

**Report to the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister  
from the Advocate for Access to Education**

**'The Hughes Report'**

**July 2011**

## 1. Introduction

In December 2010 I was appointed by the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister to be the government's Advocate for Access to Education. Over the first 6 months of 2011, I have visited schools, sixth form and further education colleges and universities throughout England and in Northern Ireland to meet students, other young people, parents, teachers, advisers and many others to discuss with them the new system for financing higher education and the best ways of ensuring maximum access to all colleges and universities by all appropriately qualified students. Many individuals and organisations have written and spoken to me, and come to meetings, and all their enthusiasm and input has been much appreciated. It was clear from the beginning how keen people were for the government to lead changes in policy and practice to deliver improved access and widened participation in our colleges and universities. There is no shortage of ideas, and no shortage of relevant experience and good practice. My task has been to try to distil this and come up with recommendations consistent with the brief given by the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister. At the end of this work I went back to some of the young people who had contributed in the previous six months, and asked them questions on some of the issues which had arisen most clearly around the country, and which were most influential on my recommendations. The answers and opinions were encouragingly consistent with many of the conclusions I had reached on the challenges which those wanting to widen access and participation have to meet.

Although the opinions collected came from the north, midlands, south-east and south-west of England, and from Northern Ireland, and from rural, suburban and urban areas alike, for me the tests of success remain the same. Will youngsters brought up in council flats just off the Old Kent Road in Bermondsey in my south London constituency think of further and higher education and training after school-leaving age as something more and more appropriate and suitable for them? And can they - or the youngster from Bootle or Bodmin or Belfast, and their parents - be persuaded to think of the financial implications of going to college or university not in terms of debts, fees and loans which are concepts which can put you off higher education before you start, but as a cost you will be able to afford after graduation or qualification, and the advantages in employment, money and experience it will bring you?

This report does not seek to be a heavyweight academic thesis reviewing all the source documents on these issues in this and comparable countries abroad. Equally, it does not ignore important recent reports and other documents which form part of the immediate background and context of this work. Among these are, of course, Lord Browne's Independent Review into Higher Education Funding and Student Finance (October 2010), and the reports by Alan Milburn's Panel on Fair Access to the Professions (July 2009) and by the Sutton Trust 'Responding to the new landscape for university access' (December 2010); the Review of Vocational Education by Professor Alison Wolf (March 2011); the reports by Sir Martin Harris 'What can be done to widen access to highly selective universities?' (May

2010) and by the Higher Education and Funding Council for England (HEFCE) 'Trends in young participation in higher education: core results for England' (January 2010) and the government's social mobility strategy 'Opening doors, breaking barriers: a strategy for social mobility' (April 2011). I have also, of course, taken account of the very recent Higher Education White Paper, 'Students at the Heart of the System', published in June 2011 by the UK government. Where my recommendations relate specifically to higher education, I submit them both in their own right and also as a response to the consultation on this white paper.

I have also not forgotten the huge importance of making sure that our colleges and universities are equally accessible to people who didn't go on to further or higher education (FE or HE) at 16 or 18, and who would benefit from returning to education at any age after that. In this context, the announced change of policy which means that from 2012 there will be no upfront payments for tuition for students, spending more than a quarter of their time studying for a first degree is a huge encouragement to wider participation. It is now an equal priority for colleges, universities, government and the rest of us to succeed in spreading to people over the age of 20, 30 or 40 the message of the good things which further and higher education offer and the benefits they bring.

The report of course is written in times that are economically constrained for public expenditure. It is not therefore full of recommendations which require the spending of extra public money. This is not because I am against higher public investment but because the parameters of public policy have been decided on for the next four years and I was asked to make recommendations within current budgetary parameters. Some recommendations could nonetheless benefit from additional or transferred public investment as opposed to relying only on investment from other sources; I hope government will look constructively and imaginatively on these suggestions.

Since January, I have not been silent or passive, simply collecting information and saving all my thoughts until presenting them together six months later. Some issues demanded much more urgent action and advice than that.

In February, I made recommendations to the Business Secretary and the Universities Minister on how they could toughen up their guidance to the Director and Office of Fair Access (OFFA) so that access agreements for 2012-13 were more effective in the future than they have been in the past. Given that yearly tuition of £6000 or more can only be charged from next year if an access agreement is approved, then under present legislation this is one of the best levers for improving access and widening participation.

When I accepted the job, the government was considering what support to give 16-19 year olds on low incomes studying or planning to continue in education or training post-16. The decision to end the previous arrangements for the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) was taken in 2010 and caused significant concern. Post-16 study is crucial to ensuring that young people gain the skills they need to progress successfully either to higher

education or to employment, and I was determined to ensure that young people should not be denied those opportunities because of their financial circumstances. We should never forget that the majority of young people in England do not choose to go to university but to take alternative forms of education and training. I submitted a further interim report in February this year with recommendations for a scheme to replace EMA in England. I am grateful that this was seriously considered in government and was followed in March by an announcement of a significant increase by the Department of Education in the amount available for discretionary support, as part of a new 16-19 Bursary Scheme, to be introduced from 2011/12. The 16-19 Bursary is available to 16-19 year olds whichever post-16 education or training route they choose to follow, with a particular emphasis on support for the most vulnerable. The Department also recognised the importance of continuing to provide financial support for those students already in receipt of EMA.

The third immediate challenge was to start turning round the off-putting debate which presented the new payment system for university courses as one which could not be afforded by anybody from lower or even middle incomes, or from backgrounds where going to university was not the tradition. The new scheme from 2012 is clearly more progressive than the present one because the cost of each course to the student will depend entirely on that student's ability to pay once they are a graduate. Given this, getting out into the public domain accurate facts, accurate figures, accurate costs and accurate calculations - and best information about the potential benefits in income terms of acquiring additional qualifications after the age of 16 - were and are overriding objectives. I therefore submitted a third report at the beginning of May recommending action that needed to be taken immediately to communicate messages about the new university funding arrangements due to start in 2012. There is a collective national interest and responsibility in the six months from July to December this year in making sure that all school, college and sixth form students and all other adults thinking of becoming university students for the first time next year, and their families and teachers, must have accurate and accessible information and encouragement rather than discouragement now. I am grateful that my central recommendation has been shared in government, and that as I suggested the principal responsibility for formulating and communicating messages about the cost to a student of university education from next year is now in the hands of an independent taskforce, not ministers or civil servants. It is great that Martin Lewis of MoneySavingExpert.com has been willing to chair and lead this group, and that a recent past president of the National Union of Students (NUS) is involved as vice-chair. Going further, it is imperative that, from now on, the messages that are given or sent out to students are formulated not just by communications or financial experts but also by students.

As I put together my three interim reports, and now this final report, I have benefited greatly from the support of my parliamentary team, led by George Turner. Ministers and civil servants have willingly given information and advice and responded to my ideas as have friends and colleagues, sixth form, college and university students and their parents and teachers in my own constituency and around the country, and hundreds of others. I give

particular thanks to Ryan Wain, 2010-2011 president of KCL students union and his sabbatical colleagues. The wisdom and help of all these people has been invaluable.

Just a few other introductory comments.

First, like everybody else, I have come to this subject very much aware of the great efforts that many universities and other HE institutions have made to widen access and participation in recent years, a report from HEFCE confirms that between 2005 and 2010 there was a rise of 32% in the participation rate of students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. Some chancellors, vice-chancellors, principals and heads of colleges are driven by these objectives as much as by anything else, but the huge progress of many has been balanced by the disappointing progress of some of the most academic and prestigious universities in the land. Sadly, access to some of these universities from non-traditional groups has not widened to anything like the same amount as other universities over recent years. That is simply unacceptable. Without undermining the national and international reputation for excellence that we all want our universities to continue to hold, all universities must become equally accessible to all equally bright students, and must be able to show year by year reductions in the biases of wealth and privilege which have for too long given too many advantages to small minorities rather than to people from the rest of our communities. Some of my recommendations would result in tougher conditions on universities if they are to retain the right to charge more for tuition. They also seek to address head on the question of how to make sure the intakes of our universities do not just reflect academic achievement up to the date of the exams taken before admission, but also the potential of a student to gain maximum added value out of the academic experience or to reach the highest level of attainment by the end of it.

I support strongly policies which encourage the best universities in the land to take students who have not as they leave school achieved their maximum potential but without reducing the chances of those who are already academic high-flyers. And I underline that there are particular courses which need particular attention if we are to widen access: medicine and dentistry, veterinary science and architecture, for example, require an initial period of study much longer than three years. Because of the accumulated costs of the extra years at university for students of these subjects, and any others requiring longer initial courses, there is a particular danger that these subjects become overwhelmingly the preserve either of the children of those already working in these professions, or of those who do not have to worry about money when they are applying to university.

Second, my report is of course addressing the challenge in England. But there are equal challenges in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In this United Kingdom there has long been a tradition of people living in one of the four home countries and then going to university in another. I did just this myself. Tuition costs are now devolved business in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland; I make no criticism at all of that. In recent weeks people will have heard and seen the announcement by the new Scottish administration of their plans to charge students coming to Scotland from elsewhere in the UK £9000 fees

while charging no tuition fees to students whose home is in Scotland. The Welsh Assembly government has a subsidy arrangement which keeps costs down for students living in Wales but studying elsewhere, and the Northern Ireland Executive has said that there will be no large increases in tuition fees in 2012. Ministers in Whitehall, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast must of course be free to make their own recommendation to their own parliaments or assemblies. But there are foreseen and potentially unforeseen consequences of these decisions for the cross-border flow of students. A structured way of planning for and dealing with this is and will remain very important, particularly from the perspective of those living and teaching outside England.

Third, I am very conscious that choices made at 14, 16 and 18 should not be choices for life. I am convinced that the best sort of education system is one where school leavers are valued equally whether they choose to go immediately into work, or into training or apprenticeships, or to college, sixth form or sixth form college and then to university. But we need a much better system of sharing the information about the continuing choices that are available to people in life which could lead them to apprenticeships or further training, to technical or academic qualifications or to a part time or full time degree.

Fourth, it is very obvious to those in the know but all too rarely stated in any wider public debate that one of the best ways of opening the doors of our universities and recruiting for degree students from all backgrounds in this country is by ensuring that FE colleges are recognised in every community as the further education service for all the community, fully integrated with schools on the one hand and with university and the world of work on the other. These colleges should be the convenient local doorways through which everybody feels comfortable to go. I have seen some brilliant examples of these colleges around the country, and pay tribute to their energy, effectiveness, enthusiasm and success. For many people from families, schools and communities where university has never featured on their radar, the best way to full-time or part-time higher education and a degree is to start at a local FE college. Everywhere and everybody benefits from colleges like these. That is also why communicating effectively with mature students and harder to reach groups is so important and why older students must never be forgotten as a target audience for all this work.

And fifth. It is well known that people from schools and colleges with generally lower academic results, from poorer families and families where there is no precedent or tradition of going to university and from areas where there is no general tradition of further study after school-leaving age are hugely underrepresented at our universities. Meanwhile, those from families with a tradition of university or the professions or both, with higher family incomes, and having received private education are generally much more likely to gain university places. Statistics from HEFCE tell us that whilst 57% of young people from the most advantaged areas will go on to Higher Education, despite recent positive trends still only 19% of young people from the least advantaged areas will do the same.

Some English universities, particularly some of the most famous and prestigious ones, have rightly been criticised in recent years for their lack of progress in widening access to these continuingly underrepresented groups. They have replied by saying that the problem cannot easily be resolved by them, but is only really able to be dealt with by families, and primary and secondary schools. The truth is that every level of the education system can take steps which will widen participation and improve access, as can others. Hence, this report does not just make recommendations to and about higher education institutions. If this country is going to right this continuing wrong and inequality, and it is clear that it is in the national interest that we should, then all must take their responsibilities – and none must try to pretend that they can do little or nothing to help.

## **2. The approach of this report**

Access to higher education, to further education or to work-based learning does not start with the applications and admissions process. Access starts much earlier, through the hopes and dreams of children.

From the age of 13, young people are presented with a huge range of choices and need to make several key decisions before they leave school and go on to further education, employment, training or higher education. Each decision influences the path they will take to reach their desired goal.

As does the government's social mobility strategy, this report takes a comprehensive, life cycle view of access. The general approach of the report is to propose a series of measures and interventions for promoting access to education which support the decisions and aspirations of young people from primary school through to university or college admission and on to employment, and which continue to prompt in adulthood those who did not have or did not take the opportunities which post-school education or training offer. These interventions will be made with and for parents and guardians, and by civil society groups, schools, businesses, colleges and universities. If we want the best futures for our children and adults and consider social mobility, widening participation and access to further and higher education a priority then everybody must play their role.

## **3. Summary of recommendations**

The summary of recommendations is ordered by the institutions towards which they are directed: schools and colleges, the Department for Education, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, universities and other higher education institutions (HEIs) and regulators.

### **Recommendations for schools**

- Primary schools should as a minimum arrange for 10 and 11 year olds a careers event or events where parents, family members and others come in to talk to pupils about their jobs and work, and give pupils the opportunity to ask questions about how to obtain and qualify for them.
- To coordinate career and access activities each school and college should have one lead member of staff responsible for all policy, activity and coordination of career information, advice and guidance in the school or college – obviously working with the chosen careers service provider. Another and different person should be the lead member of staff specifically responsible to ensure maximum access to further and higher education, training and apprenticeships. These need not be full time employees. But they should be the first point of contact in the school and college for universities, schools, businesses and charities to coordinate activities related to

careers advice and access to further and higher education within the school and college. There should be regular training available for these members of staff.

- Schools should continue to build links with local businesses to provide as many students with good work experience placements before the compulsory school leaving age. However these placements should not be a general requirement for all students for two weeks in July. A young person who wishes to go for work experience and for whom a good and appropriate placement can be found should be allowed to do so at any point from the age of 14 and placements should be coordinated in conjunction with the all-age careers service.
- Work experience schemes for the professions like that run by the Social Mobility Foundation (SMF) should be encouraged, expanded and offered to as wide a range of young people and schools and colleges as possible.
- All secondary schools and colleges should urgently develop networks of their former students who are willing to be contacted by current students. Schools should also actively arrange for former students of their school or other schools in the area to come back into school and work with current students to advise and answer questions about their career, their studies or life in general after school or college.
- Schools should supplement their networks of former students by drawing on national programmes such as Speakers for Schools, an organisation which finds inspiring and motivational speakers for schools and colleges, Future First, which helps schools bring former students back into schools, and by encouraging young people to use services such as Horse's Mouth, an online mentoring network.
- All schools should have events for parents and carers dedicated to careers and further and higher education, which bring together careers professionals, parents and students to discuss career, education and training options. This should start to happen at the latest in year nine, and after parents and young people have received information guides about future options in education, work and training.
- Schools should consider introducing graduation ceremonies in schools for all students when they leave compulsory education.

## Recommendations for the Department for Education

- The Department for Education should continuously consider how it can best support schools and colleges in their access activities. It should consider disseminating information and best practice through websites or information packs, and regularly supply updated contacts for national charities and initiatives which help with access activities. It should consider an annual paper and web-based guide to explain some of the easiest and most cost-effective ways of organising access activities, such as building up a contact base of former students.
- At the age of 13 and 14 (in English schools year nine), every student should have made available to them information on all future pathways through education to employment, including clear information about which types of careers different educational choices can lead to. The information should take the form of a full guide to the types of qualification required to reach the next stage in their education or career. The guide should not just focus on the professions or higher education; it should detail the opportunities and benefits of further education, higher education, apprenticeships, training and employment after school-leaving age. Most importantly, it should also detail the costs and financing arrangements available for all routes of apprenticeship, training and study. The guide should also contain a list of independent resources available to young people to help them with their decisions.
- The government should act urgently to guarantee face to face careers advice for all young people in schools. Government should also guarantee careers information, advice and guidance up to 17 and then 18 in line with the increase in the compulsory schooling age.
- The government should urgently publish a plan of how it intends to maintain the expertise of current careers professionals between the closures of local authority careers services in 2011 and the beginning of the all age careers service in 2012.
- In the context of the current DfE review of Personal, Social and Health Education, students between the ages of 14 and 16 should be trained in basic financial management. This is to prepare them for adult life generally and also for education, training and work in particular, and importantly to support their decisions as to which options they will choose after the age of 16. The government should work with the Personal Finance Education Group (PFEG) to agree how financial education should best be integrated into the provision of Personal, Social and Health education.

- The government should review the distribution criteria for all financial support for young people in education up to the age of 18.

### **Recommendations for the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills**

- The government should consider with Higher Education Institutions how funding can be secured for the development of a national programme of access and foundation courses, particularly to promote widening participation in the professions.
- The government should consider the reclassification of access courses in FE colleges so that they will be eligible for funding for students over the age of 24 in the future.
- Government should monitor closely the implementation of the proposal to allow universities to discount students who achieve AAB at A-Level from their quota of places to ensure that it does not conflict with actions and policies to facilitate contextual admissions.
- The majority of the national scholarships available through the national scholarship scheme should be allocated directly to each non-fee-paying English school and college for students to use at the university of their choice.
- From 2013 national scholarships should only be available for payment of accommodation and living costs, unless the student expressly requests the scholarship for fee waiver instead. This will leave open the option of a fee waiver if this is what really motivates the student, but normally the money will be used for the living costs which are of more immediate student concern.
- The government should reserve some scholarships from the national scholarship scheme for courses which are linked to employment in the region of the university after the completion of the degree course. These scholarships should only be given to universities which raise funds to supplement the national scholarship scheme.
- The government should develop an arrangement where all higher education institutions can recognise credit for coursework completed in a different HEI and which will allow students to transfer between HEIs during courses and finish their degree at a different institution from the one where they started.
- Higher education ministers in Whitehall, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast and their officials should set up a UK higher education coordinating committee to meet regularly and in public to receive reports, resolve any cross-border difficulties and, where appropriate, make recommendations.

## Recommendations to universities and other higher education institutions

- All universities should follow the model of Access HE and collaborate on a regional level on access initiatives. The goal should be for every school and college in England to be formally linked to at least one higher education institution by the end of 2011/12 through a regional consortium like Access HE. In future years the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) should make it a compulsory requirement for every university which wants to charge above the £6000 threshold to be an active member of a regional collaborative access body. As these regional groups develop, their activities should be monitored by OFFA.
- All higher education institutions recruiting for longer courses and the organisations associated with these professions should have particular programmes aimed at widening access to these courses and the HEIs should have particular arrangements for them set out in their access agreements. OFFA should also report separately on best practice in these courses and on progress in widening access to them.
- To help students with disabilities who become ineligible for incapacity benefit if they are engaged in more than 21 hours of taught study, higher education institutions should make sure that all access and foundation courses are available on a part time basis.
- All higher education institutions should advertise all their bursaries and scholarships together, and with details of the national scholarship scheme, in one annual publication and on one common website page, and have a bursaries and scholarships officer with responsibility for publicising all bursaries and scholarships and answering all questions about them.
- Colleges, universities and groups of universities should form partnerships with faith, cultural and sports organisations, supermarkets and shopping centres, transport companies, and businesses and the trade unions to maximise the promotion of opportunities for further and higher education inside and outside school gates, places of worship, sports clubs and venues, and shops, on buses, cabs and trains, and in the workplace.

## **Recommendations for regulators (OFFA and Ofsted) and the Independent Taskforce on Student Finance Communications**

- To ensure that schools and colleges are taking access seriously, activities related to career development and access to further and higher education should be part of the school inspection process, carried out by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted).
- Ofsted should make use of destination data in its school inspection programme, and should investigate cases where a school or college has a particularly poor record of access to further and higher education, and where a high proportion of students leave school without moving on into education, employment or training. Follow-up action should always include consideration of formally linking the school or college to a university in the region to build their widening participation capacity.
- All higher education institutions should follow the model of Access HE and collaborate on a regional level on access initiatives. The goal should be for every school and college in England to be formally linked to at least one Higher Education Institution by the end of 2011/12 through a regional consortium like Access HE. In future years the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) should make it a compulsory requirement for every HEI which wants to charge above the £6000 threshold to be an active member of a regional collaborative access body. As these regional groups develop their activities should be monitored by OFFA.
- The Independent Taskforce on Student Finance Communication should be continued on a permanent basis. The taskforce should work with a wider group which should be established and which can engage with all relevant organisations on the communication of all aspects of university education. At least half of this group should be young people, either recent graduates or current school, sixth form, college or university students, who could be asked to serve for between one and three years.
- Two well-known people in each region should be appointed as access advocates by the Independent Taskforce on Student Finance Communication each year, particularly to work in the key enrolment and application period from September to January.
- All higher education institutions recruiting for longer courses and the organisations associated with these professions should have particular programmes aimed at widening access to these courses and the HEIs should have particular arrangements for them set out in their access agreements. OFFA should report separately on best

practice in these courses and on progress in widening access to them. This work should be in addition to the use of access courses referred to in recommendation 22.

- The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) should have student representatives on its board and require each annual access agreement submitted to be accompanied by a commentary from the institution's student body, and should assess higher education institutions' annual progress on access and widening participation by measuring results against objective benchmarks rather than by statements of future intent. The 2004 Higher Education Act would need to be amended if financial penalties were to be imposed on the failure to meet more objective criteria. OFFA should also publish access agreements which HEIs have submitted and which do not reach the required standard for approval of their higher tuition. OFFA should be given sufficient capacity so that it can investigate complaints against higher education institutions which are not honouring their access agreements and take action to rectify this.
- It should be a requirement for all universities wishing to charge above the £6000 threshold to demonstrate that their admission process is led by trained professionals. OFFA should commission Supporting Professionalism in Admissions to propose best practice in admissions processes for fair access which should then be added to requirements for access agreements in subsequent years. These proposals could cover interviews, aptitude tests and other admissions practices.

#### **4. Primary schools**

It is never too early for people to start thinking about future careers and educational opportunities. Children in their last year of primary school can be inspired, and can form their first clear impressions of the world of work and further study.

The importance of this has been recognised by the Department for Education which has published a research report on career related activities at key stage 2. This is available on the Department for Education's website.

In some schools children in the last year of primary school have been given real work experience, sometimes for a whole five day week. For young people who live in households where nobody is in paid work this was particularly useful. However it must be recognised that this type of scheme requires particular dedication from employers and would be difficult to deliver nationally.

In the US there is an annual 'Take our Daughters and Sons to Work Day', and this is catching on here with many workplaces running similar programmes. The stated aims of the day are to show children 'The value of their education, helping them discover the power and possibilities associated with a balanced work and family life, and providing them an opportunity to share how they envision the future and begin steps toward their end goals'. The US programme is aimed at young people between the ages of 8-18 and has over 35 million participants in over 3 million workplaces each year. Their website can be found at <http://www.daughtersandsonstowork.org>.

It is clear that primary schools can play an important role in motivating children to think about their future career and start working towards achieving their dreams. In the Bermondsey school where I am chair of governors, St James' C of E Primary School, children are already taken to visits to local employers which range from large accountancy firms to public services such as the police and the fire brigade. The school has formed several partnerships with local businesses where children take part in projects which relate to those businesses, for example designing a CD with a local music company. Projects done in school can also be linked to the real world. For example a recent class project on newspapers invited in a local journalist to talk about how real newspapers are made.

Universities also have played their role. The Stimulus project at Cambridge University sends undergraduates to assist in primary schools as classroom helpers. This exposes young people to university students as well as proving to be an excellent means of encouraging university students to think about careers in teaching.

It is right that initiatives of this kind are started by individual schools using the resources available to them in their area. However all primary schools should be encouraged to arrange some sort of careers-related activities with their pupils in year six.

## **Recommendation 1**

**Primary schools should as a minimum arrange for 10 and 11 year olds a careers event or events where parents, family members and others come in to talk to pupils about their jobs and work, and give pupils the opportunity to ask questions about how to obtain and qualify for them.**

## **5. Middle schools, secondary schools and colleges**

It is currently the policy of this government to interfere as little as possible in the day to day management of schools. This is welcome. Under previous governments, many heads complained that they were far too often handed down orders from the Department for Education. This stifled innovation. So I am not recommending a scheme of action points which schools must execute, but rather an outline of types of activity which schools should run to provide the best encouragement, support and motivation for young people and help them most with their future progression into education and employment. In this context the government can take on a powerful role as a facilitator.

To carry out these activities schools should use all the resources they have available locally through building partnerships with businesses and public and voluntary sector organisations, as well as participating in national initiatives, some of which are highlighted in this report.

## **Recommendation 2**

**The Department for Education should continuously consider how it can best support schools and colleges in their access activities. It should consider disseminating information and best practice through websites or information packs, and regularly supply updated contacts for national charities and initiatives which help with access activities. It should consider an annual paper and web-based guide to explain some of the easiest and most cost-effective ways of organising access activities, such as building up a contact base of former students.**

### **5a) Information, advice and guidance for students**

A key part of successful progression from school, to college, work or university is choosing the appropriate courses. Today there are well over 4000 different qualifications a young person can take between the ages of 14 and 18 and literally millions of combinations of qualifications a young person could take before they finish school or college.

Without clear information and guidance from employers and universities about what courses are needed to reach a particular goal there is little chance for young people to make the right decisions about where they will go. Some universities have now made clear that certain combinations of subjects are much more likely to unlock the door to higher education than others. Dr Alison Wolf's recent Review of Vocational Education highlighted that many qualifications have little value to the labour market.

However in the past the way school league tables were constructed has meant that young people have not always been encouraged to take the courses which lead to the best chances of progression to further education, higher education or employment.

Through changes in the way league tables are compiled, the government is already taking action to combat perverse incentives in the system. Schools will have a duty, from September 2012, to secure access for their pupils to independent, impartial careers guidance. For the first time, the government will publish information on the destinations to which students progress when they leave school or college. This, together with information regarding the courses which each university prefers its applicants to have taken, will make the system more transparent.

All of these initiatives should be welcomed, but to make sure that young people obtain the maximum benefit from these changes strong support through information, advice and guidance from an early age is required.

A key point for decisions on a young person's future is the age of 13 and 14, when a young person starts to make the choices of courses influenced by the qualifications they hope for and the careers they plan. There is a clear consensus among professionals and many of the young people I spoke to that the first comprehensive information, advice and guidance on further and higher education opportunities should be provided at the age of 13 and 14 at the latest.

This guide could take the form of a 'What shall I do now?' guide in hard copy and electronic form. There should be common content across England, but ideally with regional supplements to deal with regional differences in education, apprenticeship, training and work offers, opportunities, benefits and costs.

Currently a number of local authorities produce 14-19 prospectuses. The 'What shall I do now?' guide should build on these for its regional supplements.

### **Recommendation 3**

**At the age of 13 and 14 (in English schools year nine), every student should have made available to them information on all future pathways through education to employment, including clear information about which types of careers different educational choices can lead to. The information should take the form of a full guide to the types of qualification required to reach the next stage in their education or career. The guide should not just focus on the professions or higher education; it should detail the opportunities and benefits of further education, higher education, apprenticeships, training and employment after school-leaving age. Most importantly, it should also detail the costs and financing arrangements available for all routes of apprenticeship, training**

**and study. The guide should also contain a list of independent resources available to young people to help them with their decisions.**

Once young people have received clear and comprehensive information on the future career options, then if they are to make the most of all the information available to them they will need professional careers advice in order to help them interpret the information and to answer any questions they may have. The government is currently undertaking a major restructuring of careers advice through the introduction of a National Careers Service and introducing a requirement on schools to secure access to independent, impartial careers guidance for their students. (The government intends to consult on extending the duty to students up to the age of 18 in schools and in colleges in due course). Both of these developments are extremely positive and widely welcome. Schools and colleges will in future have to make arrangements for their students to receive independent, impartial guidance. They will be free to determine how best to do this, including through working with external providers of professional careers guidance. This should work well, particularly when the system settles down. The new arrangements will be in part the product of the Education Bill, currently being considered in the House of Lords.

However, there is a very widespread view among most past and present school students who I spoke to around the country that young people overwhelmingly value receiving careers information, advice and guidance from another person - in person. Current government plans do not guarantee this and so there is in addition very serious and widespread concern that students will suffer accordingly. There is also considerable concern in schools and colleges, among young people, teachers and career professionals that the new system will not provide the comprehensive service needed in time for those needing professional help with career choices in 2011-12.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**The government should act urgently to guarantee face to face careers advice for all young people in schools. Government should also guarantee careers information, advice and guidance up to 17 and then 18 in line with the increase in the compulsory schooling age.**

There is widespread concern amongst careers professionals and in schools that the lack of a structured transition between the old and new arrangements for providing careers advice may lead to a loss of human capital as careers advisors and careers professionals leave the profession between the closure of local authority careers services in 2011 and the new all age career service beginning in 2012.

#### **Recommendation 5**

**The government should urgently publish a plan of how it intends to maintain the expertise of current careers professionals between the closures of local authority careers services in 2011 and the beginning of the all age-careers service in 2012.**

## **5b) Information, advice and guidance to parents and carers**

Informing parents and carers should be considered equally important as informing the young people. It is often parents and carers who will have as great an influence on the decisions young people take as their school or their peers. Therefore, at the same time that young people are given the 'What shall I do now?' guide, complementary information should be provided for parents and carers 'What should they do now?' - so that they can understand as much as possible the financial implications for the young person and for the teenager's family of an apprenticeship, a degree or going to work, and have a better appreciation of the types of choices that the young people are making. The school should then facilitate discussions between school, parent and student to make sure that all the material is understood and that decisions are made with a firm grasp of the facts.

### **Recommendation 6**

**All schools should have events for parents and carers dedicated to careers and further and higher education, which bring together careers professionals, parents and students to discuss career, education and training options. This should start to happen at the latest in year nine, and after parents and young people have received information guides about future options in education, work and training.**

### **Recommendation 7**

**To coordinate career and access activities each school and college should have one lead member of staff responsible for all policy, activity and coordination of career information, advice and guidance in the school or college – obviously working with the chosen careers service provider. A different person should be the lead member of staff specifically responsible to ensure maximum access to further and higher education, training and apprenticeships. These need not be full time employees. But they should be the first point of contact in the school and college for universities, schools, businesses and charities to coordinate activities related to careers advice and access to further and higher education within the school and college. There should be regular training available for these members of staff.**

As the government has less involvement in the day to day running of schools and colleges, it does need to take more care that students are not disadvantaged by poor school performance. This is as true in work to maximise access to further and higher education as it is in enforcing academic standards. The government has already signalled its intention to raise the threshold for failing schools considerably by raising the threshold below which a school is categorised as failing from 30% to 50% of students gaining 5 good GCSEs. The DfE is also planning to introduce 'destination statistics' for schools – to demonstrate where young people go after they leave school.

## **Recommendation 8**

**To ensure that schools and colleges are taking access seriously, activities related to career development and access to further and higher education should be part of the school inspection process, carried out by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted).**

## **Recommendation 9**

**Ofsted should make use of destination data in its school inspection programme, and should investigate cases where a school or college has a particularly poor record of access to further and higher education, and where a high proportion of students leave school without moving on into education, employment or training. Follow-up action should always include consideration of formally linking the school or college to a university in the region to build their widening participation capacity.**

### **5c) Work experience**

Work experience can be a valuable means for young people to understand more about a possible career path and give them the opportunity to come into contact with real people working in a particular sector and ask them about their career. Young people increasingly rate the potential usefulness of work experience and believe that good work experience can make all the difference to the success of their application when they are competing later for training, jobs or courses of study. If done well, work experience can be a highly motivating experience, but the quality of work experience varies widely. Some young people secure a work experience placement in career areas they wish to pursue, with organisations which are serious about providing them with a useful experience, while others spend a week in a location in which they have little interest and which has little interest in them.

Dr Alison Wolf's recent Review of Vocational Education suggested that work experience should be focused on providing high quality placements after 16. There certainly are some extremely good programmes which provide this kind of placement, such as the programme run by the Social Mobility Foundation (SMF, see below).

Health and safety and safeguarding issues have sometimes made work experience placements difficult. The new health and safety guidelines to business should make it easier for employers to take on work experience students.

#### **Recommendation 10**

**Schools should continue to build links with local businesses to provide as many students with good work experience placements before compulsory school –leaving age. However these placements should not be a general requirement for all students for two weeks in July. A young person who wishes to go for work experience and for whom a good and appropriate placement can be found should be allowed to do so at any point from the age of 14 and placements should be coordinated in conjunction with the all-age careers service.**

#### **Recommendation 11**

**Work experience schemes for the professions like that run by the Social Mobility Foundation should be encouraged, expanded and offered to as wide a range of young people and schools and colleges as possible.**

The Social Mobility Foundation was founded in 2005 with the objective of making a real improvement to social mobility for young people from low-income backgrounds. As part of this, the Aspiring Professionals Programme (APP) aims to support high achieving sixth-formers from low-income backgrounds into the top universities and professions by replicating the informal network of support often experienced by more privileged students.

This is provided through a combination of mentoring, summer internships, support throughout the university application process and skills development both before and during university. This support helps to empower these students with the knowledge, experience and skills to make informed decisions about Higher Education and future careers. At the same time it provides top universities and businesses with wider access to the brightest and most talented young people.

#### Mentoring

Every APP student is given a mentor from their preferred profession who can provide them with knowledge and advice about pursuing a career in that sector. The student and mentor commit to communicating at least once a week for a year, normally through email but also through face-to-face meetings.

#### Internships

Short 'work-taster' internships, typically between 2 and 3 weeks, are offered to students during their summer before entering Year 13 to give them a structured insight into their preferred profession.

#### Skills Development

The programme runs various skills workshops to develop skills for gaining employment, including CV writing, interview technique and networking. The programme also offers support to prepare students for university, such as helping them understand the financial support available, followed by further career-related advice during university.

#### University Application Support

APP Students are also provided with support during their university application process, such as providing advice on writing a UCAS personal statement, interview technique and aptitude tests, and are offered workshops to help explain the differences between universities together with tailored visits to certain universities, including Oxford and Cambridge.

The Aspiring Professionals Programme is currently only offered to students who are in Year 12, in receipt of Educational Maintenance Allowance or Free School Meals, in possession of at least 5 'A' grades in different subjects at GCSE and who have been predicted to obtain at least an 'A' grade and 2 'B' grades at A-Level. The eligibility of students is also considered within the context of their school, family history of higher education and teacher references.

The programme has experienced consistent success. Over half of APP students in the last four years have gone on to study at Russell Group Universities, with the rest going to other excellent universities. At the same time, the majority of employers involved in the programme who responded to the employer revaluation last year have said that the students they hosted were of the calibre that they would employ and that the programme had allowed them to work with young people who they do not usually get through their traditional recruitment channels.

## 5d) Mentoring

Mentors can be an extremely good way of helping young people through education and on to a career. A mentor can act as a role model, inspiring a young person to achieve their goals and providing them with valuable advice on how to get there.

Many of the best and most useful role models are those who come from backgrounds as similar as possible to those people they mentor. Former students from the same school or college who are currently in education, training or work, can demonstrate best that opportunities are within the reach of people from similar backgrounds.

In the Report on the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions, Alan Milburn recommended that the government set up a national database of people who are willing to act as mentors or role models in schools. Although the ideas were accepted in principle by the last government, little work has gone on to carry this forward. In my view this work is much better carried out by schools and colleges themselves, not least because most people will be more willing to commit to help their school or college if the request comes from that school or college, rather than in the form of a request to allow details to be placed on a national database.

### Recommendation 12

**All secondary schools and colleges should urgently develop networks of their former students who are willing to be contacted by current students. Schools should also actively arrange for former students of their school or other schools in the area to come back into school and work with current students to advise and answer questions about their career, their studies or life in general after school or college.**

This task is made easier by the relatively recent development of online social networks, where many people volunteer information about their current employment or study and the school they went to. This allows schools easily to locate their former students and make contact with them.

### Recommendation 13

**Schools should supplement their networks of former students by drawing on national programmes such as Speakers for Schools, an organisation which finds inspiring and motivational speakers for schools and colleges, Future First, which helps schools bring former students back into schools, and by encouraging young people to use services such as Horse's Mouth, an online mentoring network.**

## **5e) Financial Education**

Between the ages of 13 and 16, young people think about decisions which will have large scale effects on their future finances, whether choosing higher education, leaving school at 16 and going to work, or going into apprenticeship or training. They are expected to take these decisions at the same time as taking into account future earnings, money management during their courses and, in the case of higher education, knowledge about the system for paying for their degree. Many members of the House of Commons share the view of Martin Lewis of MoneySavingExpert.com, one of our country's leading advocates for financial education, and are making clear that they believe strongly that young people need to have better financial education from an early age.

### **Recommendation 14**

**In the context of the current DfE review of Personal, Social and Health Education, students between the ages of 14 and 16 should be trained in basic financial management. This is to prepare them for adult life generally and also for education, training and work in particular, and importantly to support their decisions as to which options they will choose after the age of 16. The government should work with the Personal Finance Education Group (PFEG) to agree how financial education should best be integrated into the provision of Personal, Social and Health education.**

## **5f) Graduation or Citizenship Ceremonies**

The end of compulsory school age, currently 16, marks a transition to adulthood in many ways. It is the age where young people can, register to vote for the first time and do many other things which mark the transition from youth to adulthood. I believe that there is merit in the idea of all schools having citizenship ceremonies at the end of the year. Such a ceremony would mean that whatever a young person goes on to do - vocational training, further education, work, an apprenticeship or higher education - they can all graduate together which gives a sense of equality with their peers. When speaking to young people around the country, this idea was positively received. There is merit in recognising all leavers equally to give worth to all school leavers whatever their later career or career choice.

These ceremonies could also be a useful opportunity for young people to come together for other purposes as they are about to move onto the next stage of education, training or employment. For example on graduation day, schools could have career and recruitment fairs where local colleges, universities and employers come to speak to students and parents, particularly in those families where the student had not yet decided what to do; banks could be present so that young people with no account already could choose one, and there could be exhibitions of the work of the students who could promote themselves to the local community and the local press. The students could also receive their voter

registration forms and national insurance cards at the same ceremony which would be symbolic of the move to adulthood.

### **Recommendation 15**

**Schools should consider introducing graduation ceremonies in schools for all students when they leave compulsory education.**

### **5g) Keeping contact with young people after school**

Young people leaving school to go to work, or into an apprenticeship or training, and even more so those who leave school to do none of these things, can often find it very difficult to get back into training or college, let alone to think of university. Today, many schools and colleges give their young people email accounts to use whilst they study. Schools and colleges should look into the feasibility of allowing young people to keep their institutional email accounts for as long as they wish after they leave the institution for the purposes of receiving updates on further education, training or study opportunities.

## **6. Financial support for young people in education between the ages of 16 and 18**

It is clear that many young people face significant financial barriers to accessing education between the ages of 16 and 18. If we are to give the maximum number of young people the opportunity to participate in higher education, then we must make sure that the maximum number of people are able and encouraged to stay on in education and training after 16.

The educational maintenance allowance (EMA) introduced by the last government clearly had some role in raising participation in after 16 education and in producing positive incentives for attendance.

However, with the age of compulsory education rising and the much greater expectation that young people will stay on in education and training after 16 it is right that the policy of financial support should move from a focus on incentives to a focus on providing financial support to those who face real barriers to participating in further education.

From this year the 16-19 Bursary Fund will provide the financial support for young people in education between the ages of 16 and 18. The fund has a set level of support for the most vulnerable young people and any other students facing genuine financial difficulties may be awarded a bursary at the discretion of their school, college or training provider. Further information can be found on the directgov.uk website:

[http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/14To19/MoneyToLearn/16to19bursary/DG\\_066955](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/EducationAndLearning/14To19/MoneyToLearn/16to19bursary/DG_066955)

The 16-19 Bursary has been introduced before the participation age rises, first to 17 in 2013, and then to 18 in 2015. Therefore to encourage young people to stay on for more education or training after 16 when they may otherwise think they cannot afford to, it is essential that

schools and colleges make extremely clear their criteria for awarding a bursary and that they are well publicised.

In 2011-12 the 16-19 Bursary is being distributed on the basis of current EMA allocations. One key issue which will need soon to be addressed is how this money will be distributed to schools and colleges in forthcoming years. With the end of EMA, a new and fair formula is needed. When discussing EMA there were concerns expressed by some young people about the use of household income to distribute the benefit, as they said that sometimes this did not capture income from better-off parents who may not have been living with the young person. Others believe there are problems with using free school meals as the only criterion, although it is currently the main indicator for young people from low income families; for example in rural areas, it seems that free school meal take up is often very low.

### **Recommendation 16**

**The government should review the distribution criteria for all financial support for young people in education up to the age of 18.**

### **7. Partnerships between schools, colleges and universities.**

The opportunity for young people to experience further and higher education by visiting a college or university and experiencing lectures or lessons can be a great motivator in persuading them to pursue a further education course or a degree.

This type of outreach should not be directed at students applying to a particular college or university, but rather to encourage all school students to think about applying to college or university in general.

There has been an excellent scheme which has been supported by the DfE and run by London Higher called School – HE links in London (SHELL). This links every school in London with a university for the purpose of outreach activities. This coordinates outreach at a regional level and allows all the higher education institutions (HEIs) in the capital to deliver more effective access programmes. SHELL has now become Access HE and will be the coordinating body for access activities in London. One of the advantages of the regional approach is that within each region there is a diversity of HEIs. This means that school students can visit different types of university (for example city universities, campus universities, specialist colleges etc) in order to show their students the different experiences available to them.

### **Recommendation 17**

**All universities should follow the model of Access HE and collaborate on a regional level on access initiatives. The goal should be for every school and college in England to be formally linked to at least one higher education institution by the end of 2011/12 through a regional consortium like Access HE. In future years the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) should make it a compulsory requirement for every university which wants to charge above the £6000 threshold to be an active member of a regional collaborative access body. As these regional groups develop, their activities should be monitored by OFFA.**

## School – HE links in London – SHELL and Access HE

The School –HE links in London (SHELL) project was established as part of the final phase of the London Challenge, 2008-2011, supported by the Department of Education, to raise standards in London Schools. It set out with two pledges: to ensure that every maintained school in London has a partnership with one or more HE institution, and that a higher proportion of Londoners go on to HE including the more competitive universities.

London Higher, representing the interests of 40-plus HEIs across London, won the contract to develop an action plan for the SHELL project and to undertake these two pledges. It also set out a broader ambition to strengthen partnerships between schools and HEIs more generally. A small SHELL team at London Higher worked closely with London's four Aimhigher partnerships, taking a pan-London view involving 400 secondary schools and more than 40 HEIs to improve collaboration between them.

Following the conclusion of the project, it was established that it had fulfilled both pledges and that the project illustrated the clear benefits of a regional programme of collaboration for both schools and HEIs. For the former, the regional approach for partnerships allows greater access to information and opportunities from a range of HEIs and allows access to one impartial source, reducing the pressure on teachers to explore what every individual HEIs can offer. For HEIs, this collaboration allows those institutions with specialisms to take a lead and to avoid competition in offering very similar activities to schools.

Teachers stressed in particular the value of having links with a number of HEIs so that they can offer a variety of information to students.

To further improve links, SHELL also stressed the need for senior leadership teams in schools to develop a strategic approach to HE engagement, that this approach should be considered just as relevant to 11-16 schools as 11-18 schools and sixth-form colleges and that there is a real need for both schools and HEI to have a good understanding of the subjects and subject advances at both institutions. More generally, SHELL were clear that both schools and HEIs have a lot to learn from, and give to, to one another.

With the conclusion of the SHELL project in 2011, its objective to improve the relationship and collaboration between schools and HEIs will continue through Access HE within London Higher. In particular, Access HE will aim to improve the ability of HEIs to deliver Access Agreements, in particular strengthening links between them and schools to improve effective outreach by providing this regional level of co-ordination and support.

## **8. Universities and other higher education institutions**

Although there has been a marked increase in the number of people from poorer and non-traditional backgrounds attending university over the last five years, universities can still do more and the most selective universities can do much more.

Research from OFFA demonstrated that despite a large scale increase in participation in higher education since 2005, a young person from the most advantaged background is seven times more likely to attend one of the most selective universities than a student from a less advantaged background. This ratio has risen from six times more likely in the mid-nineties.

Since the changes to the student financing regime approved by parliament in December 2010 and the comprehensive spending review last year there have been large changes to the access environment for universities.

Aim Higher, the main programme for the coordination and promotion of access activities, has had its funding ended by the government. However, because of the changes in the system for financing higher education almost all Universities are now obliged to spend much more money on improving university access. The OFFA process means that most universities will have to spend a much larger amount of their income on access related activities.

It is therefore clear that universities from now on will have to play a much more active role in activities which promote general widening participation rather than activities which are aimed towards targeted recruitment.

### **8a) Communicating the new student finance regime**

Key to getting communications on university and career progression right is to get the language right. We should not expect young people to understand the system of student finance for universities if we consistently use language which does not accurately reflect the obligations for young people to contribute towards their education.

As I went around the country I still heard many fears from young people about being weighed down by debt as they leave university. For most people debt means an obligation which needs to be paid back whatever the income of that person, and to which serious penalties are attached if repayment is not made. The common understanding of debt is very different from the reality of the finance system for higher education - which is not repaid until a minimum earnings threshold is reached, and where all repayments are based not on the fees for the course but on the income of the graduate. And unlike commercial loans, outstanding obligations are written off after a time period.

Evidence from the Sutton Trust and others demonstrates that this message is still not getting through. Communications from government have not so far been effective. This task is also not helped, for example, when a recent high profile online advertising campaign funded by the government only mentioned the fact that students will not have to pay any

upfront fees to go to university in the fifth paragraph of a section of the website entitled 'Can I afford to go to university?'

Failure to communicate the new regime for financing higher education effectively could mean that young people could be put off or demotivated from applying to university or from obtaining the grades they need to go to university. Communicating effectively is therefore as important as any other activity associated with widening participation or fair access to university.

Everybody with responsibility should seek to explain student finance by concentrating on the cost to the individual graduate rather than fees or loans or debt. When they have explained to them accurately the monthly repayment which graduates will be required to pay under the new system for student finance, young people and their families are almost always greatly reassured and encouraged about the benefits of going on to university.

However politicians are not the people who should have lead responsibility for what is said or communicated to potential students and their families. After years of heated political battles on student finance, political leaders are not the most credible or helpful advocates for university education.

This is why I recommended to government that it take the lead responsibility for communicating the new system for student finance out of the hands of politicians and give it to an independent organisation. I welcome the Independent Taskforce on Student Finance Communication chaired by Martin Lewis of MoneySavingExpert.com and with Wes Streeting, a recent President of NUS, as his deputy, which was launched during Universities Week this year.

### **Recommendation 18**

**The Independent Taskforce on Student Finance Communication should be continued on a permanent basis. The taskforce should work with a wider group which should be established and which can engage with all relevant organisations on the communication of all aspects of university education. At least half of this group should be young people, either recent graduates or current school, sixth form, college or university students, who could be asked to serve for between one and three years.**

#### **8b) Regional advocates for access**

As well as the access activities of schools and colleges in finding and recruiting speakers and former students to come and speak to their students about careers and further and higher education there is a role for celebrities and people in the public eye who have gone on to higher education to be helpful, as the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister have suggested. High profile people, acting as access advocates, can take a lead regionally and locally through events with local students and media appearances. The best time for starting this activity would be in the key period of September to January.

## **Recommendation 19**

**Two well known people in each region should be appointed as access advocates by the Independent Taskforce on Student Finance Communication each year, particularly to work in the key enrolment and application period from September to January.**

### **8c) Recruitment for longer courses**

The additional perceived cost of courses for qualifications which inevitably last longer than three years is an additional factor which may discourage applicants from non-traditional backgrounds from applying for such courses. I recognise the commitment of the government to dealing with this issue and welcome the announcement in June's Higher Education White Paper that NHS bursaries will be paid in full for years 5 and 6 of the courses for those starting next year to study for medicine and dentistry. Although there are special arrangements put in place such as these, extra effort is needed to widen access to these courses. There is already good practice to build on, for example the British Veterinary Association (BVA) have broadened their recruitment efforts to go to youth clubs and weekend youth events.

## **Recommendation 20**

**All higher education institutions recruiting for longer courses and the organisations associated with these professions should have particular programmes aimed at widening access to these courses and the HEIs should have particular arrangements for them set out in their access agreements. OFFA should also report separately on best practice in these courses and on progress in widening access to them. This work should be in addition to the use of access courses referred to in recommendation 22 below.**

### **8d) The Office for Fair Access**

With the rise in the amount of money which universities may charge, the role and the profile of the Office for Fair Access, the statutory body which must agree access agreements with universities before they can charge a course fee above £6000, has taken on much greater importance. To reflect this, the June 2011 Higher Education White Paper committed the government to increasing the powers and the resources of OFFA. The government said that it will ask OFFA to come forward with proposals for extra powers. To contribute to this process, I make the following initial suggestions.

One specific problem which has been highlighted during the course of compiling this report has been that OFFA has not had the resources or mechanisms available to it to monitor the implementation of higher education institutions' access agreements. This will need to be rectified in order to make OFFA a more effective regulator.

## **Recommendation 21**

**The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) should have student representatives on its board and require each annual access agreement submitted to be accompanied by a commentary from the institution's student body, and should assess higher education institutions' annual progress on access and widening participation by measuring results against objective benchmarks rather than by statements of future intent. The 2004 Higher Education Act would need to be amended if financial penalties were to be imposed on the failure to meet more objective criteria. OFFA should also publish access agreements which HEIs have submitted and which do not reach the required standard for approval of their higher tuition. OFFA should be given sufficient capacity so that it can investigate complaints against higher education institutions which are not honouring their access agreements and take action to rectify this.**

### **8e) Access and foundation courses**

Access courses are courses aimed at providing students with the academic preparation for a university course for which they may not have been able to obtain adequate preparation at school or college. They are also successful when aimed towards specialist degrees which prepare people for a profession. Some access courses are run by universities to give students access to specific degree courses. Others are run by FE colleges to give people who may not have taken A-levels in preparation for university.

FE access courses are level three courses which will no longer be eligible for funding for students over the age of 24.

Foundation courses give students who may not have studied the prerequisite subjects to obtain the training and preparation required before taking on a degree.

One of the best examples of an access course which leads to a specific degree course is the King's College London Extended Medical Degree Programme (EMDP). Here, students from state comprehensives in inner-city London are given a lower-graded offer and enrol on a medicine programme which lasts one year longer than the traditional medical degree. Students concentrate on improving core skills in the first year before seamlessly then entering the traditional medicine course. However with the increase in graduate contributions, access courses will represent significant additional costs to the student. This may have an off-putting effect on the student choosing this course over another course in another subject.

## **Recommendation 22**

**The government should consider with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) how funding can be secured for the development of a national programme of access and foundation courses, particularly to promote widening participation in the professions.**

### **Recommendation 23**

**The government should see how it can reclassify access courses in FE colleges so that they will be eligible for funding for students over the age of 24 so that the maximum amount of people have the chance to go to into higher education.**

### **Recommendation 24**

**To help students with disabilities who become ineligible for incapacity benefit if they are engaged in more than 21 hours of study each week, higher education institutions should make sure that all access and foundation courses are available on a part-time basis.**

#### King's College London's Extended Medical Degree Programme

The Extended Medical Degree Programme (EMDP) is the UK's flagship widening access to medicine programme, launched by King's College London as part of its Outreach for Medicine initiative. It is aimed at supporting disadvantaged young people who wish to study medicine. The programme offers up to 50 undergraduate places to talented students from non-selective schools or Further Education Colleges in London, Kent and Medway to study medicine.

EMDP students follow the same medical curriculum as other medical students and undergo the same rigorous assessment. However, instead of running for the usual five years, the programme lasts for six, allowing the first two phases, an introduction to Medical Science, to be studied at a steadier pace. Students also receive mentoring and support during their first three years.

The programme aims in this way to offer places to students who may not have achieved the necessary grades to train as doctors on a standard 5-year course and to raise the aspirations of pupils in local schools who may not otherwise feel able to pursue a medical career.

### **8f) Selection for university places**

Few institutions continue to interview students as part of their selection process. Interviews can be a useful tool in assessing students but they should be as objective as possible. It is my firm view that interviews which are conducted by an academic who will end up teaching that particular student are too subjective. This is not to say that interviews are not useful in the admissions process. Interviews, particularly when there is a large amount of highly able students, can be useful methods of differentiating students. However, like the rest of admissions procedures, interviews should be conducted by trained admissions personnel who will not have face to face teaching responsibilities for the interviewee.

## **Recommendation 25**

**It should be a requirement for all universities wishing to charge above the £6000 threshold to demonstrate that their admission process is led by trained professionals. OFFA should commission Supporting Professionalism in Admissions to propose best practice in admissions processes for fair access which should then be added to requirements for access agreements in subsequent years. These proposals could cover interviews, aptitude tests and other admissions practices.**

### **8g) Contextual admissions**

The use of contextual data in admissions has been a subject of frequent debate over the last few years. Government has looked favourably on universities using contextual admissions and the guidance from the Secretary of State for Business, Innovations and Skills to the Director of Fair Access encourages the use of contextual data for admissions. In conversations with universities it has become clear to me that many universities use contextual data in their admissions process and have done for some time. The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) is also going to provide contextual data for admissions from this year. The White Paper on Higher Education also states that the government believes that the use of contextual data by universities is appropriate. Universities must remain free to use contextual data if they wish, although they would be under no obligation to do so.

If universities believe that they will obtain better results from taking students who have demonstrated clear potential but may have lower grades than others then that is justified. However some institutions have expressed the worry that specific proposals in the government's White Paper on Higher Education which allow the recruitment of certain top performing students outside a university's normal quota of places could have an effect contrary to other policies which seek to provide incentives for contextual admissions.

## **Recommendation 26**

**Government should monitor closely the implementation of the proposal to allow universities to discount students who achieve AAB at A-Level from their quota of places to ensure that it does not conflict with actions and policies to facilitate contextual admissions.**

## **8h) Post-qualification admissions (PQA)**

I welcome the commitment of the government to look more formally at PQA; this would mean a change to a system where applications for university would be made after results are known and therefore on the basis of actual rather than projected results. There is a range of views on which is the fairer timetable for admissions if government wants the policy which most effectively widens participation and establish the fairest access to all HEIs. Targeting would-be applicants is not so easy with a system of pre-qualification admissions. A system of post-qualification admissions would allow the top universities to target better students who perform well and come from difficult backgrounds or from areas which do not usually send young people to university. This would be hugely positive for fair access in England. This type of targeting is something which is already done by some of the top universities in the US. I understand that Harvard University, for example, writes to every top performing 'minority' student in the country asking them to consider applying to Harvard; this is highly advantageous for the university as it gains a competitive advantage from recruiting the top students. Another advantage of post-qualification admissions is that it would make the whole process much more transparent, which could dispel some of the mystique around university admissions to the top universities.

## **8i) Scholarships to universities**

The history of scholarships and bursaries for increasing participation and access at university in England has been poor.

Traditionally universities in England have not had the large scholarship funds available in the United States and other places. What money there was has been distributed in hardship funds which a poor student might find out about when they were already at university. Whilst this type of fund may have been useful in student retention it could never motivate people to go to university.

The national scholarship scheme introduced by the government is a very welcome development as it clearly raises the profile of university scholarships. A minimum annual award of £3,000 will provide an effective incentive particularly for non-traditional applicants from poorer families who might worry they might not be able to afford to attend university.

In the United States the University of Texas offers a scholarship to the top 10% of every graduating class in every school. This clearly motivates school students to achieve the grades required and demonstrates that in every school there is the possibility of going on to university.

A similar scheme could be started here if scholarships were offered to a certain number of students in every secondary school, sixth form and FE college who satisfied a minimum UCAS tariff points score and who came from a family with an income below a certain level.

If 10,000 scholarships from the national scholarship programme were allocated this way then every school and sixth form and FE college could have on average three scholarships available to them.

At the beginning of every school year schools and colleges would be told of their allocation of scholarships for the next three years. If a school or college did not have any students whose family incomes fell below the agreed threshold in any year, their allocation of scholarships would be reallocated to schools and colleges which had a greater number of lower income students.

Once schools have begun to publish data on the destinations of their students, more scholarships could be targeted towards areas which had particularly low participation rates in higher education.

Each scholarship could be advertised as worth no less than £3,000. Each HEI would be able to top up any national scholarship once they know how many national scholarship students they have.

The advantage of such a scheme would be that every young person in every school and every college and who came from a disadvantaged background would know up to three years before university entrance that scholarships were potentially available to them and people like them. This would provide a real goal to aim for and motivate many young people to achieve the better grades necessary to be offered a place and with it potentially a scholarship too.

### **Recommendation 27**

**The majority of the national scholarships available through the national scholarship scheme should be allocated directly to each non-fee-paying English school and college for students to use at the university of their choice.**

The national scholarship scheme for students starting at university in 2012 allows universities to use the money for a variety of purposes. One of the key debates on access is about fee waivers. Some university vice-chancellors have presented compelling evidence that fee waivers do have an incentive effect, and a minority of students who I have met over the last six months have expressed a preference for fee waivers.

My view is that as the costs of university tuition will only be paid after the student has left university and earns a decent wage, for many students scholarships would be far more useful for paying for the accommodation and living costs which are often the biggest financial worry before university.

## **Recommendation 28**

**From 2013 national scholarships should only be available for payment of accommodation and living costs, unless the student expressly requests the scholarship for fee waiver instead. This will leave open the option of a fee waiver if this is what really motivates the student, but normally the money will be used for the living costs which are of more immediate student concern.**

### **8j) The national scholarship scheme and graduate employment**

It is clear that a key driver in getting young people to pursue a career in higher education is the prospect of obtaining a job after university and being able to follow a preferred career path. This is particularly relevant for young people who come from 'working class' backgrounds where security of employment is very important.

In times with difficult graduate employment prospects there is a greater risk that that young people from 'working class' backgrounds will be less motivated to pursue careers through higher education.

Scholarships which are tied to real work either before or after university can therefore be a great means of encouraging young people to apply for university.

Several private sector firms are now leading by introducing scholarships for students which include financial support during a degree, training during summer holidays and a job on graduation.

The government's White Paper on Higher Education also sets out the intention to increase the number of sandwich courses available and this is to be welcomed.

But the government could go further and design a scholarship scheme which would actively promote employment after university.

If 10,000 of the announced 16,000 national scholarship scheme places are made available to all schools and colleges in 2012, the remaining 6,000 could be allocated to those HEIs which provide graduate employment opportunities in their region.

The national scholarships would be made available to universities via a bidding process. The university would have to prove that it had secured employment for one year after graduation at a minimum salary set by the government. The employment would have to be in an area related to the field of study of the student. This employment would also have to be based in the region of the university and universities would not be able to use their core funding to sponsor the work placement. These scholarships could be targeted at specific industries and at students from underprivileged backgrounds.

Such a scheme would encourage universities to develop links with employers in their region. It would also encourage graduates to stay in the region in which they were trained, and would stimulate the fundraising capacity of universities.

#### **Recommendation 29**

**The government should reserve some scholarships from the national scholarship scheme for courses which are linked to employment in the region of the university after the completion of the degree course. These scholarships should only be given to universities which raise funds to supplement the national scholarship scheme.**

Many HEIs have their own bursaries and scholarships, but finding out about them before applying is often extremely difficult.

#### **Recommendation 30**

**All higher education institutions should advertise all their bursaries and scholarships together, and with details of the national scholarship scheme, in one annual publication and on one common website page, and have a bursaries and scholarships officer with responsibility for publicising all bursaries and scholarships and answering all questions about them.**

#### **8k) Transfers between higher education institutions**

Making sure students complete the work necessary to gain their degree or other qualifications has always been important. People who drop out of universities may do so because of problems at home, pregnancy or financial or other family reasons. Many of these people may come from difficult backgrounds.

However it is currently difficult for students who may have had to take some time out of studying or to move home then to continue and finish their studies at another HEI. This means that some people never finish their studies.

In some other countries, programmes which mean that the student can return to study later or continue a similar course at another university are common.

#### **Recommendation 31**

**The government should develop an arrangement where all higher education institutions can recognise credit for coursework completed in a different HEI and which will allow students to transfer between HEIs during courses and finish their degree at a different institution from the one where they started.**

## **Communicating with mature students and harder to reach groups**

Part time study has always been one of the best ways of widening access and increasing participation in higher education. The changes to the student financing system which will see part time students studying at more than 25% intensity not paying anything towards the cost of their tuition upfront for the first time is a huge step forward in this regard. It is therefore important for universities not to forget potential mature students and harder to reach groups who may be interested in part time degrees when carrying out their outreach activities.

### **Recommendation 32**

**Colleges, universities and groups of universities should form partnerships with faith, cultural and sports organisations, supermarkets and shopping centres, transport companies, and businesses and the trade unions to maximise the promotion of opportunities for further and higher education inside and outside school gates, places of worship, sports clubs and venues, and shops, on buses, cabs and trains, and in the workplace.**

### **8I) Crossing national boundaries to go to university in the UK**

There is clearly much concern about the effects of different tuition finance systems in each country within the UK. Universities in England fear that they will be relatively less attractive to students from any of the other home countries. This will not disappear as an issue for as long as there is any difference in funding for tuition between one country and another.

### **Recommendation 33**

**Higher education ministers in Whitehall, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast and their officials should set up a UK higher education coordinating committee to meet regularly and in public to receive reports, resolve any cross-border difficulties and, where appropriate, make recommendations.**

## **Conclusions**

For much of the first six months of 2011 promoting further and higher education has been dogged by the controversies surrounding the replacement of the educational maintenance allowance and the new system for paying the tuition costs which will come into effect from 2012. With the establishment of the Independent Taskforce on Student Finance Communication and the publication of the Higher Education White Paper I believe there is an opportunity now to move on. My report is intended to propose actions that can be taken, starting now, which will help set the agenda. Huge numbers of people and organisations who work in education, the careers services and organisations, the professions, the voluntary sector and in other ways with young people and adult learners are determined to communicate the benefits of training and education after school-leaving age. It would be completely irresponsible for anybody, whatever their personal or political views, now to exaggerate the cost to future students or to misrepresent the facts in ways which put off the very people who need most encouragement to obtain further qualifications and experience of education. I believe that with sustained and enthusiastic efforts, particularly over the next sixth months until the closing date for applications for entry to university and other higher education institutions next year, the argument can be won and the messages communicated effectively the length and breadth of the country. Modern media, social networking and imaginative outreach by universities and colleges all have their part to play. The will undoubtedly exists. There are many ways to achieve progress. There is a shared national interest for our universities and other higher education institutions to remain the best in the world. But there is an equally important interest in making sure that every single individual living in this country in the future begins at an early age to aspire to an apprenticeship or further or higher education, and not necessarily only once in their life. Parents and teachers, and schools, colleges and universities all have their role to play. We all do. There are few greater collective responsibilities than encouraging the next generation, our neighbours and our fellow citizens to discover the great personal and wider benefits of education and training. We must make sure that no ivory tower or university campus should be a no-go area for anybody in this country in the future.

**Simon Hughes**

**July 2011**

## **Appendices**

## **Appendix 1 – Results of the survey of students met as part of school, college and university visits**

Over the course of the six month appointment Simon Hughes visited schools, colleges and universities across the country. A full list of these institutions is provided in appendix 3. During these visits he spoke with students, teachers, lecturers, student union representatives, staff and parents. At the end of six months, Simon went back to students he had met and who had provided their email addresses and asked them some final questions. The results of this questionnaire are set out below.

**Appendix 2- Letter of appointment of advocate for access and terms of reference**

Simon Hughes was appointed to be Advocate for Access to Education by a letter from the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister on 24 December 2010. The letter and the terms of reference can be found on the following pages.

**Appendix 3 - List of schools, colleges and universities visited and organisations and individuals met**

Southwark College

South Thames College

St Francis Xavier Sixth form College, Balham

Greenwich University

University of Liverpool

Liverpool John Moores University

Liverpool Community College

Xaverian Sixth Form College

Combined Universities, Cornwall

Cornwall College

Penwith College

Solihull College

King Edward VI Sixth Form College

North Warwickshire and Hinckley College

Birmingham City University

Barton Court Grammar School

The Isle of Sheppey Academy

Canterbury College

Mid Kent College

University of Kent

Bangor Grammar School

South Eastern Regional College

Queens University of Belfast

National Association of Student Money Advisers (NASMA)	157 Group	National Association of Head Teachers
Association of Managers of Student Services in Higher Education (AMOSSHE)	Open University	University Alliance
Money Doctors	Bridge Group	Office of the Independent Adjudicator (QIA)
Higher Education Liaison Officers Association	Brightside UNIAID	University and College Union (UCU)
National Union of Students	The Villiers Park Educational Trust	Richmond Upon Thames College
Teach First	King's College London	King's College London Extended Medical Degree Programme
Youth Access	TeachFirst	Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL)
YouthNet	Aimhigher Greater Manchester	ATL Future
Kikass	Institute of Careers Guidance (ICG)	British Veterinary Association
Office for Fair Access (OFFA)	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)	Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons
The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)	Association for Careers Education and Guidance (ACEG)	National Youth Theatre
Universities & Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)	Institute for Learning Learning and Skills Improvement Service	Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)
Association of Colleges (AOC)	SKILL	ASDAN
Sixth Form Colleges Forum (SFCF)	Association of Learning Providers	British Dental Association
Million +	Children's Society	British Institute of Architects
University of Cambridge	Barnardos	British Medical Association
London Metropolitan University	Centrepoint	Open University
London Higher	YWCA	Russell Group
School Higher Education Links in London (SHELL) at London Metropolitan University	Guild HE	1994 Group
Association for School and College Leaders (ASCL)	Action for Children	Into University
National Union of Students (NUS)	Careers Research Advisory Centre (CRAC)	Sutton Trust
UK Youth Parliament Board of Trustees	Icould	London Met
British Youth Council	Child Poverty Action Group	Pearson Plc
Birkbeck University	Gingerbread	Aim Higher London
	Roehampton University	Universities UK
	Educate	
	University of East London	