

# Literature synthesis lessons from the widening access, student retention and success national programme archive (WASRS)

In May 2012 Dr. Marion Bowl was commissioned by the Higher Education Academy to conduct a synthesis of material in the Widening Access, Student Retention and Success National (WASRS) programme archive. The work was funded by the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE). WASRS brings together literature and research from five national widening participation programmes operating between 2004 and 2012:

- Aimhigher
- Aimhigher Associates
- Action on Access
- Lifelong Learning Networks
- What works? Student retention and success

The synthesis draws together some of the central themes running through the archive and aims to make the evidence gathered from widening participation programmes accessible to a wide audience including practitioners, researchers and policy makers. There are seven themes in the synthesis as a whole:

- Findings from the final years of the Aimhigher Programme 2008-2011
- The contribution of further education and sixth form colleges to widening participation
- The role of higher education students in widening access and improving retention
- Collaboration and partnership working in a competitive environment
- The contribution of pre-entry interventions to student retention and success
- Promoting social mobility by creating pathways to the professions and vocational careers: the role of progression agreements
- Student finance: what have we learned to date to inform access, retention and success under the new funding regime in England?

Marion Bowl's work focused on the second theme: The contribution of further education and sixth form colleges to widening participation. It covers the role of colleges in institutional networks and partnerships to support widening participation as well as the role of colleges in nurturing students' aspirations to enter higher education and smoothing their transition to university-level study.

Work on the synthesis was completed in September 2012 and the resulting document was launched at a national conference at the London School of Economics on 18th December. The conference was sponsored by HEFCE and the Higher Education Academy and is entitled **Widening Participation 2012 and beyond: tools and resources for the new higher education context** ([http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/events/detail/2012/academyevents/18\\_Dec\\_WP\\_2012\\_and\\_Beyond](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/events/detail/2012/academyevents/18_Dec_WP_2012_and_Beyond)). As well as launching the synthesis the conference provided an opportunity for managers and practitioners to discuss the continuing challenges to access, widening participation, retention and success in higher education.

## Download the WASRS report

[www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/WP\\_syntheses/WASRS\\_Bowl.pdf](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/WP_syntheses/WASRS_Bowl.pdf) ([http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/WP\\_syntheses/WASRS\\_Bowl.pdf](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/WP_syntheses/WASRS_Bowl.pdf))

## Contact Details

For more information, contact Marion Bowl [m.bowl.1@bham.ac.uk](mailto:m.bowl.1@bham.ac.uk) (<mailto:m.bowl.1@bham.ac.uk>)