

Fair Access Briefing: Three

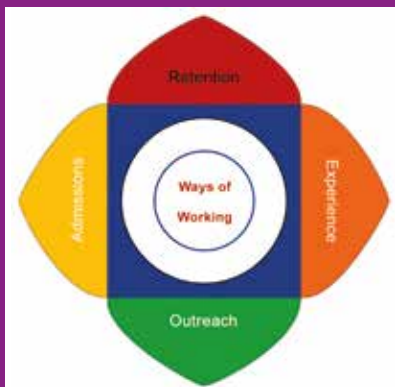
Ways of working for widening participation

Bournemouth University's programme of Fair Access Research is committed to working and learning together to make higher education more equitable and empowering for all students and staff.

One of the ways that we embed this approach into our ways of working is through close partnership with students in the co-creation of our research.

Developing and implementing research and policy shaped by the voices and lived experiences of students can help ensure that organisational changes best enable all students to flourish and realise their potential.

Research partnerships with students have included an initiative with undergraduate research assistants to explore student perceptions of disability during the admissions process, and a project with a group of widening participation students as they tell their own stories and experiences of university (see the Co-Creation Case Study inside).



Why student voices matter

Making sure that student voices shape research, policy and practice is essential for widening participation to enhance equity, democracy and social justice in higher education.

The term student voice embraces discussions and actions that directly concern students' experiences and opinions. It offers a way to represent students in research and policy.

Student voice is not limited to speech; it can include images, written work and involvement in the developmental stages of research and thinking as well as its creation.

These approaches open us up as academics and professionals to the potential that students have to inspire, question and challenge us.

Listening to students' voices through the development of strategies for co-creation can help encourage students to actively participate in their learning.

Developing curriculum projects and strategies for personal development with students can give those who are often denied a voice the opportunity to influence their experiences at university.

When students are actively engaged with their studies and feel like they belong to a learning community that involves the whole institution, they are more likely to remain engaged and complete their course successfully.

"This experience has shown me that sometimes I think we all forget that other people around us are like us, they have thoughts, feelings and their own lives, people they care about and people or things they miss. By looking at our daily lives in detail, it reminds us we aren't different at all and that we appreciate our small details that make our short lives, ours. Small details, favourite things, objects we own, why we do things the way we do. Our own thoughts and thinking systems..."

Student participant

Meet the team: Our PhD students

Below are profiles of the students undertaking their doctorates as part of the Fair Access Research programme.



Ed Bickle

Before starting his PhD, Ed conducted research and evaluation within the widening participation field. He brings this expertise into his academic research. Ed passionately believes that research needs to give voice to young people to make real changes for those most in need.

The focus of Ed's PhD is the aspirations of five young people living in low participation neighbourhoods. He is interested how every day lived experiences help to shape their aspirations.

Ed has undertaken five periods of data collection, starting with focus groups. Initial sessions concentrated on producing primarily descriptive accounts of the aspirations of participants, with latter sessions generating more interpretative data sets on lived experiences.

Early analysis indicates that the participants are actively seeking to become aspirational citizens. Ed's research explores how everyday experiences provide personalised opportunities for developing aspiration, whilst also reinforcing, supporting and, sometimes, restricting these aspirations.



Lizzie Gauntlett

Prior to coming to Bournemouth University in 2014, Lizzie worked as a widening participation practitioner and taught A-Level students. Lizzie's research interests lie in education and psychology and their intersections and she has published in this area.

Lizzie's thesis is concerned with exploring the phenomenon of resilience through the lived experience of low-income students. The focus on resilience is part of a positive psychology model that can be used to listen to those 'quiet voices' which tell us about the everyday experience for these students.

The research uses a qualitative methodology known as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Listening to the voices of students who are persisting and succeeding provides rich, qualitative data to elucidate complex, situated processes. Semi-structured, in-depth individual interviews were conducted with these participants in winter 2015.

Initial analysis of the data suggests an important role for familial, social and institutional factors, alongside more dispositional traits typically associated with resilience.

Co-Creation case study: 'My Voice, My Story'

The Fair Access Research team has recently undertaken a research project with a group of BU undergraduate students from non-traditional (widening participation) backgrounds. A key aspect of the research entitled 'My Voice, My Story' is that it enabled the student participants to become research co-creators using a methodology known as photovoice. Using photovoice, the students employed photography as a means of telling their stories and experiences of university life which they then shared within the group. The students also shared their stories at the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Festival of Social Science workshop in November 2016

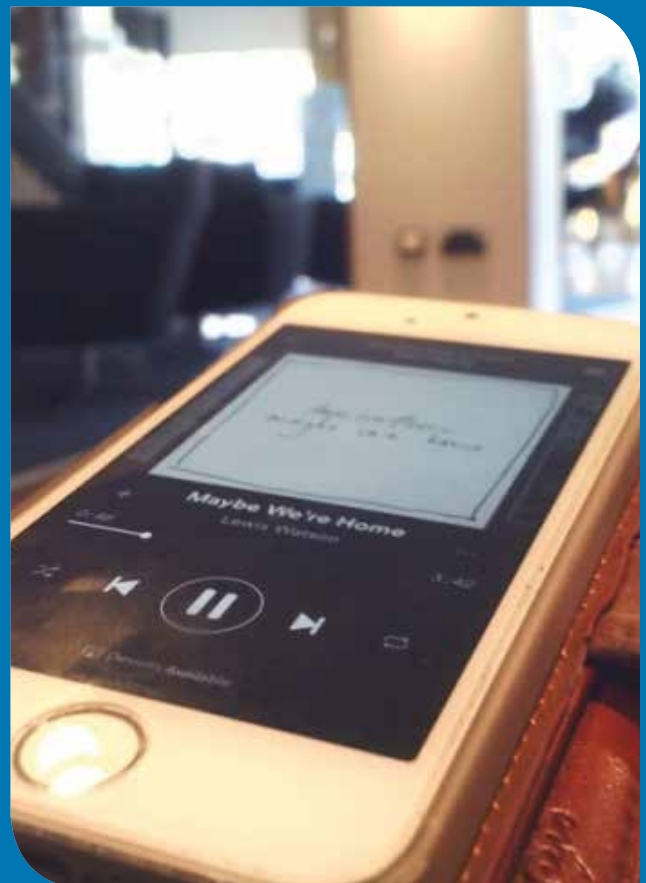
With an audience of academics and WP practitioners from a variety of different universities the workshop allowed participants to listen to students' voices, learn from their stories, engage with the photovoice research method and work together to develop practical responses to some of the challenges which the stories presented.

Some themes which are emerging through an analysis of the research data include the concepts of transition, connectedness, and the journey. The images and associated stories told by the students have been reproduced in a video montage created by BU media students and available on the BU YouTube Channel www.bournemouth.ac.uk/my-voice-my-story

With its origins in community work and public health, this visual approach to sharing stories acts to empower groups by enabling voices to be heard through a visual, participatory approach. The photovoice method has been used internationally to inform policymakers, and enable policy changes to be meaningfully shaped by the lived experiences of the communities which they serve. This makes it an ideal approach to apply in a Higher Education context when addressing issues of Widening Participation.

As well as co-creating the research itself, the students involved have been able to benefit from the opportunity to explore and share their own experiences within an academic context, and to advance their communication and presentation skills

The outcomes of the 'My Voice, My Story' project will be shared to inform the BU policy making process, through the Fair Access Advisory Management Group in summer 2017. For further information please contact Dr Vanessa Heaslip, Dr Maggie Hutchings or Dr Clive Hunt.



Publications

Gauntlett, L., Bickle, E., Collins, B., Heaslip, V., Thomas, G. and Eccles, S. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis: A means of exploring aspiration and resilience amongst Widening Participation students, Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, Vol 19:2, Open University, Centre for Widening Participation

www.bournemouth.ac.uk/wp-abstract

Hunt, C., Collins, B., Wardrop, A., Hutchings, M. Heaslip, V., Pritchard, C., First and second generation design and engineering students: experience, attainment and factors influencing them to attend University, perceptions of student experience www.bournemouth.ac.uk/student-experience-article

News

- Organisational learning and widening participation: Maggie Hutchings and Alex Wardrop presented their research at the Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) international conference in December 2016. Their paper explored knowledge management and organisational memory, and learning together, and they presented a theoretical schema identifying different models for organisational learning and widening participation.
- Evaluating outreach: Vanessa Heaslip is leading a systematic review to identify how the impact of outreach is being understood in current UK research.
- New academic advisers Guidance for WP: The FAR team have created new widening participation guidance for academic advisers, available at www.bournemouth.ac.uk/wp-guidance

Get in touch

At the heart of the Fair Access Research project is a commitment to working together for widening participation. We understand that to make a difference to students requires collective effort and a sharing of different expertise. The project team is interested in continuing to find ways to transform practice at BU and in higher education more widely.

For more information, and to read some of our Fair Access Research blogs, take a look at the Centre for Excellence blog:

www.bournemouth.ac.uk/fair-access

If you want to know more about the project, develop an idea or find ways to embed fair access research into your work email Vanessa (vheaslip@bournemouth.ac.uk) or Clive (chunt@bournemouth.ac.uk)