

22.8.2025

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**Title**

Policy-participation trajectories in English higher education

**Publication year**

2007

**Source/Footnote**

In: Higher education quarterly. - 60 (2006) 4, S. 392 - 412

**Inventory number**

22381

**Keywords**

Ausland : Großbritannien : einzelne Hochschulen ; Ausland : Großbritannien : Studium, Studenten, Lehre ; Hochschule und Staat : allgemein

**Abstract**

The pattern of expansion that brought mass characteristics to English higher education is very different from that intended to achieve near-universal access by the end of the present decade. The spectacular growth of the late 1980s and early 1990s was neither projected nor planned, with important consequences for the shape of the English system. By contrast, the policies of renewed expansion and widening participation from the late 1990s represent a radical attempt to change the traditional pattern of demand for English undergraduate education, with future growth focused on the short-cycle forms of vocational higher education. Although influenced by the example of Scotland in building expansion at levels below the first degree, the policy experiment pursued in England is highly distinctive, including the invention of a new undergraduate qualification and a partnership role for further education colleges. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)