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Author

SLACK, Kim

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Collaboration with community to widen participation : partners without power or absent friends?

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Abstract

Current discourse around widening participation emphasises the importance of partnership and collaboration. For example, the Learning Skills Council and government policy all cite the need to adopt collaborative approaches to assist with widening participation and student progression. In 1998 the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) called for proposals for higher education institutions to build partnerships to widen participation. Successful partnership bids were subsequently funded for a period of one year initially and extended up to three years in total. One of the aims of the partnerships as outlined by the HEFCE was to address uneven rates of demand for higher education amongst certain socio-economic groups by working in collaboration with other organisations. This article focuses on one aspect of an evaluative research project examining collaboration resulting from the HEFCE initiative: the involvement of communities in developing partnerships. It examines their initial involvement and the extent to which they were then incorporated into ongoing partnerships and decision-making. Factors that mitigate against community involvement

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are discussed. It is concluded that although organizational and institutional links can be highly beneficial to realizing the objective of a widened base of involvement in HE there may be a sense in which the role of communities is either neglected, or worse, omitted. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)