



Action on Access:  
Looking to the future  
of Widening Participation



**Action on Access**  
The National Co-ordination Team for Widening Participation

**“EDGE HILL IS PASSIONATE ABOUT HELPING EVERY STUDENT FULFIL THEIR POTENTIAL. WE ARE DELIGHTED TO HOST ACTION ON ACCESS AND RECOGNISE THE CONTRIBUTION IT IS MAKING TO THE NATIONAL WIDENING PARTICIPATION AGENDA.”**

JOHN CATER, VICE CHANCELLOR,  
EDGE HILL UNIVERSITY



Action on Access is now in its eighth year as the national co-ordination team for widening participation. During this time we have established ourselves as an organisation which provides high quality advice, events and information on widening participation to and for the sector.

We are delighted that funding for Aimhigher has been secured for the next three years and we look forward to continuing to work with partnerships and higher education institutions. Change seems always to have been an inevitable feature of our context and operation, and this publication signals a re-profiling of activity in response to current policy changes. The restated commitment of widening participation developed by the Department for Innovation Universities and Skills (DIUS) and HEFCE will see a stronger relationship between Aimhigher, higher education institutions (HEIs) and local schools and colleges and a more coherent set of outreach activities from both institutions and partnerships. It will focus on targeting resources to learners from the lowest socio-economic groups, on tight costing, value for money, on co-ordinated programmes and on robust evaluation.

Action on Access is keen and ready to meet the challenge to provide advice in these key areas, to take a more integrated approach to widening participation activities in HEIs and Aimhigher, and to support the process of change with good intelligence and timely, relevant programmes of events. As Action on Access reviews its strategic plan so there will be more emphasis on national and sectoral considerations, and on working more closely with institutions.

However, whilst change is a feature of the widening participation landscape, the goal of increasing and widening participation in the interests of economic success and social equity remains constant. And partnerships remain a key component in the success of that mission and the work of Action on Access. As we enter 2008 we should like therefore to thank everyone for their continued commitment to both.

Two handwritten signatures in black ink. The first signature is 'Rhiannon Evans' and the second is 'John Storan'. Both are written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rhiannon Evans & John Storan

## A national voice

Action on Access plays a leading role in widening access and participation alongside stakeholder organisations for whom it is a major source of information advice and guidance. We are at the forefront of implementing key government policies to help people from under-represented groups, particularly low socio-economic groups and those with disabilities, enter and succeed in higher education.

Two of our main aims are to:

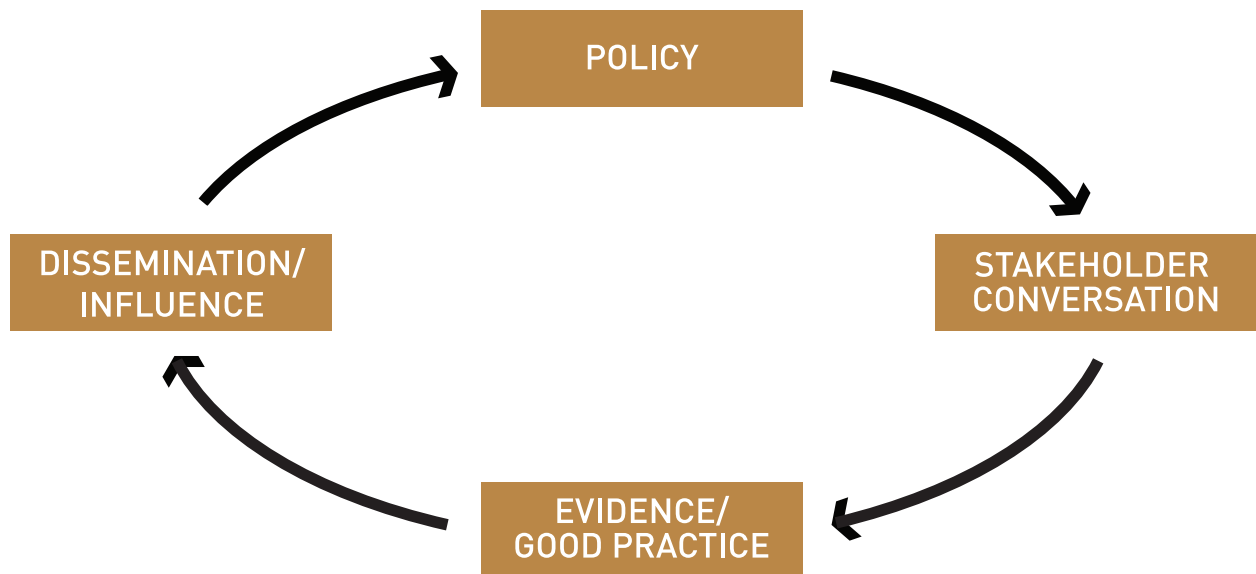
- support HEFCE in the development of widening participation policy and practice
- work with partnerships, including Aimhigher, and HEIs to develop self-sustaining regional and national peer networks which share best practice.

Action on Access has a team of experienced regional advisers who:

- provide strategic guidance and advice to higher education institutions and partnerships
- work with key organisations and networks to raise awareness of and develop the effectiveness of work to widen participation.

Action on Access works with specialist advisers and consultants who contribute to:

- a range of consultancy services to institutions and partnerships
- our publications which highlight widening participation issues and showcase good practice
- the planning and delivery of an annual series of national and regional conferences, subject-specific seminars, networking events and policy forums
- the provision of specialist policy advice and information to government departments, the funding council and other agencies.



Model of Action on Access's role at the interface between HEFCE, higher education institutions, partnerships and stakeholders.

## Our key priorities looking ahead

Widening participation in higher education remains a key policy objective for the government and the funding councils, and there are exciting challenges ahead. Our role as the national co-ordination team is to work with practitioners, higher education institution and partnership managers as well as other key stakeholders in widening participation to anticipate, influence and prepare for these challenges.

Our key priorities for 2008 include:

- articulating and communicating widening participation policy, and helping build capacity across the sector
- improving the evidence base (particularly the quality) for the impact of widening participation interventions by both Aimhigher partnerships and institutions
- developing with Aimhigher partnerships an Aimhigher learner progression framework, and improving the links between Aimhigher and the school improvement process and the new 14-19 curriculum
- working with Aimhigher partnerships to continue the improvement of the management of resources, targeting and collection of data, and a smooth transition to the programme for 2008 to 2011
- working with institutions to embed widening participation in their mission, management and culture
- working with institutions to develop and support key activities that are progressive and effective and can be promoted as exemplars for embedded, long-term widening participation commitments
- working with institutions and Aimhigher partnerships to continue to develop and embed support for disabled learners across the sector
- leading the Disability Equality Partnership (working to a coherent planned programme with the Higher Education Academy and the Equality Challenge Unit) in 2008 to develop and embed increased access for disabled learners into higher education
- providing a high quality information and dissemination service, through conferences and seminars, publications and a developing electronic platform using website and email distribution lists.



## National partnerships and networks

Working in partnership is the cornerstone of Action on Access. We have effective and sustained relationships with educational institutions, key organisations and stakeholders with a shared vision. These include:

Aimhigher  
Association of Colleges  
Equality Challenge Unit  
Foundation Degree Forward  
GuildHE  
Higher Education Academy  
Learning and Skills Development Agency  
National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth  
SKILL: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities  
The Department of Health  
National Institute of Adult Continuing Education  
The National Open College Network  
National Union of Students  
The Open University  
The Quality Assurance Agency  
The Sector Skills Development Agency  
The Training and Development Agency for Schools  
Universities and Colleges  
UCAS  
Universities UK

We are one of three members of the Disability Equality Partnership together with the Higher Education Academy and the Equality Challenge Unit. This partnership enables the three organisations to draw on their individual strengths and resources to identify complementary objectives and provide rationalised support to the education sector. Many of our partners are also members of the Action on Access Advisory Forum which advises on our strategies and provides a strategic opportunity to keep stakeholders in higher education informed of our activities and a platform for debate.





## A national programme

Action on Access continues to lead and deliver a national programme of conferences, events, publications and an electronic platform for information including website, distribution lists and monthly bulletins from its base at Edge Hill University:

- developing and maintaining a website which has attracted more than five million hits since its re-launch in February 2006
- producing 10 electronic bulletins every year on a comprehensive range of topics including widening participation research, managing change, collaborative working practice and employer engagement
- managing Jiscmail (email distribution) groups with more than 2000 subscribers which enable practitioners and managers working to widen participation to share and receive information on policy developments, new publications, guidance and events
- maintaining an online helpdesk to answer queries relating to widening participation, including specific disability issues in higher education
- working with, and producing resources for, those who facilitate the access to higher education of disabled learners; a remit which is embedded across all the work of the team
- working with the Aimhigher National Communications Resource Team to deliver high quality communications and marketing advice and information to Aimhigher partnerships.

## The national co-ordination team

Action on Access, the national co-ordination team for widening participation in higher education, is funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (with support from the Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland), to whom we provide advice and feedback on funded programmes. We encourage the development, promotion and enhancement of social inclusion for the broadest possible access to higher education by:

- working with universities and colleges and their key stakeholders
- working with collaborative partnerships including Aimhigher and schools
- working to promote inclusive approaches to disability within higher education.

**Directors:**

Rhiannon Evans, John Storan

**Deputy Director:**

Andrew Rawson

**Advisers:**

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Rachel Cross, Martin Murphy, Carol Roche, Gareth Watt, Mike Wray

**“WE ARE PLEASED WITH THE CONTRIBUTION WHICH ACTION ON ACCESS HAS MADE TO THE WIDENING PARTICIPATION AGENDA AND LOOK FORWARD TO CONTINUING TO WORK WITH THEM”**

John Selby, Director of Widening Participation, HEFCE





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The National Co-ordination Team for Widening Participation

For more information on the work of Action on Access, its roles and to access the resources, publications, Jiscmails, helpdesk and sign-posting visit the website: [www.actiononaccess.org](http://www.actiononaccess.org)

This document can be downloaded from the Action on Access website under Resources/Publications. It is also available in large print, Braille and CD.

Please call 01695 650 850 for alternative format versions.

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