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for Quality Assurance at Institutional Level“**

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IBAR Project Work-Package 6

# Quality and Access – comparative study

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## 1. Introduction

This report presents data from seven EU countries: The Czech Republic, Latvia, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia and the UK. The report was produced in October 2011 by the IBAR Project team at the University of Strathclyde, UK.

The report describes current procedures and policies for managing access to higher education and discusses barriers to effective practice. It draws on data from four higher education institutions in each participating country and also considers the broader legislative and political environment that influences institutional practice in this area.

At present, there is no dedicated section on the management of access in the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG1)*. This report will form part of the data from which recommendations will be drawn on the status of access as an area of concern in the context of ESG.

## 2. Access in context

All of the countries surveyed are signatories to a variety of European directives, including the Bologna Declaration, which have implications for the accessibility of higher education. 'Access' is however a poorly-defined term in the context of European higher education systems and subject to considerable variation in the way it is articulated through national legislation and institutional policy and practice.

Data collected by the IBAR partner teams shows that there has been a substantial growth in student numbers across all of the countries surveyed in recent decades. Some countries, including Latvia and Portugal, enjoy high participation rates but are experiencing demographic changes which are affecting overall numbers in higher education. Declining student enrollments in these countries has created challenges for higher education institutions and resulted in changes to access procedures.

The widespread growth in student numbers across Europe means that, by definition, there have been related changes in student demographics and that higher education is more 'accessible' for more people than it was in the past. Participation goals for all the countries included in this study are around 50% and in some cases this target has already been exceeded. Our examination of access issues therefore takes place within the context of relatively uniform massification, or even universalisation, of national higher education systems.

In all of the countries surveyed there are national rules or strong national steering governing the admission of students to higher education, with some selection of candidates possible at faculty or department level. Institutions in the UK probably enjoy the highest level of autonomy over selection and admissions procedures. The basis for admission is primarily secondary school leaving attainment (or equivalent) although in some systems institutions, or faculties/schools set entrance examinations. This is particularly the case in professional disciplines, including law and medicine. In some systems where there has been a particular focus on improving admissions rates from under-represented groups, alternative access routes are permitted (for example, via specially designed access courses or via transfer from technical or further education colleges).

Whilst national-level drivers and national-level organisation of university admissions are an extremely important feature of all the systems surveyed, the institutional case studies collected as part of the research for this study describe local dimensions to recruitment. Applicants either express a preference for institutions in their application and/or institutions

seek to recruit from particular groups or to admit particular individual candidates. They therefore perhaps exercise a greater degree of choice than the broad picture might imply.

Typical measures used by institutions to influence access include control over entrance requirements, including entrance examinations. In The Netherlands, a recent change in legislation has allowed institutions to select up to ten percent of their entrants.

Massification, widening participation and changes to pre-tertiary education combine to mean that the array of qualifications offered by candidates is often much wider than it was thirty years ago. That in turn affects the assumptions on commonality of prior knowledge that institutions are able to make about the knowledge base of student cohorts, often most sharply visible in science and technology disciplines.

Institutions have put in place, or enhanced, general or targeted policies, practices and initiatives to support student recruitment, access and widening participation. Countries which undergone democratic reform in the last 20 years have developed new legislation and may have deliberately sought to apply standardised admissions approaches. Nonetheless, specific legal provisions are made that are intended to encourage wider intake of under-represented groups, for example, in Slovakia for Hungarian and Roma populations.

One correlate of massification is that the public costs of higher education increase significantly. This is a considerable strain in a time of recession but also raises questions about accountability and the value of higher education to society. A key question is how macroeconomic goals are being delivered via higher education and how institutional action might be designed to respond to national, economic drivers. In counterpoint, many academics emphasise the civic or social benefits of higher education.

### **3. Support for access to higher education**

#### **3.1 National legislation, policy and procedures**

In all the countries surveyed higher education is subject to national planning and a degree of national control. The extent to which pan-national legislation or steering, and in particular the Bologna process, has led to appreciable changes in the way that higher education is organised at national level varies considerably, but in many countries economic drivers are key determinants of extension of access to higher education. The desire to build a highly-skilled workforce has driven massification and simultaneously focused attention on alternative access routes into higher education. In some countries, considerable legislative attention has been paid to improving the equality of opportunity of potential applicants to higher education, with a particular focus on those from lower socio-economic groups or from ethnic minorities. This means that institutions not only have to demonstrate fairness in their admissions procedures, but are also increasingly expected to play an active role in raising the aspirations of previously under-represented groups.

#### **3.2 Outreach and recruitment**

For a majority of the institutions surveyed in this study there is a strong local dimension to recruitment and admissions, despite the significant influence of national legislation. Most of the institutions are keen to extend their recruitment reach beyond the local environment, by marketing to students in different parts of the country, or by marketing to students in other countries. In countries where local student numbers are falling, attracting students from other countries is becoming an increasingly important component of institutional strategy and is changing the nature of provision (for example, in Portugal and The Netherlands some

institutions now offer classes in English). Similarly, the decline in numbers of school leavers has meant that institutions are increasingly keen to offer places to mature students or to learners with different types of qualifications. In the Czech Republic, institutions seek to encourage greater numbers of applicants to less popular courses by using a variety of marketing tools. This model is also common in the UK where increasing levels of institutional competition to attract high-performing students is also a significant driver.

In many of the countries in this study, there has been a national policy focus on widening participation and an expectation that institutions will play a part in encouraging under-represented groups to consider tertiary education and in attracting greater numbers of applicants to under-subscribed courses. Common outreach activities offered to the whole community include the provision of information to potential students and to their parents about the nature of university study, about how to pay for study and how to access grants or bursaries and information about campus life including accommodation. Many institutions also offer open days, school visits, summer schools and increasingly use media and social networks to share information.

In some countries, particularly the UK, there are also more targeted activities directed specifically at traditionally under-represented groups and intended to raise aspiration and increase the numbers of those applying successfully to universities. Activities described by UK institutions include regular visits to both primary and secondary schools in areas of relative deprivation, in-school mentoring schemes to support potential candidates from lower socio-economic groups, on-campus activities for potential students from deprived backgrounds, and summer schools offering alternative admissions routes for students who do not hold traditional qualifications. Whilst these schemes are perceived as broadly successful and can be extremely rewarding for individual students, there is also recognition that they can be expensive and can usually only support a relatively small number of candidates.

### **3.3 Admissions arrangements**

In all of the countries surveyed, admissions arrangements are subject to national control and coordination. The extent to which institutions are able to exercise discretion in the design and execution of admissions policy is limited in most contexts, although in some countries there has been a move to extend institutional autonomy. In The Netherlands, the extension of institutions' ability to select a proportion of their students is motivated by a desire to create a better fit between candidates and study courses and therefore improve overall motivation of students, and the quality of graduates and of the workforce. Well-managed selection procedures are also perceived as a way to maximise retention.

In the UK, which probably enjoys the highest level of institutional autonomy in admissions processes, institutions are loosely divided into those that need to actively recruit for the majority of their courses and those that have more applicants than places for most courses and can afford to select. Where there are more applicants than places, institutional policies on access determine the design of additional measures, including interviews, examinations or other measures and care is taken to ensure that these processes do not disadvantage individuals or groups of students from particular backgrounds. Recent proposals to change the way in which numbers are capped at institutions with high applicant numbers may have further implications for the way in which access is managed at different universities in the UK.

In all the countries surveyed there is a concern that admissions processes are fair and conducted in an ethical and equitable way. High levels of national control and coordination both support and, in some cases, inhibit, the development of good practice. National changes in legislation which compel institutions to accept a wider range of qualifications, including a

consideration of relevant work experience have extended access to previously excluded groups and changed the nature of higher education provision. In The Netherlands, for example, shorter study programmes, partnership courses between universities and employers and distance learning are becoming more common.

Institutions in countries in which national policies on access are less clearly defined, such as Poland, appear less able to pursue active widening participation policies, possibly because of the lack of direct national funding or enabling legislative environments. Similarly, there is variation in the extent to which there is national discussion or debate about the impact of social inequalities on secondary school performance. Whilst this issue appears to be increasingly recognised as a factor in access to higher education, the extent to which university admissions processes have changed to reflect differing school experiences is relatively small and, in the case of the UK, is currently threatened by new national policies on the competitive allocation of university places to high-performing school leavers.

### **3.4 Student support**

#### **3.4.1 Financial support**

In most countries, the costs (both direct costs and indirect, opportunity costs) are perceived to be potential barriers to access for some students from lower socio-economic groups. In some systems, national schemes offer grants to students from poorer backgrounds, using family income to calculate the level of support, although there has been an increasing erosion of direct grant funding in favour of student loans. In some systems, institutions are wholly responsible for defining the terms and level of financial support to eligible students. Typical measures include subsidised accommodation, social-based scholarships, merit-based scholarships and short-term, or one-off hardship payments.

#### **3.4.2 Educational and pastoral support**

A massified and more diverse student population has meant that institutions in all systems have needed to offer new support services and, in some cases, tailored educational experiences for different groups of learners. Common activities include language classes for non-native speakers, flexible timetables or distance learning options for learners who also work or who have other commitments, and pastoral or counselling services to help with specific personal problems. In some institutions, there are centralised services which support the transition of new students into higher education and organise institution-wide support schemes commonly including student mentoring initiatives.

The availability of specialist educational support varies considerably. In some institutions extra support for individual students is offered at departmental level and there is no university-wide student learning support service. Where there are centralised educational support services these are available to all students and there is concern that services do not make assumptions about the needs of particular cohorts or compel certain groups to participate in extra activities. Where these services are not in place, students have identified this as a barrier to access and/or progression.

There is variability in the extent to which institutional arrangements for student support demonstrate a commitment to access as a range of activities that transcends admissions and instead encompasses the whole student lifecycle. Definitions of 'access' vary in national contexts and discourse and it could be argued that a wide variety of student-facing services could be described as 'access' support, including those which promote graduate employability as well as those which support academic retention and progression.

#### **3.4.3 Support for disabled students**

The impact of equality legislation means that support arrangements for students with disabilities is widely available, although there is some variation in the definitions of disability recognised at institutional level. Typical measures include provision of accessible teaching spaces and accommodation, adjusted study plans for disabled students and special coordinators offering specific support. There is evidence to suggest that in some national contexts certain courses are not open to disabled students because of concerns about safety or concerns about students' ability to fully participate. In some institutions, special arrangements are in place to support students with less visible disabilities, including autism and dyslexia. Institutions are generally reliant on students self-disclosing any disability. In some cases, this may mean that individuals do not receive additional support because they are reluctant to self-identify as disabled. In some institutions, the numbers of students self-reporting a disability can be surprisingly high when institutional definitions include non-visible disabilities like dyslexia. In this case, arrangements need to transcend support services and encompass institution-wide accessible and inclusive curriculum and assessment design.

#### 3.4.4 Support for other groups of students

In many of the institutions surveyed no data is collected, sometimes reasons of history, on the ethnicity of applicants or enrolled students and no special support provision is made for learners from minority backgrounds, although foreign students are commonly offered language courses as required. In some national contexts, minority groups are perceived as well-integrated into society and not requiring of special support. In other contexts, there is a perception that some groups face particular challenges that affect their ability to participate in higher education. In the UK, research suggests that individuals belonging to some ethnic minority groups are less likely to do well at secondary school and therefore less likely to aspire to higher education and some institutions offer targeted outreach and support for these groups. Similarly, data collected at UK institutions on progression can be disaggregated according to ethnic background and this has allowed some institutions included in this study to identify particular problems experienced by some groups and to take remedial action. Similar activities are reported by institutions in The Netherlands.

In some national contexts there are particular access issues associated with minority ethnic groups which are not currently directly addressed by the higher education sector. This is particularly true of the Roma population in Slovakia who often struggle to gain school qualifications and are consequently unlikely to aspire to higher education. At present, there is limited activity at higher education level to address these particular challenges.

#### 3.5 Collection and use of data

The context of data collection varies across the countries participating in this study, reflecting differing national policy contexts, although there is widespread collection of data to serve national statistics and planning. In countries with greater institutional autonomy (for example, the UK) accountability is manifested by systematic collection and publication of a range of data, all of which is mandated by law. Data is collected on student enrolments at each publicly funded higher education institution in the UK and includes information on age, disability, ethnicity, domicile and gender as well as information about prior qualifications, course and mode of study, source of fees and destination after graduation. Many institutions also collect local data on student satisfaction at different times and to serve local strategic needs.

Whilst data published nationally serves national planning needs it can be and frequently is used to rank institutional performance and there is some concern that data is being used in a simplistic way to judge institutional performance rather than being used primarily to improve educational provision. In the UK, there is anxiety that national performance measures,

including league tables, damage institutional efforts to improve access because they judge the quality of institutions on the examination performance of entrants and on course progression and graduate destination. These measures are perceived as problematic in the context of widening participation as they assume a monolithic view of a 'successful' student experience.

In national contexts where no data is collected about, for example, ethnicity of students there is a corresponding lack of targeted support for these groups, which may suggest that lack of data is perpetuating assumptions about the educational experiences of particular cohorts.

## **4. Barriers and challenges**

### 4.1 Barriers and challenges at European level

Findings from partner institutions surveyed across the seven participating member states indicate a number of general potential challenges to the Ministerial commitments to enhancing social mobility that have been taken to date. Though each of these challenges was not found to pertain in all partner institutions there was sufficient data to indicate these as general considerations across the member states.

#### 4.1.1 Shortcomings within national legislation and policy

In a number of contexts national legislation and policy governing access to higher education were deemed insufficient to ensure the levels of effectiveness that might be required. For example in the Czech Republic current statutory legislation, for reasons of historical sensitivity, does not permit higher education institutions to collect data on ethnic groups, inhibiting the operation of effective access policies. In Slovakia the state policy of very open access to higher education, in which university entrance procedures were deemed to be used to keep unemployment figures down was reported to be having unintended negative consequences in terms of maintaining educational quality within institutions. Latvian institutions similarly reported a general contradiction between mass entrance and the maintenance of quality, whilst universities in the UK reported insuperable difficulties in balancing the competing policy demands of performing well in government-sanctioned league tables as well as sustaining high levels of widening participation.

#### 4.1.2 Lack of institutional autonomy

In many of the participating states access has continued to be an important area of state regulation of the higher education system since it has significant consequences for each country's national economic and social development. For this reason governments have tended to retain control over (or 'steer at a distance') the size and composition of enrolments in higher education, and matters of widening participation, social equity and redress, the costs of the system and the contribution of HE to economic competitiveness. Hence many partner institutions reported the constraints in this area on their autonomy and agility to respond in terms of policy and strategic decision-making. For example, regarding access policies, Portugal is now being steered from a quantity to a quality paradigm, to a more clear definition of the binary divide, to a more diversified offer of programmes and to a more diverse public. In the case of the Portuguese partner institutions national legislation is felt to curtail their ability to select students in particular subject areas. The Pedagogical and Scientific Councils determine their access regulations and are responsible for the selection process of those candidates. These Councils define the specificities of access regarding different scientific fields (Engineering, Arts, Management, Design, Communication, etc.). Similarly in the Netherlands, although universities have recently been permitted to select up to 10% of their entrants, the partner institutions there still report that they have little control over the access process. One consequence is that completion rates have been identified as an issue.



#### 4.1.3 Insufficient inclusion of specific groups

A number of member states identified intractable social problems which led to continuing under-representation of social groups within higher education. In Slovakia the poor participation of Roma students within traditional schooling has led to their exclusion from higher education opportunities. There is considerable variability in modes of enabling access to higher education for disabled students, with, in certain contexts, perceptions that lack of achievement is attributed to inherent disability rather than provision of opportunity to overcome institutionally maintained barriers within course design. In the United Kingdom differential performance at secondary school level owing to factors of social class continue to restrict the access to higher education of students from more deprived socio-economic backgrounds and certain geographical areas of the country. A recent study there found that currently fewer than one in five young people from the most disadvantaged areas enter higher education compared to more than one in two for the most advantaged areas. In Latvia, government policy on access to higher education has led to a situation where unemployed students were unable to afford tuition fees and hence were excluded from access.

#### 4.1.4 Costs and insufficient funding for widening participation activities

The global financial crisis has led to government budget cuts in public services across all participating member states significantly reducing the resources available. In the United Kingdom key institutional contacts in partner institutions reported insecurity about their future role(s) owing to staff cuts and re-organisation and remained unclear as to the viability of projects at local level in the longer term. Some who were engaged in access-related activities and who provided a range of outreach activities at regional and area level, by means of partnerships between higher education institutions, schools, colleges, employers and other agencies were not confident of the sustainability and longer-term funding of such initiatives.

### 4.2 Potential barriers within national contexts

Within the broader frame of these more generic challenges the partner institutions within individual participating member states identify further challenges specific to their contexts.

#### 4.2.1 Portugal

The Portuguese system is currently experiencing intensifying competition between higher education institutions. As access policy is steered centrally, both universities and polytechnics must comply with national access regulations through national examinations. Although there is some blurring of roles of universities and polytechnics competition to recruit students is more difficult among polytechnics and also amongst certain disciplines, such as in Arts programmes. Conversely Engineering is traditionally associated with a high social status and with high economic income, therefore holding a greater capacity to attract students. Polytechnics meanwhile constitute, in the Portuguese context, a true second choice, considered less reputable than universities, and hence this becomes a barrier to maintaining quality. One pattern emerging is the influence of the Bologna Process and the consequent increase in mobile students. This is changing the institutional environment. By providing classes taught in English, institutions are explicitly attracting foreign students; on the other hand, English classes are also motivating Portuguese students to go abroad. Driven by the recent decrease of traditional students, institutions are now opening to new publics, especially those coming through the special competition (students older than 23 years and CETs). This is a big change for institutions, forcing them to readjust and develop measures to assure and improve academic quality.

#### 4.2.2 Czech Republic

In the Czech system emphasis has shifted to demand rather than supply. There remains at present a lack of (financial) incentives for institutions to attune their access-related measures to their Quality Assurance policies owing to the generally high demand compared to supply. (An exception to this would be the Development Programmes of the Ministry). Programme diversification has caused adverse effects in relation to fostering access, such as high drop-out rates. A further barrier lies within the current system of higher education funding (at the system level) which does not discriminate between proactive (enterprising) and reactive (defensive) responses on the part of higher education institutions to the recent expansion in student numbers. Guidance and counselling services still need developing appropriately, including services for students with disabilities and foreign students (other than Slovak nationality). There is an underdeveloped degree of cooperation between HEIs and the providing secondary schools, resulting in insufficient motivation on the part of secondary school students. This is especially the case in relation to the subjects of technology and chemistry. There is currently excessive competition for development grants, which has tended to discourage intra-institutional cooperation, which would, if in place, increase overall chances for obtaining the grants. Finally, though trust in core academic values is upheld and not questioned, some cases of low accountability of academic and managerial staff in relation to access issues can be a concern owing to the still unsaturated demand for HE study.

#### 4.2.3. Poland

Important debates on the definitional problems of terms such as ‘access’ and ‘quality’ are currently taking place within the Polish system which points to a potential issue of divergence between formal EU stances on such matters and those still crystallising within member states. There is at present no clear or established state policy on access or progression. Within the Polish system institutional data provides no direct base for identifying ethnic minorities or for identifying students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. As a result, there is no targeted provision for either of these groups.

#### 4.2.4 Latvia

Funding inconsistencies complicate access arrangements within the Latvian higher education system. It remains difficult to predict what students will study since they may change subsequently to a particular programme for the reason that it receives funding, even though the students are not motivated to study that subject. This leads inevitably to issues of maintaining quality and progression in such programmes. Demographics are also a distinctive problem. Growth in the participation rate may be abating because of demographic changes including high levels of emigration. Within the last five years student numbers have fallen by 30,000. One priority of national policy is to attract students to Latvian universities but many young people are currently choosing to study abroad. In relation to under-represented groups, the 2010 Latvian Education Law amendments have significantly broadened the right to education, including a non-discrimination clause for asylum seekers, refugees and persons with alternative status in Latvia. However, the target groups are very often unable to show any documents of evidence on previous education. Moreover teaching in the Latvian language is perceived as a barrier to education for some under-represented groups and for students coming from abroad.

#### 4.2.5 The Netherlands

The slowly shifting admissions policies of institutions and reaching the 50% participation government target have proved to be problematic in the Netherlands. Access to higher education policy can be seen to focus at present too much on young students with a good prior education. High drop-out rates are a barrier for widening participation in the Netherlands. Moreover it is difficult to match students with an appropriate study programme and institution

owing to still limited capacity regarding matching the needs of students with the programmes on offer. In the open access system the institutions are currently concerned about the quality of students they are obliged to admit. In terms of international students, institutions require validation of foreign diplomas and certain language proficiency, which may be a barrier for the access of international students to the higher education institutions in the Netherlands.

#### 4.2.6 Slovakia

There is a general lack of policy focused on access at the national as well as institutional levels. The accreditation process for study programmes does not take the requirements of the labour market into consideration. Hence access to study programmes is more aimed at the personal interest of individual students than real labour market needs. Access is thus affected by these personal interests, for example it is easier to get into science programmes because fewer people want places. Moreover students are able to select several institutions at the same time. There is a different attitude to access among private HEIs and on the whole institutions prefer a higher number of enrolled students who do not finish their study above the establishment of clear access criteria. National policy is more oriented towards financial support for research activity at HEIs with decreased support for educational activities. There is also a weak ratio of teachers in regard to the number of students, with individual teachers being employed multi-contractually with several universities. Finally there is a lack of information and tracking tools concerning access for certain cohorts (such as disabled students and ethnic minorities). Neither is there sufficient feedback from the labour market regarding quality and employer demand and career destination data as to who gets employed in each field.

#### 4.2.7 United Kingdom

The United Kingdom system is currently subject to competing policy agenda such as those which set institutional rankings and league tables in contention with the furtherance of widening participation. This is part of a discernible shift in the perception of higher education from a public to a private good. The subsequent cost/benefit analysis of HE participation undertaken by less privileged socio-economic groups may result in such groups choosing not to participate in higher education. This is compounded by the fact that there remain problems of getting balanced information to certain socio-economic groups regarding university entrance and access and support opportunities. Recent measures such as open competition for elite, so-called 'AAB' students, has intensified inter-institutional rivalry in a zero-sum competition for such students which may make some courses in less prestigious institutions non-viable. There are considerable tensions around the ways in which university quality is measured (for example, the academic attainment of entrants is one indicator) that can be a barrier to widening participation. Similarly, there are difficulties in measuring the short and long-term impact of widening participation activities undertaken by universities. These tensions are magnified at present because of funding constraints in higher education. A further complication is that elite institutions may tacitly subvert government access and widening participation agendas in order to safeguard global excellence rankings.

### 5. Recommendations

In conclusion a number of recommendations for any future redrafting of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG) can be drawn from the contextualised identification of barriers within the participating member states. These are as follows:

5.1 Include access as a key dimension of a revised set of *Standards and Guidelines*.

Access and the related matter of widening participation have emerged from the national reports within this study as crucial, complex and pressing priorities in terms of the governance and the social and economic effectiveness of higher education in the regions of Europe. The current absence of any standard or guidance on a matter of such importance to the future effectiveness of the European Higher Education Area, and to ministerial commitments to enabling social mobility, is an obvious shortcoming in the current directive and needs to be addressed in the current spirit of ESG as a guiding framework for institutions to adopt and adapt.

5.2 Encourage higher education institutions to take ‘ownership’ of access, embedding a culture of good practice in this area.

There is variation in the extent to which institutions are taking responsibility for the implementation of governmental initiatives to promote access. Individual institutions vary in terms of the respective degrees of proactivity and caution they demonstrate in this regard. Caution, even inertia, may arise through a professed dependency on state ‘law’ in such matters, or conversely through an attempt to balance or subvert competing and sometimes contradictory government agendas and directives which set responsibilities for access uncomfortably against rankings of institutional prestige and perceived excellence. Institutions should be supported and encouraged to adopt identified effective practice and such barriers to adoption minimised.

5.3 Introduce greater capacity for HEIs to choose their students directly.

Institutions across the participating member states are often hampered and impeded by restrictive national legislation and policy measures that reduce their capacity for organisational responsiveness, imagination and agility in relation to access initiatives. Such constraining factors need to be identified and where possible eliminated to enhance provision.

5.4 Encourage higher education institutions to track their students

There is currently inadequate tracking of students and provision of helpful information to guide them. In general terms, institutions should be enabled to develop structures and mechanisms, not necessarily always formalised or systematised, which are aimed at collecting pertinent data on students’ enrolment, progression, and rates of graduation and dropout, to better inform policy and enhance practice.

5.5 Improve outreach measures

Institutions need to develop stronger administrative capacities to be able to reach out to prospective students, to support and inform them through appropriate study programmes. Good practice in outreach activities (summer schools, mentoring, after-school tuition and links with schools and colleges in disadvantaged areas), financial support for underrepresented students and additional expenditure on activities to support student retention and success need to be more widely encouraged. Access agreements can be established to identify achievable targets that institutions set themselves to make progress.

5.6 Promote inclusion

Access should be more clearly defined as open to life-long learning possibilities, and as accommodating all age groups, social classes and ethnic groupings. It should embrace a broad variety of modes of study and focus not only on traditional student school-leaver cohorts in full-time study programmes.