

## Professor Liz Thomas

### Director Widening Participation Research Centre Edge Hill University

Professor Liz Thomas is director of the Widening Participation Research Centre at Edge Hill University. She is also Senior Adviser for Widening Participation at the Higher Education Academy, and Lead Adviser Working with Institutions for Action on Access. Liz is currently managing a programme on behalf of the Higher Education Funding Council for England to assist institutions to mainstream and sustain their widening participation activity and contributing to a number of research projects. Liz has ten years experience of undertaking and managing widening participation research, including directing an international project with partners from ten countries. Liz is author and editor of nine books on widening participation, including *First Generation Entrants in higher education: an international analysis* (2006, SRHE and Open University Press); *Overcoming the barriers to higher education* (2007, Trentham Books); and *Improving retention in higher education* (2007, Routledge). She is also editor of the journal *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*.

### Qualifications

BA (hons) Philosophy, Politics and Economics, University of York  
MA Social and Community Work Studies, University of Bradford  
PhD, Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield (ESRC-funded)  
Postgraduate Certificate in PhD Supervision, Staffordshire University

### Employment

2007 – current Director, Widening Participation Research Centre, Edge Hill University  
2007 – current Lead Adviser, Working with Institutions, Action on Access, National Co-ordination Team for Widening Participation, Edge Hill University  
2004 – current Senior Adviser for Widening Participation, Higher Education Academy  
1998 – 2004 Institute for Access Studies, Staffordshire University

### Research Experience

2008 *Mainstreaming and Sustaining Widening Participation in Institutions*. HEFCE-funded project working with 16 institutions from across the HE sector to support them to embed WP.

2007-8 *Girls into Physics*. Institute of Physics' commissioned evaluation of teachers' action research projects designed to increase the numbers of girls studying physics post-16.

2007-8 *What influences vocational learners?* Research commissioned by Aimhigher Greater Merseyside to explore the factors influencing young people's decisions to pursue vocational courses of study post-16 and post-18.

2007 *Ten Year Review of the Sutton Trust Summer Schools*. Survey of participants and interviews with a sample of them to explore the ways in which the summer schools influenced their decisions and choices about participation in higher education and beyond. Due for completion June 2007.

2006 *Widening participation in the health and social care sectors*. Literature review and survey to explore how widening participation in the health and social care sectors is

being undertaken, and to make recommendations to the Department of Health Widening Participation in Learning Team, headed by Sir Bob Fryer.

- 2006 *Review of the Barriers to Participation*. HEFCE-funded literature review to identify the evidence about why different social and cultural groups and individuals do and do not participate and succeed in higher education, what kinds of interventions have been proved to be effective and the gaps in our knowledge. A highly inclusive, lifecourse model is used. The research will be widely disseminated to inform future policy and practice, and to shape further research. This is a collaborative project with the Department of Educational Studies at the University of York and the Institute for Access Studies at Staffordshire University.
- 2005 *Project to assess the higher education sector's progress in developing successful approaches to widening participation*, Universities UK and the Standing Conference of Principals. This is the third study to be commissioned, which uses a case study approach to exploring good practice across the higher education sector. It includes a review of the available statistical data and re-visiting the 23 examples featured in previous reports. The focus of this review is to explore how and to what extent HEIs have learnt from good practice and embedded this into their policies and practices more generally. This is a collaborative research project with the European Access Network, University of Paisley, University of Stirling, University of Swansea and University of Ulster.

#### Selected Publications

- 2008 *Improving student retention in Higher Education*, RoutledgeFalmer (with Glenda Crosling and Margaret Heagney)
- 2007 *Review of widening participation research: addressing the barriers to participation in higher education* (working title), Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books, with Stephen Gorard, Nick Adnett, Helen May, Kim Slack and Emma Smith
- 2006 *First Generation Entrants in Higher Education: An international analysis* (with Jocey Quinn). Maidenhead: Society for Research in Higher Education and Open University Press
- 2006 *Personal Tutoring in Higher Education* (editor, with Paula Hixenbaugh). Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books
- 2005 *Widening Participation in post-compulsory education*. Second Edition London and New York: Continuum
- 2006 'Lifting the Hood: lifelong learning and young white provincial working class masculinities', *British Educational Research Journal*, with Jocey Quinn, Kim Slack, Lorraine Casey, Wayne Thexton and John Noble
- 2005 'Learners on their own terms? Learning brokerage, mainstream transformation and social exclusion' *Journal of Access Policy and Practice*, with Jocey Quinn, Kim Slack, Lorraine Casey, Katy Vigurs and Noshin Flynn
- 2005 The 2003 UK Government Higher Education White Paper: A critical assessment of its implications for the access and widening participation agenda' *Journal of Education Policy*, 20(5), pp615-630, with Rob Jones
- 2005 'The implications of widening participation for learning and teaching', in Layer, G. and Duke, C. (eds) *Widening Participation*. Leicester: NIACE
- 2003 'Improving the retention of students from lower socio-economic groups', *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 25.1, pp63-75, with Mantz Yorke
- 2003 *Improving completion rates among disadvantaged students* (editor with Michael Cooper and Jocey Quinn). Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books

- 2002 'Student Retention in Higher Education: The role of institutional habitus'. *Journal of Education Policy* vol. 17, no.4 pp423-432
- 2002 *Collaboration to Widen Participation* (editor, with Michael Cooper and Jocey Quinn). Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books
- 2002 'Aspirations and Access to Higher Education: Some Critical Reflections on a Schools-based Aspiration-raising Initiative', *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 4.2, pp18-25, with Kim Slack
- 2002 'Developing an Evaluation Framework to assess the contribution of community and work based learning', *Research in Post-compulsory Education*, 8.2, pp19-38, with Kim Slack
- 2001 *Widening Participation in post-compulsory education*. London and New York: Continuum
- 2001 'Not "just passing through": making retention work for present and future learners', *Journal of Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 3.2, pp2-3, with Rob Jones
- 2001 'Power, Assumptions and Prescriptions: A critique of widening participation policy-making' in *Higher Education Policy*, vol.14, issue 4, pp361-376
- 2001 *Access to Higher Education: the Unfinished Business. An evaluation for the millennium* (editor, with Michael Cooper and Jocey Quinn). Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books
- 2000 'Bums on Seats' or 'Listening to Voices': The nature and role of evaluation research in the 'Widening Participation Agenda' of the 1990's and beyond, *Studies in Continuing Education*, volume 22:1, pp95-113
- 2000 *Changing the Culture of the Campus: Towards an inclusive higher education* (editor, with Michael Cooper). Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books