Reaching the parts of society universities have missed: A manifesto for the new Director of Fair Access and Participation

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BRIGHTER FUTURES FOR ALL

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Preface

Paul Clarke, Head of External Affairs, Brightside

A crucial part of widening participation work is helping prospective students plan for their future: to embrace change with confidence and see the opportunities beyond the apparent obstacles in their path. This has been a challenge for the widening participation sector itself, ever since the Dearing Report in 1997 launched the modern widening participation agenda. A year later, tuition fees were introduced for the first time, beginning a series of policies which have left higher education in a state of continual flux.

This decade alone, radical change seems to have become an almost annual occurrence: starting with the demise of Aim Higher in 2011, the tripling of tuition fees in 2012, the lifting of the student numbers cap in 2015, the setting of ambitious targets to double the number of disadvantaged students in higher education, the introduction of the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) and the creation of the Office for Students (OfS). And with the Prime Minister's announcement of a comprehensive review of higher education funding at the start of 2018, things will not settle down any time soon.

The establishment of the Office for Students might seem to be a mere technical change: the merger of the Office for Fair Access (OFFA) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) under one more convenient umbrella. But the Office for Students has the potential to be an agent of profound change, particularly with regard to widening participation.

Its stated aim is to 'ensure that every student, whatever their background, has a fulfilling experience of higher education that enriches their lives and careers'.

Another seemingly minor name change worth noting is the change of title for the Office for Students's chief of widening participation policy from the Director of Fair Access to the Director of Fair Access and Participation. This represents recognition of a growing consensus in the sector: that simply getting more students from under-represented backgrounds into higher education is not enough, especially when they have worse non-continuation rates and outcomes than other students overall, with disadvantage following them long after they have left higher education.

The incoming Director of Fair Access and Participation, Chris Millward, has strong foundations upon which to build. Thanks to the access agreement procedure and enforcement established by OFFA, there are now record numbers of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and first-generation students in higher education. The National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) is driving the sort of meaningful joint working between higher education institutions OFFA called for, often in areas of the country previously 'under the radar' of many widening participation interventions.

But weaknesses remain. There has been a precipitous decline in part-time students, many of whom have traditionally been from disadvantaged backgrounds. Progress across the sector has also been uneven overall, with a small number of universities doing the heavy lifting when it comes to increasing the number of disadvantaged students, while the access

gap remains stubbornly wide at many of the most selective institutions.

Tackling these challenges will require fresh thinking and new ideas, from a variety of different perspectives. That is why Brightside and the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) – following on from our joint 2017 publication *Where next for widening participation and fair access?* – have called upon a range of people to provide advice to the new Director of Fair Access and Participation. These include vice-chancellors and widening participation departments, third sector representatives, politicians, media commentators and former and current students with experience of widening participation work. Whereas the more extensive essays in our previous publication proposed longer-term strategies, the short contributions displayed here are intended to be actions that could be put into practice more quickly.

The ideas presented are as diverse as the voices. But a common theme is that widening participation needs to be thought of with a broader scope, that 'one size fits all' solutions will not work if we wish to make higher education representative of the diverse society it serves. Different groups such as care leavers, refugees or those with physical disabilities or mental health problems have different needs, and support should be tailored accordingly. This support can be financial, and ideas advocated here include the return of maintenance grants, fee waivers for specific groups of students and funding to help disadvantaged students cover the costs of attending open days.

Equally important is support to make everyone feel welcome

in higher education, regardless of their background. Mentoring and other forms of one-to-one support, such as dedicated staff with responsibility for care leavers or students with mental health issues, can reassure prospective students that higher education does contain people who understand their concerns, and in many cases have overcome similar obstacles themselves. Such personalised support could also be extended to the parents and families of first-generation students, the people who probably have most influence over someone's decision to pursue higher education. Speaking to someone with first-hand experience of the higher education system can also help those who lack other forms of advice and guidance to find the mode of study that is best for them, whether that is a traditional three-year degree course, studying at a further education institution or taking one of the newer technical routes such as degree apprenticeships.

Awareness of the opportunities higher education can offer takes time to develop, and there are calls here for greater engagement with schools at an earlier stage, and also for universities to devote resources to improving early years' education. But the sector should not be moulding students or asking people to change themselves to fit in. Instead, it should be making concerted efforts to change itself. As some of our contributors state, the prevailing culture and curriculum in many higher education institutions is built on traditions, preconceptions and unconscious bias which can feel exclusionary to those from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds and identities. White, working-class boys, too, continue to remain severely under-represented in higher education, shrouded by a belief that university is not for them,

with fewer aspirations and a distinct lack of drive and support. Understanding and changing this hegemony in our institutions requires robust research, strong will and tenacious action.

There are no silver bullets here, rather a selection of tools for widening participation which, if used wisely, can dismantle the barriers that prevent far too many individuals from benefitting from higher education. Advancements in technology also mean that the Office for Students has a greater range of means at its disposal. At Brightside, we are using the internet to help universities support young people in parts of the country that previously seemed difficult to reach. There is also huge untapped potential for technology to be used to introduce young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to networks to build their social capital, which is of critical importance when it comes to building their careers.

In addition, the vast amount of data in the 'knowledge economy' has the potential, if used and analysed correctly, to reveal the factors that most influence different participation rates. It can also be used to form the basis of more effective interventions to close the gaps – whether through more refined application of contextual admissions which truly reflect both an applicant's background and potential or more accurate targeting of widening participation work to ensure those who need it most are not missed.

This report is not intended to be simply a list of demands to the Office for Students and the new Director of Fair Access and Participation, in particular. These proposals can only be successfully implemented with the co-operation and genuine commitment of the entire higher education sector, which must

work towards long-term goals with long-term funding. But all funding needs to be justified and the current evaluation of widening participation is too patchy and inconsistent across the sector: practitioners have a duty to understand what works, whether any spending is worth it if goals are to be reached and what the opportunity cost of backing one project over another might be. We must also ask some tough questions and consider some radical changes: around the use of unconditional offers, the introduction of quotas or a move to post-qualification admissions, for example. Alongside many others working in widening participation, we at Brightside regularly hear stories from the young people who progress through our programmes about how higher education has transformed their lives. We, together with HEPI, hope that the ideas here will bring about real change in the sector, so it can transform many more.

Summary of Priorities

This report contains recommendations for the new Director of Fair Access and Participation from different stakeholder groups – some of which are working within universities to advance the widening participation agenda, while others are sharing their experiences from other sectors or as external observers. We have highlighted one key idea in each of the entries, which together make up a 35-point plan for the new Director of Fair Access and Participation outlined below.

According to our contributors from academia, to further widen access and participation in the English higher education sector, the Office for Students and the new Director of Fair Access and Participation should:

1. encourage rigorous research on any hidden assumptions behind the content and delivery of the curriculum and examination and assessment techniques (Professor Tim Quine, University of Exeter);

2. introduce mandatory unconscious bias training for staff (Professor Kalwant Bhopal, University of Birmingham);

3. appoint a Commissioner for Student Mental Health to co-ordinate a national response to the mental health crisis in our higher education institutions (Ross Renton, University of Worcester); and

4. ensure there is a repository for high-quality evidence on what works for widening participation and fair access (Professor Anna Vignoles, University of Cambridge).

According to widening participation practitioners, the Office for Students should:

5. place a top priority on higher education access for white working-class boys, who are the most under-represented group in higher education, as well as white working-class girls (Anne-Marie Canning, King's College London);

6. encourage universities to focus on employability and broader success for all groups across the student lifecycle (David Woolley, Nottingham Trent University);

7. provide external funding for a national programme for Year 5 pupils to Year 11 pupils that helps to break some of the cultural barriers to higher education that are difficult to tackle through short-term interventions (Ant Sutcliffe and Dr Hannah Merry, National Collaborative Outreach Programme);

8. require all institutions to include a target to improve the access, success or progression of students with experience of being in care (Emily Hughes, Kingston University);

9. develop a basket of measures to support contextual admissions, target outreach activity and assist in monitoring and tracking student progress and outcomes (Mike Nicholson, University of Bath); and

10. support widening participation targets that go beyond one Parliament (Dr Graeme Atherton, National Education Opportunities Network).

According to students, former students or those representing students, the Office for Students should:

11. fund pilots for work connecting parents of first-generation students with parents of potential first-generation students (Summer Dolan, Northumbria University);

12. when taking a metrics-based approach to teaching quality, use more appropriate calculations, such as progress towards closing the Black Attainment Gap (Shakira Martin, National Union of Students);

13. roll out access regulation via Access and Participation Plans at a subject (cluster) level akin to what is happening with the Teaching Excellence Framework (Jim Dickinson, UEA Students); and

14. ensure care leavers are allocated a Designated Member of Staff who is not having to balance this role alongside others (Beth Taswell, City, University of London).

According to representatives from third sector organisations, the Office for Students should:

15. guarantee mentoring support for every school and college student who wants it (Anand Shukla, Brightside);

16. promote long-term evaluation planning and encourage all universities to invest in analytic capacity (Andrew Berwick, The Access Project);

17. reopen the debate on post-qualification admissions (Conor Ryan, Sutton Trust);

18. facilitate access to education through granting more fee waivers for asylum-seeking young people (Dan McEvoy, Refugee Support Network); and

19. ensure the Higher Education Statistics Agency mandates returns on sexual orientation and gender identity, as with other protected characteristics (Pete Mercer, Stonewall).

According to representatives from schools and colleges, the Office for Students should:

20. draw upon expertise in the further education sector and prioritise training for all widening participation staff, so that they can produce materials and activities that genuinely represent the entire sector (Sophie Heaton, UCEN Manchester);

21. urge universities to fund basic costs for those who cannot otherwise afford them, such as travel to university open days (Paul Murray and Chere Kempt, Oasis Academy Isle of Sheppey); and

22. increase articulation partnerships, forming efficient and cohesive pathways from school through college to university (Vonnie Sandlan, Colleges Scotland).

According to representatives from think tanks and research institutes, the Office for Students should:

23. encourage new Oxbridge colleges to boost the number of students from under-represented groups at our oldest, richest and most prestigious universities (Nick Hillman, Higher Education Policy Institute);

24. fully link data in one place that can be used to assess the impact of policies contained in Access Agreements (Professor Lorraine Dearden, University College London and Institute for Fiscal Studies);

25. encourage universities to devote attention to nurseries, in the same way as many already support or sponsor state schools, so that more people can get a high-quality education as early as possible (Ryan Shorthouse, Bright Blue);

26. eradicate higher education 'cold spots' in England by urging universities to develop rural outreach programmes to ensure no community gets left behind (Diana Beech, Higher Education Policy Institute);

27. work with universities to ensure that disabled students are supported to succeed in an inclusive higher education environment (Megan Dunn, Equalities Challenge Unit); and

28. put greater scrutiny on employers to ensure they are not just attracting students from a limited list of the least diverse institutions and refusing to consider students below a certain A-Level tariff (Nik Miller, the Bridge Group).

According to journalists, the Office for Students should:

29. take action to curb the surge in unconditional offers before it damages the life chances of some of the most underprivileged students (Rosemary Bennett, *The Times*); and

30. reintroduce a cap on student numbers as there is some evidence the economic gains from increasing student numbers stalled back in the mid-2000s, with hard quotas for students from working-class backgrounds at each university (Sonia Sodha, *Observer*).

According to politicans from across the political divide, the Office for Students should:

31. make rebalancing higher education a priority and incentivise universities to offer degrees which will meet our skills needs (Rt. Hon. Robert Halfon MP, Education Select Committee); and

32. recognise that good careers advice can be transformative for young people and can drive them towards educational opportunities that they have never considered (Justin Madders MP, All-Party Parliamentary Group for Social Mobility).

According to employers or those representing employers' interests, the Office for Students should:

33. put a focus on the decline in part-time students at the top of the agenda (Harry Anderson, CBI);

34. conduct further research into the specific contexts behind admissions data to help public understanding and the development of appropriate policies (Gary Attle, Mills & Reeve LLP); and

35. put an end to unpaid student and graduate placements, internships and work experiences, which are a barrier to equal access and social mobility, and ensure any such positions are openly advertised (Helen Smith, Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Service).

Perspectives from academia

1. Professor Tim Quine, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education), University of Exeter

Ensuring a more diverse population progresses to higher education should undoubtedly be a key aim for the sector. This means not only economically or socially disadvantaged students, but mature and part-time students as well as under-represented ethnic groups. However, as universities become more adept at identifying potential during the admissions process (through the application of contextual data, for example), they must also ensure that all learners, irrespective of background, succeed in their studies and immerse themselves in the wider opportunities a university education brings. We must also ensure students are supported to progress to the next stage of their career, be that further study or employment.

The Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) has shone a light on differential outcomes at universities but we need to know more about why these differences happen. **The Office for Students should encourage universities to conduct rigorous research to uncover any hidden assumptions about the content and delivery of the existing curriculum as well as the examination and assessment techniques currently employed.**

Universities must also guarantee equality of access to high-quality internships / work placements and international experiences for all students, while also balancing universal support for students with targeted support where it is most needed.

2. Kalwant Bhopal, Professor of Education and Social Justice, University of Birmingham

Radical change is needed in higher education to support Black and Minority Ethnic students. There is ample evidence to suggest that Black and Minority Ethnic students remain disadvantaged in higher education: they are less likely to attend elite and Russell Group universities, less likely to gain a 2:1 or First class degree and are more likely to drop out of university than their peers. A key factor that many students discuss is their experience of racism, both from peers and from staff, in which they feel staff give favourable treatment and greater support to white students, which can influence their grades.

To address these issues, universities must, first, demonstrate they are monitoring racist incidents and underlying evidence of structural discrimination. Secondly, they should publish clear action plans with specific measurable outcomes on how the university will address racism. Thirdly, this information should be disseminated consistently across the university.

Too many institutions invest heavily in delivering narratives of their commitment to social justice rather than addressing actual problems. One specific measure is **the introduction of mandatory unconscious bias training; it is no longer good enough for staff to claim they are unaware of discrimination in the workplace**. If universities are serious about addressing inequalities, they must implement transparent policies so that all students, regardless of their ethnic background, can benefit from their university experiences.

3. Ross Renton, Pro Vice Chancellor, University of Worcester

According to the Children's Society, serious mental health problems affect about one in ten children, with only 30 per cent receiving appropriate interventions. These unaddressed issues have, unsurprisingly, materialised within higher education. There has been a significant increase in demand for support services, with the Institute for Public Policy Research showing a fivefold increase in first-year students disclosing mental health problems within a decade. While it is right to recognise the significant commitment of institutions to support these students, it is often too little, too late. This should be a priority, with **the appointment of a Commissioner for Student Mental Health to co-ordinate a national response to this crisis.** They should be tasked to create a model that cuts through organisational divides and compels schools, colleges, universities, employers and the National Health Service (NHS) to be proactive, to collaborate and to target resources where they will have a sustained impact.

Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds often make choices about their studies based on graduate employment opportunities. It is therefore important that inconsistencies in the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) coding system are addressed to ensure, for example, that graduate learning support workers in schools with substantial responsibilities are classified as graduates not non-graduates as has been the case.

4. Anna Vignoles, Professor of Education, University of Cambridge

Most of the difference in the likelihood of going to university between poorer and richer students can be explained by differences in their prior achievement. However, there remains a socio-economic gap in access to high-status institutions even when we allow for prior achievement. We also know that poorer students are less likely to apply to these institutions. So interventions to influence application behaviour are essential.

We need to understand whether a post A-Level application system would be advantageous for under-represented groups. For example, differences in predicted grades across state and independent schools may disadvantage the former. Further, if poorer students do not aim as high due to a lack of confidence, making choices after they receive their grades should improve fair access. The Office for Students might consider a post A-Level admissions pilot to determine whether it is feasible and could produce gains.

Universities are currently spending a relatively large sum of money on fair access activity. It is essential we understand which activities are effective. Universities and other sector bodies should be required to undertake robust evaluation and **the Office for Students should drive forward work setting up a repository for high-quality evidence on what works for widening participation and ensuring fair access.**

Perspectives from widening participation practitioners

5. Anne-Marie Canning, Director of Social Mobility and Student Success, King's College London

White working-class boys are the most under-represented group in higher education. Their access to university – and the access of white working-class girls too – should be a top priority for the Office for Students.

A 2016 report by LKMco and King's College London offered clear direction for supporting white working-class children into higher education. Attainment for this group is a significant barrier to progression and widening participation programmes must be targeted at Key Stage 4 or earlier. Parents need to be engaged in order to support post-16 progression and we should be wary of interventions that rely upon sport as an engagement tool. Finally, degree apprenticeships could be a powerful widening participation tool for white working-class young people too.

At King's we have established the McFadzean Scholars programme for Year 10 low-income white boys and their parents. This has been positively received by schools. We are launching a new online website called www.borntobe.org.uk which targets parents and carers in white working-class communities. Through the website, families can order a home-learning pack, live chat with one of our parent leaders and connect with stories from similar families who have had a child go on to university.

The Director of Fair Access and Participation should set a high standard for initiatives focused on white working-class pupils and ensure they are integrated as a discrete target group in large-scale widening participation programmes. We should be resolute in taking a proactive approach to helping more white working-class children make it to higher education.

6. David Woolley, Head of Schools, Colleges and Community Outreach, Nottingham Trent University

There is too great a focus on simply accessing university, particularly a Russell Group university, in the widening participation debate. Access to university is not necessarily the great leveller it is assumed to be. Many students from disadvantaged areas and under-represented groups do less well in higher education than those with the same prior educational attainment from more advantaged areas.

Some universities, like my own institution, are addressing this issue and challenging the notion of what university study is and should be. Nottingham Trent University (NTU) is refreshing the curricula of all our courses to ensure they facilitate success for all students. Included in this we have looked at the value of work experience and found that disadvantaged students' participation in sandwich courses can cancel out the socio-economic effect on their progression to graduate-level employment. So, from 2018, all NTU students will have a meaningful work-like experience as part of their course.

We believe other institutions can learn from this. **The Office for Students should encourage universities to consider**

their curriculum design, their focus on employability and broader success for all groups across the student lifecycle.

7. Ant Sutcliffe, Head, and Dr Hannah Merry, Operations Manager, Higher Horizons+ National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) consortium

Higher education providers are well-placed to lead collaborative networks which raise the aspirations and attainment of disadvantaged young people in their locality. From years of leading and evaluating widening participation work, we believe that collaborative outreach is not only ethically sound in an increasingly marketised sector, but is also financially efficient, reducing unnecessary duplication of work while utilising the varied strengths of a broad range of partners.

External funding is necessary to make higher education institutions work together effectively. This means collaborating on a variety of targeted interventions over a prolonged period, leading to the positive relationships with young people which are key to successful entry and progression through higher education.

The Office for Students should therefore provide external funding for a national programme for Year 5 pupils to Year 11 pupils which helps to break some of the cultural barriers to higher education based in class and localism that are difficult to tackle through short-term interventions.

Widening participation professionals are well placed to assess, identify, and overcome these barriers in partnership with businesses, schools, the community and national careers advice provision. With support from the Office for Students for

a collaborative programme, universities' central teams could then focus more on community-building projects, the mature student market, progression programmes for Year 12 and Year 13 pupils, and post-entry support to create a sustainable, whole lifecycle approach to widening participation and student success.

8. Emily Hughes, Access and Support Manager (KU Cares), Kingston University

Meeting the needs of care-experienced and other vulnerable groups should be explicitly included as a priority within guidance from the Office for Students. **We would recommend that all institutions are required to include a target to improve the access, success or progression of care experienced students.** We believe that this would demonstrate a real commitment to ensuring a significant change in the educational and life outcomes of this marginalised group.

We know that care-experienced students generally take longer to complete their degree due to external factors linked to their care status. At present, there is no acknowledgment or understanding from Student Finance England regarding this. We believe the resulting financial difficulties are a contributing factor to the high attrition rate among these learners. So the Office for Students should use its influence to ensure that care-experienced students are not financially disadvantaged if they have to take a break from study or repeat multiple times due to mitigating circumstances.

A significant proportion of our care-experienced students require intensive and sustained wellbeing services. If we aim

to increase the proportion of care-experienced learners into and through higher education, it is vital that institutions are encouraged to provide adequate mental health and wellbeing services.

9. Mike Nicholson, Director of Undergraduate Admissions and Outreach, University of Bath

One of the challenges in a new role is that there is a pressure to innovate and do something new. But access and widening participation is a well-travelled path. Rather than fruitlessly searching for a silver bullet, we should utilise the existing expertise and ideas. A good starting point is the October 2016 report of the Social Mobility Advisory Group, *Working in Partnership: enabling social mobility in higher education*, which is full of good recommendations and proposals, most of which have been sidelined as politicians and decision-makers have grappled with new challenges.

One recommendation that could achieve a quick win would be the development of contextual data. The Participation of Local Areas (POLAR) classification groups was a start, but it is being increasingly used as the only indicator of disadvantage, a role for which it was never intended and for which it is unsuited, on its own, to deliver. With the existing knowledge and expertise, **it should be possible to develop a basket of measures applicable not only to support contextual admissions, but also target outreach activity and assist in monitoring and tracking student progress and outcomes**. If you are feeling really radical, you could also support development of measures that work across all four nations of the UK.

10. Dr Graeme Atherton, Director, National Education Opportunities Network (NEON)

Widening access work across the last 20 years has been bedevilled by short termism. There has been a parade of time-limited national collaborative outreach projects, from Excellence Challenge in 2000 to the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) in 2017, with moving targets. **The new Director of Fair Access and Participation and the Office for Students can lay down a marker by talking the language of long termism. This means advocating for targets that go beyond one Parliament.**

Scotland is committed to ensuring that 20 per cent of higher education students are from the 20 per cent most deprived backgrounds by 2030. Similar long-term targets are required for England but should include success in higher education and progression into graduate employment for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. These targets should be supported by a commitment to a national collaborative infrastructure which is part-funded by higher education institutions as part of their Access and Participation agreements and the Office for Students. This infrastructure needs many years of committed funding upfront and should build on the present National Collaborative Outreach Programme but should be 'all age' to counter the bias toward younger learners which has been a feature of the last two decades.

Perspectives from students

11. Summer Dolan, Student, Northumbria University

For more low-income students to enter higher education, they have to *want* to go to university in the first place. In my own experience, by the time university is being seriously discussed in the state school system you are well into secondary education, and often surrounded by a culture that sees academic effort as 'uncool'. Low-income students, from a young age, need examples of people from similar backgrounds who have succeeded at university. Mentoring programmes like Brightside's are vital and this mentoring could also include parents. **The Office for Students should fund pilots for work which connect parents of first-generation students with parents of potential first-generation students, which would provide them with knowledge and support surrounding the process.**

I would also suggest, as someone who spent hours trawling through university finance pages on the internet as well as private scholarship pages, that a scholarship search should be integrated into the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). UCAS already asks for the occupational background of the main earner in a student's household, and this – combined with other factors they collect such as age, gender, race, field of study and location – could be used to direct students to private scholarships and grants they might be eligible for. This could be combined with data from universities to suggest to applicants which universities have grants and scholarships they could apply for.

12. Shakira Martin, President, National Union of Students (NUS)

Even with the massive increase in student numbers the most selective institutions have not diversified sufficiently on issues of race, gender or socio-economic background. Ensuring that students from all backgrounds have an equal chance to attend the same universities and can progress into equally successful careers must be a key goal.

Interventions must benefit students equitably, and not just enrich students with existing advantages. For example, interventions around academic engagement focused at improving retention often predominantly enrich the students with existing significant support.

A failure to focus interventions on those who need it most – including through a much-needed intersectional approach – has seen long-standing inequities failing to be addressed. For example, the Black Attainment Gap and inequities in disability support continue regardless of a decade of focussed work.

Historically, access has focused on socio-economic background, but now needs to focus on a more intersectional understanding of the student experience. Liberation of education from oppressive structures – for example class, race or disability – is a key mechanism for making a truly transformational education. **If the Office for Students is to take a metrics-based approach to teaching quality, it should use a more appropriate calculation such as progress towards closing the Black Attainment Gap.**

13. Jim Dickinson, Chief of Staff, UEA Students

The old Office for Fair Access (OFFA) regime and the intended Access and Participation Plans work at an institutional level, but beneath institutional averages there are massive differences between subjects. Where, for example, providers deliver Nursing and Midwifery, that provision usually means a significant proportion of that provider's mature recruits are enrolled on health courses. Without that provision, their performance would look significantly worse.

Former Director of Fair Access Les Ebdon previously argued that the law as it stood prevented him from analysing progress or regulating at subject or department level on the grounds of academic freedom. This is obviously problematic and preposterous. It was never clear if he was correct, or indeed if the Higher Education and Research Act (2017) changes things; but in any event, **given the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework is to operate at subject (cluster) level, so should access regulation via Access and Participation Plans.**

This should include a clear focus on the 'professions', where, despite general progress on higher education access, there appears to be little or no impact on the diversity of those entering Dentistry, Medicine or Law. As such, as well as strengthening links with schools / colleges to address prior attainment, the Office for Student's focus on outcomes should strengthen links with industry associations and bodies to promote diverse access to the professions upon graduation.

14. Beth Taswell, Care Leaver and Young Adult Carer Support Officer, City, University of London

It is essential to allocate care leavers a Designated Member of Staff who is not having to balance this role alongside another. This will enable practitioners to focus on the transition and on-course support for students, so that provision and policy can be developed effectively (and by the experts) and meaningful relationships can be built between the Designated Member of Staff and students. It will also allow practitioners to look after their own wellbeing in an emotionally-charged job.

As a care leaver myself, when I was studying my designated contact focused solely on the support and provision for vulnerable student groups. Because of this, I felt valued as an individual and not a hindrance on someone's time. With that kind of relationship, I was able to trust that the Designated Member of Staff's advice and support was about what was best for me and not just what was best for the institution.

The Director of Fair Access and Participation could support greater collaboration between local authorities and higher education institutions to ensure that young people are supported effectively both in and out of university. The Office for Students could engage with the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers to support better co-ordination and dissemination of knowledge and best practice.

Perspectives from third sector organisations

15. Anand Shukla, Chief Executive, Brightside

The lack of effective information, advice, and guidance is a damaging policy failure which inhibits social mobility.

While there is no shortage of information about higher education for young people, prospective students also need: advice and guidance to enable them to navigate it; to plan for their future; to discover and access opportunities they did not realise existed; and to provide practical strategies to realise their ambitions.

Today in the UK, access to such support all too often comes down to your family, school or college and whatever networks you are fortunate enough to access. This patchy approach to advice and guidance damages individual life chances while reducing the available talent pool for the country.

The digital age should make this state of affairs needless. The internet can connect young people with role models who can provide the personal insights and encouragement they need. In 2018, there are no longer any social or geographical barriers to providing one-to-one support to any young person. Based on Brightside's experience of mentoring 100,000 disadvantaged young people online over the last 15 years, **I want to see the Office for Students guarantee mentoring support for every school student who wants it.**

16. Andrew Berwick, Chief Executive, The Access Project (TAP)

Effective programmes change young people's lives. This is magical, but building a programme is not magic. You pilot, then if this appears to work you develop and improve through evaluation and specific annual refinements.

The Access Project has run its programme since 2008, but this has been transformed through changes made every year. I am proud of the result: we have evidence of impact, and will make more changes to improve further.

Yet I am still dismayed by the wider progress made on access. Despite huge increases in spending, we are so far from closing the access gap. Increasing spending and volume of programmes is not solving this problem. We need better programmes. This can only happen by evaluating, improving what works, and dropping what does not.

The Office for Students should promote long-term evaluation planning, beyond the annual Access Agreement cycle. It should encourage all universities to invest in analytic capacity – even where it means reducing activity with young people.

Widening participation is a young endeavour within the field of education: we are improving, and have much to learn. I hope the Office for Students will foster a culture where we take our duty to learn as seriously as our duty to deliver.

17. Conor Ryan, Director of Research, Sutton Trust

Fairness should be at the heart of the Director of Fair Access and Participation's agenda. That means making the admissions process fairer and ensuring outreach and access funds are spent effectively. His task would be helped if maintenance grants were restored and if fees changed, so the poorest students pay nothing and the better-off pay back the most.

But it is not just about money. The Sutton Trust's *Admissions in Context* research gave the lie to the idea that contextual admissions by lowering grades is patronising and discriminatory. Our analysis showed that one-in-five admissions of non-disadvantaged students were at least two grades below the standard criteria at elite universities. The new Director of Fair Access and Participation should ask universities to do the same for all disadvantaged students with high potential and be upfront about what is required to access a course.

At the same time, **he should reopen the debate on post-qualification admissions**: our *Rules of the Game* research showed bright but poor students consistently have their grades underestimated. Without AS-Levels, the time is ripe for change. Finally, he should insist that universities improve evaluation of the £750 million they spend on access and student support so that it is invested effectively.

18. Dan McEvoy, Specialist Higher Education Support Worker, Refugee Support Network

The Government should ensure no asylum-seeking young person wishing to study at university is excluded by insurmountable financial barriers. These include tuition fees charged at a higher 'overseas' rate and an inability to access student finance. Legislation regarding fee status and eligibility for student finance should be amended to address this, ensuring that talented young asylum seekers are not prevented from continuing their education.

Universities should facilitate access to education through granting more fee waivers for asylum-seeking young people. A greater number of higher education institutions should follow the example of universities involved with the Article 26 scholarship scheme, which promotes fee waivers and bursaries to enable young asylum seekers to realise their potential through education, and they should adopt Article 26's *Guiding Principles on Sanctuary Scholars in UK Higher Education*.

Schools, further education colleges and refugee support organisations should ensure that accurate advice on higher education rights and entitlements is available to young refugees and asylum seekers. It is essential that tailored advice from sources which understand the education system and the complexities of the asylum system is available and accessible.

19. Pete Mercer, Head of Public Sector Membership Programmes, Stonewall

While many assume universities are friendly environments for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) people, we know that LGBT students still face worrying levels of bullying, harassment and social exclusion, with trans students at particular risk. All institutions should take a proactive role in addressing harmful culture and behaviours.

We know that these negative experiences can significantly impact on LGBT students' attainment and drop-out rates. Half of trans students (51 per cent) who responded to a National Union of Students' survey admitted to having seriously considered dropping out of their course. While progress is being made, more should be done across the sector to address the barriers that prevent LGBT students from accessing the support they need.

Sexual orientation and gender identity data returns for students and staff are currently inadequate. This means that many institutions are unable to determine the access and participation rates of LGBT students across academic departments and student services. **Data returns on sexual orientation and gender identity are not currently mandated by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), unlike other protected characteristics, and it is vital that this is addressed.**

Perspectives from schools and colleges

20. Sophie Heaton, Higher Education Outreach Officer, UCEN Manchester

The Office for Students should represent the interests of higher education students in every type of institution, not just universities. This means helping students understand all their options, allowing them to weigh up meaningful differences in potential routes so that they can make truly informed decisions. While important for all students, this is particularly crucial for those from disadvantaged backgrounds or under-represented groups, who may have more barriers to traditional university study and less knowledge of alternatives such as higher education in further education colleges. However, universities often dominate the widening participation higher education field. This has resulted in information, advice and guidance that is largely university focused.

I have seen many presentations, workshops and resources described as 'impartial' because they mention Foundation Degrees and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs). Unfortunately, these are often included as 'other' qualifications; an alternative, without any valuable explanation as to what they could mean for particular students.

The Office for Students should draw upon expertise in the further education sector and prioritise training for all widening participation staff, so that they can produce materials and activities that genuinely represent the entire sector and implement standards to guarantee their quality and accuracy. Higher education in further education needs a

louder voice if we are to help more students, and it should be shouted about by staff in all types of institutions.

21. Paul Murray, Head of Community Engagement, and Chere Kempt, Head of Careers, UCAS Applications and Work Experience, Oasis Academy Isle of Sheppey

The Oasis Academy Isle of Sheppey is a coastal community school and has issues that are typical of other similar areas, such as trying to raise the aspirations of some of our students and their families.

The cost of university education is a major hurdle for many families. If students opt for university, they quite often live at home and travel to cut down costs. This limits them to local universities. In Kent, we are lucky to have the Kent and Medway Progression Federation and very supportive local universities that offer a good experience.

However, we would like to see more universities extend their outreach work into areas and communities like ours, to introduce students to the range of opportunities open to them, and the support available so they can take them up. But that support must begin before young people make their application, since if they want to go to open days further afield many families simply cannot afford to pay for the travel and overnight stay.

The Office for Students should urge universities to fund these basic costs for students who could not otherwise afford them, so they do not become another barrier in their way.

22. Vonnie Sandlan, Senior Policy Officer, Colleges Scotland

A mechanism of delivery which works well in Scotland, underpinned by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, is the clearly-mapped and accessible pathways to progression.

These pathways exist through colleges in Scotland delivering education and skills training beyond the traditional remit of further education, meaning individuals can study at higher education level in college with all the support, guidance and advice that exists for individuals in a further education setting.

Post-16 opportunities are changing to meet the needs of a new generation of millennial learners whose curriculum has taught them how to learn.

A focus on tackling youth unemployment, combined with efforts to keep young people at school until the end of S6 (Sixth Year), and a dynamic labour market with changing expectations on workers, has encouraged new ways of thinking: from the Foundation Apprenticeship, undertaken in the senior phase of school and delivered by colleges, which gives work-based learning a space at school, to **increasing articulation partnerships forming efficient and cohesive pathways from school through college to university.**

The college sector in Scotland is integral in both pre- and post-16 education and ensures that learners are equipped with the skills and experience to move comfortably into employment and deploy their talents.

Perspectives from think tanks and research institutes

23. Nick Hillman, Director, Higher Education Policy Institute

Our higher education sector benefits enormously from the presence of Oxford and Cambridge. As two of the oldest, most prestigious and most successful universities in the world, the whole system sees trickle-down benefits. For example, it is hard to believe UK institutions would be so fantastically good at recruiting students from other countries without Oxbridge at the apex.

But, as with most good things in life, it is not all positive. The consequences include hyper-selective admissions: in 1963, the Robbins Report called for 'rather more equality of attraction' between Oxbridge and other universities: 'We should make the most of first class ability wherever it exists.' That remains a challenge today.

Yet the position of Oxbridge at the top of the tree is unlikely to change: it is noticeable that those who campaign so vociferously against selection at age 11 tend to be silent over hyper-selection at 18. So we must think about delivering fairer access to the most selective institutions alongside widening participation overall.

Fortunately, the best solution to both challenges is the same: provide more places, so that entry is not such a fierce battle. In recent decades, other institutions have expanded their undergraduate numbers far more than the two Oxbridge institutions have done. **If existing colleges are reluctant to increase their undergraduate entry, then it is time to**

consider founding a number of entirely new Oxbridge colleges to boost the number of students from under-represented groups at our oldest, richest and most prestigious universities.

24. Lorraine Dearden, Professor of Economics and Social Statistics, University College London, and Research Fellow, Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS)

Good policymaking and regulation requires good data used in an appropriate way. **We have data that could be used to assess the impact of policies contained in Access Agreements as well as for better understanding the important mechanisms behind differential access to higher education for disadvantaged students. The Office for Students needs to fully link this data in one place.**

Why? IFS research linking schools and Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data shows that students who get the same GCSE results at age 16 are equally likely to progress to higher education, irrespective of their socio-economic status. However, there are socio-economic gaps in access to elite universities and the types of subjects studied, even allowing for school outcomes.

We do not know fully whether this is because (i) bright disadvantaged students are less likely to apply for these courses, and/or (ii) they do, but do not get accepted, and/or (iii) their predicted grades and/or subject choice have some role. There are also socio-economic differences in drop-out rates, completion rates and outcomes once a person starts university. Good data would not only help us find out why these things are happening, but which access programmes are best at tackling them.

25. Ryan Shorthouse, Director, Bright Blue

Decision makers and opinion formers should stop wasting time advocating the abolition or reduction of tuition fees. It is ignorant and lazy policymaking. Instead, to further boost participation of those from less advantaged backgrounds, they now need to focus earlier on in people's lives.

Cognitive ability at age five strongly predicts educational attainment by adulthood. The Effective Pre-School, Primary and Secondary Education (EPPSE) study shows that participation in high-quality, pre-school education is associated with better A-Level results. We desperately need, but still do not have, a high-quality, pre-school education system.

Universities, bringing resources and expertise, could help. Many already sponsor or offer other support to state schools, and, according to Universities UK's analysis of Office for Fair Access (OFFA) Access Agreements, most have plans to increase their work in this area significantly. The Office for Students should encourage universities to devote similar attention to nurseries too, so that more people can get a high-quality education as early as possible.

26. Diana Beech, Director of Policy and Advocacy, Higher Education Policy Institute

As the first in my family to embark on higher education, after growing up in a county without a university, I credit my teachers for giving me the direction and confidence to choose a university that was right for me. Attainment levels at my Sixth Form were above average, but the lack of universities in the vicinity meant pupils left without a clear idea of what going to university

entailed. Local industry also did not fully understand how to harness the potential of returning graduates, meaning going to university represented a one-way ticket out of the region.

It should be a priority of the new Director of Fair Access and Participation to eradicate higher education 'cold spots' in England by urging universities to develop rural outreach programmes to ensure no community gets left behind. These should include: open days for sixth-formers from rural communities with transport provided by universities (or at least costs covered); arrangements for current students and recent graduates to meet with prospective applicants in schools in remote areas; and entrepreneurship programmes, with final-year students and local employers to encourage graduate openings and attract graduates from both inside and outside the local area to work there.

27. Megan Dunn, Senior Policy Advisor, Equalities Challenge Unit

In January 2017, the Disabled Students' Sector Leadership Group published its guidance on *Inclusive Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: a route to excellence*. This advises institutions to create inclusive learning environments, and remove barriers that are commonly faced by disabled students. To ensure that disabled students are supported in higher education, providers must create inclusive learning environments, looking beyond issues relating to the physical estate and ensure that the requirements of disabled students are considered in all elements of the higher education experience.

Higher education providers must create more inclusive

admissions, discussing with disabled applicants how their requirements would be met before they decide which institution they want to attend. Inclusive teaching and learning practice should be considered in course design and delivery. Careers advice must ensure disabled students not only get the support they need to find a job, just like their non-disabled peers, but that they are aware of their rights in the workplace and how to exercise those rights.

If higher education is to meet its obligations to students and society, **the Office for Students needs to work with universities to ensure that disabled students are supported to succeed in an inclusive higher education environment.**

28. Nik Miller, Chief Executive, the Bridge Group

Beyond matters immediately within the control of the Office for Students, there are important areas that risk limiting positive progress on fair access that deserve attention. First, there needs to be greater exploration of the way in which university league tables are constructed: for example, they typically disadvantage institutions operating contextual admissions (because entry tariff is considered a proxy for student quality), and consider graduate outcomes in absolute terms (assuming implicitly that every students' starting line is in the same place).

The sharper focus on student success is welcome, but employers play a critical role in determining students' prospects. This demands greater scrutiny. For example, many employers continue to attract students from a limited list of the least diverse institutions, refuse to consider students below a certain A-Level tariff – as university contextual admissions

opens the door for many students, it is slammed shut once more upon graduation – and offer unpaid and unadvertised internships.

These items could be dismissed as outside of scope. That would be unhelpfully reductive: achieving equality of opportunity requires collective responsibility, and collaborative action. Above all, the creation of the Office for Students is an important opportunity to look inwards with a sharper focus, but also to look outwards; to convene influencers across sectors to deliver coherent approaches, and to dismantle prevailing contradictions.

Perspectives from journalists

29. Rosemary Bennett, Education Editor, *The Times*

The Office for Students should take action to curb the surge in unconditional offers before it becomes another distortion in the higher education 'market', damaging the life chances of some of the most underprivileged students.

Once the preserve of the brightest and best, pupils heading for mediocre A-Level grades are increasingly being bribed by lower-ranking universities with these highly questionable offers, with the proviso that they make it their firm choice. The risk is these students, perhaps lacking confidence in their abilities and unfamiliar with the system, trade down to a university they know they will definitely get into, underperform in their exams and get lumbered with poor A-Levels for the rest of their lives.

Second, but related, would be a universal system in transferrable credits so bright students who really take to their studies at university can trade up to a better institution after a year. If there is thriving competition between universities, as we are often told, it should not stop at the point of admission. Users need to be able to switch supplier.

30. Sonia Sodha, Chief Leader Writer, *Observer*

If we were really committed to improving access to top universities, we would bite the bullet and introduce class-based quotas. Progress on this front has been pathetically slow: yes, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are going to universities in greater numbers than before, but they remain disproportionately shut out of the highest-ranking institutions.

Between 2010 and 2015, four-in-five students admitted to Oxford and Cambridge came from the top two social classes; only 6 per cent had parents in routine or semi-manual work. This matters: where you graduate from profoundly affects your lifetime earnings.

Enough is enough. It is time to recognise our top universities are more zero-sum than we have previously acknowledged. **The Office for Students should reintroduce a cap on student numbers – there is some evidence the economic gains from increasing student numbers stalled back in the mid-2000s – and introduce hard quotas for students from working-class backgrounds for each university.**

This would help break down the unfair and stubborn middle-class lock on privilege. It would also force more middle-class students down a vocational route – surely the only way we are ever going to get parity of esteem between post-18 vocational and academic qualifications.

Perspectives from politicians

31. Rt Hon. Robert Halfon MP, Chair, Education Select Committee

This country's obsession with full academic degrees has led to the creation of a higher education system that favours academic routes, while intermediate and higher technical offerings are tiny by comparison. Our labour market does not need an ever-growing supply of academic degrees: there are not the jobs available and for many graduates the return on their investment is paltry. Other young people are currently being set-up to fail, with a third of England's 16-19-year olds stranded with low basic skills.

The Office for Students must make rebalancing higher education a priority and incentivise universities to offer degrees which will meet our skills needs. We should end the divide between technical and academic education and rather see them as intertwined: two parts of the same system of self-improvement and both equally well supported. Degree apprenticeships are the perfect expression of this and universities should be ramping up their offer of these courses. Education should be a ladder of opportunity for all young people and our higher education sector needs to up its game to recognise and support those who pursue technical qualifications.

32. Justin Madders MP, Chair, All-Party Parliamentary Group for Social Mobility

The *Class Ceiling* report by the Social Mobility APPG on access to the leading professions advocates increasing the use of

contextual recruitment, and the Office for Students should encourage exactly the same in higher education.

While universities have made much more progress towards this than the elite professions, the exact mechanisms of the recruitment process can too often be a mystery to the young people approaching it. This is particularly prevalent in those from schools without a history of sending pupils to top universities.

In relation to this, good careers advice can be transformative for young people and can drive them towards educational opportunities that they have never considered, but it is far too variable. There is a place for much greater collaboration between schools, universities and employers in spreading a 'what works' approach, so that as many people as possible find the options that suit them best.

This should be part of a far more strategic approach to social mobility, led by government, requiring cross-sector leadership and real collaboration. While there are excellent examples of good practice, too often this work is carried out in isolation.

Perspectives from employers

33. Harry Anderson, Policy Adviser (Higher Education), CBI

The UK has made welcome progress on opening up access to university in recent years. The number of disadvantaged 18-year olds on full-time undergraduate courses reached record levels in 2017, increasing by 52 per cent in a decade.

Yet progress made in one area must not allow us to become distracted from the challenges we face in another. The crisis in part-time students urgently needs addressing. From a peak of almost 590,000 in 2008/09, part-time student numbers fell to just over 310,000 in 2015/16. This is a fall of 47 per cent. This decline wipes out the progress made in widening participation to full-time students. So, the total number of disadvantaged students entering university may actually have fallen in recent years.

Given the world of work is changing, it is increasingly clear that people already in employment will need to be able to raise their skills alongside existing commitments. **That is why the decline in part-time students is so alarming and why it needs to be top of the agenda.**

In representing both universities and businesses, the CBI would welcome working with anyone interested in reversing this trend. The Government's review of post-18 education offers an ideal opportunity to address this issue as we look to create a funding system that better enables new and more flexible routes to higher education. With the UK's future prosperity reliant on the skills and ingenuity of people, no sector has more to offer than our world-leading universities.

34. Gary Attle, Partner, Head of Education and Governance, Mills & Reeve LLP

There are many Latin phrases which one had to learn as a Law student. One of the more popular phrases is a principle of responsibility in certain types of legal claim: 'res ipsa loquitur', meaning 'the thing speaks for itself'.

Several universities have the Latin phrase 'rerum cognoscere causas' as their motto, which means 'to know the causes of things'. This would appear to be a timely mission given that a mandatory 'transparency condition' will be introduced into the new regulatory framework by the Higher Education and Research Act (2017). The transparency condition will require certain registered higher education bodies to provide to the Office for Students such data as is requested relating to the number of applications received, offers made, offers accepted, courses completed and awards provided. The Office for Students may request the data by reference to gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background. Higher education institutions will also be required to publish the data.

Is it sufficient to let this data 'speak for itself'? If we are committed 'to know the causes of things', **we need careful reflection and further research from the Office for Students, universities and other organisations into the specific contexts behind this data to help public understanding and the development of appropriate policies.**

35. Helen Smith, Director of Social Mobility, Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Service (AGCAS)

AGCAS's strategy for social mobility is to enhance and equalise access to all careers, institutions and organisations and to help students develop the awareness, confidence and skills needed to unlock their career potential. The latest AGCAS *Graduate Labour Market Survey* identified that nearly three-quarters of UK university careers services delivered initiatives for widening participation students in 2016/17.

As pre-18 careers support is sparse, many students are ill-equipped to make key decisions about post-16 and higher education options and careers. Most university career services are now gathering and using data to review incoming students' career readiness, analysing widening participation criteria and targeting resources to provide more personalised support. In 2017/18, AGCAS will conduct a further review of targeted higher education careers activity.

Unpaid student and graduate placements, internships and work experiences are an obvious barrier to equal access and social mobility, yet they persist. To address inequality, such roles should be paid and openly advertised.

We know that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to study locally or to return home after study, often limiting their employment and earning potential. However, without associated commentary, rigid application of proxies such as salary outcomes to represent graduate success take little account of regional labour market variations.

Conclusion

Dr Diana Beech, Director of Policy and Advocacy, Higher Education Policy Institute

The ideas presented in this report are ambitious and numerous. In an ideal world, our authors' priorities would be swiftly fulfilled. However, the policies put forward are different in nature to one another: some seek to help different under-represented groups; some require the buy-in of stakeholders outside the higher education sector (such as employers and schools); and some require a change of customs and practices, which is difficult to effect overnight.

The onus is therefore on the Office for Students (OfS) and the new Director of Fair Access and Participation and his team, in particular, to consider the ideas put forward, to prioritise those that could bring about the greatest quick gains and to put systems in place to ensure longer-term goals are also achieved.

Success will be no easy task, especially as budgets remain tight. But, as a new body, the Office for Students and its dedicated head for widening participation, the Director of Fair Access and Participation, have an opportunity to set a new vision and new terms of conduct for the promotion of social mobility in universities and colleges. This should include taking the features which worked from previous social mobility initiatives and adding new policies to the mix to help people from the most disadvantaged areas of our society – and, for example when it comes to refugees, those who come from other societies.

The key to success is ensuring no group gets left behind. Inclusion needs to become the *leitmotiv* – or the driving principle – of the higher education institutions of the future. A recent HEPI

report, *Demand for higher education to 2030*, revealed a need for 300,000 extra full-time undergraduate places by the end of the next decade. But this assumes continuing increases in the higher education participation rate, which means embracing far more students from under-represented groups, and that may not happen on its own.

Human beings tend to be categorised by the areas in which they grow up, by their prosperity, by the people they meet and by the opportunities they encounter. But social circumstances should never lead to a cap on potential. It should be a priority of the Office for Students and its registered providers to ensure higher education is open to all in who desire it and can benefit from it.

Admittedly, at the dawn of a new regulatory era for higher education in England, it may feel that the Office for Students leadership is standing at the entrance to a labyrinth with multiple options to choose from to reach the final destination – in this case, a truly open and inclusive higher education sector. As with every puzzle, some routes may not lead anywhere, but they must be tried and tested in order to rule them out. Other routes may lead to unexpected yet positive discoveries and some will enable us to progress in our journey as hoped. Nobody expects an instant miracle. Widening participation practitioners across the sector have become accustomed to slow but steady progress.

There are dangers in pressing for lots of new interventions to improve access to higher education for multiple under-represented groups simultaneously. In particular, if the recommendations in this paper were implemented in an overly heavy-handed way or if we were to measure success mainly by inputs rather than outputs or if any new interventions are

not evaluated properly, the end result could be more intrusive regulation without much public benefit. We must be constantly vigilant to ensure this does not happen.

It is essential we do not go backwards. It is critically important we continue to make at least as much progress in the future as in the past. But the goal should be more ambitious: to deliver a big increase in the pace at which we spread opportunity to all parts of society, for the benefit of individuals and higher education institutions but, most importantly, to the good of all society.

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The new regulatory regime for higher education in England incorporates a new approach to access and participation. Inside the Office for Students, a new Director of Fair Access and Participation (Chris Millward) will encourage universities to make further and faster progress than ever before.

HEPI and Brightside jointly asked 35 leading thinkers for their views on the right priorities for the new Director of Fair Access and Participation. The contributors include practitioners, students, politicians, think tanks and academics, all with different interests and expertise.

The ideas in these short essays are as diverse as the voices. But all offer keys that could really unlock higher education for everyone.

Brightside is a social mobility charity, creating inspirational mentoring connections which help young people make life-changing decisions. We work in every region of England and have mentored over 100,000 young people since 2003.

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