

Institution: UNIVERSITY of WEST LONDON
Unit of Assessment: 25 EDUCATION
Title of case study: Widening participation policy and practice within the higher education sector in England
1. Summary of the impact <p>This body of funded research has been conducted primarily in collaboration with Professor Mary Stuart (Kingston University, and currently University of Lincoln) as Principal Investigator. The University of West London collaborators are Dr Catherine Lido and Dr Lucy Solomon. The research highlights factors negatively-impacting Widening Participation (WP) student populations in terms of: experiences, progression and academic outcomes, and evaluates/promotes key variables to support WP students in Higher Education and beyond (e.g. postgraduate study, career success). Findings from our triangulated, mixed-methods approach reveals ‘sense of fit/belonging’ and ‘connection/identification’ with the university, as predictors of students’ wellbeing, academic self-esteem and academic achievement and retention. The impact can be seen in peer-reviewed books/papers, conferences, online presence and policy/practices within HEIs.</p>
2. Underpinning research <p>This body of interdisciplinary research was the first to apply both Social Identity frameworks (Tajfel & Turner, 1974) and Cultural Capital (Bourdieu, 1973) simultaneously toward practical evaluation, assessing and promoting interventions to support WP students within undergraduate and postgraduate study, and beyond into successful career pathways.</p> <p>The trajectory of this body of research can be seen clearly in its track record of funding from 2008 onward. This was preceded by a project funded by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) entitled ‘<i>Widening participation to postgraduate study: Decisions, deterrents and creating success</i>’ (2006-07), in which Drs Lido and Solomon collaborated with the Principal Investigator. The report was well-received and led to further research, funded initially by the HEA and subsequently by ESRC and West London Lifelong Learning Network. The research programme explores the moderating and mediating factors in WP students’ achievement and experience within and beyond university, and has been disseminated via national and international conferences, workshops and peer-reviewed publications.</p> <p>Grants received during this time period include:</p> <p>Higher Education Academy (£27,581): ‘Student Diversity, extra-curricular activities and perceptions of graduate outcomes’ (2007-08). Dr Lido was Co-applicant with lead researcher Professor Mary Stuart (then Kingston University), and Professor John Field (University of Stirling). Project details, reports, and links to project outcomes can be found at: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/detail/2007/rp_2007_mary_stuart</p> <p>ESRC Research Grant (£79,814): ‘The Impact of Social Identity and Cultural Capital on Different Ethnic Student Groups at University’ (2007-09). Dr Lido was Co-applicant with lead researcher Professor Mary Stuart (Kingston University). Project details, reports and links can be found at: http://www.esrc.ac.uk/my-esrc/grants/RES-000-22-2485/read</p> <p>West London Lifelong Learning Network (£10,000): ‘Key Statistical Skills Surgeries for a Widening Participation Student Population’ (2008-09). Dr Lido was Principal Investigator. The full report can be found at: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/LLN/WL_Key_statistical_skills_surgeries_to_support_a_WP_psychology_student_pop.pdf</p>

3. References to the research

- Solomon, L. (2013). 'Pre-Arrival' pp83-103 in Morgan, M. (Ed.) *Supporting student diversity in higher education - a practical guide*. Oxford: Routledge. ISBN13: 978-0415818230.
- Stuart, M., Lido, C., Morgan, J., Solomon, L. & May, S. (2012). *Choosing a student lifestyle? Questions of taste, cultural capital and gaining a graduate job*. In Hinton-Smith, T. (Ed.) (2012). *Issues in widening participation: Casting the net wide?* London: Palgrave. pp129-145. ISBN 9780230300613.
- Stuart, M., Lido, C. & Morgan, J. (2011). *Personal stories - How students' social and cultural life histories interact with the field of higher education*. International Journal of Lifelong Education, 30(4). 489-508. ISSN 0260-1370. DOI: 10.1080/02601370.2011.588463.
- Stuart, M., Lido, C., Morgan, J., Solomon, L. & May, S. (2011). *The impact of engagement with extracurricular activities on the student experience and graduate outcomes for widening participation populations*. Active Learning in Higher Education, 12(3). 203-215. ISSN: 1469-7874. DOI: 10.1177/1469787411415081.
- McMillan, L. & Solomon, L. (2008). 'A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down', pp102-107 in Crosling, G., Thomas, L. & Heagney, M. (Eds). *Improving student retention in higher education: the role of teaching and learning*. London: Routledge. ISBN: 0-415-39920-3.
- Stuart, M., Lido, C., Morgan, S., Solomon, L., & Akroyd, K. (2008). *Widening participation to postgraduate study: Decisions, deterrents, and creating success*. HEA Published Report (April 2008). Available at: http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/York/documents/WPtoPG_Stuart.pdf

4. Details of the impact

A body of funded and published research activity by Dr Catherine Lido and Dr. Lucy Solomon, in collaboration with Professor Mary Stuart (now Vice-Chancellor, University of Lincoln), has lent itself to interventions, workshops, conference days and policy implications for the support, retention, progression and employability of widening participation students. This work began in approximately 2006, securing Higher Education Academy (HEA) funding to explore widening participation, alongside an international expedition to assess WP funding across five countries (*Action on Access* funded), and to evaluate *AimHigher* initiatives within the UK. Post-2008, the body of research took the direction of examining widening participation students before, during and after their studies, looking especially beyond classroom experiences, for a more holistic and interdisciplinary approach to diversity and inclusion in the UK.

The team's expertise in understanding the impact of gender, disability and socio-economic status (SES) were applied initially within an HEA project to widen access into postgraduate study. The project report (HEA, 2008) is: part of the HEA *EvidenceNet* resource library, has promoted access to PhD programmes particularly amongst black British students, forms part of the 'Higher Education Empirical Research Database' for informing policy and practice, and forms part of a report to the Secretary of State (BIS) for the 'One Step Beyond' initiative).

The HEA *EvidenceNet* resource library contain also the outcomes of further funded work on the importance of extracurricular activities to strengthen widening participation students' employability, as published in 'Active Learning in Higher Education' (Stuart, Lido, Morgan, Solomon, & May, 2011). This publication was listed (October 2012) as being amongst the top 20 most-accessed papers within this journal.

Impact case study (REF3b)

A further paper in the International Journal of Lifelong Education (Stuart, M., Lido & Morgan, 2011) led to a book chapter aimed at HE practitioners entitled '*Choosing a Student lifestyle? Questions of taste, cultural capital and gaining a graduate job*', published in 'Issues in Widening Participation' Hinton-Smith (ed.), 2012. According to the publisher, Palgrave MacMillan, it gives insight into the "extent to which higher education is able to act as a force for social equalization or exclusion of opportunities". This, together with Dr Solomon's chapter: 'Pre-Arrival' in the book 'Supporting Student Diversity in Higher Education - a practical guide' (Morgan, 2013) have been widely accessed by UK and international HEI practitioners.

In addition, This body of research has been disseminated at national and international conferences at: the Centre for Social Psychology in Ireland (Limerick), the Centre for Applied Positive Psychology (Warwick, UK), the HE Research & Development Association (Torquay, UK), and as part of the Higher Education Academy Seminar Series, '*Higher Education Students & Ethnicity: Lessons from Research*'. Led by Professor Stuart and Dr Lido, this workshop engaged high profile practitioners (diversity specialists, senior management and human resources contacts) with policy implications in the area of diversity and inclusion, spanning multi-disciplinary and national and international contexts.

The main narrative of this body of research stems from the team's promotion of 'belonging' and 'cultural capital "fit" measures', and interventions for students. Interventions include Dr Lido's user-friendly 'Key Statistical Skills' workshops for non-traditional students, to help overcome statistics anxiety in the social sciences, and Dr Solomon's book chapter 'spoonful of sugar' where culinary analogies in quantitative social research methods teaching are used. In 2012, the University was co-funded to host a flagship HEA conference for practitioners and students, sharing best practice and revisiting WP policy in political and economic climate for 2013. An online forum remains, hosting a library and networking space.

The research output of Lido and Solomon, informed by, and developed in the context of the University's WP agenda, has impacted other UK HEIs through dissemination of policy and practice. This is evidenced via the Higher Education Empirical Research (HEER) database, HEA EvidenceNet, BIS reports and '*Improving the student experience*' online resource.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Peer reviewed journal articles and book chapters with UK and/ or International reach:

- Solomon, L. (2013). '*Pre-Arrival*' in Morgan, M. (Ed) Supporting Student Diversity in Higher Education - a practical guide, Oxon: Routledge.
- Stuart, M., Lido, C., Morgan, J., Solomon, L. & May, S. (2012). '*Choosing a Student lifestyle? Questions of taste, cultural capital and gaining a graduate job*'. In Hinton-Smith, T. (Ed.) (2012) Issues in Widening Participation (London: Palgrave).
- Stuart, M., Lido, C. & Morgan, M. (2011). *Personal Stories - How students' social and cultural life histories interact with the field of higher education*. International Journal of Lifelong Education, 30:4 (Special Issue, Summer 2011).
- Stuart, M., Lido, C., Morgan, M., Solomon, L. & May, S. (2011). *The impact of engagement with extracurricular activities on the student experience and graduate outcomes for widening participation populations*. Active Learning in Higher Education, 12:3. (Third Issue, 2011).
- McMillan, L. & Solomon, L. (2008) '*A Spoonful of Sugar Helps the Medicine Go Down: Using Culinary Analogies in Quantitative Social Research Methods Teaching*', in Crosling, G., Thomas, L., & Heagney, M. Student Retention Programmes in Higher Education, London: Routledge.

Impact case study (REF3b)**Organisations with named contacts of users/beneficiaries to corroborate claims:**

- University of Lincoln, Professor.
- University of Kingston, Learning and Teaching Coordinator/Student Experience Manager.
- University of Kingston, Institutional Researcher, Academic Development Centre.
- Higher Education Academy, Academic Lead for Strategic Change and Internationalisation.