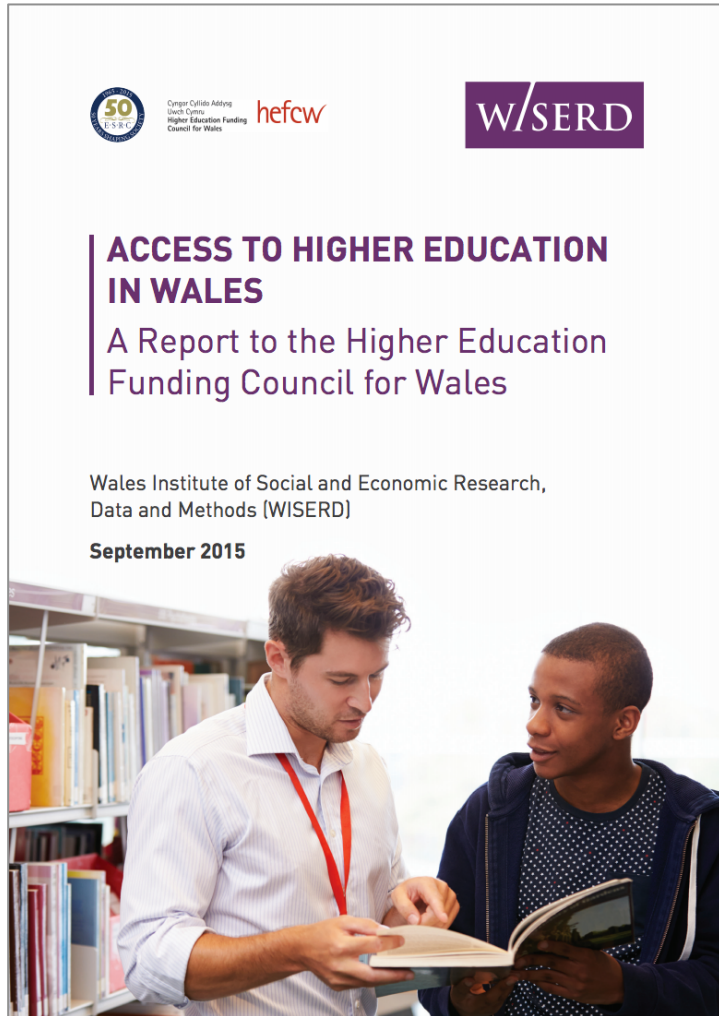


# Learner Destinations: Evidencing Impact and Success in Widening Access to Higher Education

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# Objectives of the Research

1. Analyse how individuals resident in Wales progress through secondary school, into sixth forms and further education colleges and on to HE
2. Examine and evaluate the development of distinctive approaches to widening access to HE by Welsh Government

Funded with the support of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)

Key findings from  
the research

Implications for  
policy and practice

Recommendations



# The administrative data

We have created a longitudinal widening access database linking 4 administrative datasets:

1. National Pupil Database (NPD) for Wales;
2. Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR);
3. Welsh Examinations Database (WED); and
4. Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data

Year of data									
2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	'Old' HESA data		'New' HESA data	
						2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
					GCSE		A Levels	Year 1	
				GCSE		A Levels		Year 1	Year 2
			GCSE		A Levels	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	
		GCSE		A Levels		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	
	GCSE		A Levels		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3		
GCSE		A Levels		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3			

Impact and Effectiveness of Widening Access to HE in Wales  
Working Paper Series<sup>1</sup> – WAQNCW2014-2

Overview of the Widening Access Database

Rhys Davies and Caroline Wright



Educational achievement (particularly at age 15) is the greatest determinant of participation to HE

GCSE points	Participation in HE by age 20
0-20	2.6%
21-30	5.2%
31-40	12.5%
41-50	29.3%
51-60	55.6%
>60	81.7%



Participation in HE by age 20	Males	Females
Overall	30.3%	38.7%
Eligible for free school meals	12.0%	15.4%
Not known to be eligible	33.3%	42.5%



## But once we take account of levels of attainment what other factors are associated with participation to HE?

Female pupils **eligible for free school meals** are 21% less likely to participate in HE than equivalent non-FSM female pupils (for males this figure is 12% less likely)

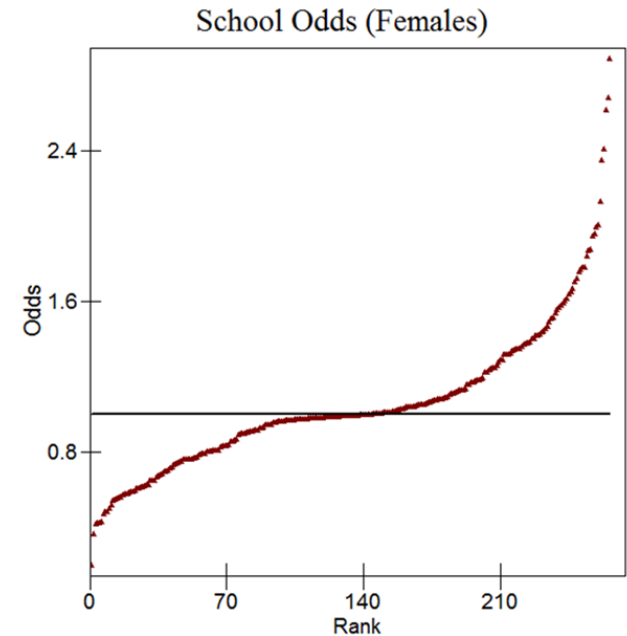
Male '**non-White British**' pupils are 2½ times more likely to participate than male White British pupils

Males and females are 6.7% and 7.5% (respectively) less likely to participate if they live in the **most deprived areas** of Wales compared to equivalent young people in the least deprived areas

But we also find that young people living in the **fourth quintile of most deprived** are less likely to participate than those in the 20% most deprived areas – the effect of **Communities First** policy for WA?



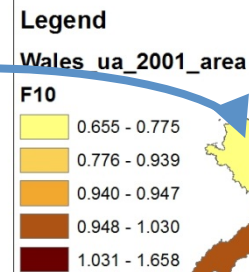
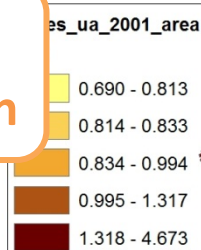
## Schools





## Access to what?

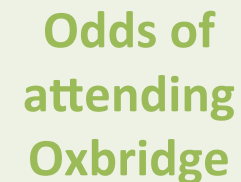
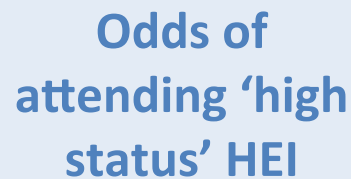
HE  
Participation



First  
Degree



## Odds of attending HEI in Wales



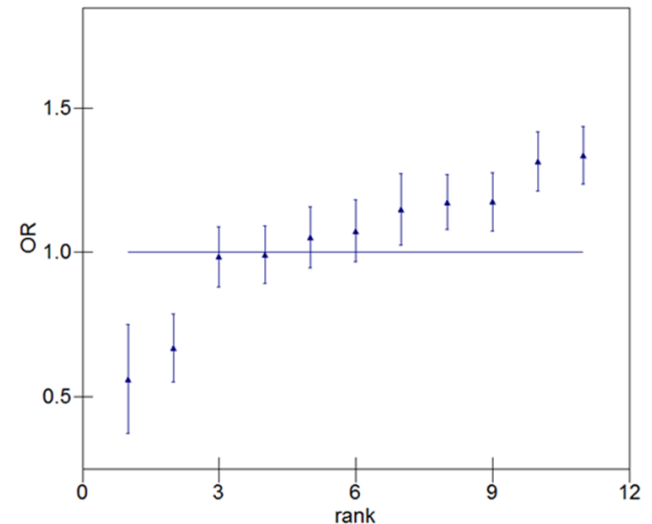


# Retention in Higher Education

- **Prior attainment** has the greatest effect on HE retention
- No relationship between most **socio-economic indicators** and retention
- **Males** are 23% more likely to withdraw than equivalent females
- Those **studying in Wales** are 13% more likely to withdraw than those who study elsewhere

## University

Odds of dropping out by HEI (after)



## How widening access policy is understood

1. Inequalities in educational prior achievement
2. Inequalities in admission to higher education
3. Inequalities in higher education outcomes
4. Inequalities in knowledge of higher education

## Identification of target groups for widening access

- Identifying under-represented groups depends on the above, but is hindered by lack of reliable data
- Trade-offs between convenience of measures to target particular groups and robustness with which they capture under-represented groups
- Severe limitations of area-based approach to identifying target groups



## Widening access to what

- Variety of qualifications in HE (ranging from NVQ Levels 1 to 6)
- Difference between entry qualification and exit qualification
- Access to heterogeneity of higher education landscape (and rest of UK)

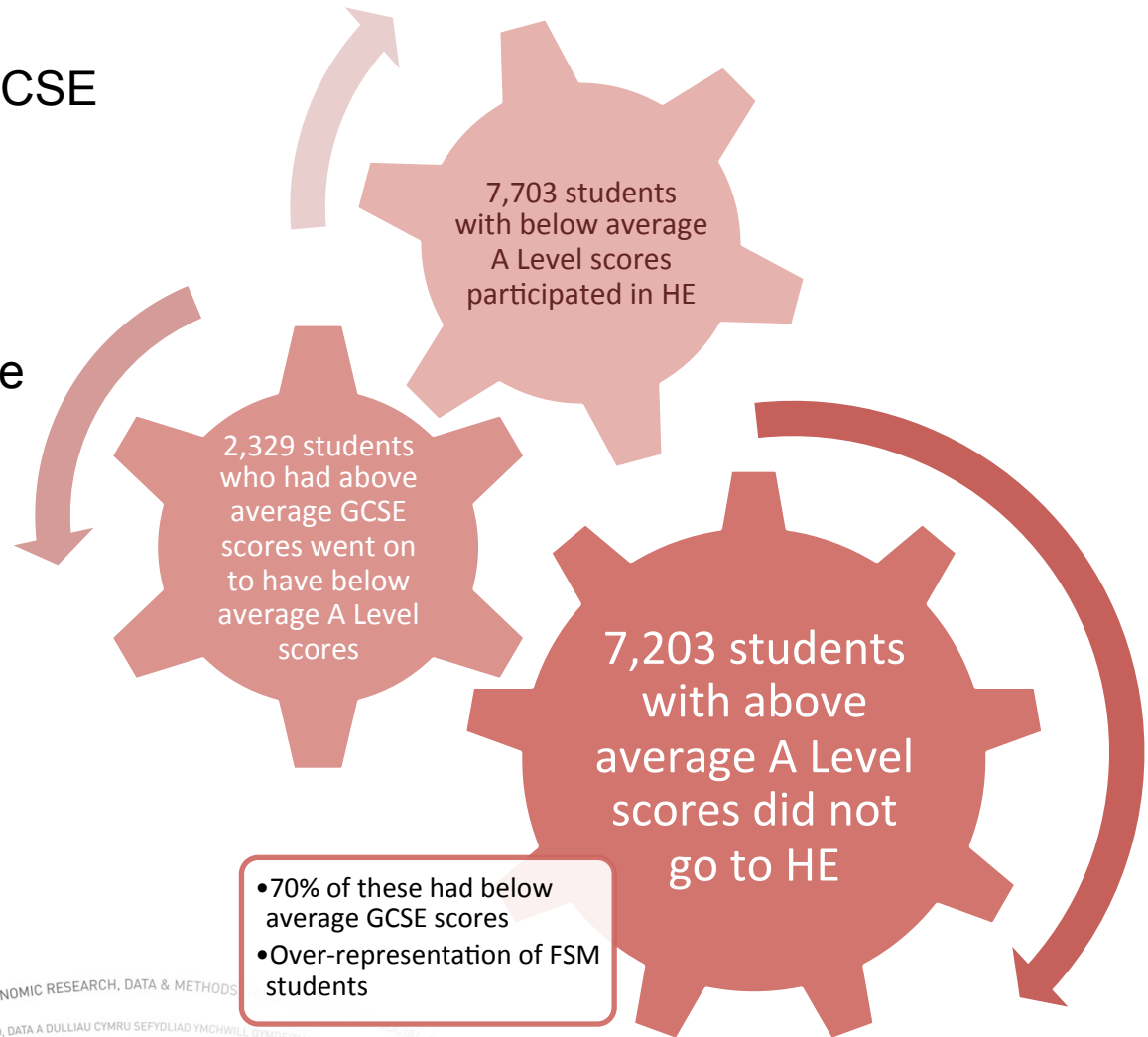
## Organisation of the widening access 'system'

- Effective collaboration required between stakeholders (national policy, regional partnerships, HEIs in Wales, departmental admissions, Communities First, schools, FE sector, HEIs in other countries of UK)
- Tension between the *supply-side* and *demand-side* of widening access, intensified by liberalisation of undergraduate recruitment and cross-border mobility
- Assessing impact of widening access activities is essential to the development of their effectiveness



We calculated the average GCSE and A Level scores of Wales domiciled students in Higher Education

Across the three cohorts there were...



### Future Direction of Widening Access

Where should **responsibility** for Widening Access exist?

Greater and better **use of data** for Widening Access

This could be achieved through a **national strategy** (of Government, HEFCW, schools, FE, Reaching Wider Partnerships and HEIs) using the **Unique Learner Number**

Superior **targeting of potential WA participants** that is transparent, based on achievement *and* potential, reliable and more efficient

Further **nuanced interventions and admissions arrangements** that can be tailored to particular groups of WA participants

More **robust evaluation** of WA strategies and interventions that allows for comparisons with similar non-WA participants

Better **monitoring** of WA students through their Higher Education to ensure WA sees participation and progress as a single phenomenon





## GUIDANCE FOR EVALUATING WIDENING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

The purpose of this guidance is to provide advice to university widening access practitioners about how to evaluate their widening access strategies and practices. It is important to note that this can include a wide range of initiatives ranging from university policies (such as admissions policy), to departmental activities with schools to short-term interventions with targeted groups (such as summer universities). Just as no initiative is the same the evaluations are likely to be the same. Consequently it is not be prescriptive about how such initiatives should be evaluated. Practitioners should consider the key characteristics of good practice when undertaking their own evaluation.

This guidance is supplementary to the HEFCE evaluation tool for practitioners (3rd Edition 2014). However, this guidance focuses on evaluation design rather than how to conduct an evaluation. In this guidance we set out *four steps* practitioners should consider when preparing to evaluate widening access activities:

1. Outline a policy logic model
2. Decide the aims of the evaluation
3. Design the evaluation
4. The use of administrative data

### STEP 1

OUTLINE A POLICY LOGIC MODEL

### STEP 2

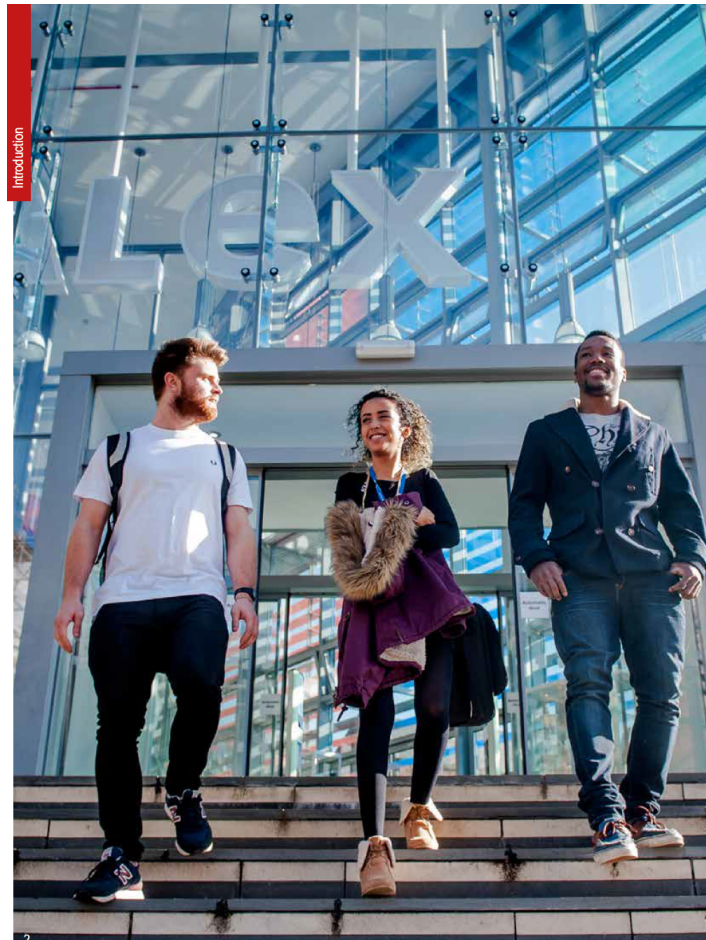
DECIDE THE AIMS OF THE EVALUATION

### STEP 3

DESIGN THE EVALUATION


### STEP 4

THE USE OF ADMINISTRATIVE DATA





# ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES OF EVALUATING TWO DIFFERENT KINDS OF WIDENING ACCESS INITIATIVES

	SUMMER UNIVERSITY	CONTEXTUAL OFFERS		SUMMER UNIVERSITY	CONTEXTUAL OFFERS
Context	Address inequalities in knowledge of higher education amongst Year 10 pupils.	Address inequalities in prior educational attainment of recent school leavers.		Pre-event survey asking pupils about their background, current understanding of HE and probability that they will go to HE. Focus groups and interviews with pupils during visit. Post-event survey asking about the visit, what they liked etc. and how it might benefit them. Follow-up survey with participants one year after event asking about future plans.	Interviews with admissions tutors asking them about their interpretation and implementation of the new university admissions policy. Focus groups with academic teaching staff about the policy and how they think students will progress on their course. Interviews with WA students during their first year about their transition to HE and their academic progress.
Main aims	Better understanding of HE and how to access it. Increased motivation to do well in GCSEs and to further educational career.	Greater rate of participation amongst applicants who have experienced prior educational inequalities.		Process evaluation	
Rationale	Some 14/15-year olds do not have access to the necessary social and cultural capital required to make positive decisions about their educational future, including what HE is for, what benefits it brings and how to secure a place in HE.	Some applicants have not had the same educational opportunities as other applicants and so may not achieve the same entry requirements despite having the potential ability to achieve well at university.		Outcome evaluation	
Inputs & activities	3-week visit to university during summer vacation by FSM pupils from local schools to be introduced to the range of subjects/research taught, university life, admissions information, tutoring for core GCSEs, etc., plus 1-to-1 mentoring during Year 11.	New university policy that (a) identifies potential WA applicants and (b) permits admissions tutors to lower typical entry requirements by two grades.		Longitudinal / extended evaluation	
Outputs	Number of pupils attending the event. Improved understanding about barriers and access to HE knowledge for practitioners.	Number of: applicants flagged by admissions tutors; offers made; applicants who take up offer; places confirmed (and by department)			



Cyngor Cyfiliad Addysg  
Uwch Cymru  
Higher Education Funding  
Council for Wales



# Further information



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