

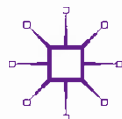


# WIDENING PARTICIPATION, HIGHER EDUCATION AND NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

*Supporting Transitions through  
Foundation Programmes*

*Edited by*

**CATHERINE A. MARSHALL,  
SAM J. NOLAN *and* DOUGLAS P. NEWTON**



# Widening Participation, Higher Education and Non-Traditional Students



Catherine A. Marshall • Sam J. Nolan • Douglas P. Newton  
Editors

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## FOREWORD

The global landscape of higher education provision is changing rapidly. Many UK universities have pursued an active internationalisation agenda while at the same time seeking to ensure fair access for under-represented groups of students. One innovative approach has been to develop an in-house foundation centre aimed at UK mature students and younger international students. This book explores the rationale behind this approach and how it fits into the landscape of national foundation year provision. The chapters describe various innovative approaches to admissions, marketing and recruitment and to the development and delivery of curricula which support students hoping to study further in a research-intensive university. The book concludes with three case studies of students who have gone on to successful careers within and outside academia.

The contributors to the book were praised for supporting good practice in the field of widening participation and social mobility in the 2012 Millburn report *University Challenge: How Higher Education Can Advance Social Mobility*. The lessons learned from this approach will interest all who work to widen access to higher education.

Professor Stuart Corbridge  
Vice Chancellor and Warden  
Durham University, UK



## PREFACE

Obstacles, real and imagined, stand between some people and higher education. Some may have left school early and/or lack the expected paper qualifications, some may have had family obligations which had priority, others may see a disability or the kind of life they live as denying them access, while others see higher education as something “people like us just do not do.” The need to include people like this, to *widen participation* in higher education, has received a lot of attention. It is variously seen as having the potential to support the national economy, to alter the nature of society, to enable equal opportunity, and to reduce alienation stemming from perceived or real exclusion.

From time to time, various strategies have been devised to encourage wider participation, and higher education institutions may be offered incentives if they increase their intake of under-represented groups, or are subject to disadvantages if they do not. But much less is available on the practicalities of making these students’ experience of higher education a successful one. This has been a personal and collective interest of the contributors to this book. Bringing together the various strands of interest has allowed us to describe the endeavour, and how the students’ needs may be met as they follow an introductory, *foundation year*, a preliminary year, or Year 0, in a university, preparing them to begin an undergraduate degree. During this year, students’ knowledge and skills are refreshed, updated, and extended, and they are inducted into ways of learning that are very different from those they met in school.

In what follows, we sometimes refer to these foundation year students as “non-traditional” students. They comprise those who are subject to

obstacles like those mentioned earlier, and they generally would find direct entry on a degree course of their choice unlikely, fruitless, or too daunting. Many could be described as “mature” students, largely from the UK, who are older than the majority of undergraduates commonly found in the UK’s higher education institutions; that is to say, they are over 21 years old, and often much older, often having had paid employment in the intervening years between school and the foundation year. Such students may feel there is or has been more than one obstacle between them and higher education. Others, described here as “international,” are from all parts of the world, particularly the Far East, and tend to be younger and lack the paper qualifications required for direct entry to a particular degree course. The term “non-traditional student” is a wide and somewhat vague one and can vary with context and cohort. We have indicated what it commonly means for us, but readers will be able to relate and interpret our accounts to suit their own contexts and their own students and, hopefully, find them of some practical use.

CAM, SJN, DPN,  
Durham University, 2016

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All editors and contributors are currently based at Durham University, except Sarah Learmonth, who is at Cambridge University.



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## Barriers to Accessing Higher Education

*Catherine A. Marshall*

### CAPITAL, HABITUS AND FIELD

Bourdieu's work explored the interaction between three concepts—capital, habitus and field—which he used to explain the maintenance of a stratified society. He expanded the notion of capital, arguing that it was not just tangible economic capital which could be used to account for the structure of society in terms of which individuals or groups held power and status, but that so could other forms of capital, which he referred to as cultural capital and social capital (1986). He used the term cultural capital to refer to those social assets which support social mobility beyond economic means including aspects such as style of speech, dress, ownership of books or pictures, or knowledge of types of music and art forms; his term social capital referred to the social networks and connections within a group of people. His view was that there was misrecognition of the value of different forms of culture as being something intrinsic to that form (e.g. piece of music, artwork or literature), whereas in fact it is arbitrary and defined by the dominant group. He proposed that in the education system it is those aspects of culture deemed worthy by the dominant group which are

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valued and studied (1976). This consequently means that individuals from the dominant group will have an advantage in education as their familial background will have allowed them to develop a habitus which values and leads to the acquisition of the cultural capital required to do well in education (Moore, 2004). Bourdieu's theory was that the different forms of capital were convertible; for example, cultural capital can be converted to educational qualifications leading to greater economic capital, and in the same way that children can inherit their wealth from their parents, so too can cultural and social capital be transmitted within the family (1986). In this way, those groups with the cultural resources, particularly with regard to education, use them to maintain their status (Swartz, 1997).

The concept of habitus was developed by Bourdieu to describe a "system of shared social dispositions and cognitive structures which generates perceptions, appreciations and actions" (1984, p. 279). These are the dispositions inculcated in an individual by the environment and culture in which one grows up, which Bourdieu describes as unconscious internalisation of the chances of success of an individual from a particular class. The habitus produces certain actions and attitudes within particular fields, with Bourdieu describing fields as structured spaces with varying degrees of autonomy which produce their own values and behavioural constraints that are relatively independent from other fields (Naidoo, 2004). Bourdieu uses the term "field" to describe the setting in which the interactions of capital are sited; the arena where the social relationships are structured in terms of power. An individual's role in a particular field is determined by the cultural capital one holds in that field and how well one's habitus is adapted to it (Bourdieu, 1993).

It has been argued (e.g. Archer, 1970; Jenkins, 1992) that Bourdieu's ideas are particular to French society. However, Robbins (2004) argues that his ideas are transcultural and transferable and that there has been a failure to engage with Bourdieu's ideas in the UK. This chapter considers the effect of capital and habitus of individuals in the fields of formal education in the UK.

## WHICH GROUPS ARE UNDER-REPRESENTED?

The generally accepted consensus is that non-traditional students in HE include "women, ethnic minorities, mature and working class students and students with disabilities" providing one side of a dichotomy with "a privileged minority of young, white, Western men without disabilities