväskylä College of Education became the University of Jyväskylä in 1966, with faculties in education and social sciences, humanities, mathematics and science, and sport sciences<sup>33</sup>.

The Finnish Education system is underpinned by a commitment to student success and providing the context by which its youth can reach their full potential. However, educational excellence is most significantly due to the deep embedding of the value of education within Finnish culture. Conversations with Dr David Hoffman, a researcher of international comparative higher education, helped to explore this cultural significance. An underlying question within Finnish culture is not "Who should be included?" but rather "On what basis should someone be excluded?" Finnish people deeply respect gender equality and egalitarianism; and are intrinsically committed to *Sisu*.

The *Sisu* is a Finnish cultural term which embraces the essence of Finnish culture. It represents an internal 'call to arms' on which to build nationhood, ie in the post -independence era after independence was gained in 1917. Oppressed by Sweden, then Russia, Finland's independent nationhood was built on the premise that the nation's greatest resource is the skill and knowledge of its people; hence it became an imperative to prioritise education as a means of people (and subsequently the nation) having opportunity to reach their full potential.

As stated below, Finland is characterised by two types of higher education institutes which are non-hierarchical.

*The Republic of Finland is one of the Nordic countries and, in terms of area, the seventh largest in Europe. It is a welfare state with a high standard of living, a small and educated population of just over five million, and pioneering high-tech know-how. Finns are proud of their advanced welfare system, the high level of education, and Finnish design and architecture. The country and its people have been moulded by its location between East and West.*

*...The Finnish education system is based on the principle that everyone should be equally provided with basic education services. Adult education offers the opportunity to obtain education and complete qualifications at any stage of your life. For example, upper secondary schools for adults provide an opportunity to take the matriculation examination and to supplement the upper secondary school curriculum.*

*... Finland has two types of higher education institutes: universities and polytechnics (nowadays usually called 'universities of applied sciences'). Universities focus on academic and scientific research and teaching methods, whereas polytechnics emphasize the needs of working life and the development of professional skills.<sup>34</sup>*

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.jyu.fi/en/> (date accessed 12/10/2011)

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.jyu.fi/en/introduction/history-and-milestones> (date accessed 25/4/2012)

<sup>34</sup> Extracts from [https://www.jyu.fi/en/study/services/life\\_in\\_finland](https://www.jyu.fi/en/study/services/life_in_finland) (date accessed 20/4/2012)

## **Discussion**

### Operationalising the Agenda

All countries are members of the European Union (EU); and hence are committed to the principles of Social Inclusion in Higher Education through Widening Participation, working with Diversity and Lifelong Learning. However, how each country manifests such commitment is subject to the cultural and political ideologies in place. The Netherlands, Ireland and Finland run binary, non-hierarchical systems whereby educational choices are equally valued. In the UK, as in Australia, there is significant difference in educational status between Further and Higher Education institutions; and therefore, how pathways between sectors are negotiated to provide educational opportunities is a key contemporary focus.

Although all members of the EU, changes in government can have a significant effect on practices; and this was evident in the UK where, during my visits, the new conservative government was implementing changes from a Social Inclusion focus in education to a Social Mobility focus. Funding models were also being changed to include increased student fees and to be market driven. The impact of these changes was being seen by some as somewhat catastrophic for Widening Participation for non-traditional students. Perceivably successful programmes such as Aimhigher were being dismantled. It was stated that the opportunities that the Programme had presented, the resources developed and the skilled workforce were all being made redundant. However, others were keen to see the changes as presenting new opportunities and access imperatives that had not yet been experienced. Whatever the actuality, it is accurate to say that the UK Higher Education sector was in considerable upheaval during the period of my visits, and during that time, staff of the universities all expressed significant uncertainty as to what the future would hold in regard to Social Inclusion and Widening Participation.

At institutional levels, practices to widen access and participation were operationalised differently. Such practices were therefore contingent upon other factors such as geography and demography, culture, funding sources and institutional values. For instance, in Finland, education is so highly valued culturally, that its commitment to diversity is intrinsic in all of its practices. Approximately 80% of school leavers in Finland pursue higher education.

At Trinity College Dublin (TCD) in Ireland and the Vrije Universiteit (VU) in the Netherlands, their Social Inclusion commitments were based on a fundamental engagement with Widening Participation and creating opportunities to include and support a diverse range of students.

Within the UK, how institutions undertook their commitment to Social Inclusion differed. The University of East London (UEL) and Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) are geographically located within low socio-economic areas that historically have been hubs of thriving waterfront and manufacturing industries respectively. With significant downturns in these industries, regeneration and renewal funding had been directed to major infrastructure developments and a commitment to change the demographic make-up of the areas towards attaining Higher Education qualifications. For UEL, this has resulted in the building of the new Docklands Campus, and has seen entrepreneurial opportunities develop as a result, eg the establishment of the Knowledge Dock, partnerships with businesses at Canary Wharf, the opening of the Thurrock Shop and the strategic relationship with the Olympic Games and fostering Widening Participation through sport. At Lancaster University (LU), a top 10 UK university and structured on a collegiate system, the Social Inclusion agenda could be described more as a 'bolt on' activity. There are not necessarily social, financial, nor demand imperatives for LU to extend its access; however LU is committed to providing an inclusive experience for all its students.

### A diversity of practices and programmes

Widening Participation requires good outreach programmes. Until July 2011, Aimhigher had been a successful programme which had run for quite a few years in the UK. It had become increasingly streamlined, and although operated locally, was nationally coordinated. It had a large funding base with millions of dollars allocated to programmes scattered around the UK. An

important characteristic of Aimhigher was that the operational aspect of the Programme was not attached to individual institutions. Although the Programme may have been 'housed' in a particular institution such as a university, it was run by a collaborative team between schools, communities, further and higher education institutions who undertook a 'joined up' approach to outreach. The model was similar to a Local Area Coordination model. Aimhigher had a coordinated message and evaluation processes; however some activities may have varied at local levels depending on the particular needs and demographics of where the Programme was situated. For example, Programmes may have targeted specific groups such as young gifted and talented students, students who live or previously lived in alternate care, families, first in family students, students of different cultural backgrounds, refugees, students with disability and adult learners. Also the media of the activities varied, with a wide use of exposure to different educational experiences, publications and posters, well developed websites, DVDs and the use of drama and creative activities. Preparatory and support Programmes and summer schools were also available.

Aimhigher was a nationally coordinated outreach programme. Similar institutionally based outreach and transition activities operated in Ireland and the Netherlands through TCD and VU respectively. At TCD, the Tertiary Access Programmes and the National Institute for Intellectual Disability are nationally and internationally significant for the widening participation of non-traditional students. Similarly, at VU, a summer Programme for mature age / adult learners was significantly successful.

#### Context, messages, accessibility, position and support matter

It was apparent that context matters. For example, place and the use of space were important aspects. How learning spaces were designed for the diverse needs of students was critical to successful student experiences. At Lancaster University, a supported, new state of the art student learning centre had recently opened which provided enclaves for individual and group learning, a range of performance and preparation spaces, as well as conversation spaces. How students could gather on campuses to meet, and have social and reflective spaces reflected intentional, institutional planning and design of spaces. With an emphasis on sport, the Dockland Campus of UEL was, at the time, finishing the construction of an outdoor exercise space to supplement fitness training.

Another important contextual feature was the discourses presented in institutional literature, publications and posters. At UEL, for example, wall posters were welcoming and promoted affirming messages for students about capacity to be successful and affirming student strengths. At LU, posters showed trust of students in terms of access and eating etc in certain spaces. These discourses are important messages to promote a sense of belonging in an institution for all students, regardless of background and identity.

Somewhat paradoxical though, was the need for tight security and approved access to get to support parts of a couple of institutions.

How students and staff could access institutions via transport options was also significant, as this is a critical factor for LSES students. All institutions were accessible through well-established public transport systems with buses and / or trains. The light rail system that runs through the Docklands Campus of UEL was particularly impressive and is part of the wider infrastructure renewal and regeneration commitments to the East London area. This also incorporates developments for the London 2012 Olympic Games.

Where a Social Inclusion agenda is operated from within an institution is critical. Particularly impressive was UEL's commitment that this should be situated within the External and Strategic Development Services. The closer the planning and operations of the agenda were to the Chancellery and Secretariat of a university was seen as important and useful for higher levels of integration within the institutional activities.

All of these contextual issues are important retention strategies. Another impressive retention strategy is worthy of highlighting. At UEL, all first year students who successfully complete their first semester at university (at a full time rate) receive a £500 bursary. This money can be utilised for accommodation, travel, fees and books and assists students in stabilising their enrolment at university. Behind such an allocation are also learning and teaching strategies developed by academic staff to encourage student success.

### Research and Scholarship

The need for different types of research and scholarship to support a Social Inclusion in Higher Education agenda was discussed at every university.

There is a wide body of evaluation reports and research about programmes, policies and practices of learning and teaching strategies. However, the range of research and scholarship in regard to the macro issues impacted by Social Inclusion and Widening Participation were not so prevalent (ie such as sociological impacts, intergenerational changes and changed productivity).

I asked of all the Aimhigher and associated academic staff, what could have been done differently in order to have provided a safety net for the ongoing operations of the Programme? I was consistently told that there was a sense that people were too busy 'doing' the Programme, plus providing the necessary reports and evaluations, at the expense of undertaking deep, rigorous research about socio-political impact.

However, it was a privilege to discuss various forms of research at all of the universities and to understand how the evidence of the research informed practices and underpin resource development. In the UK, that these could happen at a national level through different agencies, including the Higher Education Academy, was particularly impressive.

## CONCLUSIONS

As stated, this Project was *To investigate sustainable outcomes for students of low socio-economic backgrounds in Australian Higher Education - Netherlands, UK, Ireland, Finland.*

In conclusion then, I wish to highlight 5 significant aspects that I consider as important findings that are necessary to contribute to sustainable outcomes; and which will require ongoing deliberation. These are:

1. Beliefs and embeddedness
2. Collaboration
3. Engagement, Support and Incentives
4. Outcomes and Feedback Loops - questions
5. Evidence and Research

### 1. Belief and embeddedness

First and foremost, a successful Social Inclusion in Higher Education agenda is dependent upon *how* the agenda is embedded in cultural, ideological and socio-political understandings of education. These understandings are book-ended at one end by Finland's commitment to promoting education as the nation's best resource; and striving to provide opportunities by which to realise the potential of its people. For Finland, investment in education is an investment in the well-being of the nation.

The other book-end relates to the position that Higher Education is only for an elite group of people; and that policies, practices and structures support this belief (eg. as previously determined in South Africa). In this context, excellence in performance and reputation are paramount. Furthermore, the impact of this emphasis places Social Inclusion and Widening Participation as threats to institutions achieving this goal. Whilst it is unusual for contemporary institutions to hold onto such an exclusive ideology, there are modified versions still apparent. These modifications include participation in Social Inclusion and Widening Participation to fulfil roles as 'good corporate citizens' and to be in a position to offer a charitable or philanthropic response to diversity and / or non-traditional learners. This approach represents a financial investment.

In between these book-ends, are a range of beliefs that support the agenda in a variety of ways through moral investments to improved opportunity. These can include social justice approaches to ensure fair and equitable access to Higher Education; making opportunities through offering a range of programmes; and being committed to Lifelong Learning.

However, it is fair to say that all of these approaches make commitments to improved productivity and social well-being of communities. A commitment to aspiring to the values of the Finnish end of the spectrum is what would be required for the best outcomes.

### 2. Collaboration

Collaboration between many stakeholders is significant for sustainable outcomes. These collaborations can be attached to specific institutions, be between the Higher Education and corporate sectors, be inter-sectorial or independent of specific institutions (eg Aimhigher). They can also have a local, national and international focus and involve a variety of personnel.

Collaborations are important for:

- Raising aspirations, outreach, widening participation, pathways of non-traditional students
- Supporting for success
- Recording outcomes

- Sharing knowledge and building resources.
- Undertaking research, being innovative and creating enterprise

### 3. Engagement, Support and Incentives

Sustainability will be enhanced when there is consolidated engagement and support for the Social Inclusion in Higher Education agenda by politicians and policy makers; project workers; support staff, academic staff, and university and sectorial leaders. How families and communities support the agenda; and how peers (eg mature age, cultural, pathways, disciplinary) support each other are also critical aspects.

Support can also be provided via operational strategies such as accessing and utilising alternative funding (such as through corporate collaborations; renewal and regeneration funding); preparatory / access Programmes / foundation degrees; pathways and dual sector relationships; offering bursaries and scholarships or awards pre and post enrolment; being cognisant of the significance of space and place, including physical and learning environments; being an institutional / sectorial priority (strategic intent); and understanding the student experience by appreciating their complexity and particularity in regard to lifelong learning; and within demand driven models.

### 4. Outcomes and Feedback Loops: the ongoing questions

It is important to note that in considering sustainability issues, we need to be aware of impact and how feedback loops may be affecting practices, eg. inter-generational impacts, changing demographics within a community, changing skills and growth of new industries and innovation.

We are also faced with ongoing questions that command continual attention. Questions identified from this Project include:

- *What constitutes success? (Do personal and institutional perceptions align?)*
- *Who do people become? (In terms of practitioners, citizens, family members)?*
- *What impact do students' experiences have on individuals, families, communities and policies?*
- *How are communities / societies improved?*
- *How are programmes and activities 'linked up'; and when should new collaborations be sought and formed?*

### 5. Evidence and Research

This Project highlights the importance of evaluation and evidence to develop and / or improve practices; contribute to resource development (in local, institutional, sector contexts); provide good data sets; and inform policy development.

However there is also a need for rigorous macro, sophisticated research to critically evaluate existing practices and structures, and to create new approaches and innovations for sustainability. Such research may focus on topics such as relationships between gender issues and structures, cultural imperialism and structures; normative constructions and diversity. It also provides evidence that transcends political ties and ideologies, and that can create opportunities for innovation, collaborative enterprise, partnerships and alternative funding.

*Finally*, it is important to state that whilst this Project provided a wonderful experience to explore European examples of practices within the Social Inclusion in Higher Education agenda, it also gave me an insight into how well Australian practices compared. In many respects, the

comparison was positive. However, the most significant issues that were revealed from the comparisons included that:

- Lots of good works are being undertaken in Australia, but in a rather ad hoc manner.
- There is a lack of nationally co-ordinated policy and practice imperatives to achieve deep social results.
- There is a paucity of research-led practices from a range of conceptual perspectives.

I believe one other point needs highlighting. Because of their histories and current demographics, it is noteworthy that none of the European countries grapple with issues in regard to their own Indigenous people. As Australian universities continue to address experiences of social exclusion in regard to *our* First Peoples, our Higher Education sector stands to also gain valuable insights and make significant changes in ways that are not discussed in Europe.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

I therefore offer the following recommendations for consideration in the Australian context.

1. That there be a deeper commitment to the Social Inclusion in Higher Education agenda in Australia that can result in long term, sustainable outcomes for people of low socio-economic backgrounds who seek and pursue a university education.
2. That there be a range of nationally convened programmes that are research-led; communicated through national, regional and local publications; and locally implemented and operated.
3. That there be a national research and development agenda established; and that transparent and competitive allocations of research funding be allocated as an ongoing learning and teaching priority; and that publications be encouraged.
4. That a national academy and resource clearing house be established for research and statistical data; and that accessible and affordable professional development programmes are offered.
5. That an annual student-led national conference about Social Inclusion in Higher Education be supported so that student voices are central to policies and practices.
6. That incentives be available for corporate partners to provide alternative funding for the Agenda.
7. That bursary schemes attached to 1st year academic success be considered by institutions as a key retention strategy; and funded to do so.
8. That targeted infrastructure funding be available to enhance experiences of place and space.
9. That community collaborations and communities of practice be encouraged to be established.
10. That students' and institutional stories be developed and promoted through web interfaces and social media to raise aspirations; celebrate success and share innovations.