



# **ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN WALES: A CASE STUDY ON POLICY IMPLEMENTATION**

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# Abbreviations

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<b>ABI</b>	Area-based intervention
<b>APP</b>	Access and Participation Plan
<b>CF</b>	Communities First
<b>EMA</b>	Education Maintenance Allowance
<b>FE</b>	Further Education
<b>FSM</b>	Free School Meals
<b>GIS</b>	Geographic Information Systems
<b>GRT</b>	Gypsy, Roma, or Traveller (Community)
<b>HE</b>	Higher Education
<b>HEI</b>	Higher Education Institution
<b>HEFCE</b>	Higher Education Funding Council for England
<b>HEFCW</b>	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
<b>HNC/D</b>	Higher National Certificates/Diplomas
<b>IMD</b>	Index of Multiple Deprivation
<b>KS</b>	Key Stage
<b>HESA</b>	Higher Education Statistics Agency
<b>LA</b>	Local Authority
<b>LPN</b>	Low Participation Neighbourhood
<b>LSOA</b>	Lower Super Output Area
<b>OFFA</b>	Office for Fair Access
<b>OFS</b>	Office for Students
<b>ONS</b>	Office for National Statistics
<b>POLAR</b>	Participation of Local Areas
<b>Q</b>	Quintile
<b>SFC</b>	Scottish Funding Council
<b>SR</b>	Student Recruitment
<b>UHOVI</b>	University of the Heads of the Valleys
<b>WA</b>	Widening Access
<b>WIMD</b>	Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation
<b>WP</b>	Widening Participation

# Abstract

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This thesis is a case study of widening access (WA) policy implementation in Wales, specifically focusing on policy interventions, policy tools, and practitioner enactment. A mixed-methods approach is adopted, involving semi-structured interviews and quantitative administrative datasets, to address the research aim: to explore WA policy implementation in Wales and provide a framework that can be used to make recommendations for improving policy and practice.

An in-depth analysis of one WA intervention, employing Geographic Information System (GIS) techniques, illustrates that the efficacy of the area-based policy tool varies substantially by region. While some ineffectiveness can be put down to the limitations of the intervention design or the design of the tool, there are also issues with the use of the tool (the practitioner enactment of the policy). Evidence from the interview data suggests there is an over-reliance on top-down approaches and area-based tools in WA.

The study develops a conceptual framework for WA Policy Implementation, informed by the work of Matland (1995), which is used to analyse and interpret the empirical data. The WA Policy Implementation Framework identifies four ideal types: Administrative, Political, Experimental, and Symbolic. The data analysis indicates that policy outcomes can be improved by using each of the four components of the typology as part of a 'design process' for implementation. Strengthening 'bottom-up' approaches will ensure that 'street-level' knowledge develops value and may help to mitigate some of the risks of top-down approaches. However, a number of risks are also highlighted e.g. the risk to fairness and transparency if practitioners are given total freedom.

The research concludes with a series of recommendations for WA policy implementation. The WA Policy Implementation Framework may provide a way of managing the risks associated with each typology while capitalising on the benefits. This, combined with appropriate evaluation, is more likely to lead to WA policy implementation success.

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# Chapter 1:

# Introduction

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Inequitable access to Higher Education continues to be an issue across Wales and the rest of the UK (Younger et al. 2019). In the UK, the issue has received increasing political attention over the last 60 years. There are two main drivers for the widening access agenda. First, there are the economic benefits of a more educated workforce (as highlighted by the Robbins report (The Committee on Higher Education (1963)) and, second, there is a prominent social justice argument. Over the last 20 years, both agendas have resulted in an increasing number of policies and interventions designed to improve access to Higher Education (Donnelly and Evans 2019), and there has also been an increase in the use of area-based policy tools in this field. This, inevitably, has resulted in a growing body of practitioners working in the domain of widening access and participation, which has been accompanied by a growing body of research. Despite this, little attention has been paid to policy implementation and the role of practitioners in enacting the policy.

This study contributes to the body of research by generating knowledge on policy implementation in Widening Access (WA) in Wales, with a particular focus on area-based policy tools, policy interventions, and practitioner enactment. These terminologies are complex and will be explored through existing literature in the first four chapters. The definitions used by this study are clarified briefly in Section 1.2 and then defined in full by the end of Chapter 4.

## 1.1 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The research was conducted between 2013 and 2020 during a significant period of change for the Higher Education (HE) sector in Wales. As this study was

starting out, 2012 saw tuition fees rise to a maximum of £9,000, and the student number cap was removed, enabling Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to gain more money by recruiting more students. Within the Welsh Context, Communities First – the Welsh Government’s flagship programme for tackling poverty – ended in 2018. This was significant for the Welsh HE sector as Communities First was also the focus of national policies and institutional widening access strategies. In addition to policy changes, there has been a surge in the production of WA literature and research (Harrison and Waller 2017).

The ‘modern’ era of university access policies, strategies and interventions arguably started in 1997, following the Dearing Report (National Committee of Inquiry into HE 1997), New Labour winning the UK general election, and most significantly for this study, devolution in Wales in 1999. Despite over 20 years of WA policies and targeted provision, the narrative of progress is complex. There has been growth in the overall numbers of students, but access continues to be unequal with some groups privileged over others. Even where access has increased, there is a divide between ‘high tariff’<sup>1</sup> institutions and the post ’92 institutions<sup>2</sup>. The inequalities in Higher Education are complex, often intersecting with numerous characteristics, such as social class, gender, age, ethnicity, disability, and geography (Gorard et al. 2019). As the body of widening access research literature grows, so does the list of the groups that experience inequitable access, participation, and success in Higher Education. Chapter 2 will summarise some of the key literature.

The term ‘Widening Access’ is contested (Burke 2013). Outside of Wales, it is often referred to as ‘Widening Participation’. More recently, there is an emphasis on ensuring these policies or programmes adopt a full student life-cycle approach – focussing not only on access but on successful participation and graduate

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<sup>1</sup> High tariff refers to HEIs that tend to require higher entry requirements so are generally more competitive.

<sup>2</sup> The 1992 Higher Education Act allowed 35 polytechnic institutions to become universities. These are commonly known as the post ’92 institutions.



success. The whole lifecycle approach is too broad for this study, so it will focus on access and outreach activities. At the time of conducting the thesis, the guidance from the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) still heavily focussed on access, so these policies and programmes have a maturity about them that will aid the study's contribution to knowledge. The study will use the term 'widening access' (WA) to refer to the outreach and access agenda, incorporating policies, strategies and practices.

Further, it should be noted that the reason for this study is not only academic. The researcher is also a practitioner-manager in the field. Various conversations within a work context developed a curiosity around the topic of widening access policy implementation and led to a desire to understand it better.

## **1.2 FOCUS OF THE STUDY**

The study explores the implementation of widening access policy in Wales and is presented as a case study of South-East Wales. This region was chosen for two main reasons. Firstly, it is the most populated region of Wales and has the highest number of deprived communities in the nation (Welsh Government 2015). Secondly, the position/positionality of the researcher as a practitioner-manager in the region facilitated access to data and interview participants. The ethics of this positionality are discussed in Chapter 5.

The case study adopts a mixed-methods approach to explore the policy implementation process. Interviews with widening access and community practitioners are used to develop knowledge of WA policy implementation (the policy tools, policy interventions, and practitioner enactment). This is triangulated by linking administrative data to explore the efficacy of the policy tool, Communities First, for meeting the policy goal.

The study develops a framework for WA policy implementation, informed by Matland's (1995) conflict-ambiguity framework, with four ideal types of implementation created (see 1.6). Three specific components of policy implementation are explored through the framework:

- The area-based policy tool: the ‘technology’ used to reach the policy goal – in this case, Communities First and the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD). These tools are used by practitioners for targeting provision, and then by institutions and government for benchmarking and measuring success.
- The policy interventions: programmes (interventions) created by middle managers or teams in response to the institutional/regional strategy
- The policy enactment: The day-to-day work of practitioners in delivering the interventions

The data is used to identify whether the typologies of the interventions and tools match the typologies within which the practitioners operate (alignment is crucial for success in implementation). Chapter 6 will align the interventions to the framework, and Chapter 7 will align the practitioner enactment to the framework. In total, 15 practitioners were interviewed, including 10 university practitioners and 5 community practitioners. The university practitioners covered three Higher Education Institutions in the region (Cardiff Metropolitan University, Cardiff University, and the University of South Wales) – this included First Campus practitioners (First Campus is a HEFCW funded Reaching Wider widening access partnership – Reaching Wider brings together all HE and FE institutions in Wales). The Community practitioners covered five different Communities First clusters, three from Cardiff, one from Rhondda Cynon Taf and one from Caerphilly. This latter group was challenging to engage as the Welsh Government announced the end of the Communities First programme (resulting in job losses) just as the researcher was recruiting interview participants. Many of the practitioners had already left their jobs, and of those who remained there was a low response to the invitation to take part in the research.

### **1.3 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE**

While the body of research on widening access continues to grow, little attention has been paid to the policy implementation process and the lens of the

practitioner. This thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge in three ways. Firstly, its focus on the policy implementation process, with particular attention to the policy tools, policy interventions, and practitioner enactment of the policy. The role of practitioners in delivering the intervention and using the tool is an under-researched area. The study develops a framework, grounded in theory, to develop knowledge of WA Policy Implementation.

The second contribution to knowledge is in the applied nature of this thesis. The strength of a Professional Doctorate student is in their ability to link research with practice. It was essential to the researcher that the thesis produced meaningful recommendations that could be applied in practice. This has undoubtedly been the case, and findings from the study continue to influence practice and inform the development of a new Widening Participation strategy at Cardiff University. For example, the scope of Cardiff University's Widening Participation strategy is based on the widening access indicators as shown in Table 2.2, using a more expansive basket of measures than the previous strategy. Perhaps more importantly, the scope will be reviewed annually, giving an opportunity to reflect on the street-level knowledge of practitioners and consider the inclusion of new groups they may have identified through their practice. Equally as important, the measures of success for the new strategy have been shaped using the WA Policy Implementation Framework that has been created through this research. The latter covers a range of qualitative and quantitative measures, providing the opportunity to reflect on lessons learnt and use alternative indicators of success in addition to area-based indicators.

The final contribution to knowledge is in the research methods used for the study. Much research in widening access tends to use either qualitative or quantitative methods – mixed-methods research in the field is less common. The study develops knowledge by showing how a mixed-methods approach can generate a richness of data and findings. While the use of area-based measures has been researched previously, the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) techniques triangulated with qualitative interview data is a new way of exploring WA policy implementation.

## 1.4 THE WELSH CONTEXT

The widening access policy landscape in Wales is complex, and there are several overlapping policy agendas that influence the way in which policy is formulated and implemented. Since devolution in 1999, the contexts of the nations (Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales) have become increasingly different to that of England. A summary of key policies is provided here, but they are explained in full in Chapter 3.

Communities First was the Welsh Government's flagship programme from 2002 – 2018, focussing on tackling poverty in the most deprived communities in Wales. In addition to providing funding to support communities, the Welsh Government required and encouraged other mainstream provision to be targeted at these areas too – including all Higher Education Institutions.

Communities First areas were identified through the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD). WIMD ranks all areas (Lower Super Output Areas – LSOAs), each with an average population of 1,600, based on the levels of multiple deprivation according to health, housing, education, employment, income, access to services, housing, and physical environment (Welsh Government 2014). WIMD allows the ranking of 1909 LSOAs in Wales to illustrate relative deprivation, but it cannot be used to measure the deprivation of one LSOA in isolation.

HEFCW is the regulator for Wales and provides the link between the Welsh Government and the HE sector. HEFCW set the national widening access strategy, regulating and monitoring HEI activity through fee and access plans.

HEFCW also funded the Reaching Wider Partnerships, which were launched in 2002 and continue to run today. These partnerships are regional, collaborative efforts to widen access to higher education.

Further information about the profile of the South-East Wales region is provided at the end of Chapter 3.

## 1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The overall aim of the study is to explore Widening Access policy implementation in Wales and provide a framework that can be used to make recommendations for policy and practice. Four research questions have been developed to address this overarching research aim, as summarised in Table 1.1

**Table 1.1 Research Questions**

<b>Research Questions (RQ)</b>	<b>Chapter</b>
RQ1: How is Widening Access policy implemented through differing institutional interventions, and how appropriate are these interventions for meeting the overall policy goal?	Chapter 5
RQ2: To what extent is Communities First an effective area-based policy tool for targeting those most under-represented in Higher Education?	Chapters 5 and 6
RQ3: To what extent does the practitioner enactment of Widening Access policy impact the original policy goal?	Chapter 6
RQ4: How can the implementation of widening access policy be improved?	Chapters 5, 6 and 7

## 1.6 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The structure of the thesis is based on the flow of the research questions. Chapter 2 is the first of three literature review chapters and has three purposes. Firstly, it provides historical context to the development of WA policy and practice across the UK – including the interventions that have been designed in response to the policy. Secondly, it draws on research to highlight the issues of participation in Higher Education that continue to exist, as well as theories that attempt to explain why. Finally, the Chapter draws on the literature around area-based

initiatives and ecological fallacy and explores how these relate to widening access.

Chapter 3 is a literature review of the WA policy landscape in Wales. The chapter provides further detail on some of the key documents that form the policy landscape in Wales, including WIMD, Communities First, HEFCW, Reaching Wider, and institutional strategies. Key socio-demographic data about the south-east Wales region and its history of engagement with Higher Education is outlined.

Chapter 4 develops the theoretical framework for the study. Policy implementation and policy enactment literature is reviewed, and a conceptual framework for WA policy implementation in Wales is developed. The framework is informed by Matland's conflict-ambiguity framework (Matland 1995), which provides four ideal types of policy implementation. This framework will be used to 1) categorise the typology of the interventions and tools, and 2) align practitioner enactment to the framework. This provides a structure to assess whether or not the practitioner enactment aligns to the design of the interventions and tools (and in doing so, predict where implementation problems might occur).

Chapter 5 is the Methodology, providing a commentary and justification for the chosen research methods. The case study is situated within the social science paradigm of pragmatism – the Methodology explains this positionality and argues why it is most appropriate for addressing the research questions. Ethical considerations are also addressed in detail in Part 2 of Chapter 5.

Chapter 6 focuses on policy interventions and tools, first drawing on qualitative interview data to explore how four different policy interventions are designed from the WA Policy Landscape. Secondly, administrative datasets are linked through GIS techniques. Through the data analysis, it is possible to explore the extent to which the design of an intervention, combined with the area-based policy tool, allows an intervention to meet the original policy goal.

Chapter 7 focuses on policy enactment by practitioners. The WA Policy Implementation Framework is used to illustrate the very 'social' nature of policy

implementation, and specifically the significance of enactment by practitioners. The WA Policy Implementation Framework is used to analyse the data and identify commonalities and issues of enactment. A discussion is presented at the end of the Chapter to draw together the findings from Chapter 6 and 7 with the WA Policy Implementation Framework.

Finally, Chapter 8 is the study's conclusion, and the Chapter provides several recommendations for policy and practice while also addressing some of the limitations of the study.

# Chapter 2: Access to Higher Education

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## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The term Widening Access (WA) has become of increasing importance in government and Higher Education (HE) agendas in the last two decades. Now common in education discourse, WA policy is on the strategic agenda for all Higher Education institutions (HEIs), required by governing bodies such as the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) and the Office for Students (OFS).

All HEIs are expected to show commitment to supporting and encouraging applicants from underrepresented groups, and the last two decades have seen a boom of programmes labelled as ‘outreach’ or ‘access’ (McKenzie et al. 2019). As funding has become tighter, universities are under more pressure to demonstrate the impact of WA initiatives. One of the ways in which this has been achieved is to use area-based policy tools. In Wales, this has involved the use of Communities First data (taken as a proxy for deprivation) to target underrepresented groups<sup>3</sup>, using this same geographical data to monitor performance, and in some cases even drawing on it as a basis for contextual admissions policies. However, despite all these attempts, there is relatively little evidence of the impact of WA policies,

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<sup>3</sup> As will be highlighted in Chapter 3, HEFCW identifies individuals living in areas of high deprivation as an under-represented group in Higher Education. The complexities of these definitions are discussed in Section 3.12



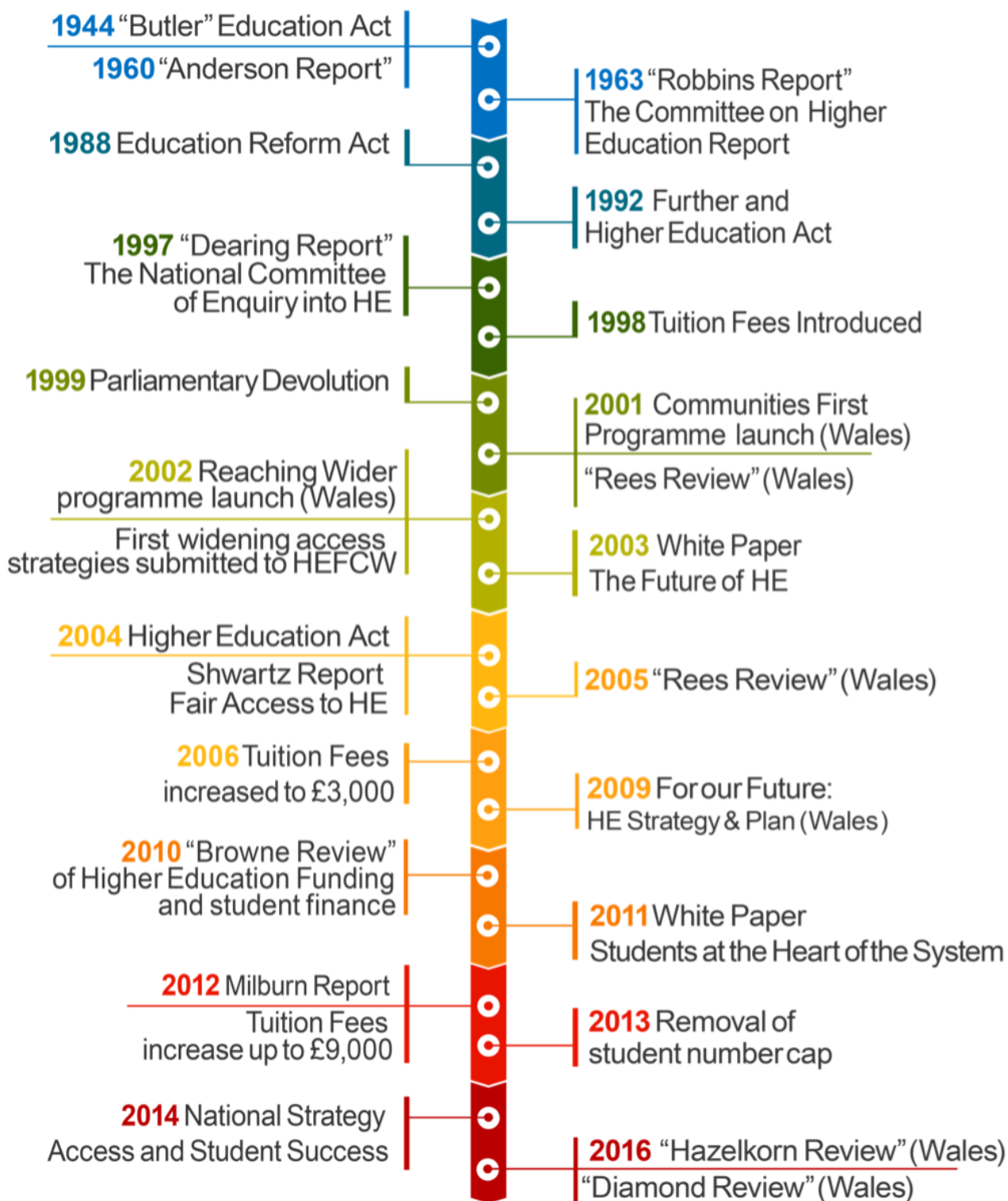
strategies, and practice. There currently exists a myriad of research papers on WA, trends in student participation in HE, and differential outcomes for WA students (Boliver 2013; Taylor et al. 2013; Harrison and McCaig 2015; Boliver 2016).

Often, in practice, WA falls into the ecological fallacy ‘trap’ because of the indicators or targets used. In Wales, for example, WA has most commonly been defined by Communities First postcodes (see Chapters 6 and 7. The WA agenda appears to have adopted a dichotomous approach of students being labelled widening access or not. In other words, geographical location has, in many WA strategies, become the prime indicator for targeting groups and measuring success - often with no consideration for other factors (such as family characteristics or individual experiences).

Many commentators have discussed issues with using area-based policy tools (Halpin et al. 2004; Andersson and Musterd 2005; Harrison 2013; Harrison and McCaig 2015). One issue, for example, is they do not have the granularity (nor are they designed to) to provide information about an individual – the tools can only describe aggregate characteristics of the area an individual lives in. While area-based tools are not perfect, they do offer a useful tool to help WA practitioners target under-represented students. This chapter will review literature relating to Widening Access, participation in Higher Education, area-based initiatives (ABIs) and tools, and ecological fallacy.

**Figure 2.1: Key developments in HE Policy**

### **A timeline of key developments in Higher Education policy**



## 2.2 THE PROBLEM OF PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The narrow social composition of Higher Education has been recognised as a policy issue for over 60 years (Younger et al. 2019). Figure 2.1 has been created as part of this thesis and provides an overview of the key Higher Education policy developments since World War 2. During this time, the Higher Education sector in the UK – and most other Western countries – has undergone significant transformation (Altbach et al. 2009), with significantly higher participation rates – from roughly 5% participation in the 1960s to over 40% in the 2000s (Greenaway and Haynes 2003; Boliver 2013; HESA 2017). Despite participation in HE increasing significantly over the last 60 years, students from the most socially disadvantaged backgrounds continue to be under-represented in Higher Education (Boliver 2013; Chowdry et al. 2013).

Over the last century, the 1944 Education Act is one of the first attempts to make education more accessible. Focussed on primary and secondary education, the Act, known as the ‘Butler Act’, called for education to be more accessible to women and the working class. This aligned with a post-war recovery plan for society.

Perhaps with the exception of the Anderson Report (1960), which introduced student grants, the issue of access to Higher Education received little attention until the Robbins Report (The Committee on Higher Education 1963). The Robbins Report argued for a more accessible Higher Education system for anyone with the potential, regardless of background. The report claimed that the expansion of HE could potentially help with the recovery of the economy. By default, this included encouraging women and those from less privileged backgrounds to go to university. On the back of this, the Labour government at the time introduced polytechnics as a way of expanding HE provision.

The 1988 Education Act is the next significant development for education, although this still focussed mostly on primary and secondary education. Notably, this included the introduction of the National Curriculum, but it also indicated that more independence for further and Higher Education sectors was to come.

In 1992, the Further and Higher Education Act made two critical changes for the sector. Firstly, it allowed 35 polytechnic institutions to become universities (the post '92 institutions). Secondly, it introduced funding bodies to the sector with the creation of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

The Dearing Report (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education 1995) represents the start of the modern era Widening Access agenda as it is known today (Harrison and Waller 2017). The report shone a spotlight on the social inequalities of Higher Education in a way that had not previously been done. It recommended that HEIs had a pivotal role to play in remedying these social inequalities and should develop strategies to improve access for under-represented groups (this was framed in terms of expansion of Higher Education). To facilitate this, an injection of money was needed to support the growth of students progressing to HE. The report recommended the additional money should come from implementing tuition fees.

Due to parliamentary devolution in 1999, the home nations gained additional powers over Higher Education. In Wales, HEIs were expected to submit their first institutional widening access strategies in 2002. At the same time, the national creation of the Reaching Wider Partnership was launched to improve access to HE through collaboration (HEFCW 2020b). Two papers were key for the development of policies in Wales around this time – The Rees Reviews of 2001 and 2005 – both are discussed in further detail in Chapter 3.

Through this new era of widening access policies, previous discourses of equality of outcome became discourses of equality of opportunity. The new supposedly meritocratic system was seen as a way to help 'raise aspirations' of those from lower socio-economic groups. This meritocratic system gives the impression that anyone can succeed in society if they work hard. These ideas were developed more fully through the HE White Paper (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee 2002) and the 2004 Higher Education Act, which introduced variable tuition fees up to £3,000.

The Browne Review (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills 2010) was set up to explore possible solutions to the fact that student numbers were increasing but public funding was struggling to keep up with the growth. The review recommended lifting the cap on tuition fees in England – which would also have significant implications for the home nations. The review produced 4 key claims that continue to influence Higher Education policy today:

- That all graduates will benefit from increased wages and good jobs, and that there will be a return to productivity (suggesting it is possible to measure the human capital aspect of the economic value of HE)
- That all graduates benefit from better jobs and salaries i.e., the graduate premium (therefore, it is justified that they should pay for it).
- That universities should be accountable for ensuring good economic return for all their courses (suggesting that a course with low employability rates is then a course with little value).
- That creating a market with students at the heart of it will force universities to be more accountable (the student becomes a consumer who can choose the courses with the best value).

In 2012, it became possible for HEIs to charge up to £9000 in tuition fees. HEIs charging the higher tuition fee rates were required to show how they were supporting the most under-represented students (for example, through WA interventions and student support).

## **2.3 RESPONSES TO POLICIES: WA INTERVENTIONS**

To combat growing concerns around the narrow social composition of Higher Education, several policies have been developed at national, regional, and institutional levels. These policies attempt to deliver on the ‘access agenda’ and improve access to Higher Education (Evans et al. 2019). WA policies have been implemented with a variety of interventions that aim to improve access to HE. These interventions are often targeted at ‘non-traditional’ (increasingly seen as a derogatory term) or under-represented students (Thompson 2019). Table 2.1

provides a summary of some of the most popular indicators used to identify and define WA students.

Many institutions in the UK deliver 'black box' WA interventions (Younger et al. 2019). Black box interventions contain multiple components, often last for several years, and may include on and/or off-campus activities such as mentoring, application support, revision support and study skills advice. Black box interventions include collaborative partnership interventions, such as Realising Opportunities, Reach Scotland and Reaching Wider (Wales). They also include institutional interventions, such as the AtoB (Birmingham University), the Manchester Access Programme (Manchester University), PARTNERS (Newcastle University) or Step Up (Cardiff University). These interventions are complex, and no two are the same, making it extremely difficult to pinpoint which part of the intervention may have been instrumental in improving access to Higher Education, or whether it is a cumulative effect.

**Table 2.1: Indicators used for WA programmes**

<b>Individual Characteristics</b>	<p>Includes whether a person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is a mature student</li> <li>• Has a disability</li> <li>• Is from a potentially disadvantaged ethnic group (including Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities)</li> <li>• Speaks English as a second/additional language</li> <li>• Has a potentially disadvantaged gender status</li> <li>• Is a recent immigrant</li> <li>• Is a refugee/asylum seeker</li> </ul>
<b>Individual Experiences</b>	<p>Includes whether a person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has a non-traditional qualification route to HE</li> <li>• Has spent time in care</li> <li>• Is estranged from their family</li> <li>• Has suffered chronic ill-health</li> <li>• Is a young carer</li> <li>• Has suffered a recent bereavement or other disruption/adversity</li> <li>• Was a participant in an outreach programme</li> <li>• Attended a school targeted by an outreach programme</li> </ul>
<b>Family Characteristics</b>	<p>Includes whether a person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free school meal (FSM) eligibility/receipt</li> <li>• Parent/carers occupation or social class</li> <li>• Household income</li> <li>• Educational maintenance allowance (EMA) recipient</li> <li>• Family receives income/tax credits</li> </ul>
<b>School Characteristics</b>	<p>These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School type, such as whether fee-paying or state-funded</li> <li>• School average performance at Key Stage 4 (KS4) and/or KS5</li> <li>• Percentage of pupils eligible for FSM</li> <li>• Percentage of pupils progressing to HE</li> <li>• Percentage of pupils receiving EMA, where EMA is available</li> <li>• Primary feeder school to a meeting school any of the above</li> </ul>
<b>Neighbourhood Characteristics</b>	<p>These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI)</li> <li>• Local HE Participation rate (POLAR)</li> <li>• Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) or Scottish IMD (SIMD) or Welsh IMD (WIMD)</li> <li>• Neighbourhood socioeconomic demographic (ACORN, MOSAIC)</li> <li>• Communities First (Wales)</li> </ul>

Adapted from Gorard et al. (2019, pp. 102-103)

## 2.4 BARRIERS TO HE

There is a growing body of research that attempts to identify the barriers to Higher Education that WA interventions are designed to overcome (for example, see: Gorard et al. 2007; Chowdry et al. 2013; Riddell et al. 2013; Taylor et al. 2013; Boliver 2016; Burke 2017; Harrison and Waller 2017; Evans et al. 2019). Some of the key papers are reviewed here.

In their review of the Higher Education Sector and issues of access to HE in Wales, Stroud et al. (2004) draw on empirical research to highlight various barriers to Higher Education for students from low-income households. Not only do they claim aversion to debt is a problem, but university must be seen as a 'realistic choice' for it to be a possibility, and this is impacted by resources, knowledge, and the opportunities available to them. This is intertwined with issues such as poor self-esteem and low educational attainment (Rees and Istance 1997; Stroud et al. 2004).

Research by Gorard et al. (2007) suggests that success in school is the main factor in deciding whether or not a student will progress. This is also found by Chowdry et al. (2013), whose quantitative study shows that those from higher socio-economic backgrounds are much more likely to progress to (elite) HEIs than those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. However, when controlling for socio-economic groups in their analysis, they discover that the effect of educational attainment prior to university has much more of an impact on entrance rates to university (and type of university) than socio-economic status.

Attainment in school continues to be a strong theme in research that explores the barriers to Higher Education. A report by the Department for Education (2014) shows that performance in school (formal qualifications) accounts for roughly 95 per cent of the variation in Higher Education participation rates. Harrison and Waller (2017) show that the ability to achieve 'good' qualifications in school is linked to socio-economic status and accumulation of (educational) disadvantage.



Even where some progression to Higher Education is seen, when controlling for application rates there remains a significant difference in applications to elite institutions (Boliver 2013). Reay et al. (2009) suggest this may be down to fears of social integration. Other researchers indicate that the geographical location of elite institutions is a barrier (Mangan et al. 2010). Harris (2010) researched the subject choice of students and showed that less-advantaged pupils were more likely to select subjects that would not facilitate entry to the most selective universities.

More recent research tends to focus on the importance of intersectionality. Intersectionality is the acknowledgement that the socio-demographic characteristics of a person cannot be studied in isolation, but there will be an overlapping effect of demographic, personal, and social characteristics. For example, Richardson et al (2020) Comment that:

...middle-class girls from ethnic minority groups generally show the highest participation whereas white working-class boys show the lowest.

Richardson et al (2020, p.352)

Crawford and Greaves (2015) also highlight the importance of considering intersectionality when researching access and participation in HE. Their research showed that the effect of social class was greater in White children than children from Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic backgrounds.

Despite any marginal improvements in HE participation, the relatively advantaged social groups continue to be over-represented in elite HEIs – little progress has been made in disrupting the established social order (Harrison and Waller 2017). In an attempt to change this, WA provision across the UK HE sector continues to expand and grow, as evidenced in Access and Participation Plans in England, Access Agreements in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and Fee and Access Plans in Wales.

## 2.5 WHAT WORKS? DEFINITIONS OF SUCCESS AND MEASURING IMPACT

With growing attention paid to widening access agenda, there is an increasing focus on demonstrating ‘impact’ and showing ‘what works’. Progress on this has been varied and difficult to explain due to unreliable or limited access to data (Passy and Morris 2010; Harrison and Waller 2017). While the growth of under-represented groups in HE has been observed, this is mostly in line with the growth seen for those most advantaged entering HE and reflects an increasing supply of Higher Education providers and places, as well as improvements in school attainment.

Boliver (2011) suggests that any decline in HE inequalities is primarily due to reaching the ‘saturation point’ of those from the most advantaged social class. Despite the growth in Higher Education, the ‘social class’ gap continues to be a problem. The literature on the matter can be split into two issues: firstly, that issues of under-representation continue to exist (see Boliver 2011; Boliver et al. 2021), but secondly, even where there have been some localised successes, there is a lack of robust evaluation (see Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research and Data (WISERD) 2015). This makes it challenging to identify what precisely about the intervention was the likely cause of change.

The increasing pressures that WA teams are facing to demonstrate ‘what works’ may be explained by the epistemological issues of WA that remain unresolved:

There is, perhaps, a natural desire to understand complex systems and to purposefully influence them. An individual’s progression through the education system and into adult life is one such system and it is vested with strong symbolic value by society due its roles in determining power hierarchies, economic competitiveness, and personal liberties.

Harrison and Waller (2017, p. 151)

As Harrison and Waller highlight, the matter of progressing to Higher Education is a complex social process with many different influencing factors. It is an important topic because of the symbolic value that Higher Education represents (for example, future life opportunities). Despite over two decades of investment

into access initiatives, issues of under-representation in Higher Education continue to exist. As time goes on, there appears to be an increasing pressure on practitioners and institutions to demonstrate the impact of their programmes.

As these social processes are so complex, institutions and regulators appear to have focussed more on demonstrating impact via the recruitment of students from under-represented groups or areas of high deprivation. Issues of targeting the 'right' people for WA interventions continue to exist, and there is a growing expectation for HEIs to recruit from certain geographic areas (in place of individual socio-economic status – or 'class') evidenced by using area-based measures in Fee and Access Plans, league tables and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) returns. The boundaries between access and recruitment activities continue to blur. As a result, the hard targets of recruitment are increasingly applied to the complex world of WA (Harrison and Waller 2017). Governments and institutions appear to have forgotten the broader goal of social justice and instead are focussed on chasing postcodes – which are only a proxy for deprivation (this is discussed further in Chapters 6 and 7).

There are some studies that have attempted to identify 'what works' in widening access initiatives. Younger et al. (2019) completed a systematic review to identify evidence of what works in WA. They struggled to find any robust research and, in their paper, stress the increasing need for and importance of high-quality evaluation of WA interventions. Their work also highlights several studies in the US which might have beneficial applications for WA in the UK (despite limitations due to contextual differences).

Harrison and Waller (2017) comment on two issues. Firstly, that partnership working has the potential to generate programmes designed for 'the least resistance' to avoid or reduce conflict between partners. Secondly, the ambiguity around terms such as 'evaluation', 'monitoring' and 'measurables' combined with a lack of researcher skills and techniques have made it difficult for practitioners to demonstrate success.

Similarly, in their report to HEFCW on access to Higher Education in Wales, the research team at WISERD found that:

Evaluating the impacts of widening access initiatives on patterns of participation in Higher Education is difficult and limited, given the data that are currently available”

WISERD (2015, p. 3)

Again, this highlights the problem that access initiatives are attempting to change complex social phenomena, and this requires robust research methods to assess the impact of these initiatives effectively.

Burke (2017) focuses on the tension between the world of recruitment and league tables with widening access. Universities are often trying to balance the demand for ‘excellence’ with ‘equity’ – the first often wins the battle due to an increasingly globally competitive HE market, as the league tables show (Rostan and Vaira 2011). While ‘excellence’ and ‘equity’ are not necessarily in opposition to each other, research has shown that the ‘excellence agenda’ can often overshadow or challenge the access agenda (Stevenson et al. 2014; Burke 2017). This might also limit the extent to which widening access interventions can truly be successful.

In Wales, area-based tools have dominated the WA discourse since the creation of the Communities First programme. This is in a HE landscape where HEFCW continues to provide tighter guidance to HEIs in an attempt to ensure that tuition fee income is appropriately spent on supporting the students who are most disadvantaged.

## 2.6 AREA-BASED INITIATIVES

The emphasis on impact has resulted in an increased emphasis on the importance of evidence-based practice and evaluation of impact. One of the ways in which this has been achieved is to use ABIs as policy tools for targeting and monitoring performance (in this study referred to as area-based policy tools). In Wales, this has involved the use of Communities First data (taken as a proxy for deprivation)

to target resources, monitor performance, and in some cases even drawing on it as a basis for contextual admissions policies.

## DEVELOPMENT OF AREAS-BASED INITIATIVES

Area-based initiatives have been written about for well over a century (Smith 1999), but it was in the 1990s that a major expansion of ABIs could be seen. This came as a result of increasing pressure on governments to achieve nationally agreed standards to combat socio-economic deprivation and social exclusion - for example, in education, health and housing (Smith 1999). By the 1990s, social exclusion and socio-economic deprivation were issues of significant concern across Western Europe, and it was believed that these issues stemmed from exclusion, limiting individuals' opportunities, and trapping people in socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods. It was thought that *neighbourhood effects* of segregated groups would cause further social issues and inequalities (Andersson and Musterd 2005). Area-based approaches were brought about to combat neighbourhood effects and to challenge 'wicked problems' caused by social exclusion (Finn et al. 2007). These area-based approaches take a spatial and geographic focus on a selection of the 'most deprived' areas to reduce social exclusion (which is believed to be a root cause of a wide range of issues).

For the purpose of this research, area-based initiatives are characterised by policies and practices that attempt to link the socio-economic deprivation of an individual to their residential environment (Van Gent et al. 2009). Smith (1999 p1) defines areas of deprivation targeted by area-based approaches as:

A high level of proportion, of individuals or households, who experience a range of negative or undesirable circumstances, either singularly or in combination, which significantly reduce their overall wellbeing: these include, for instance, low incomes, employment, poor health, bad housing conditions and lack of skills. The concentration of these deprived households and individuals in an area coupled with the undesirable aspects of that area: poor environment, poor housing, neglected open spaces, abandoned shops and houses, high crime levels, lack of services, shortage of job opportunities, can act to reinforce the level of deprivation experienced by the community.

While many Western governments adopted ABIs as a way of tackling issues that were believed to stem from social exclusion (ranging from specific issues such as unemployment or poor education to broader issues such as deprivation – as shown from the extract above), The United Kingdom is regarded as a leader in the area (Smith 1999). First elected in 1997, the New Labour Government in the UK saw through a significant expansion of area-based approaches, including Education Action Zones - an attempt to address low education standards and socio-economic deprivation in England. With devolution, the Welsh Assembly Government initiated their flagship area-based programme, Communities First – this is discussed further in Chapter 3.

As a number of authors have reflected (Mayo and Anastacio 1999; Smith 1999; Andersson and Musterd 2005), these programmes were associated with market-oriented policies. They linked the targeting of tightly restrained public resources with an increasing emphasis upon the promotion of private sector investment, promoting the marketisation of services whilst simultaneously enhancing the active involvement of the voluntary and community sectors in the regeneration process. These policies claim to encourage economic development and fill the potential gaps that might otherwise emerge in the provision of services as the local state has been rolled back. The active involvement of the local communities offers opportunities to enhance the legitimacy of these arrangements in the eyes of local actors (Mayo and Anastacio 1999).

North American literature links ABIs to the idea that those who are better off can afford to move to areas of opportunity, and therefore they will be better off than those who cannot do this (Galster and Killen 1995; Rosenbaum et al. 2002). These urban strategies are related to new governance arrangements that are being developed across Europe and stem from the decentralisation of power to lower levels of government that are nearer to the people. Andersson and Musterd (2005) question whether area-based approaches are the best strategies for addressing urban problems. Selective approaches such as the urban area-based interventions can be seen as a response to inefficiencies in general/universal welfare state approaches and practices. These inefficiencies are related to the budget cutbacks conducted in most countries over the last decade or two. The

weaker the welfare state gets (less redistribution of resources), the more visible poverty becomes. The State reacts by launching selective programmes targeting specific and visible concentrations of poor people (Andersson and Musterd 2005, p. 387).

As the problem of social inequalities in Higher Education continues to exist, ABIs have been introduced into the sector in an attempt to target resources and solve the problem. However, as they have become used in Higher Education they have moved away from a comprehensive, multifaceted area-based programme and have arguably been reduced to a policy tool and goal in their own right.

## **2.7 AREA-BASED POLICY TOOLS AND THE WIDENING ACCESS AGENDA**

The ability to target the ‘right’ students is central to successful widening access programmes. New Labour became the leaders of using ABIs as a solution to educational inequalities (Halpin et al. 2004; Rees et al. 2007). The act of targeting and developing eligibility criteria for WA programmes dictates who can and cannot take part (Harrison and Hatt 2010). If the targeting is wrong, then scarce resources are wasted on those who are already well-supported for progressing to HE (Thomas 2001). There has been some clarity over definitions of ‘under-represented’ in Higher Education since the early 2000s and the list continues to grow (see Table 2.2), but the practical use of these definitions is often problematic (i.e., the individual data is usually not readily available for widening access practitioners to use) (Harrison and Hatt 2010). With the absence of (high quality) individual-level data, area-based policy tools continue to be widely used in widening access policy and practice across the UK (Harrison 2012b; Harrison and McCaig 2015; Harrison and Waller 2017). These area-based policy tools differ slightly to the broader ABIs – it is not one coordinated programme, but they are tools for targeting resources and monitoring progress against policy goals.

Policy has had an increasing focus on area-based policy tools in Higher Education, justified by claiming that there are compounding effects of living in geographic concentrations of disadvantage and that these areas need more targeted

solutions (Harrison and Hatt 2010). Institutions and practitioners have operationalised various policy tools by translating the tool (e.g., Communities First or Low Participation Neighbourhoods) into postcodes - a system which is relatively easy to implement. Researchers have shared concerns about the use of neighbourhood data and postcodes for targeting under-represented students (Allardice and Blicharski 2000; Rees et al. 2007; Harrison and Hatt 2010), and this is discussed further in Chapter 3 with relation to Communities First and WIMD. There are underlying assumptions made about the use of area-based approaches as a proxy, for example:

The theory underpinning this geographical proxy is not discussed but there is a working assumption that individuals in NS-SEC groups 4 to 8 are most likely to be found in these sorts of areas. There is a clear danger with this assumption (...) that these two types of area (high deprivation and low participation) are correlated to a significant degree

Harrison and Hatt (2010, pp. 69-70)

The body of research critiquing the use of ABIs and tools to widen access to Higher Education continues to grow (Halpin et al. 2004; Andersson and Musterd 2005; Rees et al. 2007; Van Gent et al. 2009; Harrison and Hatt 2010; Harrison 2012b,2013; Taylor et al. 2013; Boliver et al. 2015; Harrison and McCaig 2015; Gorard et al. 2019).

Smith (1999) and Plewis (1998) claim that the failure with area-based approaches can be put down to insufficient financial resources. Sammons et al. (2003) highlight issues that short timescales and short-term funding causes (such as a lack of stability due to high staff turnover). Linked to this, Dyson and Todd (2006) claim that inappropriate evaluation strategies may have been used – classic evaluation is not appropriate for such short-term projects as the social change may not have yet happened. These different types of policy implementation may require different strategies for evaluation.

These earlier critiques of area-based initiatives tend to focus on the lack of planning or poor implementation. Later research has instead concentrated on



critiquing the assumption that area-based interventions are appropriate for combating deeply rooted social inequalities:

A key premise of ABIs of all kinds is that there is a geography of poverty and social disadvantage, which is best addressed by adopting a policy approach which is framed spatially. Some of the underlying premises of this geography of poverty are that poverty is concentrated in particular areas; that people living in these areas suffer multiple forms of disadvantage that need to be tackled on a number of fronts; and that the concentration of poverty itself exacerbates the situation (often referred to as 'area effects').

Rees et al. (2007, p. 267)

Rees et al. (2007) highlight several concerns with area-based initiatives, three of which are highlighted here. Firstly, concentrations of deprivation is not an exact science – the very definition of what deprivation is and how it can be measured and monitored is debated, as is the idea of a 'neighbourhood effect' that might result from high concentrations of poverty. In trying to focus on concentrated areas of high deprivation, area-based initiatives are likely to miss more socially disadvantaged people than they hit. Secondly, the concept of 'multiple-deprivation' is often oversimplified – it is a complex phenomenon, and the ways in which different components of deprivation interact and intersect is contested. Thirdly, the idea that there is an *area-effect* that operates beyond an individual's circumstances (with either positive or negative influences) appears to be widely accepted, but definitions of these area effects are often ambiguous.

Harrison and McCaig (2015) warn about the overuse and misuse of Low Participation Neighbourhoods (LPNs), using a range of data to illustrate that the efficacy of such tools is questionable, not only as a proxy for targeting the most disadvantaged students, but again they actually 'miss' more people than they 'hit'. They also show that ABIs such as this can encourage questionable practices by institutions and practitioners, resulting in misconceptions about complex social inequalities – this is supported by the empirical data presented in Chapter 6.

Harrison and Waller (2017) identify two specific issues with using ABIs for widening access. Their research states that using ABIs for targeting will result in

deadweight (students participating when they are already likely to progress to HE) and leakage (referring to resources that are intended for socially disadvantaged students but end up benefiting those most advantaged, thus reinforcing social inequalities).

## 2.8 ECOLOGICAL FALLACY

Some – but not all – of these issues with area-based initiatives can be described as problems of ecological fallacy. In this context, ecological fallacy<sup>4</sup> is the problem of area-characteristics being applied to all individuals within that area – failing to recognise the individual circumstances that each person lives in (as Table 2.2 shows, area-effects are only one of five categories that could be considered within WA definitions).

Ecological fallacy is a growing problem in the widening access agenda, with policies widely dictating the use of various area-based policy tools (POLAR, Communities First, WIMD, etc.), as evidenced by Gorard and colleagues (2019). The issue is that these policies are used to dictate what happens on an individual level, but the measures themselves represent an area average (e.g., of deprivation or participation in Higher Education) rather than showing the distribution on an individual level (Rees et al. 2007; Harrison and McCaig 2015). The use of these policy tools has *“accelerated beyond their validity as a tool in understanding participation”* (Harrison and McCaig 2015 p 794).

The issue of ecological fallacy has been highlighted by a number of researchers (see for example: Bulmer 1986; Rees et al. 2007; Harrison and McCaig 2015; Boliver et al. 2015; Gorard et al 2019; Fisher and Begbie 2019). While there are some merits to spatial approaches – particularly for targeting limited resources and the ‘operationalizability’ for practitioners on the ground – there are drawbacks to making causal inferences from spatial data (Martin, 1996; Osborn

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<sup>4</sup> In a broader context, ecological fallacy is the interpretation of statistical data that occurs when inferences about the nature of individuals are deduced from inferences about the group to which those individuals belong

and Shuttleworth 2004). Osborn and Shuttleworth's (2004) work on access to HE in Northern Ireland highlighted the risk that targeting resources at socially deprived areas may lead to more applications, but the applications may be from individuals who are not socially disadvantaged themselves. They conclude by saying that geographical approaches to widening access fall into the trap of ecological fallacy and are 'inefficient and unjust', but that policymakers and defenders of the approach argue that the goal is not precision, but to provide a tool that will generally push HE access in the right direction (Osborn and Shuttleworth 2004).

Harrison and McCaig (2015) conducted research on Low Participation Neighbourhoods in England, and comment:

One form of ecological fallacy is found in the dictum that 'you are where you live' – otherwise expressed in the idea that you can infer significant information about an individual or their family from the prevailing conditions around their home.

Harrison and McCaig (2015, p. 795)

Harrison and McCaig's acknowledge the purpose of policy tools (in their case – Low Participation Neighbourhoods (LPNs)) serve as a reliable proxy). For example, LPNs may be useful for indicating areas where they may be individuals with potential for HE, but these tools should not be used as a tool in their own right (e.g., to target individuals living in a certain area). This level of individual targeting requires a much more nuanced approach (Harrison and McCaig 2015).

Boliver et al. (2021) summarise two key issues that may result from ecological fallacy. Firstly, there is the risk that it will result in false-negatives – that some individuals will be classed as 'not disadvantaged' because they do not live in an area where there are high levels of deprivation. Secondly, it can result in false positives – despite coming from an area of high deprivation, an individual might not be disadvantaged at all (Boliver et al. 2019). In their recommendations, they strongly advise HEIs against using area-level indicators for individual-level decisions (in this case, for contextual admissions), and instead advocate the use

of free school meal or household income data (both individual-level indicators that can be verified).

## **2.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

Chapter 2 has provided a summary of recent literature relating to widening access, area-based policy tools and ecological fallacy. The HE sector has continued to focus on the access agenda and social inequalities in Higher Education, and researchers continue to highlight the complexity of inequalities and the wide range of barriers that result in under-representation. The review of the broader UK landscape sets the foundations for the next chapter, which will focus specifically on the Welsh context and associated policies, strategies, tools, and interventions.

# Chapter 3: The Welsh context and policy landscape

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## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 is a review of the widening access policy context in Wales. It begins by briefly situating Wales within the UK context, before providing a more thorough review of the policy landscape in Wales. The contents of this Chapter can be grouped into four main themes.

First, the national landscape is reviewed throughout sections 3.3 – 3.8. This covers HEFCW policy documents, including the national Reaching Wider programme. The national policy tools are also reviewed, covering the design of the WIMD and the Communities First programme.

Second, the profile of South-East Wales, in particular its social, economic, and demographic profile and history of engagement with Higher Education, is outlined. South-East Wales is the focus of this study for two main reasons. Firstly, it is the most populated and diverse region of Wales with the highest number of Communities First areas. Secondly, the researcher is located within this region, and this facilitated access to data.

Third, the South-East Wales response to the policy landscape is reviewed. This covers the First Campus Partnership, Cardiff University, and Communities First Clusters in the region.

Finally, before concluding, the Chapter reflects on the use of terminology throughout the institutional, regional, and national policy landscape. Specifically, this includes outlining some issues with the use of terms such as ‘deprivation’, ‘hard to reach’, and ‘under-representation’.

### **3.2 THE UK POLICY CONTEXT**

The WA agenda in the UK is complicated for many reasons, not least because of parliamentary devolution in 1999 where HE policy became a devolved responsibility to the four jurisdictions (nations) of the UK (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales). Due to cross-border flows of students, decisions made in England continue to have a significant impact on Wales (Rees and Taylor 2006; Gallacher and Raffe 2012; Evans et al. 2019).

While all four UK nations have placed importance on WA before and after devolution, the differing policy landscapes, as well as funding and fee structures, have led to some variation in approaches to widening access (Gallacher and Raffe 2012). Nevertheless, the introduction of variable fees led to an increased emphasis on fair access and participation across all four nations, as policy documents demonstrate (Gallacher and Raffe 2012).

### **3.3 THE WELSH POLICY LANDSCAPE**

Following devolution, the Learning Country (National Assembly for Wales 2001) marked a new beginning for the Welsh national education system. It set out a plan until 2010, explicitly geared towards the needs of Wales:

We share strategic goals with our colleagues in England, but we often need to take a different route to achieve them. We shall take our own policy direction where necessary, to get the best for Wales.

National Assembly for Wales (2001, p. 2)

*Investing in Learners: Coherence, clarity and equity for student support in Wales*, led by Professor Teresa Rees, was published in 2001, known as the “Rees Review” (Independent Investigation Group on Hardship and Funding 2001). This report recommended that upfront tuition fees should be replaced with a graduate endowment scheme to be paid by students once they had graduated, as well as more targeted maintenance support. The Rees Review resulted in the Welsh Assembly Government implementing a means-tested learning grant for students usually resident in Wales, and this was introduced in 2002.

The 2004 Higher Education Act gave the Welsh Assembly Government full power over HE and FE. This resulted in the commission of a second Rees Review (Rees 2005). The second Rees Review recommended flexible top-up fees for Welsh students studying in Wales (similar to the system used in England at the time). However, Labour’s minority support in the Assembly saw the recommendation of top-up fees rejected before the report could be published. What resulted was the introduction of top-up fees for non-Welsh students. For Welsh domiciled students studying in Wales, a non-means-tested grant was provided to cover the increase in tuition fees. This shows some divergence from England, with Wales continuing to heavily subsidise the cost of tuition.

From 2012, HEIs in Wales were able to charge up to £9000 a year in tuition fees. To charge this amount, institutions were required to offer additional provision to promote equality, diversity, and inclusion - funded through a proportion of the tuition fee income and monitored through the submission of Fee and Access Plans and monitoring returns (HEFCW 2020a). As the regulator, HEFCW monitored this by requiring HEIs to report on the recruitment, retention, and graduate outcomes of under-represented students (including WIMD and Communities First). In setting these targets, they also prescribe area-based policy tools for targeting Widening Access activities (i.e., provision is targeted specifically for people living in Communities First areas).

In 2016, two key publications were released that would have a significant impact on the HE sector in Wales: The Diamond Review and the Hazelkorn Review.

The Diamond Review (Welsh Government 2016) focussed specifically on Higher Education funding and student finance arrangements in Wales, covering widening access, part-time and postgraduate provision, skills gaps in Wales, and long-term financial sustainability (Welsh Government 2016). The review led to the following changes:

- An undergraduate student finance system based on ‘progressive universalism’ to ensure all students could afford maintenance costs through the combined provision of a maintenance grant and a tuition fee loan. Under this system, all students would receive a minimum of a £1,000 grant, and the students most in need would receive a grant that would cover all their maintenance costs.
- An improved funding system to support and encourage part-time study
- A new loan system to support postgraduate study

Welsh Government (2016)

The Hazelkorn review (2016) was commissioned by the Welsh Government to identify gaps in post-compulsory education and training. One of the major recommendations in the review, which has since been accepted by the Welsh Government, is to create a new regulatory body in Wales to oversee FE, HE, and Research. The hope is that the new regulatory body will ensure academic and vocational pathways are valued equally within Wales, and that both have improved links with the labour market (Centre for Global Higher Education 2017). In November 2021, the Welsh Government presented plans to replace HEFCW with the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER) (Welsh Government 2021).

Collaboration and partnerships between Higher Education institutions has been a strong feature of the WA policy landscape in Wales – this is seen, for example, through the on-going commitment to Reaching Wider partnerships and Communities First programme which ran from 2002 - 2018. FE colleges have also



played a role in promoting access to HE in Wales, through collaborations such as the University of the Heads of the Valleys Institute (UHOVI). HEFCW strategy has been consistent in its collaborative expectations of the sector, and this expectation continues to grow (HEFCW 2013). A prominent feature of all of these programmes is that they adopt an area-based approach in some way. This was done through the use of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation and, up until 2018 when it phased out, Communities First.

### 3.4 HEFCW – THE HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL FOR WALES

HEFCW is the regulator for Wales. At the time of conducting this research, HEFCW's most recent widening access strategy covered the period 2013/14 – 2015/16 (HEFCW 2014). The purpose of the strategy is to ensure Welsh Government ambitions for widening access are delivered, and it does this by situating widening access within the broader policy context – *“Its purpose is to provide a fuller picture of our strategic intentions and promote a clear understanding of widening access (WA) policy and practice in Wales”* (HEFCW 2014 p1). One of HEFCW's overall corporate objectives - outlined in the corporate strategy (see HEFCW 2013) - was to 'secure inclusion, progression and success in higher education' (HEFCW 2014 p2) – it is this objective that their Widening Access Strategy nests beneath.

HEFCW's Corporate Strategy includes four key measures for widening access (HEFCW 2014, pp. 2-3):

1. To increase the proportion of individuals domiciled in Communities First cluster areas and in the bottom quintile of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) studying in HE (covering access and progression for people of all ages)
2. To increase the proportion of Individuals domiciled in Wales from areas of low participation at HE
3. To improve the retention and degree completion for full- and part-time students

4. For the proportion of part-time learners to be equal to, or greater than, the comparable UK figure.

The first is of particular importance for this study, as it indicates that the top-level corporate strategy for widening access has a focus on deprivation – i.e., the targeting of HE opportunities to areas with high levels of deprivation, which in this case are identified through WIMD quintiles and Communities First clusters.

In the WA strategy, HEFCW defines the aim of widening access as focussing on ‘to and through’ Higher Education, covering access, inclusion, progression, and success in Higher Education. The strategy aims to:

enable learners across all age ranges and backgrounds, who face the highest social and economic barriers, to fulfil their potential as students, lifelong learners, citizens and employees’

HEFCW (2014, p. 4)

And this is to be achieved through the following commitments:

1. prioritise all-age recruitment from Communities First cluster areas and areas in the bottom quintile of the lower super output areas of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD);
2. improve participation and success in HE by all-age groups under-represented in higher education, including those from UK low participation areas;
3. secure and increase articulation and progression pathways into higher education including FE and HE, HE in FE and to Welsh medium HE;
4. promote fair admissions, and Wales as the destination of first choice, for higher education including to students from Wales and the UK;
5. prioritise higher-level learning and skills, retention and student success;
6. increase flexible learning opportunities, including part-time study, workplace learning and technology-enhanced learning;
7. support widening access approaches to delivering the International Action Plan for Wales;
8. improve fair access to the professions, high level skills and the priority sectors contributing to economic prosperity;

9. support UK and national duties and Welsh Government priorities relating to tackling poverty, raising educational aspirations and attainment, social mobility and equality of opportunity;
10. prioritise widening access sustainability;
11. maximise the potential for collaborative, cross-sectoral, multi-agency approaches regionally and nationally; and
12. improve the evidence base to support WA and impact assessment demonstrating effective practice and success in WA to HE;

HEFCW (2014 p5)

The strategy prioritises the recruitment of all-age students from Communities First Cluster areas as part of the Welsh Government's long-term agenda, which aims to break "*the link between deprivation and educational attainment by supporting tackling poverty and social mobility agendas in disadvantaged communities*" (HEFCW 2014, p. 7). Through the regulation and monitoring of fee and access plans, HEFCW commits to ensuring universities prioritise Communities First and bottom quintile WIMD communities. However, there is also a commitment to improving participation and success for students from under-represented groups (which includes those from low participation areas).

The strategy also stresses HEFCW's focus on maximising "*the potential for collaborative, cross-sectoral, multi-agency approaches*" to widening access (HEFCW 2014, p. 17), relating to both the Reaching Wider partnerships and the Communities First programme.

### 3.5 REACHING WIDER

Reaching Wider was set up in 2002 by HEFCW as a regional response to the Welsh Government's commitment to widening access to HE in Wales. Both Rees reviews recommended regional partnerships and collaboration to 'raise aspirations' and support learners from under-represented backgrounds to progress to Higher Education. Reaching Wider brings together further and Higher Education institutions to work together for a community-oriented approach to improving access to HE. At first, the programme was split into four regions: South-East, South-West, Mid, and North Wales, with funding allocated according to the proportion of people living in Communities First clusters in each area.

Following a change in Communities First clusters in 2012, the North and Mid Wales regions combined to form one. Three Reaching Wider regions remain at the time of this study: North and Mid Wales, South-West Wales, and South-East Wales (First Campus). The First Campus strategy is reviewed in further detail in Section 3.4.

Through partnership working and collaboration between all Further and Higher Education providers in Wales, the Reaching Wider programme aims to increase participation in HE for targeted groups and communities - primarily individuals from Communities First areas, children who are looked after, and care leavers (HEFCW 2020b).

The Reaching Wider programme guidance for 2014/15 – 2016/17 is a key policy document for this study. The policy sets parameters to ensure Reaching Wider will align to a number of overlapping policy agendas in the area. A selection of these mentioned within the guidance include:

- Welsh Government widening access-related policies
- HEFCW's Corporate Strategy
- HEFCW's Widening Access strategy
- HE regional strategic plans
- HEI institutional plans (e.g., Fee and Access Plans, Strategic Equality Plans)
- The future Generations Bill
- University Heads of the Valleys Institute (UHOVI)
- Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol (to promote Welsh language)
- Tackling poverty, and specifically child poverty

HEFCW (2014)

Twelve purposes of Reaching Wider are outlined, and this includes a focus on targeting support at people living in Communities First and WIMD quintile 1 areas. The following extract is taken from the policy guidance to illustrate the complexities of the parameters set:

The role and purpose of [the RW strategies for his period] includes (...) working with people of all-ages in Communities First cluster areas and the bottom quintile of lower super output areas (LSOA) in the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD), particularly those ‘hardest to reach’<sup>5</sup>

Within Communities First cluster areas and the bottom quintile of LSOA in the WIMD, we expect Partnerships to prioritise:

1. Groups under-represented in higher education including ‘hard to reach’ individuals, as defined earlier in this circular and people with protected characteristics such as genders under- represented in certain subject areas or professions, ethnic minority communities not represented in HE, including refugees and asylum seekers and their families and traveller and gypsy families;
2. young people/adults not yet at the point of transition to HE or without higher-level qualifications or skills;
3. workplace and workforce learning, including personal, professional development and specific upskilling for new and different employment needs and to increase social mobility;
4. people seeking pre-entry and progression opportunities through the medium of Welsh and/or bilingually;
5. provision in schools, communities and families which builds capacity and provides additionality by improving learner support;
6. promoting and supporting effective full- and part-time progression routes to further and higher education via school, post 16, work, community and other learning routes;
7. signposting further and higher education information, advice, guidance, admissions and support services;

HEFCW (2014 pp12-13)

There is a complexity around the parameters set due to the various definitions and terminologies used – discussed further in Section 3.12. This has a potential to

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<sup>5</sup> The definition of ‘hard to reach’ is at an early stage, but for the Reaching Wider Programme this group would include those people living in Communities First cluster areas and the WIMD bottom quintile of lower super output areas who are: from workless households; experiencing ‘in work poverty’; in receipt of educational maintenance allowances (EMAs), eligible for free school meals; carers including those with a care background, ex-offenders, young parents (under the age of 18); young, white, working class males and people with protected characteristics.

lead to ambiguity, the implications of which will be outlined more fully in Chapter 4.

The next two sections will focus on the policy tools that are stipulated within the national policy guidance reviewed here – specifically WIMD and Communities First.

### 3.6 WELSH POLICY TOOLS - WIMD

The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation – the Welsh Government’s official scale of deprivation -- was used to identify areas that were eligible for the Communities First programme (i.e., the areas that are most deprived). The index helps to identify small areas with an average population of 1600, known as Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs – see figures 3.3 and 3.4), where there are high levels of multiple deprivation. It is important to note that the index is a scale of relative deprivation - so it is not possible to use WIMD to quantify or measure the deprivation in one specific area, but it can be used to identify if areas have higher or lower levels of multiple deprivation in relation to all other LSOAs in Wales.

The scale is based on 1,909 LSOAs with an average population of 1,600. The measure does not identify specific individual circumstances but takes into account aggregate characteristics of people living in the LSOA (Welsh Government 2014). This point is essential, as issues of ecological fallacy present themselves when all individuals within an area are assumed to have the same average characteristics as that area – as discussed in Chapter 2.

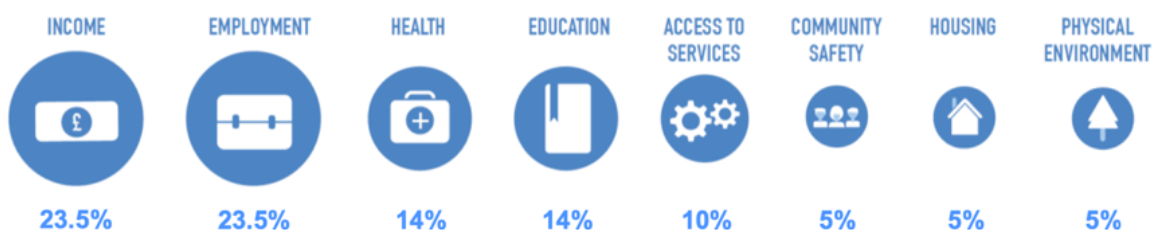
The Welsh Government define deprivation as:

“...the lack of access to opportunities and resources which we might expect in our society (...) [The domains] relate to both material and social aspects of deprivation. Material deprivation is having insufficient physical resources – food, shelter, and clothing – necessary to sustain a certain standard of life. Social deprivation refers to the ability of an individual to participate in the normal social life of the community.

Welsh Government (2014 p14)

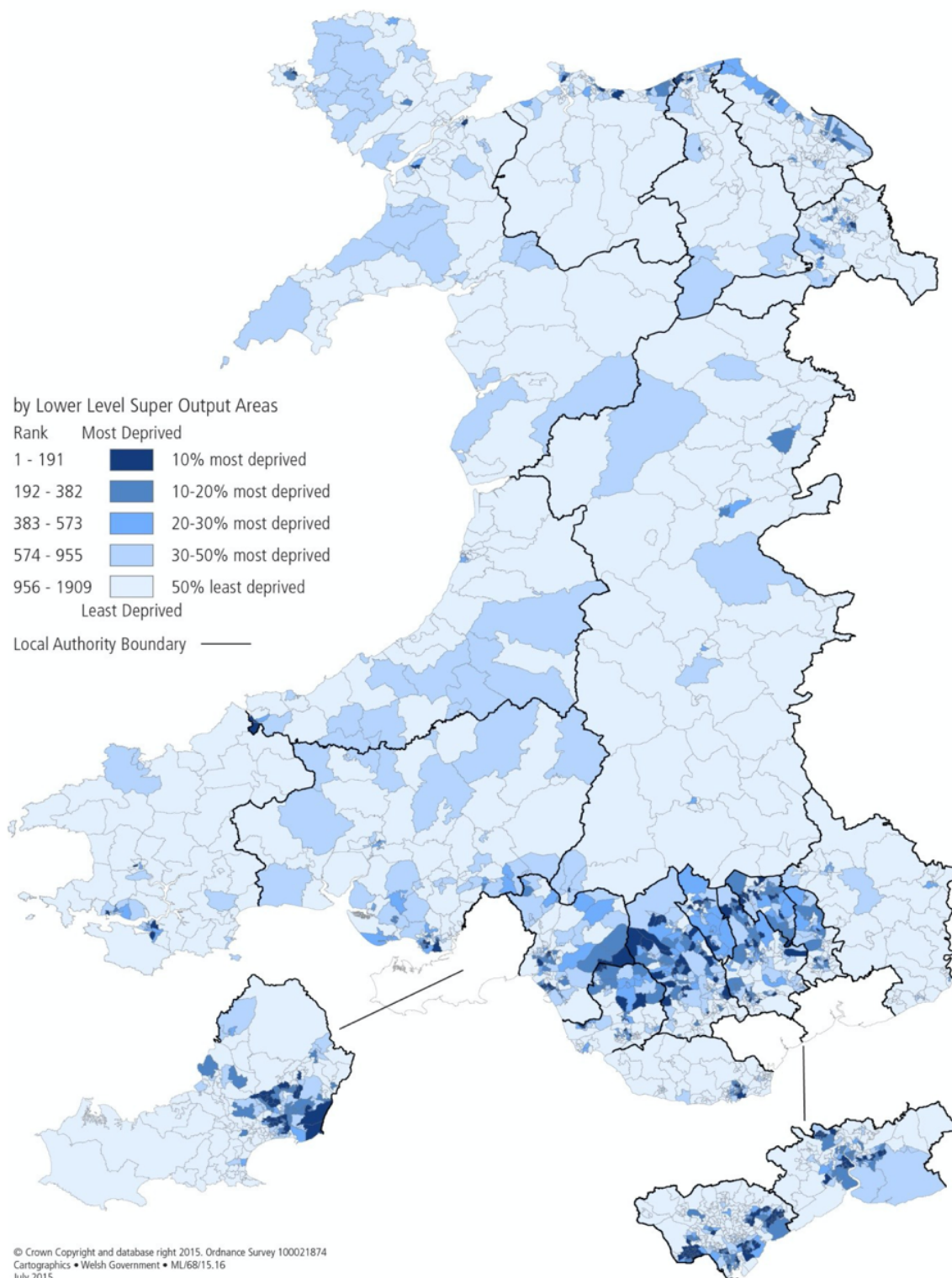
The WIMD comprises eight separate ‘domains’ of deprivation (see Figure 3.1). These domains are weighted and combined into a single number, which forms the overall index score. The score of each individual domain is also available. At least one domain is updated annually. Figure 3.1 provides an overview of the 8 domains and the weighting they are given in the overall WIMD score. The 1,909 LSOAs are then ranked and split into quintiles (see Figure 3.2). Quintile 1 represents the most deprived areas through to quintile 5, representing the least deprived areas. Figure 3.3 provides an overview of the WIMD as an infographic to show how the various components are used to create the overall rank.

**Figure 3.1: WIMD domains and weighting**



Welsh Government (2014, p. 11)

**Figure 3.2: Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2014 Map**

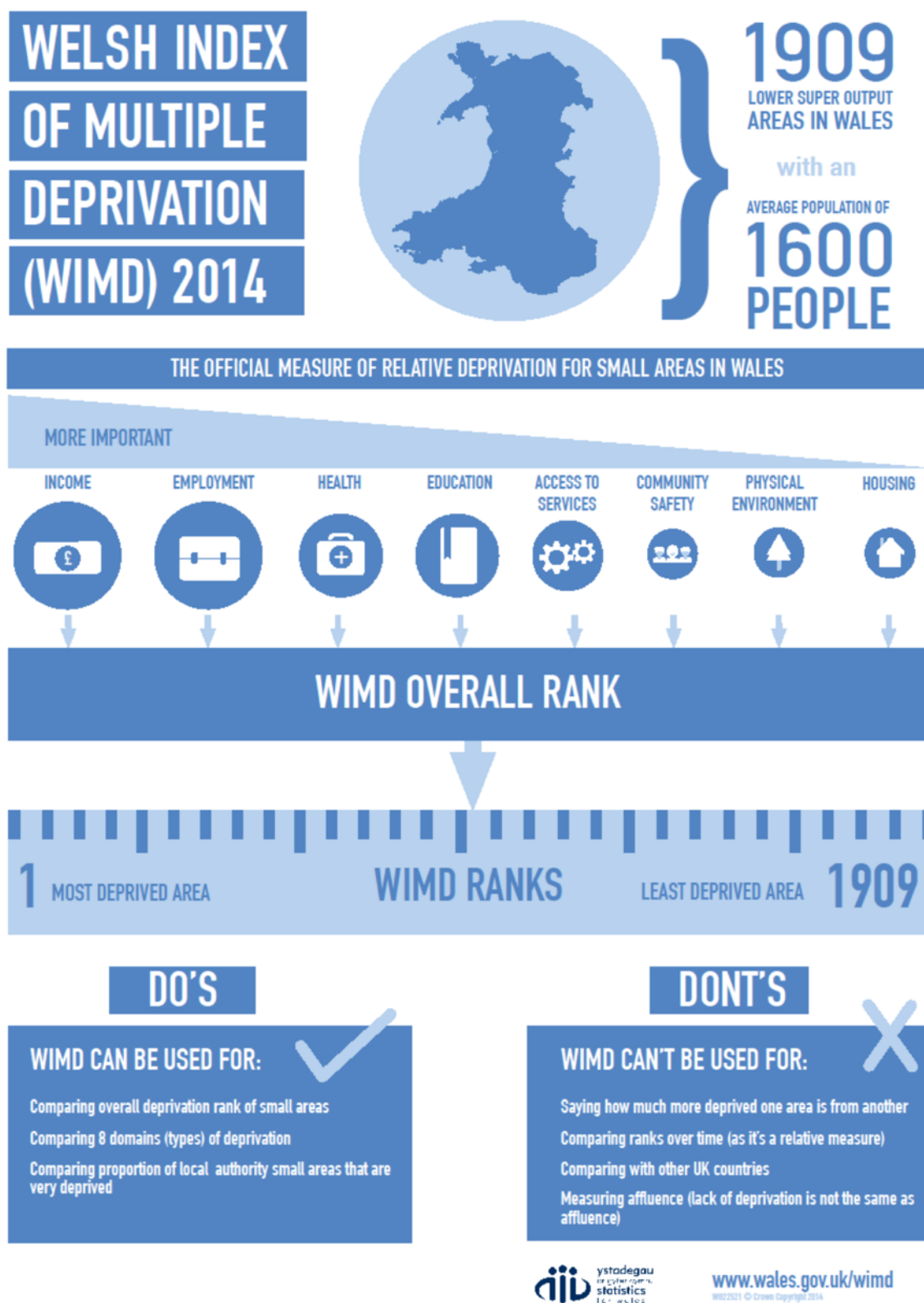


**Note:** This map was revised on 12 August 2015 following provision of revised data by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Welsh Government (2014, p. 11)



**Figure 3.3: Infographic summary of WIMD**



Welsh Government (2014, p. 3)

### 3.7 THE COMMUNITIES FIRST PROGRAMME

Communities First was a Welsh Government flagship area-based initiative (ABI) which was launched in 2002 and ended in 2018. The programme had three different phases of development but broadly it aimed to tackle poverty in the most deprived communities in Wales (identified through the WIMD). Community empowerment was a major focus of the programme.

In addition to making financial resources available to the Community First partnerships, other sectors and organisations were encouraged to target resources at Communities First areas. For instance, through HEFCW's Widening Access guidance, HEIs were required to focus on the recruitment of students from Communities First areas – this included the targeting of outreach programmes to these areas, too – see, for example, the establishment of Reaching Wider in 2002 (Welsh Government 2013).

Phase 1 of Communities First spans 2002 - 2007/8 and is characterised by 'a big bang' – it was a capacity building phase (Todd 2018). At the outset, 132 targeted community partnerships were set, covering around 19% of the Welsh population (National Assembly for Wales 2001). These were identified through the 100 most deprived electoral wards and 32 sub-ward pockets of poverty. Ten special projects based on communities of interest such as BAME communities in Cardiff and young people in rural areas were also added (Adamson and Bromiley 2008).

The guidance claimed Communities First was different from previous funding programmes in the following ways:

- It is a long-term programme which will run for a minimum of ten years.
- Communities themselves decide what is needed and are helped to realise their ambitions.
- It aspires to increase the level of participation of local people.
- It brings in funding and support from a number of different sources.
- It is about making a long lasting difference to our disadvantaged communities.

- It encourages creativity, risk taking and imaginative approaches.
- It involves an integrated approach to addressing poverty and the factors that cause or contribute to it.

National Assembly for Wales (2001 p.3)

The guidance continued to outline that everything under the Communities First umbrella should aim to tackle one or more of the following problems:

- Building confidence and self-esteem of those living in these communities and developing a 'can do' culture.
- Encouraging education and skill training for work.
- Creating job opportunities and increasing the income of local people.
- Improving housing and the surrounding environment.
- Improving health and wellbeing through an active and healthy lifestyle, and by addressing a range of issues that affect people's health.
- Making communities safe and secure places in which to live, work and play.
- Driving forward changes to the way in which public services are delivered.

National Assembly for Wales (2001 pp.3-4)

Guidance as to how communities should go about delivering the programmes was intentionally ambiguous – the hope was that ambiguity would allow partnerships to respond to local needs (National Assembly for Wales 2001). However, subsequent research by Adamson and Bromiley highlighted the potential for ambiguity to 'permit avoidance of responsibility', and ultimately weaken the likelihood for positive regeneration outcomes (Adamson and Bromiley 2008 p.36).

Despite the ambiguity, monitoring and evaluation of the programme would be tackled at two levels. On a national level, the Welsh Assembly Government was looking for improvement in the quality of life - over the initial 10-year period - of people living in these targeted areas of high deprivation. On a local level, partnerships would be monitored against the targets and goals set out in each Community Action Plan.

Towards the end of this first phase, Adamson and Bromiley (2008) conducted research on the Communities First programme. Their research found that most community members had responded positively to the opportunities Communities First had offered, and members recognised how they could play a role in shaping their own communities. However, they also found that the programme had the potential to create conflict in some areas – particularly where existing local organisations had not been fully embedded into the partnership (Community councils were one example where Communities First partnership was seen as a competitor). In most cases, with additional support and mediation, the conflict had been resolved and resulted in a better outcome for both parties. This was not always the case, however, and for some partnerships conflict continued to be a barrier to effective delivery. Furthermore, their research demonstrated that the expectation for mainstream programmes to bend provision to meet local needs was not as successful as hoped. Instead, it created conflict with other legislative duties to provide a national or universal programme (Adamson and Bromiley 2008).

During the second phase of Communities First, the programme was aligned more closely to government priorities such as child poverty, early years support and education. The terminology around the programme started to change at this time, too, moving away from a ‘regeneration’ programme and being reframed as a ‘capacity development programme’ (Adamson and Bromiley 2008). At the end of this second phase, a number of changes were proposed in response to perceived weaknesses in the programme model, including:

- Larger geographical units called ‘clusters’
- An increased focus on employment and employability
- A revised outcomes framework
- Several rural Communities First areas being removed from the programme
- Doing away with communities of interest
- ‘Reduced complexity’ via fewer delivery agents

Todd (2018 p12)

In April 2012 - the third phase of Communities First - the programme was renewed as the ‘Community-Focused Tackling-Poverty Programme’, with the overall aim of reducing poverty through creating ‘Prosperous Communities’, ‘Healthier Communities’ and ‘Learning Communities’. It continued to have an area-based approach but was broadened to include the most deprived 24% of the population, as defined through the 2012 WIMD. In this third phase of the programme, there were 52 Communities First areas in total, known as ‘Clusters’. The Clusters were made from a number of LSOAs, and the geographic cover, shape of support and funding was allocated through an application process for local stakeholders to become Lead Delivery Bodies for designated Cluster areas. The population of each cluster ranged from 10,000 - 15,000, although some Clusters were slightly smaller (Welsh Government 2017). 37 of the 52 Communities First Cluster areas are in south-east Wales (see Figure 3.4), the area of focus for this study.

Rees et al. (2007) comment on the change seen in the third phase. When Communities First partnerships were first created, the areas were externally identified (as was the case traditionally with ABIs through, for example, socio-economic data). However, the boundaries of the third phase of Communities First cluster areas were self-identified by groups within the communities, and a competitive tendering process was used to allocate resources:

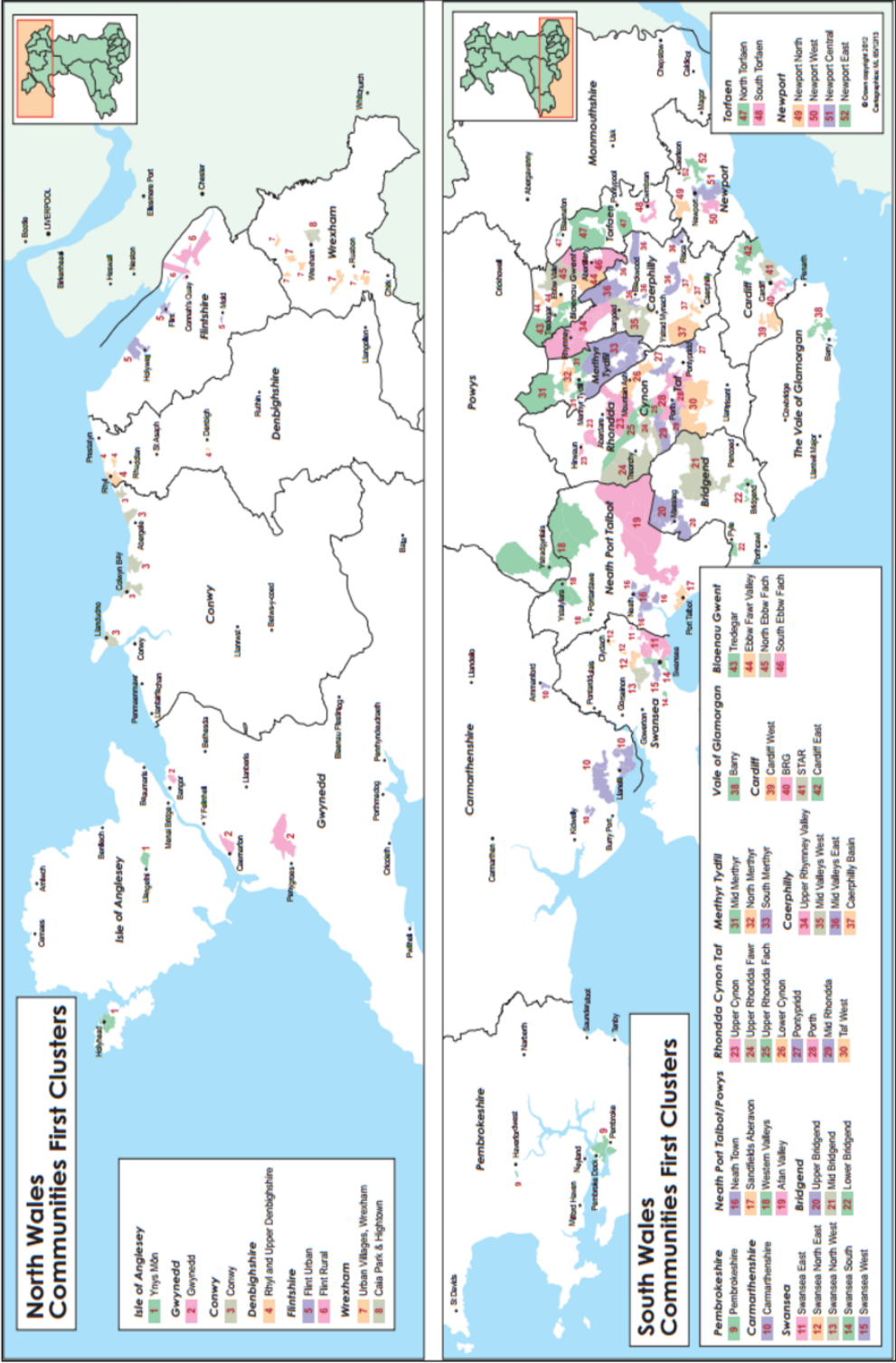
“With the adoption of competitive tendering, however, ABIs are now increasingly selected on the strength of how well the special needs of an area are presented and the ideas and value-for-money that are being

proposed. And while partnerships submitting bids for ABI funding may draw on standard indicators of deprivation (...) the nature of the problems and the boundaries of the area to be targeted are self- rather than externally defined. Hence, whilst ultimate control over the allocation of resources remains with the central state, responsibility for gaining access to funding is displaced to the local area. The state is thereby able to regulate the allocations which are made, but remains at one step removed from the processes through which the allocations are actually made.”

Rees et al. (2007, p. 265)

This new approach to area-based initiative placed some of the onus on local communities to affect change in their own areas. It also explains why some Lower Super Output Areas in Communities First areas were not in the bottom quintile of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, as the data analysis in Chapter 5 will show.

Fig 3.4: Map of Communities First areas across Wales



Source: Communities First: A Process Evaluation (Welsh Government 2015, p. 6)



**Fig. 3.5 LSOAs and Communities First: Cardiff - STAR**

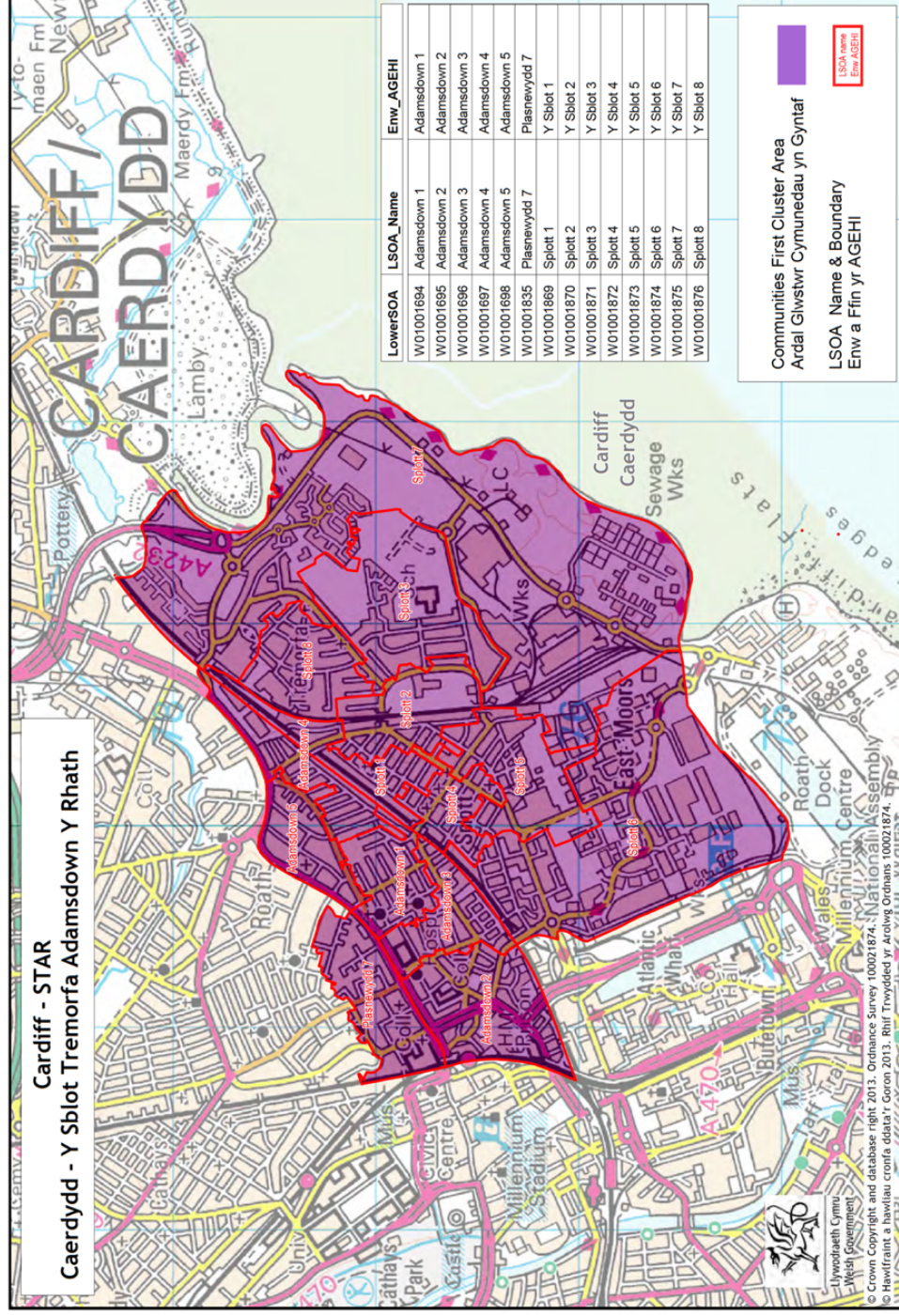
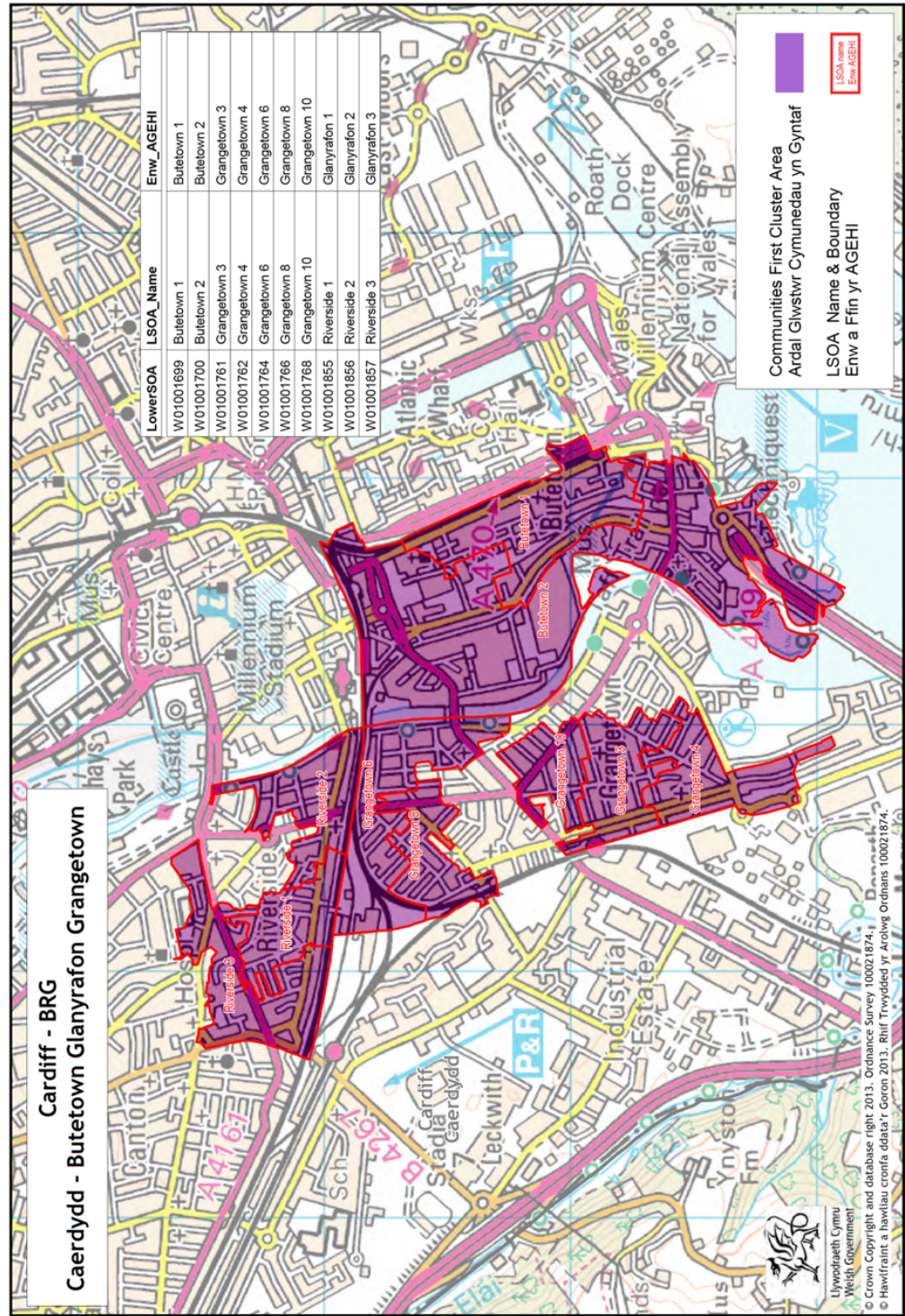




Fig. 3.6 LSOAs and Communities First: Cardiff – Grangetown



### 3.8 THE NESTING OF AREA-BASED TOOLS

Figures 3.5 and 3.6 provide two examples from Cardiff to illustrate how LSOAs relate to the Clusters (the third phase of Communities First). Figure 3.1 is the STAR Communities First Cluster. This Cluster contains 14 LSOAs. The map illustrates how LSOAs can vary in size (for example – LSOA Splott 7 is much larger than Splott 4). This is because LSOAs are based on population size. Figure 3.5 illustrates how the architecture of Communities First Cluster areas can be problematic in reality – the map shows a gap where Grangetown 10 is separated from the rest of the cluster area by LSOAs that are not part of a Communities First area. The reality of this for practitioners delivering programmes on the ground will be explored further in Chapters 6 and 7.

Another problem, which will be explored further in Chapter 6, is that practitioners use postcodes as a proxy for identifying WIMD or Communities First data, despite the fact that postcodes do not map neatly onto LSOAs. Postcodes cover a smaller area than LSOAs. As explained on the ONS website (ONS 2019) a ‘best-fit’ lookup is used to map postcodes to LSOAs, based on plotting the postcodes’ mean address to the LSOA. Postcodes have become the way that practitioners operationalise various area-based tools, including Communities First. The implications of this are explored further in Chapter 6.

### 3.9 THE CONTEXT OF SOUTH-EAST WALES

This section provides context to the location of this study in South-East Wales. Sometimes called the ‘Cardiff Capital Region’ (Welsh Government 2021), it is Wales’ smallest region geographically but has almost half the population of Wales (1.53million people in 2018 - Welsh Government (2019)). The region contains 939 LSOAs, representing 49% of all LSOAs in Wales (Welsh Government 2019). Out of the 191 most deprived LSOAs in Wales, 126 are in SE Wales (Welsh Government 2019).

10 local authorities make up the region: Bridgend, Blaenau Gwent, Caerphilly, Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil; Monmouthshire; Newport; Rhondda Cynon Taf; Torfaen; and the Vale of Glamorgan. Cardiff is the capital city, which makes up 24% of the region's population. The region also includes towns and valleys that are still recovering from the impact of deindustrialisation (Welsh Government 2019; Welsh Government 2021). Some areas in the region – including inner city areas and parts of the valleys - are identified as the most economically deprived areas in Europe (Welsh Government 2021).

At the start of this study, numerous reports placed Wales as one of the poorest performing regions for productivity, employment rates, economic inactivity and Gross Value Added (GVA) (Saunders et al 2013). Within Wales there is variation, but there is an extreme concentration of deprivation in the South-East Wales valleys area – sometimes referred to as the head of the valleys representing roughly 17% of the South-East Wales population (Saunders et al 2013). The coal, iron, and steel industries that once created opportunities in the area have all closed down (Rees et al, 1999; Rees and Stroud, 2004; Saunders et al. 2013).

The area has largely had a hand and fingers pattern of development over the last 150 years, reflecting its major role in the industrial revolution and the rapid expansion of the iron, coal and steel industries initially in the Heads of the Valleys, then within the Valleys, then on the coastal plain. The legacy of industrial changes has left stark contrast between prosperity and deprivation

Welsh Government (2008 p13)

Following World War 2 there was a decline in the heavy industries in South Wales, and with the arrival of the Thatcher government in 1979, their fate was sadly sealed. In 2008, Tower Colliery, which had been bought by the workers in 1994, was the last coal mine to close its doors and marked the end of the industry in South Wales

WISERD (2008 p15)

Following the closure of these industries (with the last single mine closing in 2008), the region was left with a huge skills gap, educational exclusion, and social injustice (Welsh Government 2008; Saunders et al. 2013).

In terms of education, the pupil-teacher ratios were higher, there were more special needs learners in primary schools, and markedly more children were in receipt of free school meals. Attainment rates were lower across the board for all key stages of performance.

Saunders et al. (2013 p79)

The Heads of the Valleys area suffered from lower attainment rates at Key Stage 4, and this resulted in lower participation rates in HE. There were also higher percentages of 16-14-year-olds not in education, employment, or training (NEET) for 16-24-year-olds, and below-average employment rates for all age groups in comparison to the rest of Wales.

The profile of this sub-region of South-East Wales resulted in the creation of the Heads of the Valleys Education Programme (HOVEP), and with that came the launch of the Universities Heads of the Valleys Institute (UHOVI) – the latter was a programme to provide skills and qualifications at all levels were in the region, with the hope of improving employability (Saunders et al. 2013). The programme aimed to bring together multiple HE and skills providers to target provision – another example of an ABI as discussed in Chapter 2. The programme also coincided with the construction of two new educational establishments in the major towns of Ebbw Vale and Merthyr Tydfil, both with the remit of providing lifelong learning opportunities to the region.

### 3.10 THE PROFILE OF SOUTH-EAST WALES IN 2018/19

As of 2019, the employment rate for people aged 16-64 the whole South-East Wales region was 73.4%. Although this was the highest of the regions in Wales, 3 out of 5 of the local authorities with the lowest rates of employment continue to sit within the South-East Wales region (concentrated in the Head of the Valleys area). This highlights the ongoing diverse and juxtaposed nature of the region (Welsh Government 2019).

The age distribution in this region was the most even in Wales, with a fairly even distribution across all ages (Welsh Government 2019). This was partly due to the presence of three campus-based universities in the region: Cardiff University, University of South Wales, and Cardiff Metropolitan University<sup>6</sup>.

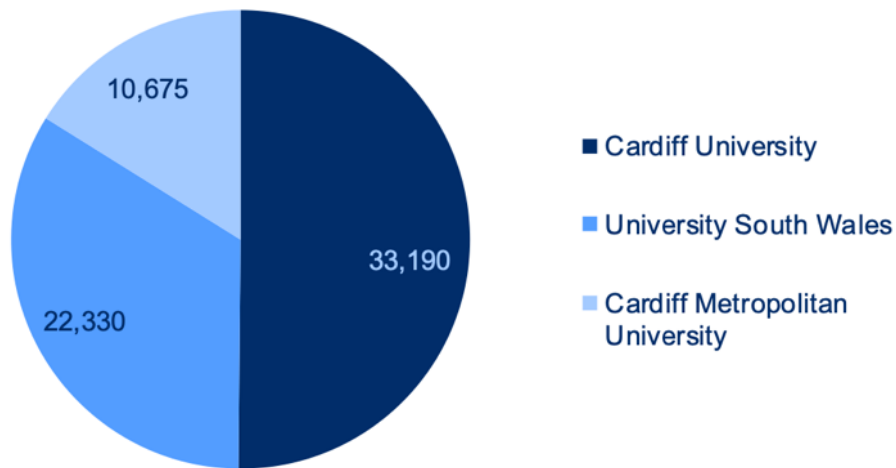
There were just over 66,195 enrolments on HE courses in SE Wales in 2018-19, representing 50% of all enrolments in Wales (Welsh Government 2019) – see figure 3.7. Cardiff University is the largest of the three institutions based on student enrolments, with 33,190 students enrolling in the 2018-19 academic year, followed by University of South Wales (22,330) and then Cardiff Metropolitan University (10,675).

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<sup>6</sup> The Open University operates in Wales too, through part-time and distance learning. It is not considered within this study as the focus is on full-time, undergraduate level study.



**Fig. 3.7 – Student enrolments to HEIs in SE Wales 2018-19**



Welsh Government (2019 p8)

### **3.11 SOUTH EAST WALES: REGIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO THE POLICY LANDSCAPE**

Within the South-East Wales region, the key policy documents and strategies for this study include First Campus, Cardiff University, and Communities First. These reflect where the interview participants come from, so it is important to review the literature here first to enable a comparison with the practitioner accounts in Chapters 6 and 7.

#### **FIRST CAMPUS - THE SOUTH-EAST WALES REACHING WIDER PARTNERSHIP**

First Campus is the HEFCW funded Reaching Wider partnership in South-East Wales. It is a collaborative programme that works across all Further and Higher Education Institutions in the region to widen access to Higher Education. For the period of this study, HEFCW's guidance stated that the Reaching Wider partnerships must align with the following strategic themes (HEFCW 2013):

1. Supporting transition
2. Supporting educational aspiration-raising
3. Enhancing educational skills
4. Promoting vocational and employability skills
5. Promoting equality of opportunity and inclusive approaches

In response to this, the First Campus 2014-2017 strategy outlined how the partnership would meet these strategic themes. The purpose and mission of First Campus were to:

...provide a series of effective and sustainable pathways that inspire and capture the imagination of learners from South-East Wales who would not otherwise consider or access Higher Education. First Campus will support transition, raise educational aspirations, enhance educational skills, provide employability skills and deliver equality of opportunity using inclusive approaches.

First Campus (2014, p4)

The strategy included a broad range of aims, such as increasing social mobility; tackling poverty; contributing to a diverse HE population; supporting progression to educational opportunities; focusing activities on groups that are under-represented in HE; and taking an evidence-based approach to outreach. This was to be achieved through the following ten objectives:

1. Support transition to increase confidence, progression, lifelong learning and success. Provision will include primary to secondary school interventions; family learning; FE to HE progression; bite-size provision; promotion of 14-19 progression pathways;
2. Support educational aspiration-raising to increase motivation, retention and progression. Provision will include working with all those with the potential to disengage with education; and listening to the parent/carer voice;
3. Enhance educational skills to enable learners to fulfil their academic potential and be prepared for further and/or Higher Education. Provision will include subject-specific and/or generic skills programmes, after school clubs, mentoring, revision support, residential provision;

4. Promote employability skills to encourage upskilling, career aspirations, including access to the professions. Provision will include for example, awareness raising around the world of work, pathways to part-time further and Higher Education, and undergraduate skills development;
5. Promote equality of opportunity and inclusive approaches for looked after children and people with protected characteristics;
6. Work with schools and community groups in South East Wales including the Heads of the Valleys (HoV) region to offer high quality, innovative and inspiring projects that allow participants to access all universities and colleges engaging in HE delivery in the SE Wales region including bite-size learning;
7. Develop and reinforce Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) with particular reference to student finance and progression pathways as part of the activities programme;
8. Promote and share good practice with collaborative multi sectoral working (for example, Communities First clusters and Voluntary sector) developing appropriate projects designed around the needs of city and valley communities;
9. Work closely with the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol in promoting Welsh medium opportunities in HE;
10. Collaborate with further education providers and CollegesWales to ensure that opportunities to progress are available to learners;

First Campus (2014 p5)

The objectives were broad in remit, covering components such as confidence-building, aspiration- and attainment-raising, developing educational skills, promoting employability, working with local schools and colleges, and generally promoting HE as an option through partnership working and provision of information, advice, and guidance.

As a partnership, the First Campus programme relied on employing HEIs (those with First Campus staff), non-employing HEIs (those without First Campus staff), FE colleges, schools, and community partners. The strategy committed First Campus to work closely with these partners and institutions to ensure the alignment of strategic priorities.



To implement its strategy, First Campus outlined the programmes that they would run. This included a wide range of activities including taster days, revision activities, residential and non-residential summer schools, and mentoring. Most of these activities were short-term/one-off events, but some aimed to work more intensively with students over a more extended period.

## CARDIFF UNIVERSITY

Cardiff University was founded in 1883 and was originally named the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire (Cardiff University 2020). It is the only Welsh institution that is a member of the Russell Group – a group of 24 self-selected institutions that are research-intensive (Russell Group 2020).

For the 2019/20 academic year, the University had a total of 33,260 students enrolled from over 130 countries. This included 23,755 undergraduate students, 8,505 postgraduate students, and 8,475 international students. 96% of graduates were in employment and/or further study in the 2017/18 graduate outcomes survey (Cardiff University 2021 p9).

The University has seen a steady increase in the percentage of WP students enrolled from 2013/14 to 2016/17, and since 2014/15 has been above the benchmark for recruitment of young, first-degree full-time students from low participation neighbourhoods and Welsh domiciled students from Communities First/WIMD areas (see Table 3.1).

**Table 3.1 – Cardiff University progress  
against WP Metrics from 13/14 to 16/17**

Measure	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17
Proportion (%) of UK domiciled young full-time, first degree students from UK low participation areas	7.6	9.6	9.3	9.2
Proportion (%) of UK domiciled students from UK low participation areas	21.9	23.1	24.0	24.3
Proportion (%) of Welsh domiciled students from Communities First / WIMD areas	16.6	17.0	17.3	18.5

Cardiff University (2018 p9)

Cardiff University's Widening Access and Retention Strategy for the period being researched had a vision to:

...attract, recruit and retain the most able students from the most diverse backgrounds and enable them to maximise their potential.

Cardiff University (2013 p1)

The strategy prioritised the recruitment of students from Communities First areas and is underpinned by four objectives: (1) to raise aspirations; (2) to ensure fair recruitment and admissions; (3) To develop (flexible) access routes to HE and (4) to effectively support students. The strategy made no reference to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation but acknowledged areas of low participation in HE as a secondary priority.

Cardiff University's widening access interventions are used for the case study and GIS analysis in Chapter 5. The Cardiff University intervention is referred to as the Widening Participation (WP) scheme, and throughout the study it will be referred to as the WP scheme to differentiate it from widening access schemes more broadly. The WP scheme at Cardiff is an intensive programme that aims to improve access to university for young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. It is targeted specifically at students in Year 12 and provides support throughout Year 12 and 13 (students aged 16-18).

In order to achieve this, several interventions are offered to pupils who join the scheme, including workshops, academic taster sessions, summer schools and additional support to write personal statements and navigate UCAS and Student Finance processes. The eligibility requirements state that pupils must live in a Communities First area in order to join the scheme. The scheme is marketed to students by university staff who visit schools throughout the academic year to promote the benefits of Higher Education. Pupils register for the scheme during the talks.

For the pupils who sign up to the scheme but are not eligible (they do not have a Communities First postcode), they are invited to join a general student recruitment (SR) scheme instead. The SR Scheme provides early access to more general events, including open days, taster days and public lecture series, but these are usually open to everyone. Aside from being added to a mailing list to be kept informed about recruitment and marketing events, there is no real benefit to being on the student recruitment scheme. It is more of a marketing and recruitment tool.

For the purpose of this research, the SR Scheme is being used as a comparator group and a means of identifying individuals who are ‘missing out’ on the WP Scheme. This will lead to a conservative estimation of those who are missing out on the support available but nevertheless provides a useful benchmark for further research. This is discussed further in Chapter 5 (Methodology) and Chapter 6.

## COMMUNITIES FIRST IN SOUTH-EAST WALES

Communities First is included in this study as clusters would often work in collaboration with HEIs and First Campus to widen access to Higher Education. However, exploring strategy documents that outline how the Communities First programme is implemented is difficult. As of 2012, each Communities First Cluster was required to have an implementation plan, but none of these plans are easy to find online. Those that were found during the review of policy literature

fell outside the geographic area of this study (there was one for Neath and one for Ynys Môn). Although Communities First clusters were contacted for this information, nothing was received (probably due to the closing down of the programme at the time). This makes it challenging to analyse the strategy documents of Communities First clusters in South-East Wales to review how they interpreted and translated the overall policy into strategies and action plans within their clusters.

However, there was some information available about one of the joint interventions that was delivered collaboratively by the Cardiff Communities First Clusters, Cardiff University, and Student Volunteering Cardiff (Cardiff Homework Clubs (No Date)). The Student Homework Clubs was a free programme that aimed to support children's learning development, ultimately with the goal of supporting access into FE and HE. The programme was delivered across multiple sites in Cardiff (covering all of the Cardiff Communities First areas).

While the Cluster strategies and implementation plans are not readily available online, through the interviews we learn more about the interventions, and the community practitioners all explained that one of their goals was to widen access to Higher Education. This interview data is analysed in Chapters 6 and 7.

### 3.12 OBSERVATIONS: DEPRIVATION AND UNDER-REPRESENTATION

As policy guidance and regional/institutional strategies have developed, the terms deprivation and under-representation are both used in describing the groups targeted by the policy landscape. HEFCW's widening access strategy for 2013/14 to 2015/16 uses both terms, and this filters through to the First Campus and Cardiff University policy documents, too.

As noted in section 3.4, HEFCW's corporate strategy covers four objectives, including:

- i. Prioritising the recruitment of students from Communities First areas and LSOAs in the bottom quintile of WIMD
- ii. Improving participation and success for groups under-represented in HE

Upon reading the policy guidance further, it appears that HEFCW intends for the focus of outreach and access programmes to be Communities First and WIMD (i.e., to secure higher rates of applications from students living in these areas). For under-represented groups, the focus is on retention rates and student success. What is not clear is whether Communities First and WIMD are classed as an under-represented group (but they do include areas of low participation within 'under-represented' – a measure that forms part of the WIMD model). However, at the end of HEFCW's WA guidance, the focus for widening access appears to be on under-represented groups (and there is no mention of Communities First or WIMD):

We are committed to securing the sustainability of widening access to higher education in Wales. Widening access to HE is a public good with multiple benefits. While we recognise that increased costs are incurred in supporting some under-represented groups, we are confident that best practice in supporting under-represented groups will enhance all learners' experiences and ensure a more diverse student population.

HEFCW (2014 p18)

Further complicating the matter, the Reaching Wider guidance, as discussed in Section 3.5, includes references to Communities First Clusters, WIMD lower quintile LSOAs, under-represented groups, and introduces the term 'hard to reach' groups. Reaching Wider partnerships are told to focus on Communities First and WIMD, and within those areas to target groups that are hard to reach and/or those under-represented in higher education.

There is a level of ambiguity around the terms deprivation and under-representation throughout the policy landscape, and it is not clear whether Communities First and lower WIMD LSOAs are a target because that group is under-represented in higher education, or because there is a broader Welsh Government policy landscape that aims to tackle poverty in the most deprived communities in Wales. Of course – it could be a combination of the two.

Donnelly and Evans' (2016) work on higher education, widening access and employment around South-East Wales is relevant here. Although WIMD and Communities First Clusters might help to identify areas of deprivation, the areas themselves are different. The cultural, historic, and spatial conditions of individuals will also impact attitudes towards higher education and employment. Drawing on empirical data, Evans highlights that in addition to deprivation or opportunities, *"ethnicity, attainment, and the availability of local HE provision could go some way to account for the differences"* (Donnelly and Evans 2016 p10). Further issues relating to definitions will be discussed further in Chapters 7 and 8.

### 3.13 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter focused on the Welsh context and WA policy landscape. The review of policy literature revealed that the policy arena for widening access is complex and cannot be isolated to just one policy; instead, there are several related national policies and strategies that form the widening access agenda. A summary of the key national policy areas is provided, including HEFCW, Reaching Wider, Communities First and the WIMD.

Despite HEFCW stipulating that widening access provision should focus on Communities First and WIMD quintile 1 within Cluster areas, a review of First Campus and Cardiff University strategy documents shows that Communities First is the main focus – little attention is paid to WIMD.

The description of the Welsh context provided in this Chapter will be used in Chapter 4 to develop a framework for exploring WA Policy Implementation in Wales.

# Chapter 4:

# Developing a

# framework for WA

# Policy

# Implementation

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## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed and demonstrated throughout Chapter 3, the nature of the WA policy landscape in Wales is complex. There are a number of different policies to consider (such as HEFCW's strategy, Communities First, WIMD, Reaching Wider, First Campus, and Cardiff University's institutional response). This results in a complex policy arena within which many actors operate, including policymakers, regional partnerships, institutions, and practitioners. Therefore, in order to study how WA policy is implemented, a conceptual framework is required that acknowledges that complexity but helps to assess the opportunities and barriers to successful implementation. Such a framework would help to address questions such as: *What tensions exist in implementing WA policy? What are the implications of this? What is the role of practitioners in implementing WA policy? Where might problems exist in implementing WA Policy and how might these problems be overcome? How is WA policy implementation best evaluated? Is a policy tool – such as Communities First – always needed?*



This study will draw heavily on the conflict-ambiguity framework by Matland (1995), to address such questions around WA policy implementation. Matland's framework is particularly useful for four reasons. Firstly, it will provide a theoretical lens for developing knowledge of the WA policy implementation landscape and the potential issues arising from it. Secondly, the use of Matland's four ideal types of policy implementation may provide a way to overcome potential implementation issues, as will be explained. Thirdly, the framework provides a way of linking the multiple levels of policy implementation with policy tools and interventions. Finally, the framework is not only conceptual but has been empirically tested by many researchers in a variety of fields. The empirical testing provides evidence of its robustness. Existing research that draws on Matland will be reviewed in this Chapter, ultimately with the aim of producing a framework for WA policy implementation that can be empirically tested with the data in Chapters 6 (the policy interventions and tools) and 7 (practitioner enactment).

Section 2 of this chapter will review existing literature on WA Policy implementation. Given the limited research in the area, broader work on policy implementation in education (specifically enactment theory) will also be briefly reviewed.

Section 3 offers an introduction to Matland's framework, and then provides an overview of other research that has used Matland. Section 4 will draw on others' critiques and developments of Matland's work to adapt the framework for WA policy implementation.

Section 5 presents the WA Policy Implementation Framework developed as part of this thesis.

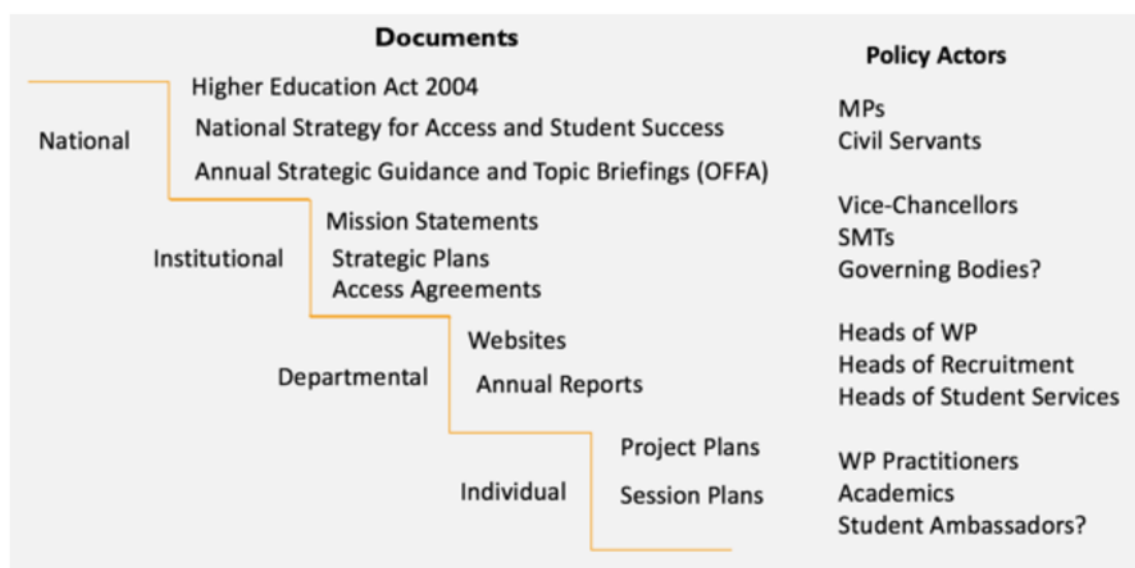
The Chapter Summary brings together the first four Chapters of the thesis to outline how the WA Policy Implementation Framework will be used for the empirical data analysis in Chapters 6 and 7.

## 4.2 LITERATURE ON POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

There is a growing body of research relating to widening access and participation – much of this hoping to identify ‘what works’ to improve Higher Education outcomes for underrepresented groups – yet little attention has been paid to the implementation of WA policy (Evans et al. 2019; Rainford 2019).

Chapter 3 highlighted the complex policy implementation arena for WA: it spans the national policy landscape, the prescribed policy tools, the regional or institutional strategies, the WA practitioners, and the interventions. These various levels of policy implementation are acknowledged by Rainford (2019), who adapts the policy implementation staircase (Reynold and Saunders, 1987 cf. Trowler 2002) specifically for Widening Participation Policy (see Figure 4.1). This model can be used to better understand the complexities of policy implementation in WA as it distinguishes between the national, institutional, departmental, and individual levels.

**Fig. 4.1 WP Policy Implementation Staircase**



? = actors may be involved in the process but to varying degrees in different institutions

Rainford (2019 p36)

However, the limitation of this model is that it implies a hierarchical, linear process, but the reality is messy (Ball 1994) and individual practitioners will have to interpret each level of the staircase in order to deliver WA interventions.

This ‘messiness’ of doing policy is acknowledged by authors such as Braun et al. (2010). They use the term ‘enactment’ to describe the ‘doing’ of policy on the ‘street level’. Ball (1994) explains that policies often exclude details of what exactly should be done. This can result in a process of doing policy that is ‘creative, sophisticated and complex but also a constrained process’ (Braun et al. 2010, p. 586). In her research on teacher sensemaking of policy in schools, Coburn (2005) explains that this lack of detail results in practitioners:

...[understanding] policy ideas through the lens of their values and pre-existing knowledge and practices, often interpreting, adapting, or transforming policy messages as they put them in place

Coburn (2005 p.477)

Practitioners are a key component of the policy implementation process as they use the policy tools and carry out the interventions. Rather than defining policy implementation as an unproblematic attempt to ‘solve a problem’ (Braun et al. 2010), policy implementation in this study is understood to be an on-going social process and one that is “diversely and repeatedly contested and/or subjected to ‘interpretation’ as it is enacted in original and creative ways” (Braun et al. 2010, p. 549). This thesis takes this definition quite literally, and enactment refers to the ‘street-level’ work done by individual practitioners in ‘delivering’ the interventions and their use of the policy tool.

Enactment theory studies tend to be more conceptual in nature and consider the full policy cycle (see, for example, Braun et al. 2010), which would not be feasible within the constraints of a Professional Doctorate thesis. However, integrating the practitioner perspective into Matland’s framework will strengthen this study’s ability to better understand WA policy implementation in Wales. Chapter 7 will focus specifically on practitioner enactment and the extent to which the

practitioners align with the typologies of their interventions. One strength of Matland's work, after all, is in its capacity to be empirically tested.

### 4.3 INTRODUCING MATLAND'S CONFLICT-AMBIGUITY FRAMEWORK

Matland's (1995) framework theorises policy implementation at different levels (national, institutional, and local) according to two axes of policy conflict and policy ambiguity (see Figure. 4.2).

The axes of ambiguity and conflict are used to create four ideal types of policy implementation. In reality policies are complex and dynamic and will shift from one type to another. As they do so, they display more of the characteristics of the ideal type they move towards. However, 'there is no tipping point at which a slight move up or down causes a radical shift from one type of implementation to another' (Matland 1995 p.159).

**Figure 4.2: Matland's ambiguity-conflict Framework**

		CONFLICT	
		Low	High
AMBIGUITY	Low	<i>Administrative Implementation</i>  <b>Resources</b>  Example: Smallpox eradication	<i>Political Implementation</i>  <b>Power</b>  Example: Busing
	High	<i>Experimental Implementation</i>  <b>Contextual Conditions</b>  Example: Headstart	<i>Symbolic Implementation</i>  <b>Coalition Strength</b>  Example: Community action agencies

Matland (1995, p. 160)

The notion of conflict in WA policy implementation has been mentioned several times already in the first chapters of this study (for example, see Sections 2.2 and 3.3), and conflict can affect the extent to which a policy is successful. Matland describes policy conflict as existing where *'more than one organization sees a policy as directly relevant to its interests, and when organizations have incongruous views'* (Matland, 1995 p156). Conflict can be vertical (in a hierarchical fashion between organisations and policymakers, or actors and organisations), or it could be horizontal (organisation-to-organisation). This conflict can arise either as a result of the goal itself or the interventions designed to reach the goal. Where conflict is high, partnerships are often enforced at the organisation or local levels. In these cases, power, coercion, and strong partnerships are defining characteristics.

Goal congruence is a defining feature of the policy conflict axis (Matland 1995). Where goal congruence exists (low conflict), actors and policymakers have a set of agreed goals. At the other end of the axis, there is no goal congruence, and this results in high policy conflict. Without an agreed goal, policymakers resort to 'bargaining tools' and 'coercive methods' to identify an agreed-upon set of actions that may or may not loosely relate to a goal. Conflict can appear at any point of the policy implementation process but can only exist where there are 'interdependent actors' and an 'incompatibility of objectives'. Matland frames interdependent actors both in terms of organisations and individuals.

Ambiguity in the WA policy arena has been highlighted in Sections 2.2, 3.3 and 3.4, and like conflict it is clear it also plays a significant role in the implementation of policies. Matland identifies two types of policy ambiguity: ambiguity of goals (i.e., the goal is unclear so actors may misinterpret the policy) or ambiguity of means (i.e., a lack of appropriate tools or methods to achieve the goal). The framework represents a complex relationship between conflict and ambiguity, where ambiguity has the potential to both increase and decrease conflict during different stages of policy (a point highlighted by Adamson and Bromiley in their research on the Communities First programme – see Section 3.3). While clarity may sound important, during the policy formation stage high ambiguity can reduce conflict by 'watering down' details so that a wider range of actors are

likely to agree (an issue that was also highlighted in relation to WA by Harrison and Waller 2017). During the implementation stage, however, ambiguity can lead to various, competing policy interpretations. This is likely to result in higher conflict (Matland 1995).

Table 4.1 offers a summary of suitable contexts of policy implementation for each of the four implementation types included in Matland's framework.

**Table 4.1 – Matland's Framework: Four types of policy implementation**

<b>Matland's Framework</b> <b>Type Summaries provided by Hudson et al. (2019, p. 10)</b>
<b>Administrative Implementation</b> <i>amenable to a model associated with guidance, regulation and top-down performance management</i>
<b>Political Implementation</b> <i>amenable to a model associated with guidance, regulation and performance management but will also require flexibility and collaborative working</i>
<b>Experimental Implementation</b> <i>amenable to a model associated with a bottom-up approach, sensitivity to the implementation context and support for problem-solving</i>
<b>Symbolic Implementation</b> <i>amenable to a model associated with the same features as Experimental Implementation but may also require support for capacity building.</i>

While there are many supporters of Matland's work – some of which are outlined below – it is not completely free of criticism and there are several authors who question the conceptual underpinnings of the framework. Winter (2003) critiques Matland's broader use of the term 'implementation', which covers policymakers, organisational actors, and individual actors, spanning the policy implementation process, policy interventions, individual and organisational actors, and outcomes of the policy implementation process itself. Other critics,

such as Paudel (2009), highlight the restrictive nature of the framework – not only does it lack explanation as to what policy implementation is or why it occurs, but it cannot predict future behaviours of policy actors. Weible and Heikkila (2017) critique the lack of attention paid to the source of policy conflict and the wider impact of conflict in policy. There is also a critique of hybrid models more generally – in trying to combine top-down and bottom-up perspectives, there is a risk of confusing prescriptive, descriptive, and normative methodological and theoretical elements (Barret 2004; Saetren 2005; Paudel, 2009;).

Despite these critiques, many policy implementation researchers have recognised the importance of Matland’s framework, and it is widely understood as an appropriate lens to explore the relationship between policy and practice (e.g., Hill and Hupe 2002; Smith and Larimer 2009; Paudel 2009). There are also several, notable, empirical examples of researchers applying the framework to understand the implementation of specific policies (see Perry et al. 1999; Cohen et al. 2005; Mortimer and McLeod 2006; McCreadie et al. 2008; Coleman et al. 2020). Over the last two decades, Matland’s ambiguity-conflict framework has been drawn on across a range of policy topics including disability (Cohen et al 2005), social welfare (Hudson, 2005); education (Hordern 2015) and, most recently, health and social care (Coleman et al. 2020).

A few of these key examples are explored further here as they provide a useful foundation for adapting Matland’s framework to better understand WA policy implementation in Wales.

Analysing the ‘Every Child Matters’ reforms in the UK (Children Act 2004), Hudson (2006) uses Matland’s framework to explore the role of conflict and ambiguity conceptually and empirically on the implementation of the Children Act 2004. The framework is used to explain variations with the implementation of the policy, as well as to predict what might happen in the future (i.e., what type of policy implementation is suitable - see Table 4.2 for Hudson’s conceptual adaptation of Matland’s framework). He also demonstrates how different components of the policy align with multiple types of Matland’s conflict-ambiguity framework. Perhaps most relevant to this study, Hudson

draws on Matland's framework to predict where the problems might exist in implementation and to suggest how to overcome these challenges. Hudson's study is one of the few studies to conceptually explore the dynamic nature of Matland's framework. The findings demonstrate how one policy can be multidimensional, i.e., align to multiple types within the framework and that this can shift through time (see Table 4.3 for Hudson's mapping of empirical data to the framework). Like the examples from Hudson in Table 4.2, this chapter will conceptually adapt the framework by applying WA policy implementation definitions to the framework (see section 4.4). Following the empirical data analysis in Chapters 6 and 7, empirical data will be added to the framework (see Table 4.3 for Hudson's example).

**Table 4.2 – Hudson's conceptual adaptation of Matland's framework**

	Low Conflict Administrative Implementation	High Conflict Political Implementation
Low Ambiguity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• goals are given and a means for problem solving is known</li> <li>• a central authority has the information, resources and sanction capability to enact the desired policy</li> <li>• implementation is hierarchically ordered with each link receiving orders from the level above</li> <li>• policy is spelled out explicitly at each level and there is agreement on responsibilities and tasks</li> <li>• relatively uniform outcomes at the micro-level across many sites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• there is conflict over both goals and means</li> <li>• the implementation process is a key arena for conflict</li> <li>• implementation outcomes are determined by the distribution of power</li> <li>• compliance is not automatically forthcoming</li> <li>• low ambiguity ensures that monitoring of compliance is relatively easy</li> </ul>
High Ambiguity	Experimental Implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• outcomes depend largely on which actors are involved</li> <li>• variation in outcomes from site to site</li> <li>• outcomes are hard to predict</li> <li>• opportunities for local entrepreneurs to create local policies</li> <li>• compliance monitoring mechanisms are of limited relevance</li> <li>• the policy may become a low priority</li> </ul>	Symbolic Implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ostensibly implausible combination</li> <li>• salient symbols can produce high levels of conflict even when the policy is vague</li> <li>• outcomes will vary across sites</li> <li>• outcomes will depend upon the balance of local coalition strength</li> <li>• policy ambiguity makes it difficult to monitor activities</li> </ul>

Hudson (2006 p230)



**Table 4.3 – Hudson’s empirical data applied to the framework**

	Low Conflict Administrative Implementation	High Conflict Political Implementation
Low Ambiguity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• creation of children’s trusts</li><li>• merging of education and children’s social care functions</li><li>• appointment of directors of children’s services</li><li>• development of the integrated inspection framework</li><li>• development of common assessment framework</li><li>• setting up local safeguarding children’s boards</li><li>• development of strategic planning framework</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• creation of the children’s commissioner post</li></ul>
High Ambiguity	Experimental Implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• identification of the five outcomes</li><li>• involvement of children and young people</li></ul>	Symbolic Implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• development of new information sharing arrangements</li></ul>

Hudson (2006 p234)

Coleman et al. (2020) also identified Matland’s framework as a suitable tool for analysing complex policy implementation processes. Their empirical study focuses on the implementation of the New Care Model (Vanguard) Programme in England. The researchers highlight the importance of striking a balance between top-down and bottom-up perspectives for success. Most relevant to this study, by using Matland’s model the authors identify a ‘design process’ for piloting policy programmes on a local level and then scaling it up to a national level. In this specific case, they identify that the Vanguard Programme presented initially as having low conflict and high ambiguity (Experimental Implementation according to Matland). However, the characteristics of this type (local and contextual) were not suitable for rolling out the programme on a larger scale – Political Implementation would have been more appropriate. Through their empirical research, they envisage a new way of using Matland’s framework that recognises the temporality of policy. At different stages of policy implementation, it might be necessary to shift the implementation type to ensure policy success. In their conclusion, they warn policy makers against trying

to spread ‘good news’ quickly at the detriment of realistic and appropriate evaluation. This notion of temporality and using the four types of the framework for different contextual conditions of WA policy implementation will be explored further in Chapters 6 and 7.

Cohen et al. (2005) used Matland’s framework to empirically analyse policy implementation of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 in the United States of America. The Act was intended to increase training, education, and employment opportunities – particularly for individuals with disabilities – by bringing together a number of different agencies in one location. While the study does not explicitly use Matland’s four types of policy implementation, the types are implicit in the analysis. The study uses Matland’s definition of policy conflict and ambiguity to explore how the policy has been implemented in three different states with a specific focus on individual actors and partnerships. There are three key findings that are relevant to this study. Firstly, they present the concept of ‘conflict’ as potentially having positive outcomes – and in one case they demonstrated that it led to more creative solutions being found that resulted in a much stronger outcome than the agencies had first expected. Secondly, they recommend that outcome measures should be tightened or more clearly defined, possibly through the use of suitable policy tools, to reflect performance and collaboration. Similarly, Chapter 6 will analyse in detail the role of the policy tool for widening access policy implementation in Wales. Finally, the study shows how Matland’s framework can be used to interpret actions by individual practitioners – referred to in this study as practitioner enactment. Chapter 7 will use the WA Policy Implementation Framework to categorise the practitioners. The alignment of practitioner enactment with the framework is more explicit in this study than the research by Cohen et al. (2005), which did not specifically refer to the four types of implementation.

In researching adult protection policy implementation, McCreadie et al. (2008) use Matland’s framework to illustrate how ambiguity in the policy has led to multiple solutions to implementing the policy with varying success. However, their findings deviate slightly from Matland’s model as they identified elements of ‘conflict’ within the “low-conflict” types – this was particularly the case for

low-conflict, high-ambiguity (Experimental Implementation). In this case, ambiguity was identified as the cause of the new forms of conflict, specifically because actors were at cross purposes due to unclear roles, leading to struggles to share obligations. Where this happened, their research indicated that professional or organisational values influenced how the policy was implemented. While these are more 'lower levels' of conflict (*differences of view, criticism, resentment*), the authors recognise that it does complicate Matland's typology – where conflict tends to be defined more in political terms rather than lower-level terms. Similarly, the Northway et al. (2007) study on adult protection policy in Wales found that ambiguity led to organisational or personal values influencing decision-making. The significance of practitioner perspectives will be explored, alongside the WA Policy Implementation framework, throughout the empirical chapters of this study.

Matland's implementation theory is important to understand the effectiveness of policy implementation and whether the design of an intervention aligns to the primary policy goals. Empirical data in Chapter 6 will be used to align WA interventions to the WA Policy Implementation Framework to identify potential issues in implementation. However, Matland's framework does not sufficiently incorporate the view of practitioners (the agents of change on the ground), which would help to provide more nuanced understandings of WA policy implementation (as highlighted in the examples above). Drawing on enactment theory (see for example Ball et al 2011a, Ball et al 2011b, Maguire et al 2015) overcomes this gap in Matland's work by incorporating the grounded perspective of practitioners into a WA policy Implementation Framework. There is some evidence of other researchers incorporating practitioner perspectives into Matland's framework in the examples provided above. For instance, Hudson's (2006) conceptual adaptation of the framework (Table 4.2), includes elements of practitioner enactment e.g., that there is agreement between actors on responsibilities and tasks (Administrative), that compliance may not automatically be forthcoming (Political), that outcomes are largely dependent on what actors are involved (Experimental), and that outcomes are reliant on the strength of local level coalitions (Symbolic). Cohen et al's (2005) study also

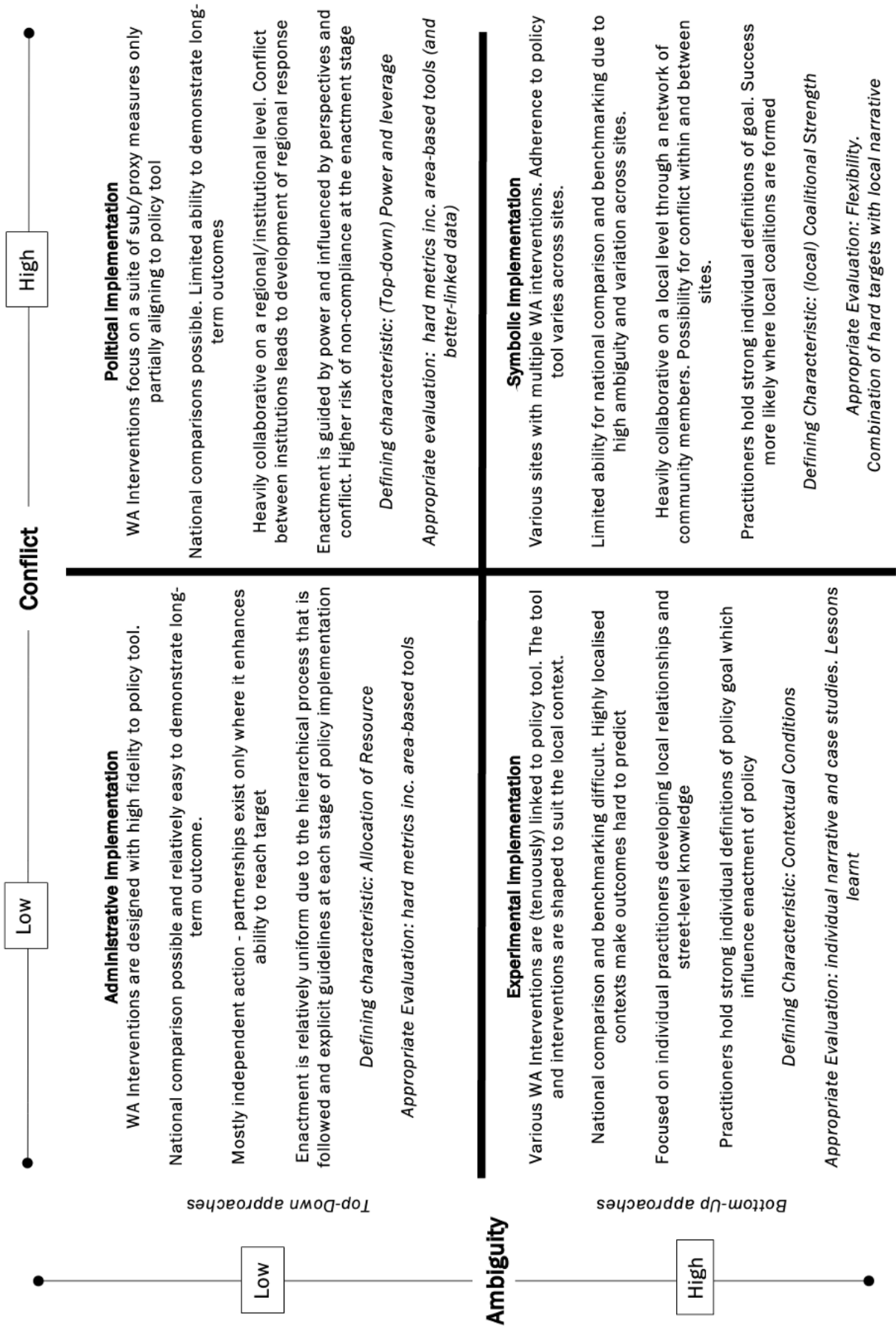
aligned individual actors to the framework, although this was less explicit than Hudson. The analysis of this alignment of WA practitioners with the framework is presented in Chapter 7.

#### **4.4 APPLYING MATLAND'S WORK TO THE CONTEXT OF WA**

As a result of the above critical analysis, definitions of WA Policy Implementation have been created and applied to Matland's framework. The adaptation of Matland's work is presented in Figure 4.3 and will be empirically tested in Chapters 6 (interventions and tools) and 7 (tools and practitioner enactment). The framework has been adapted in the following ways:

1. The definitions within the framework have been adapted to suit the field of Widening Access. These definitions have been developed from the review of literature throughout Chapters 2 and 3, and a narrative to explain the adaptations is provided below.
2. The definitions applied to the framework have been updated to reflect the key components of policy implementation that have surfaced throughout the first chapters of this study (tools, interventions, and practitioner enactment).
3. To reflect the dynamic nature of the WA Policy Implementation Framework, the definitions offer suggestions for contexts where each implementation type might be useful. For example, it is highlighted that Experimental Implementation may be useful for small-scale pilots and exploratory projects where lessons learnt are important. However, these pilots might shift to Political or Administrative Implementation when they are rolled out on a larger scale because the requirements shift from learning lessons to monitoring outcomes.

Figure 4.3 – a framework for WA policy implementation



## 4.5 FOUR TYPOLOGIES OF WA POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

This section outlines the four typologies of WA Policy Implementation that are presented in Figure 4.3.

### ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLEMENTATION (LOW CONFLICT; LOW AMBIGUITY)

...the probability of successful implementation is less than 50 per cent if an order is followed with 90 per cent accuracy after going through six hierarchical levels. If orders are comprehended with less than 90 per cent accuracy, the probability of success will fall even faster.

Matland 1995 p 162 citing Pressman and Wildavsky (1973)

For Matland, Administrative Implementation functions like a machine: the authority is located at the top with the knowledge, resource and sanction capabilities needed to enact the policy (Matland 1995). Information and orders flow down through a hierarchical chain of actors. Within this process, actors are clear of their responsibilities and tasks. Policy intentions can be distorted through the hierarchy, and actors may interpret the policy in different ways (this may be intentional or accidental). Matland cites research by Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) to highlight the importance actors play in policy implementation and the significance of actor compliance.

Within the field of WA, Administrative Implementation is broadly top-down and follows a hierarchy similar to the WP Policy Implementation staircase produced by Rainford (2019) (see Fig 4.1). In this case, the institution would develop a strategy in response to the national WA policy landscape, and interventions are designed with high fidelity to the policy tool (for example, stipulating that only students with Communities First postcodes may benefit from WA provision). The practitioners enacting the policy (by delivering the interventions) follow the parameters set by their institutional strategy and understand that the overall goal is to increase the number of students studying at that institution from priority groups (such as Communities First and WIMD quintiles 1). Monitoring

through benchmarking and national comparison is relatively easy within this type of policy implementation.

### POLITICAL IMPLEMENTATION: HIGH CONFLICT; LOW AMBIGUITY

Agents, however, often are not in a direct line relationship with the implementer, and coercive mechanisms fail to bring about compliance. Many actors have independent bases of power and can refuse to participate ..."

Matland (1995 p164)

For Matland, Political Implementation is characterised by high conflict and low ambiguity. While there may be clearly defined goals, actors either find the goals incompatible with their own, or competition between actors (whether individual or organisational) can cause conflict. Since there can be conflict between actors, top-down control is a central feature to ensure actors collaborate. This is most easily monitored when clear targets are set. Matland recognises the impact local actors can have and explains that even where power is the primary organising concept, individual actors may not comply.

Political Implementation in WA might be seen through a regional response to the WA policy landscape, where conflict exists between institutions (for example, competition for recruiting Communities First students). Power and leverage are used to encourage institutions to collaborate (this can be done through a variety of means, such as financial incentives, regulatory action, and penalties for non-compliance). Within this type, we would see collaborative WA interventions between institutions (as a result of top-down power and leverage) and some alignment to the policy tool, but this tends to be in the form of proxy indicators due to the high-conflict context. A proxy indicator, for example, might be the number of student participants in First Campus programmes from Communities First areas (rather than student recruitment numbers for each institution, which may be more contentious due to competition between institutions and likely to cause further conflict).

## EXPERIMENTAL IMPLEMENTATION: LOW CONFLICT; HIGH AMBIGUITY

demanding uniformity when processes are poorly understood robs us of vital information and limits the street-level bureaucrats' use of their knowledge as a resource (...) [and] the process requires a conscious realization that learning is the goal

Matland (1995 p167)

Matland explains that the success of policies with high ambiguity and low conflict is often reliant on the actors because '*contextual conditions dominate the process*' (Matland 1995 p165). Within this type, the result is hard to predict as it is highly influenced by the 'micro-implementing environment', and implementation is influenced by local problems, solutions, and new opportunities. The policy interventions are likely to vary significantly as the intensity of interest for local actors varies, but it creates the possibility of developing policies that are specific to local needs. Actors are likely to reject demands for conformity across interventions and will often respond with superficial efforts to conform.

Within the field of WA Experimental Implementation can be recognised by a focus on contextual conditions, local narratives and lessons learnt. This implementation type is likely to be suitable for smaller-scale or pilot interventions where there is a need to develop knowledge or find solutions to problems (for example, barriers to accessing HE for specific groups). Practitioners are more likely to operate in isolation within this type of implementation, and WA interventions will be highly tailored to the local context and need. The outputs of this kind of implementation are harder to predict, and practitioners are likely to reject demands for conformity across interventions and will prioritise contextual conditions. This is likely to mean that alignment to any given policy tool is particularly weak or tenuous.



## SYMBOLIC IMPLEMENTATION (HIGH CONFLICT, HIGH AMBIGUITY)

Policies that invoke highly salient symbols often produce high levels of conflict even when the policy is vague. Symbolic policies play an important role in confirming new goals, in reaffirming a commitment to old goals, or in emphasizing important values and principles

Matland (1995 p168)

According to Matland, Symbolic Implementation is characterised by high conflict and high ambiguity. Matland explains that this kind of policy implementation is important for showing commitment to goals (new or old) and highlighting important values and principles (Matland 1995). For these policy interventions, partnership strength at the local level is the defining feature and determines the outcome. Due to the lack of clarity and high conflict, various interventions will exist within this type with organisations and actors defining their own goals and visions.

Symbolic implementation in WA is characterised by a highly symbolic goal (such as reducing poverty – with Higher Education as a means to solve the issue) and local coalitional strength. Within this type, there are multiple sites (this could be institutions, communities, or regions), each with multiple WA interventions and varied use of the policy tool. Within each site, we expect strong, local-level partnerships, which will have a positive impact on practitioner enactment and delivery of the interventions. There is limited possibility for national comparison and benchmarking against the overall goal.

Figure 4.3 presents the conceptual framework for WA Policy Implementation in Wales – an adaptation of the original conflict-ambiguity framework produced by Matland. The empirical data in Chapters 6 and 7 will test these conceptual ideas and produce a second framework that includes empirical data. The framework will demonstrate how aligning the policy landscape to multiple implementation types is useful to diagnose issues in policy implementation, identify possible solutions, and, ultimately, improve the policy's likelihood of success by predicting where policy implementation problems might occur.

## 4.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY: DEFINING A FRAMEWORK FOR WA POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

WA Policy Implementation is a response to the WA policy landscape, ultimately with the goal of impacting the world of action by improving access to Higher Education for under-represented groups. Within this thesis, policy implementation is studied from national, regional, institutional, and practitioner perspectives. Three key components of policy implementation have been highlighted: policy tools; policy interventions; and practitioner enactment. Definitions of these components have been constructed throughout the first chapters of this study, and a summary is provided in Table 4.4

**Table 4.4 – WA Policy Implementation Definitions**

<b>WA Policy Terminology</b>	<b>Definition used in this thesis</b>
Policy Tool	A policy tool (also sometimes referred to as an instrument or technique) sets parameters and the means to reach policy goals (Bali et al 2021). Within the WA policy landscape in Wales, Communities First postcodes and WIMD are the tools used for targeting resources and evaluating policy success.
Policy Intervention	Policy interventions are the solutions to the policy landscape and should adhere to the parameters of the policy tool. For this study, policy interventions are the WA programmes and activities that have been designed as part of regional or institutional strategies to widen access to higher education.
Practitioner Enactment	Practitioner enactment is the doing of policy at the ‘street level’, which is achieved by delivering the interventions and using the policy tools. Enactment is carried out by practitioners and is influenced by their values and pre-existing knowledge and practices.

Matland's conflict-ambiguity framework provides a mechanism to link all the components of policy implementation through empirical research. Table 4.5 is provided to show how the WA Policy Implementation Framework developed throughout this Chapter aligns to this study's concepts of policy tools, interventions, and practitioner enactment. This provides the theoretical lens through which the data in Chapters 6 and 7 will be analysed.

**Table 4.5 - Developing a framework for WA policy implementation**

	<b>Administrative Implementation</b>	<b>Political Implementation</b>	<b>Experimental Implementation</b>	<b>Symbolic Implementation</b>
<b>Conflict</b>	Low Conflict	High Conflict	Low Conflict	High Conflict
<b>Ambiguity</b>	Low Ambiguity	Low Ambiguity	High Ambiguity	High Ambiguity
<b>Policy tool and interventions</b>	WA Interventions are designed with high fidelity to policy tool.	WA Interventions focus on a suite of sub/proxy measures only partially aligning to policy tool	Various WA Interventions are (tenuously) linked to policy tool. The tool and interventions are shaped to suit the local context.	Various sites with multiple WA interventions. Adherence to policy tool varies across sites.
<b>Monitoring</b>	National comparison possible and relatively easy to demonstrate long-term outcome.	National comparisons possible. Limited ability to demonstrate long-term outcomes	National comparison and benchmarking difficult. Highly localised contexts make outcomes hard to predict	Limited ability for national comparison and benchmarking due to high ambiguity and variation across sites.
<b>Approach to partnership working/collaboration</b>	Mostly independent action – partnerships exist only where it enhances ability to reach target	Heavily collaborative on a regional/institutional level. Conflict between institutions leads to development of regional response	Focused on individual practitioners developing local relationships and street-level knowledge	Heavily collaborative on a local level through a network of community members. Possibility for conflict within and between sites.
<b>Practitioner Enactment</b>	Enactment is relatively uniform due to the hierarchical process that is followed and explicit guidelines at each stage of policy implementation	Enactment is guided by power and influenced by perspectives and conflict. Higher risk of non-compliance at the enactment stage	Practitioners hold strong individual definitions of policy goal which influence enactment of policy	Practitioners hold strong individual definitions of goal. Success more likely where local coalitions are formed
<b>Defining Characteristic</b>	Allocation of Resource	(Top-down) Power and leverage	Contextual Conditions and a focus on narrative and developing knowledge	(local) Coalitional Strength
<b>Appropriate Evaluation</b>	hard metrics inc. area-based tools	hard metrics inc. area-based tools (and better-linked data)	individual narrative and case studies. Lessons learnt	Combination of hard targets with local narrative
<b>Suitable Context</b>	Guidance and top-down regulation via HEFCW. Performance management within HEIs	Very strong guidance and top-down regulation via HEFCW/Government, with provision of funding to encourage collaboration	Sensitivity to context and problem solving on a local level. Loose regulation and guidance from HEFCW	Sensitivity to context and problem solving on a local level, but support needed from government to build capacity

Despite the concerns, as the examples in this Chapter illustrate, there remains strong support for using Matland's model as a lens to explore the relationship between policy and practice, and implementation success and failure (Coleman et al. 2020). The research on Matland's framework can be split into four broad themes, and these will be developed and/or addressed throughout this study.

Firstly, as Matland himself noted, subsequent research highlights the importance of ensuring the design of policy implementation is appropriate for the expected outcomes. Matland's conflict-ambiguity framework provides a way to do this.

Secondly, the framework presents ideal types but in reality, policy implementation is dynamic. One policy might relate to multiple types, and the requirements and design of implementation can shift over time.

Thirdly, Matland's definition of conflict could be broadened beyond the political definition. Conflict can be vertical and horizontal. There are also local levels of conflict that can be present, even within 'low conflict' types of implementation. Subsequent research highlighted that conflict sometimes has a positive role to play in finding a better solution that works for multiple parties.

Finally, Matland's framework does not give enough attention to the specific role of individual actors and perspectives: For McCreadie et al. (2008), their research illustrated that practitioner perspectives could lead to different (lower) forms of conflict; Northway et al. (2007) also demonstrate that personal perspectives influence decision-making. Chapter 7 will align practitioner enactment to the typology to ascertain whether they align or not with the implementation type of the intervention, and what the consequences of this are.

# Chapter 5: Methodology

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## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 5 outlines and provides justification for the chosen research strategy and design of the case study. The research takes a mixed-methods approach, using semi-structured interviews and administrative data, alongside Geographical Information Systems (GIS) techniques, to address the research questions (see Table 5.2).

This Chapter is in two parts. Part 1 situates the epistemological and ontological position of the study and will discuss the research design and procedures. Part 2 is the researchers' critical reflections, including considerations for the role of the researcher and the familiarity that is associated with insider research. This second section is more reflexive in nature and concludes by acknowledging some of the limitations of the study.

## **PART 1: RESEARCH STRATEGY AND CASE STUDY DESIGN**

### **5.2 A CASE STUDY**

Case studies are a particularly useful method when undertaking a “*holistic investigation of some space-and time-rooted phenomenon*” (Lofland and Lofland 1995 p212). Through Case Studies, a wide variety of data and evidence can be used to explore a particular case (Rubin and Babbie 1993). The case study is suitable for this thesis due to its focus on South-East Wales (space-specific) and WA policy landscape (time-specific). As Yin (1994) outlines, the case study approach is also more appropriate for studies that are 1) more exploratory in nature and 2) focussed on the implementation of a piece of legislation – both of which are relevant to this study.

### **5.3 EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND ONTOLOGICAL POSITION**

This study is situated within the social science paradigm of pragmatism, acting as a bridge between positivism and interpretivism (Betzner 2008). Positivism is usually coupled with quantitative research methods and focuses on generalisability, reliability and replicability (Bryman 2006; Kaushik and Walsh 2019). It is a highly structured approach to research often linked to ‘top-down’ approaches, with objectivity, standardisation and deductive reasoning at the heart of the process (Creswell 2011; Kaushik and Walsh 2019). Interpretivist research, on the other hand, is associated with qualitative methods and ‘bottom-up’ approaches. Interpretivism focuses on individual experiences and subjective meanings. Researchers translate these experiences and meanings into broader patterns and understandings (Young and Collin 2004).

Pragmatism has become popular within the field of social work, and Kaushik and Walsh (2019) promote its use for any social-justice-oriented profession. Pragmatism values a variety of methods, advocating for researchers to choose a methodological approach that is suitable for the specific problem under investigation (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998; Kaushik and Walsh 2019).

Pragmatism is often associated with a mixed-methods approach, drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data. It operates in the space between positivist and interpretivist research, not committing fully to either but drawing on their core principles as needed.

This study adapts Matland's conflict-ambiguity framework (Matland 1995) into a WA Policy Implementation Framework and typology. It will demonstrate how the WA policy landscape interacts with all four types of implementation. This includes both 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches to policy implementation. It is essential that the research design is flexible enough to research the complex process of policy implementation, from the tools and interventions right through to the enactment of the policy by individual practitioners. Pragmatism offers this flexibility.

Within the context of this study, it is believed that social phenomena are created and re-created continuously through social interactions (Morgan 2014; Bryman 2016). However, individual experiences and versions of those social constructions will differ from person to person. The policy implementation process is social. At each stage of implementation, the policy is 'socialised'. It relies on senior staff to translate policy into strategy, and managers and practitioners to then develop interventions and enact the policy within the parameters of the policy tool. For this reason, a mixed-methods, pragmatic approach is most appropriate for the study. This allows quantitative data to be analysed alongside individual practitioner experiences to develop an understanding of the full implementation process of widening access policy.

Mixed methods combine both qualitative and quantitative forms of research within one project and is a common approach for case studies aligning to Pragmatism. Known as the 'third path' of research (Gorard and Taylor 2004), the approach analyses social phenomena from different perspectives, and, arguably, provides a better understanding of the research topic (Bryman 2016). This multi-dimensional approach to research is an extremely robust way of conducting research, as supported by Mason (2006, p. 10):



Social experience and lived realities are multi-dimensional and that our understandings are impoverished and may be inadequate if we view these phenomena only along a single dimension

The researcher identified that a mixed-methods research strategy was most appropriate for the case study's aims and objectives (see Table 4.2), allowing the investigation of a variety of research questions and a more comprehensive collection of data for researching the WA policy implementation process (Gorard and Taylor 2004; Bryman 2016). There are numerous benefits of mixed-methods designs. For this case study, three primary benefits are highlighted.

Firstly, the approach leads to increased accuracy of and confidence in findings. Qualitative data is more appropriate for researching practitioner perspectives, but quantitative data is more suitable for ascertaining the efficacy of Communities First as an area-based policy tool for identifying the most under-represented students. Secondly, knowledge is generated through synthesising findings and triangulating qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data provides a narrative for the trends observed through the quantitative data analysis. Finally, this approach facilitates the development of a broader, multi-dimensional understanding through different data, constructions or ontologies (Greene et al. 1989; Moran-Ellis et al. 2006; Kaushik and Walsh 2019). It allows other research methods to be used to develop an understanding of the full WA policy implementation process, factoring in both top-down and bottom-up approaches

There are critics of mixed-methods research and a growing body of literature that questions its use in the social sciences. Creswell (2011) explores this ever-increasing commentary on mixed-methods research and highlights eleven key controversies and questions – those most applicable to this study are summarised in Table 5.1 (Adapted from Creswell (2011, p. 270)).

**Table 5.1 – Key controversies and questions in Mixed Methods Research**

<b>Controversies</b>	<b>Questions Being Raised</b>
The changing and expanding definitions of mixed methods research	What is mixed methods research? How should it be defined? What shifts are being seen in its definition?
The questionable use of qualitative and quantitative descriptors	Are the terms “qualitative” and “quantitative” useful descriptors? What inferences are made when these terms are used? Is there a binary distinction being made that does not hold in practice?
What drives the interest in mixed methods?	How has interest grown in mixed methods? What is the role of funding agencies in its development?
Does mixed methods privilege positivism?	In the privileging of postpositivism in mixed methods, does it marginalise qualitative, interpretive approaches and relegate them to secondary status?
Are there too many confusing design possibilities for mixed methods procedures?	What designs should mixed methods researchers use? Are the present designs complex enough to reflect practice? Should entirely new ways of thinking about designs be adopted?
What value is added by mixed methods beyond the value gained through quantitative or qualitative research?	Do mixed methods provide a better understanding of a research problem than either quantitative or qualitative research alone? How can the value of mixed methods research be substantiated through scholarly inquiry?

While some researchers critique the binary use of ‘qualitative’ and ‘quantitative’ descriptors, these terms offer a useful starting point for explaining how WA policy implementation will be researched. Additionally, the research topic relates to an area of practice where qualitative and quantitative data is frequently used (i.e., in widening access policy, strategy, and practice). While these descriptors are broad, this Methodology chapter is used to define what exactly is meant by qualitative and quantitative data, thus mitigating the risks.

The relation to practice is also what drives the mixed methods approach. Researching the social phenomena of WA policy implementation is a complex process. Having the ability to generate knowledge and findings with reference to both qualitative and quantitative data strengthens the study and its relevance to practice.

Rather than relegating qualitative data to a secondary status, this study illustrates the importance of qualitative data for understanding the narrative. The interviews with practitioners provide a richness of data for interpreting the policy implementation process that quantitative data alone could not achieve.

At the centre of mixed-methods critique is the question around the meaning, definition, and expectations of the approach. An approach with such broad tools at its disposal is more likely to be interpreted differently by each person. The mixed methods research and the flexibility it affords comes with a responsibility to provide careful explanation and justification of the chosen research design. This is precisely what this Chapter aims to do.

## 5.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

**Table 5.2: Research Aims and Questions**

<b>Overall Aim:</b> To explore widening access policy implementation in Wales and provide a framework that can be used to make recommendations for policy and practice.
<b>Research Questions (RQs):</b>  <b>RQ 1:</b> How is Widening Access policy implemented through differing institutional interventions, and how appropriate are these interventions for meeting the overall policy goal?  <b>RQ 2:</b> To what extent is Communities First an effective area-based policy tool for targeting those most under-represented in Higher Education?  <b>RQ 3:</b> To what extent does the practitioner enactment of the policy impact the original policy goal?  <b>RQ 4:</b> How can the implementation of widening access policy be improved?

Table 5.2 summarises the research aims and questions. The subsequent sections outline how the chosen research design and methods meet the research aims and objectives

## 5.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

The overall aims and objectives were set at the beginning and were revised and updated throughout each stage of data collection and analysis (see Table 5.3 for the research timeline).

Sections 5.5, 5.6 and 5.7 describe the processes, justifications and considerations for data collection, the population, the sample, access to data, and the data analysis for two main data collection instruments: qualitative practitioner interviews and quantitative administrative data. The details of the data sources and a timeline of data collection are presented in Table 5.3.

**Table 5.3: Research Methods and Strategies of Data Collection**

<b>Qualitative Practitioner Interviews</b>	<b>Detail</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
Community Interviews	5 community workers (Covering Cardiff, Rhondda Cynon Taf [RCT], Caerphilly)	<i>Pilot: January – Feb 2017</i> Phase 1-2: March – July 2017
WP Practitioner Interviews	10 practitioners (6 First Campus / 4 Cardiff University)	<i>Pilot: January – Feb 2017</i> Phase 3-4: January – September 2018
<b>Quantitative Administrative Data</b>	<b>Detail</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
Outreach scheme participant data	4355 participants (Widening Participation = 1769 / Student Recruitment = 2586)	Participants from three cohorts: 2014/15, 2015/16, 2016/17
Wales postcode geometry data	Provided by EDINA Digimap <sup>7</sup>	Dataset downloaded 05 May 2017
WIMD data	WIMD category and overall WIMD rank of each Lower SOA Provided by StatsWales <sup>8</sup>	WIMD, 2014 data. Dataset downloaded 15 April 2017
Communities First data	Lower SOA to postcode to Communities First Look-Up.	Communities First 2014 data. Dataset downloaded 15 April 2017
Population data	Population data by LSOA and single year of age. Mid population estimates for 2014, 2015, 2016 provided by ONS	Datasets downloaded September 2017

<sup>7</sup> Code-Point® with Polygons [SHAPE geospatial data], Scale 1:10000, Tiles: l,m,ba,bb,bl,bs,cf,ch,cw,dy,ex,fy,gl,hr,ld,ll,np,pr,sa,sn,st,sy,ta,tf,wa,wn,wr,wv, Updated: 25 January 2017, Ordnance Survey (GB), Using: EDINA Digimap Ordnance Survey Service, <<http://digimap.edina.ac.uk>>, Downloaded: 2017-05-05 09:39:08.979

The mixed-methods approach of this study uses interviews, administrative data, GIS techniques and descriptive statistical analysis to develop an understanding of widening access policy implementation in Wales. Triangulation was used to cross-check trends that emerged through quantitative and qualitative data analysis. For instance, practitioners were concerned that the use of Communities First as a tool might exclude some students who would benefit from their interventions, and these claims were corroborated against the administrative data through linked datasets, descriptive statistics, and data visualisation. Equally, trends emerging from the GIS analysis were built into the interview schedules and cross-referenced with practitioner commentary, allowing the researcher to move beyond descriptive statistics to explore the 'why' (see Appendix 6).

As Table 5.3 illustrates, there were three main stages of data collection and analysis:

1. The administrative data were collected and analysed to produce descriptive statistics and visual representation of the spatial data. Any trends emerging were identified and used to shape the themes of the interview schedules.
2. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with university and community practitioners. Interviews were analysed, and any emerging themes were noted.
3. Further administrative data collection and GIS analysis based on the themes emerging from the interviews.

## 5.6 ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

### i. Data collection

This study uses GIS techniques to link large administrative datasets, making it possible to (1) produce descriptive analyses of the quantitative data collected and (2) undertake spatial analysis, providing an alternative means of representing and communicating the data. This is particularly helpful for assessing the use of area-based policy tools.

GIS has many useful features, including, but not limited to computerisation of data handling and processing; spatial analysis; digital data representation; visualisation of data; database management and querying; mathematical modelling and statistical analysis (Pavlovskaya 2006). For this study, GIS was deemed appropriate for two reasons: (1) data visualisation and (2) database management. Data visualisation is one of the most powerful and commonly used elements of GIS, allowing data, whether qualitative or quantitative, to be 'seen' as geospatial visualisations. This was particularly useful for presenting and analysing the WA intervention data for Cardiff University (see Chapter 6 section 6.4). Secondly, GIS can handle large datasets, such as census data (Flowerdew 1998), and allows the organisation of non-spatial data by geographic reference points. For this study, this provided a method for linking Communities First and WIMD to the postcode data of students, thus facilitating the analysis of the efficacy of Communities First as a policy tool through spatial data analysis.

The quantitative data used for this study is secondary data. The dataset includes the following elements (see Table 5.4 for a summary of the linked data):

- Postcode data of students on two university outreach programmes:
  - A WP scheme designed to support those from lower socio-economic backgrounds to progress to university. The scheme is an intensive programme consisting of masterclasses, taster days and a summer school.

- A general Student Recruitment Scheme, open to all students in Wales. Those who are not eligible for the Widening Access scheme are automatically placed on this scheme. Aside from receiving newsletters and early invitations to events, there is no real benefit to being on this scheme.
- Wales postcode geometry data: published by Ordnance Survey, this created the postcode boundaries on a map using address geometry provided by local authorities.
- Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) data based on LSOAs and linked to postcodes: The WIMD quintile for all postcodes and Lower Super Output Areas in Wales
- Communities First Cluster data based on LSOAs and linked to postcodes: Whether each LSOA and postcode is part of a Communities First Cluster or not (and if so, the name of that cluster)
- Population data, including population density and sample size of 16-18-year-olds, from certain LSOAs. The sample of 16-18-year-olds represents 1.19% of the population in South-East Wales (1,506,757).



<b>Table 5.4: Summary of linked dataset variables</b>		
<b>Data source</b>	<b>Variable</b>	<b>Description</b>
Outreach scheme participant data	Postcode	Postcode of participants on the outreach schemes
	Scheme	The scheme to which the participant belonged: Widening Participation (experiment group) or Student Recruitment (control group).
EDINA <sup>9</sup> Digimap	Multiple – geometry data	Wales postcode geometry data
WIMD data (Stats Wales <sup>10</sup> )	WIMD rank	Overall WIMD rank for each of the 1,909 LSOAs across Wales
	Multiple – Domain rank	WIMD rank of each of the eight domains for all 1,909 LSOAs across Wales
	Lower SOA code	The official code identifier used for each LSOA
	Lower SOA name	The official name identifier used for each LSOA
	Local Authority	The Local Authority to which each L SOA belongs
	Postcode	The corresponding postcodes for each LSOA
Communities First (StatsWales)	Communities First Name	The official name given to each Communities First cluster
	Local Authority	The Local Authority to which each cluster belongs to
	Lower SOA	The corresponding LSOAs for each Communities First Cluster area
	Postcode	The corresponding Postcodes belonging to each Communities First Cluster area
Population data (ONS)	Population estimate 2014	data by LSOA and single year of age 2014
	Population estimate 2015	data by LSOA and single year of age 2015
	Population estimate 2016	data by LSOA and single year of age 2016

<sup>9</sup> Code-Point® with Polygons [SHAPE geospatial data], Scale 1:10000, Tiles: l,m,ba,bb,bl,bs,cf,ch,cw,dy,ex,fy,gl,hr,ld,ll,np,pr,sa,sn,st,sy,ta,tf,wa,wn,wr,wv, Updated: 25 January 2017, Ordnance Survey (GB), Using: EDINA Digimap Ordnance Survey Service, <<http://digimap.edina.ac.uk>>, Downloaded: 2017-05-05 09:39:08.979

<sup>10</sup>

<https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Community-Safety-and-Social-Inclusion/Welsh-Index-of-Multiple-Deprivation/WIMD-2014>

## ii. Sample

The analysis includes the population of students who had taken part in outreach programmes at Cardiff University (usually aged 16 or 17 when they join the scheme). The GIS analysis uses the postcode data of outreach scheme students from three academic years: 2014/15; 2015/16 and 2016/17. Students were invited to join the schemes through talks that were delivered in their school or college by staff at Cardiff University. All students were invited to apply. Those who met the Communities First postcode criteria were placed onto the Widening Participation (WP) scheme. Those who did not meet the postcode criteria were placed onto the Student Recruitment (SR) scheme. The data analysis includes the student recruitment scheme as a means of comparison – this is explained further in Chapters 3 and 6. Over the three years, the schemes contained 4355 participants, including 1796 on the WP scheme and 2586 on the SR scheme. This represents roughly 15% of the wider 16-year-old population for the local authorities listed below (ONS 2020).

Understanding the research population is crucial for identifying the research sample (Schofield 1996). This study focuses on Higher Education in South-East Wales. The geographic area researched includes ten local authorities with a total population of 1,506,757:

- Bridgend
- Vale of Glamorgan
- Cardiff
- Rhondda Cynon Taf
- Merthyr Tydfil
- Caerphilly
- Blaenau Gwent
- Torfaen
- Monmouthshire
- Newport

### iii. Access

Aside from the outreach participant data, all secondary data used in the study is readily available through government websites (see Table 5.4). The Widening Participation team at Cardiff University had already collected the outreach participant data, and with permission, this data was readily available to the researcher (permission and ethics are discussed later in this chapter in Section 5.8).

### iv. Analysis

The administrative data was linked through QGIS and exported to Excel, where the data was analysed to produce descriptive statistics (see Table 5.4). Table 5.3 summarises the data collected and provides a timeline for the data collection of both the quantitative and qualitative data.

To create the linked dataset, the postcode geometry of Wales (ordnance data) was uploaded into QGIS (the software) to generate a base layer map of Wales. This created the anchor from which all other datasets could be linked using specific variables as identifiers (LSOA code, postcode, Local Authority). Before linking, each dataset was cleansed so that the formatting for each variable was consistent. This ensured that all data could be accurately linked through the geographic variables and identifiers.

Once the base layer had been created using the postcode geometry for Wales, each subsequent dataset was linked by adding a layer to the base map. Visually, this allowed different data to be represented. This included, for example, colour coding the WIMD quintiles of each LSOA, or identifying the location of participants on either scheme by dropping a pin (see Chapter 6 section 6.4 for examples). This visual linking of data also created a master database containing the variables summarised in Table 5.4. This data was exported to Microsoft Excel in order to undertake the statistical analysis of the data.

Inferential statistics are not used for two main reasons: (1) the sample was not a random sample from a population; and (2) when the data was segregated, some sample sizes were too small (for example, the difference in sample size between WP and SR groups, or range in the number of participants between local authorities, Communities First Cluster areas or LSOAs). The use of inferential statistics on such data could make it very difficult to draw meaningful comparisons between the different groups, thus producing inconclusive results (Gersten et al. 2000; Bryman 2006).

## 5.7 INTERVIEW DATA

### i. Data collection

The semi-structured interviews are just as important as the administrative data for this study. This method of data collection provides a way of generating knowledge to explore elements of WA policy implementation that quantitative data alone cannot capture – that is, the social nature of policy implementation that is open to individual interpretation.

Researchers such as Mason (2006) suggest that the semi-structured interview offers participants a better opportunity to guide the interview and direct the conversation around the given research themes, which are provided by the researcher through pre-determined prompts or guides (Bryman and Bell 2001; Fielding and Thomas 2008). For this study, semi-structured interviews offer a suitable method for exploring the knowledge and experiences of the practitioners with regards to the implementation of WA policy.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) identify nine types of interview questions. These were used to inform the interview schedules (discussed below). The nine types of questions are:

- Introductory
- Follow-up
- Probing
- Direct
- Indirect
- Structuring
- Silence
- Interpreting
- Throw away

As the interview schedules demonstrate (Appendix 6), introductory questions were used to ease the practitioner into the interview setting. These were broad, open questions (for instance, “*can you tell me about your role?*”) that provided extensive descriptions of the research topic and allowed the researcher to flag potential probing questions or discussion points for later in the interview.

Follow-up or direct questioning was used to explore a specific topic (for example, “*Could you tell me more about that widening access intervention?*”), and probing questions were used to delve deeper into a topic and further explore the understanding, meanings and experiences of the practitioners (such as, “*what do you think are the implications of having to work with full cohorts in schools?*”). Interpreting questions were sometimes used to clarify what the practitioner had previously said or to check if they would provide the same answer again. The questions were adapted based on the job role of the participant (whether they were a university or community practitioner).

The interview questions were designed to address the following research questions.

***RQ 1: How is widening access policy implemented through differing institutional interventions and how appropriate are these interventions for meeting the overall policy goal?***

This first research question is partly addressed by reviewing the relevant policy literature (see Chapter 3), but by asking practitioners to describe how they design interventions and enact the policy provided more nuanced and detailed knowledge of how the interventions worked (or not) in practice. As the data will

show in Chapters 6 and 7, the reality is that policy interventions often do not meet the policy goal, even in cases where they show close alignment to the original policy.

***RQ 2: To what extent is Communities First an effective area-based policy tool for targeting those most under-represented in Higher Education?***

In addition to the analysis of administrative data, the interviews offered a means of producing narrative and knowledge with a level of detail that the quantitative data sets could not – WIMD and Communities First are aggregate datasets and cannot provide individual-level data. The interviews strengthen the study's ability to address this question by asking the practitioners about their experiences of working with individuals and whether they felt all individuals were the 'right students' to be targeting.

***RQ 3: To what extent does the practitioner enactment of the policy impact the original policy goal?***

This question is addressed solely through the interviews. It provides an opportunity to explore the highly subjective nature of policy implementation at the stage of enactment by individual practitioners.

Sometimes what was omitted from a participant's answer was as relevant as what was covered. Where this was the case, analysis explored the issues that were not highlighted by respondents, and the implications for the policy goals.

***RQ 4: How can the implementation of widening access policy be improved?***

The practitioners were explicitly asked how they would design widening access provision if they could start again. They were also asked what they would use instead of Communities First. Their responses to these questions are synthesised with the findings from the administrative data to make a set of recommendations in Chapter 7.

## **ii. Rationale for the Interview Schedule Themes**

The main route of questioning was divided into four themes for the university practitioners: Targeting; Understanding disadvantage; Impact; Alternatives to area-based approaches. For community practitioners, two broader themes were used: Targeting and University (see Appendix 6).

### **Targeting**

The ‘targeting’ theme allowed the researcher to explore the practitioners’ understandings of the WA policy tool. The GIS analysis had shown that the success of engaging with students in Communities First areas was varied, so the questions were designed to enable the researcher to investigate this further. For the university practitioners, this route of questioning explored their experiences of using Communities First as a tool, an indicator and/or metric. All practitioners confirmed that Communities First was the primary target, so probing questions were used to see if they understood why the Communities First postcode was used.

For the community practitioners, the questions explored their experiences of the Communities First programme, and whether they felt it worked as a tool for improving access to Higher Education. This data produced under the ‘targeting’ theme is analysed in Chapters 6 and 7.

### **Understanding Deprivation**

The second interview theme relates to understandings of deprivation. This route of questioning was developed as a result of the literature review – specifically, issues of ecological fallacy (Section 2.7) and the issues around terminology identified in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.12). The Communities First policy aims to combat poverty, so these questions were intended to gauge the practitioners’ awareness of structural barriers to Higher Education faced by those who live in Communities First areas, as well as to observe how practitioners related

deprivation/under-representation to the WA policy landscape. The data gathered from this theme of questioning are discussed in Chapter 7.

### Impact

The 'impact' theme of questioning was developed due to trends emerging from the GIS analysis. Here, the researcher was looking to see how the definition of 'success' might vary between groups, and how practitioners and community workers might measure impact for their projects that use ABIs. This line of questioning explored whether there were any consequences to the chosen area-based approach. It also provided a means of triangulating the GIS analysis with the interview data. This data forms the basis for Chapter 6.

### University

The 'University' theme was specific to the Community Practitioners' interview schedule. These questions were designed in a way to triangulate the data between community practitioners and university practitioners. These questions made it possible to explore the practitioners' understandings of university and whether they could make links between institutional widening access strategies and interventions and their own work.

### Alternatives to Communities First

The final theme for the university practitioners was to explore alternatives to the Communities First policy tool. It offered an open space for practitioners to reflect on their experiences of using Communities First, identify any strengths and weaknesses, and discuss alternative approaches they might have used previously.

### iii. Benefits of interviews

The benefit of the semi-structured interview is that flexibility can (and should) be applied to the interview schedule, and it enables the researcher to ask additional



questions. There were pre-identified themes for this research, but emerging ideas or topics could also be explored. As advocated by Wengraf (2001) flexibility was a major feature of the semi-structured interviews, and the order of questioning was less important than ensuring all topics were covered. This approach facilitated more of a conversational style of interview while also ensuring the main themes were covered. The very purpose of interviewing is to be able to “gather contrasting and complementary talk on the same theme or issue” (Rapley 2004, p. 18).

The power of the semi-structured interview is that it can be beneficial for the participants too, which was undoubtedly the case for this study. Participants wanted to talk about specific issues, frustrations or topics, and the freedom of a semi-structured interview allowed them to bring in peripheral matters that were important to them (Hakim 2000). The final questions of the interview schedule provided a structured space for the practitioner to do this (see Appendix 6).

The success of these interviews required well-developed, active-listening skills. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) describe Active listening as:

An ear for the interview theme and a knowledge of the interview topic, a sensitivity toward the social relationship of an interview, and knowledge of what he or she wants to ask about

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009 p139)

When successful, active listening provides the researcher with an opportunity to gather rich data (Atkinson and Silverman 1997). Participant reactions and responses cannot be easily predicted, and the role of the qualitative interviewer requires a particular ‘philosophy and approach to learning’ that allows researchers to understand the social world through the description and interpretation provided by individuals in an interview (Warren 2002). Qualitative interviewing is a craft, and caution should be taken when using ‘textbook guides’ to conduct qualitative research; it requires apprenticeship rather than ‘cookbook knowledge’ (Seale et al. 2004).

For this reason, several pilot interviews were conducted throughout January and February 2017 as a way of learning, through trial and error, how to conduct interviews and generate rich data (see Table 5.3). The researcher kept a diary of reflections on the interview process. The semi-structured interviews took place over four data collection phases, including the pilot phase. After each interview, a brief reflexive summary took place. This involved listening to the recordings, an initial transcription, and noting down any considerations for personal and epistemological reflexivity. This process was necessary, not only to ensure the route of questioning was appropriate for answering the research aims and objectives but to ensure that my approach to interviewing facilitated the best possible collection of data. At the end of each phase, a more thorough reflexive review was undertaken: key sections of the recording were listened to again, with a further two to three rounds of updates made to the transcription (see Table 5.5 for details). The researcher noted down emerging themes to be explored in future interviews. Through this iterative process, the interviewer learnt to give more space, value silence, and provide the practitioners time to think and collect their thoughts before responding to questions. The most important lesson learnt through this process, and as noted by Rapley (2004), was to ‘stay flexible’.

#### iv. Sample

For the interviews, the study uses a stratified purposive sampling approach. Purposive sampling is a useful strategy in situations where the researcher can decide “*who will provide the best perspective on the phenomenon of interest, and then intentionally invites those specific perspectives into the study*” (Abrams 2010, p. 538). A stratified sample includes samples within samples. The combination of stratified and purposive sampling is useful “*to capture major variations*” although a common finding across all groups may still emerge (Patton 2002 p.240). The researcher’s dual role as both researcher and practitioner-manager facilitated the sampling process, saving time and ensuring that only those relevant to the study were invited to participate. The potential problems of the researcher knowing participants are discussed in Sections 5.8 and 5.9.

The research population includes:

- Three Higher Education Institutions in South-East Wales (Cardiff Metropolitan University, Cardiff University and University of South Wales)<sup>11</sup>
- University WA Practitioners employed by the three HEIs (including the First Campus Partnership)
- Community Practitioners working in Communities First areas in south-east Wales

At the outset, I had planned on interviewing 18 participants, including:

- 6 WA practitioners from Cardiff University
- 6 First Campus practitioners
- 6 community practitioners from at least three different Communities First cluster areas.

There is no official record of the number of university and First Campus practitioners employed to do this work, so it is difficult to provide an exact population figure from which the sample was chosen. However, given my knowledge of the region, I already knew the following:

- Neither Cardiff Metropolitan University nor the University of South Wales employed specific staff (separate to the First Campus partnership) to widen

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<sup>11</sup> The Open University in Wales was excluded from the study for three main reasons: it does not primarily target school leavers; it represents a different mode of Higher Education (Distance Learning); and its reporting is primarily via England where its headquarters are, rather than HEFCW.

access for young entrants, as a result only practitioners from Cardiff University were included in the study<sup>12</sup>

- There were 9 practitioners employed by the First Campus partnership (working across all three HEIs in the region)
- There were 8 practitioners employed by Cardiff University.

I invited all university and First Campus practitioners to take part in the study. Of the 8 Cardiff University practitioners, 5 accepted the invitation and were interviewed. Of the 9 First Campus practitioners, 5 also accepted the invitations and were interviewed.

The population of community practitioners is much more difficult to estimate. While it might be possible to gain an accurate figure by requesting official records and piecing together the population from different Communities First cluster records, this was not possible within the time constraints of the study. I already had 5 contacts who were community practitioners working in 5 different cluster areas. I invited all to take part in the study, and all accepted. I did attempt a snowballing strategy to try to gain more participants, but this was not successful – most likely because the timing of my interviews aligned with the announcement that Communities First would be ending and the staff were losing their jobs.

A sample of 15 practitioners were interviewed in total (community practitioners n=5, university practitioners n=10 – see Table 5.5). Of the university practitioners, the sample reflects roughly 60% of the population of WA practitioners in the region. There are two groups of practitioners: community practitioners and university practitioners. There are two sub-groups within the university practitioners: Widening Access practitioners (a general term given to

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<sup>12</sup> This should not be interpreted as a criticism of these institutions. Cardiff Metropolitan University and the University of South Wales may have not needed specific WA staff in the same way as Cardiff University did at the time of the study (due to the profile of their institutions and their ability to more easily recruit students from under-represented backgrounds). It is worth noting that Cardiff Metropolitan University did have specific staff to increase access for adult learners, but these were not included due to this study's focus on young entrants.

those who are employed by one institution to work in widening access and participation) and First Campus practitioners. For the First Campus practitioners, their 'home' institutions are not included as this would make them identifiable. Further considerations for anonymisation are discussed in Part 2 of this Chapter.

The interviews were conducted at a time and location that was suitable for the practitioners. All interviews were held in meeting rooms where the practitioners were based.

The community practitioners were all either previously employed by a Communities First hub to develop area-based programmes or based in the community and worked in partnership with the Communities First programme. All had the experience of working with universities on programmes that aim to improve access to university for young people living in the most deprived areas.

Limitations relating to sampling bias are discussed in Section 5.14.

Table 5.5 Summary of Interviews			
Pseudonym	Description	Duration (h:mm)	Reflections
Mari	Community Practitioner: Cardiff	0:59	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make more of an effort to leave silences longer –</li> <li>• Book a longer slot for interviews to allow for them starting late</li> <li>• Interview seemed more relaxed holding it at a location decided by the practitioner</li> </ul>
Daf	Community Practitioner: Cardiff	0:38	
Rees	Community Practitioner: Cardiff	0:21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responses were very short, despite probing.</li> </ul>
Lowri	Community Practitioner. RCT	0:46	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try to avoid 'jargon' in interviews – it confused the practitioner and clarification was needed</li> </ul>
Elis	Community Practitioner. Caerphilly	0:54	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid temptation to over-explain a question</li> </ul>
Dylan	Practitioner. Cardiff University	0:41	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probing with 'can you tell me more about...' worked well and provided rich data without asking a leading</li> </ul>
Efa	Practitioner. Cardiff University	1:02	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview was more conversational in nature, but this produced very rich data</li> </ul>
Del	Practitioner. Cardiff University	0:33	
Steffan	Practitioner. Cardiff University	0:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Started recording as soon as possible before 'formal' interview has started – this worked well</li> </ul>
Harri	Practitioner: Cardiff University	0:30	
Rhian	First Campus Practitioner	0:51	
Natasha	First Campus Practitioner	1:07	
Cara	First Campus Practitioner	0:53	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practitioner was aware of 'the tape' and being recorded, but remained open and casual in style</li> </ul>
Llio	First Campus Practitioner	1:09	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview was interrupted due to location practitioner has chosen – where possible, try to ensure this won't happen</li> </ul>
Gwen	First Campus Practitioner	0:44	

#### v. Access

Due to the purposive stratified sampling strategy, all practitioners (the interview participants) were known by the researcher already. The researcher sent practitioners an email with a participant information sheet. This was followed up by group meetings where the researcher was able to provide a summary of the study and answer any questions. A second email was then sent with a formal invitation to participate and a link to identify potential interview dates and locations. The limitations of this approach are discussed in Part 2.

#### vi. Analysis

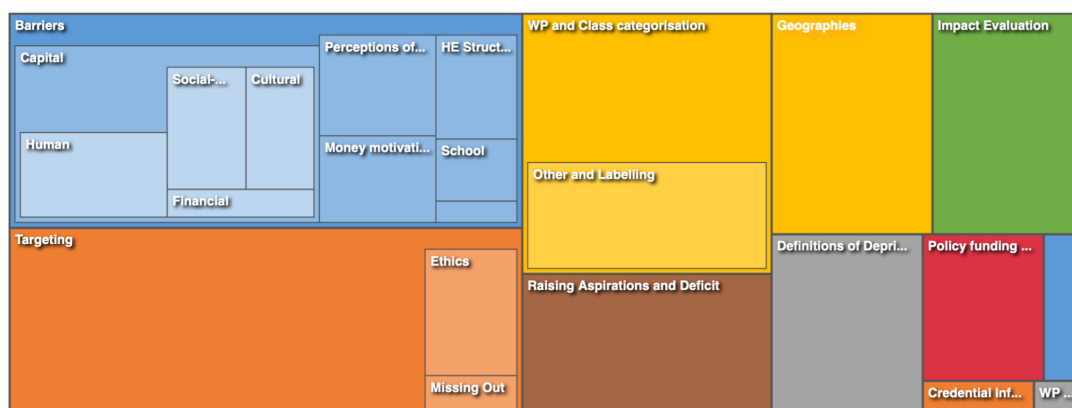
The semi-structured interviews were all digitally recorded, producing over 30 hours of audio. The analysis of interview transcripts is not a linear process (Coffey et al. 1996); the data can be attractively rich but complex to analyse, making it very difficult to identify themes or analytical paths (Bryman 2016).

For this research, NVIVO was used to transcribe the interviews. The researcher transcribed interviews on an on-going basis, and initial analysis of the data was done as soon as possible after each interview. This resulted in four phases of interviews (see Table 5.3). After each phase, data were analysed, and emerging themes were identified. These were used to delve deeper into topics in the following interviews, providing more rich data on the research themes.

To facilitate the transcription process, the audio was listened to first on its own to give an overall feel for the interview. The first five interviews were transcribed verbatim, but in addition to this, the researcher noted down any other observations that could not be recorded by the digital recorder. This included the location, general atmosphere, observations of the participant (such as the extent to which the participant seemed distracted by their work or had rushed from a previous meeting), and any noticeable change in body language throughout the interviews. After fully transcribing the pilot interviews verbatim, the researcher listened to the remaining recordings and noted down the sections that would be most helpful to transcribe. This process meant that all aspects of the interview

that were of interest were transcribed, but time was saved on transcribing sections that were not useful for the study.

**Figure 5.1: Phase 3 of analysis: NVIVO Coding tree**



Listening back to the audio recordings allowed the researcher to “get a sense of the interactional, collaborative work of the speakers” (Rapley 2004, p. 27). Listening to the audio recording also aided reflexive practice, allowing the researcher to assess their approach to interviewing and consider ways in which the interview technique could be improved in the future. The participants’ words were taken as interpretations or evidence of their own experiences, or as Kitzinger and Willmott (2002, p. 351) describe it: “*Interpretative autobiography*’ rather than specific ‘action’”.

The coding was done in four stages, as recommended by Bryman (2016). Firstly, the coding was loose, and emerging themes were identified. Once the first stage of coding was complete, the latter stages allowed meaning to be applied to the codes (Coffey et al. 1996; Atkinson et al. 2001). The second stage of coding entailed linking longer stretches of the interview transcript with research aims and objectives. The third stage involved grouping these emerging topics under themed headings. Using NVIVO, themes could be visually represented, as seen in Figure 5.1 (see appendix 7 for a detailed breakdown of the NVIVO coding nodes). For the final phase, data from NVIVO was extrapolated into a table in a Microsoft



Word document. The left-hand column contained the summarised narrative and key themes of this study, and the right-hand column contained correlating transcript extracts.

## **PART 2: CRITICAL REFLECTIONS**

This section offers some critical reflections, covering topics of ethics, reflexivity, insider research, and the ‘problem’ of familiarity. As such, the style of this section is different to the rest of the thesis and is presented in the first person.

### **5.8 ETHICAL STANDARDS AND APPROVAL**

Ethical procedures in research are important, particularly for any research where human participants are included. The guidelines produced by the British Education Research Association (BERA) are used by Cardiff University to ensure research conforms to certain ethical standards. The BERA Guidelines (2018) provide five key principles for conducting social science research:

1. Social science is fundamental to a democratic society, and should be inclusive of different interests, values, funders, methods and perspectives.
2. All social science should respect the privacy, autonomy, diversity, values and dignity of individuals, groups and communities.
3. All social science should be conducted with integrity throughout, employing the most appropriate methods for the research purpose.
4. All social scientists should act with regard to their social responsibilities in conducting and disseminating their research.
5. All social science should aim to maximise benefit and minimise harm.

BERA (2018 p4)

Before any data was collected for this study, careful consideration was given to ethical procedures to ensure the BERA principles were met. Table 5.8 Outlines the key considerations for this study according to the BERA (2018) guidelines and how they have been handled.

**Table 5.6 – Treatment of ethical considerations throughout the study**

Inclusivity	<p>Inclusivity is a core value in the field of widening access, so it was important to me that my research reflected this ethos. I have actively tried to be inclusive through this study, and this is evidenced through the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All participants were treated fairly, regardless of socio-demographic characteristics, beliefs, or perspectives. I underwent EDI training prior to collecting data, and the reflective diary provided a useful tool for monitoring my research.</li> <li>• I ensured the participant information sheet was shared in an accessible format (e.g., suitable for a screen reader).</li> <li>• I aim to provide open access to the thesis and any subsequent publications</li> <li>• A summary of this thesis will provided in Welsh</li> </ul>
Privacy – confidentiality and anonymity	<p>All data was anonymised, and recordings of interviews were kept secure (physically and digitally).</p> <p>Pseudonyms were used for naming digital files</p> <p>Participants were informed of data handling procedures.</p> <p>See section 5.10 for further information.</p>
Integrity (and methods most appropriate for the research)	<p>It was of paramount importance to conduct the research to the highest of standards and within the spirit of the educational research and practice communities. The following list is not exhaustive, but provides some examples of how I have attempted to maintain the integrity of this research:</p> <p>I ensured my contact details were available to the participants and the research community (in situations where I have given presentations). This would enable me to address any questions about my research</p> <p>My supervisors’ contact details were provided to research participants, should they wish to make a complaint</p> <p>I have referenced accurately throughout the study to ensure the work of others’ is acknowledged and attributed to them</p> <p>I have encouraged scrutiny of my work by sharing initial findings or anonymised data within my research group (fellow Professional Doctorate students, supervisors, colleagues).</p> <p>I have been honest in reporting findings that may be deemed more ‘negative’ in nature (such as mis-targeting of outreach provision in Chapter 5), despite it relating to an area of work I am responsible for.</p>

<p>Social responsibilities for conducting and disseminating research</p>	<p>The motivation for undertaking a Professional Doctorate was to have a positive impact in the world of practice, so dissemination of the findings has been important. I have already shared my research in a variety of forums, including:</p> <p>Doctoral Conference – Cardiff University School of Social Sciences</p> <p>Internal staff lunch-time session – Cardiff University</p> <p>Conference Presentation: Widening Participation in Higher Education - Open University</p> <p>Once the thesis passes:</p> <p>I will also share a summary with all participants and invite them to an informal presentation session.</p> <p>I intend to publish findings in an academic journal</p> <p>I will write a summary of the thesis that is accessible for practitioners working in the field of WA.</p>
<p>Reduce harm and maximise benefit</p>	<p>While there was no danger of physical harm, and the questions asked were not deemed ‘sensitive’ in nature, there was still a chance that a participant could become upset during the interview.</p> <p>Prior to the interview, it was made clear to participants that they did not have to answer every question, and they could skip as many questions as they wanted (with no further explanation needed). None of the participants declined to answer a question.</p> <p>Following the interviews, an informal debrief took place with the participants to get their thoughts and reflections on taking part in the research. All participants shared that it was a positive experience, and they felt that the opportunity to discuss and reflect on their experiences with another practitioner was beneficial for them and their development.</p>
<p>Opportunity to withdraw</p>	<p>Participants were asked to sign a participant information sheet to give their consent to take part in the study. All participants were given the opportunity to withdraw at any point during the study.</p> <p>Interviews were also conducted at a location chosen by the participants, and one where they could easily choose to leave mid-way through the interview if they changed their mind.</p> <p>No participant withdrew.</p>

Ethical approval was granted in November 2016 by the ethics committee at Cardiff University’s School of Social Sciences (see Appendix 4). The interview participants were not classed as vulnerable, and no special measures or procedures were required.

## 5.9 REFLEXIVITY THE 'PROBLEM' OF FAMILIARITY

Reflexivity refers to my ability to assess whether or not the research aims and objectives have been met by reflecting on my own practices:

Reflexivity requires an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process, and an acknowledgement of the impossibility of remaining 'outside of' one's subject matter while conducting research

Willig (2001 p10)

To effectively be reflexive, I needed to consider key questions such as: What have I learnt from the process? Is there anything I would do differently next time? How could my data collection practice (such as interviewing skills) be improved? (Bryman 2012). To do this, I kept a reflective research diary, noting down my personal thoughts and reflections. This approach is advocated by Burgess (2017) and an example from my research diary is seen in Table 5.5.

While I believe my study benefits from my familiarity of WA in South-East Wales, there are risks that come with this familiarity. I have given much consideration to these risks, questioning my approach from a philosophical perspective to really scrutinise the benefits of insider research, whether they outweigh the risks, and whether it is even possible to fully mitigate against the risks.

In academic writing it can become very easy to detach 'me' from my research and writing. So how could I, as a researcher with substantial prior knowledge of this field, remain distinct from the field, yet utilise my position for a better understanding? I recognise that I actively participated in groups and engaged with the participants through my professional practice, and this, inevitably, will have had an impact on my research. This frames the lens through which I formed research questions, designed the methodology, collected and analysed the data, and produced results and recommendations.

One of the biggest problems I faced in doing insider research was the extent to which I could 'make the familiar strange'; it would be very easy for me, with my

insider knowledge of WA, to make assumptions based on this prior knowledge. This familiarity and over-identification can result in the loss of cutting-edge research (Coffey, 1999; Macleod, 2018).

However, it is rare in education research that a researcher can be a complete stranger to a field (Atkinson and Delamont 2005). I had to consider whether it really was possible to ‘alienate’ myself enough when researching my own field. Even if I were able to make the familiar strange, any field will become familiar the more time a researcher spends in it (Macleod, 1996; Waterson and Rylko-Bauer, 2006; Delamont et al 2010).

Delamont and Atkinson (1995) provide a list of possible strategies to help researchers ‘fight familiarity’, including:

1. Review studies in a similar field and how they shed light on the familiarity problem (or not)
2. Draw on cultural comparisons (they suggest that by reviewing the same field in another culture, researchers will become aware of ‘the obvious’ in their own field that may have previously been overlooked).
3. Find a sub-field where the researcher is presented as ‘other’ (e.g., where participants are a different gender, social class, ethnicity, age)
4. Step into a completely different field

Clearly, this issue is something that many other researchers face, and there are lessons I was able to learn from others. As Delamont et al (2010) advise, I reviewed a wide selection of literature on ‘fighting familiarity’ and ‘insider research’ in the early stages of the study (Coffey et al. 1996; Atkinson and Silverman 1997; Coffey 1999; Atkinson et al. 2001; Rapley 2004; Atkinson and Hammersley 2007; Macleod 2018). In reviewing this literature, I was able to give more consideration to what ‘fighting familiarity’ really meant for me and my research. This was not a one-time action that I could then dismiss and move on from, but something I have had to constantly do throughout my research by adopting suitable strategies and always being reflexive and honest with myself.

I also had to consider how to mitigate my own researcher bias (my thoughts, opinions, disposition) in data collection and analysis (Greene et al. 1989). Given my close working relationship with all participants, this was particularly challenging – especially as peers and colleagues would often ask me about the research, and I wanted to discuss ideas emerging from my research to inform (and, hopefully, improve practice). I made an active effort to be selective with personal thoughts and dispositions, and through self-reflective tools and reflexive practise, it was possible to fight against this throughout data collection and analysis.

I adopted some key strategies to overcome the familiarity ‘problem’ (see Table 5.6 for a summary of mitigating strategies), such as the inclusion of what might seem ‘obvious’ questions in the interview schedules (see Appendix 6). I could have answered these questions myself (and it’s important to acknowledge I am aware of what my ‘professional’ response would be to these questions). However, by asking these questions and having an awareness of my personal view, I was able to avoid making assumptions based on prior knowledge and challenge any conclusions I came to. This approach generated rich data based on the perceptions, knowledge, and experiences of the participants.

Perhaps the biggest issue for insider research I faced was my status as researcher and the ‘other’ role(s) I had within the environment being researched; in other words, how relations of power can affect such research settings. Given the design of the study and the positionality of this thesis, and me as the researcher, a separate section is dedicated to this.

## 5.10 INSIDER RESEARCH: RESEARCHER-PEER-MANAGER

Several considerations arose as a result of my multiple identities: as a researcher, a peer, and a manager. Although I was engaging with the participants as a researcher, I knew all of them in some capacity before the research started. There can be many difficulties arising from using intimates as informants (Waterston and Rylko-Bauer 2006), and it was essential I considered how these relationships might affect the dynamics of power in a research setting.

The last couple of decades has seen more attention paid to the ethics of insider research and in particular the implications of familiarity and existing professional relationships with participants within EdD research degrees (Floyd and Arthur 2012; Stephenson et al 2006). Floyd and Arthur argue that conducting insider research with colleagues is a highly contextual situation, the ethics of which cannot be generalised or reduced to a textbook guide but needs to be considered carefully within its own context – this is particularly important where participants are colleagues of the researcher and where the nature of the research can be personal or reflective in nature. I have given much consideration to this, not least because before, during, and after my research, I continued to work alongside the interview participants as a colleague or manager.

Having reflected on the process of applying for ethics approval, I agree with a key point made by Halse and Honey (2007): The ethical considerations of insider research are not fully scrutinised through the ethics application, which tends to:

represent the practice of research as an ordered, linear process with objective principles/rules that inform/direct ethical decision making and moral action

Halse and Honey (2007 p336)

The idea of ethics being a linear process ignores the messy, social, ‘insider’ reality within which I conducted my research. This has been separated into notions of ‘internal’ and ‘external’ ethics (a concept that was first made by Tolich



(2004) specifically in relation to confidentiality, and then developed by Floyd and Arthur (2012)):

Tolich describes confidentiality in insider research as being like an iceberg with the tip above the water relating to 'traditional' confidentiality (which he terms external confidentiality) – ensuring that the participant remains anonymous. Below the surface lies internal confidentiality – the risk that people involved in the research may be able to recognise each other – which he argues goes 'unacknowledged in ethical codes'

Floyd and Arthur (2012 p3)

Floyd and Arthur extend Tolich's work beyond anonymity, and define external ethical issues as the 'superficial, easily identifiable' issues such as informed consent and anonymity (Floyd and Arthur 2012 p3). In contrast, internal ethical issues lie beneath the surface, are hidden and much more complex in nature. They relate to the on-going ethical and moral dilemmas that insider researchers, like me, have to face, linked to the on-going professional relationships with participants beyond the study. To further complicate these internal ethical considerations, my supervisors are also employed by the same institution within which I work. Stephenson et al. (2006) make this point and emphasise that it adds to the complexities for EdD researchers.

## INTERNAL ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

I faced four key challenges for internal ethical considerations: on-going relationships; insider knowledge; my multiple roles; and anonymity. Each of these are discussed in more detail.

### On-going relationships

As an insider researcher, I was constantly aware of having to live with the consequences of my actions – a point highlighted by Drake (2010). Before I had started my research, I battled with questions such as: *what happens if something is disclosed that is morally 'grey' – where there isn't a clear guide as to how I act? What happens if my findings reflect badly on the practitioners?*

*How can I keep the practitioners' involvement in my research discreet?* The connecting feature to all of these questions was the reality that my relationship with these practitioners was on-going and would continue after the conclusion of this study. I adopted Mercer's approach and accepted that at times 'pragmatism may outweigh candour' (Mercer 2007 p8). For example, when a colleague asked how I knew one of the research participants, I kept the answer vague so as to avoid disclosing their involvement in my study – it was not my place to disclose that information.

### **Insider knowledge**

Another issue I faced due to existing professional relationships with participants related to my own insider knowledge. What do I do if a participant responds to something that I suspect, or perhaps know, is not accurate?? In some cases, this might allow me to probe for further information, but how would I know when to probe and when not to? I adopted the stance taken by Hollway and Jefferson (2000) and Floyd and Arthur (2012), concluding that probing may be appropriate to challenge facts, but not in situations where the participants might be attempting to 'save face' and protect themselves or others

### **Insiders' professional and research roles**

I was very aware of some of the tensions I might face as a researcher and professional practitioner – not least because my manager would sometimes joke about my research: 'you're not going to cause any issues for us, are you?'. The reality is that this was in jest, and my manager was very open about wanting to learn lessons – even if my research highlighted weaknesses in provision. Nevertheless, it remained at the back of my mind that it was very possible throughout the research that I would be faced with difficult decisions. As an insider, my role as a practitioner was to be actively engaged with WA at Cardiff University and the South-East Wales region, but as a researcher my role was to stand back and observe (Floyd and Arthur 2012). Sikes and Potts (2008) stress that loyalty to an institution might be compromised through the process of

conducting research – in these instances, I would really have to question whether I should act or not on the information I had been given.

### Anonymity

Smyth and Holian (2008) stress that institutional anonymity is almost always problematic for insider researchers – even if the institution name is anonymised, the name of the author might give it away (and this was certainly the case for me). I discussed this with my supervisors in depth, and we came to the same conclusion as other researchers:

■ Institutional anonymity is meaningless for insiders

Floyd and Arthur (2012 p8)

■ 'It is normally best to assume that the reader will be able to identify your institution, should they wish to

Trowler et al. (2011 p3)

No matter how hard I tried, I would not be able to fully anonymise the institutions and they would be identifiable due to the locality and positionality – both of the study and me. So instead, I focussed my efforts on ensuring the interview participants were anonymous. This was not a straightforward task - not only did I have to consider whether outsiders could identify the interview participations, but I also wanted to avoid enabling the participants to identify each other (a point that Tolich (2004) also stresses). Significant consideration has been given to this, and the procedural approaches taken to safeguard the anonymity of participants are outlined in Section 5.11.

### EXTERNAL CONSIDERATIONS

There were a couple of 'external' ethical issues that could have arisen from my existing relationships with the participants. Firstly, there may have been perceived benefits to taking part in the research. For example, some of the participants received funding or support from my team to deliver projects, and they may have believed that taking part in the research would put them in a

favourable position for receiving additional support (financial or otherwise). Secondly, participants may have felt obligated to take part in the research, or even worse - that a decision not to take part could have repercussions for them or their work (such as funding or support being withdrawn).

Consideration was given to the above issues, and the following strategies were put in place to mitigate against them:

- For staff whom I line-managed, a team meeting was held, and it was made clear that participation was not obligatory for any member of staff, and that there were neither benefits for taking part nor consequences for choosing not to. Staff were advised to contact the senior manager if, at any point, they had concerns about the research. Rather than asking participants to sign up on the spot, an email was sent after the meeting, providing a research information sheet and an online registration form should they wish to participate. Of course, the staff I managed might still feel obliged. While I made every effort to account for this, there is only so much I was able to do.
- For First Campus members of staff, permission was sought from the manager to approach the members of staff and invite them to take part in the study. Permission was given to provide a research project brief at the next team meeting, where the First Campus Manager would be present and could answer any questions or concerns during or after the meeting. As with the staff I managed, an email was sent following the meeting, providing a research information sheet and an online registration form should they wish to participate.
- It was made clear to community workers that involvement in the research would not impact any partnership work underway (either positively or negatively).
- A participant information sheet was provided to all those involved in the project. Where practitioners had agreed to take part, I went through the participant information sheet with them in person prior to the interview starting.

A summary of considerations for insider research and strategies I used to mitigate these is included in Table 5.6.

**Table 5.7 – Strategies to mitigate the risks of insider research**

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Strategies to mitigate</b>
Making the familiar strange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewed a wide range of literature of ‘fighting familiarity’.</li> <li>• Adopted some of the recommendations made by Delamont and Atkinson (1995) to ‘make the familiar strange’ (see section 5.</li> <li>• ‘Obvious’ questions were asked throughout all interviews, and further clarification was sought for any ‘deferring’ responses (such as participants responding, ‘You know....’</li> <li>• I used a reflective diary as part of the reflexive process. This was an on-going process throughout the research, and enabled me to consistently work to make the familiar strange</li> </ul>
Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It was made clear to all participants that I was conducting the interviews in my capacity as a researcher, not a peer or manager.</li> <li>• I ensured participants understood participation was not obligatory, and that they could withdraw at any point</li> </ul>
Bias in data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I was careful not to discuss my thoughts or findings with colleagues or participants to reduce the effect of my researcher bias on potential interview participants.</li> <li>• I used the reflective diary as part of my reflexive practice, providing a mechanism for me to identify any potential bias in data collection or analysis.</li> </ul>

While there are risks associated with researching the familiar, there can be benefits too. Through my positive relationship with the participants, I was able to push boundaries of topics and themes, and this produced richer data that would be difficult to achieve with unknown participants. One potential issue with semi-structured interviews is the potential for participants to rehearse ‘prepared talk tracks’ – specific arguments that they, or their organisation/community, wish to communicate (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). The positive relationship that I

had already built with the participants, alongside my knowledge of the sector, meant that the practitioners felt comfortable to provide more open, honest, and personal accounts. I did not feel the participants were giving me 'prepared talk tracks'. The rich data provided by the interviews demonstrate that participants did not give the answers they thought I wanted, and their honesty can be evidenced across all interviews with comments such as 'Don't tell HEFCW I said that!', "The University won't like me saying that" or "They [senior staff] won't like me saying this, but....".

The above strategies mitigated against some of the potential risks of insider research, allowing me to draw on the strengths of my positionality and familiarity. This included easier access to participants and data, as well as the ability to relate and 'speak the language' of the interview participants, thus making it easier to blend in and reduce the 'researcher effect' (Mercer 2007). Nevertheless, the research should be read knowing that this level of 'insider knowledge' will inevitably have an impact on the findings and analysis, and the research is presented knowingly through this lens.

## 5.11 CONSENT

Participant consent is an essential ethical consideration for all social science research. The process of seeking consent provides the researcher with a space to explain the purpose of the research upfront and clarify how data will be used, stored, and presented (Johnson and Christensen 2019).

## INTERVIEW DATA

Information sheets (see Appendix 1) were given to all interview participants along with the consent forms in advance of the interviews. I talked through the information sheets prior to the interview starting, thus ensuring participants fully understood the implications of taking part in the research. The practitioners were given the opportunity to ask questions. If they were still happy to proceed, they provided consent by signing the Participant Information Sheet. Two copies

were provided – one for the participant to keep, and another that I stored securely on the University Campus.

## POSTCODE DATA FOR GIS ANALYSIS

All but one of the secondary data sources used for the GIS analysis is publicly available. In order to use the postcode data of outreach participants, permission was sought from the data controller. This was escalated to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor due to the researcher also being a member of staff. A research summary sheet was provided by email, along with a formal request. The request was granted in October 2016 (see Appendix 3) and the following data provided for participants from the 2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17 schemes was provided:

- postcode data each individual participant
- The scheme they were a member of (Widening Participation or Student Recruitment).

## 5.12 ANONYMITY AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR CONFIDENTIALITY

### INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

My ethics application stated I would collect the following data through the interviews:

- Qualitative semi-structured interviews with WA practitioners working in HEIs and community settings. Consent will be sought for interviews to be recorded and transcribed. All data will be anonymised as much as possible.

All practitioners have been given pseudonyms, and any data from the interviews that might have made it possible to identify them has been removed or altered. Consideration was given to anonymising the data further (i.e., names of regions, institutions, and intervention). However, total anonymisation would not have

been possible (see section 5.9 for a more detailed discussion). As a result, specific data about the practitioners (such as age, gender, time in role) has been omitted from the study. The practitioners are a sample from a very small population, and any further detail could make them identifiable by others working in the region (or each other). Prior to the interview commencing, I explained to each practitioner that the names of institutions and partnerships could not be fully anonymised, but to protect their identities and to provide anonymity I would change or exclude any information about them that might be identifiable – this included omitting names of places they may mention that could be traced back to them. I also provided larger groupings to identify practitioners (e.g., by Cardiff University, First Campus, and Community), rather than smaller, more specific categories, to strengthen the anonymity.

## CARDIFF UNIVERSITY PARTICIPANT SCHEME DATA

My Ethics Application form stipulated the following data would be collected:

- Postcode data for participants of Widening Participation and Student Recruitment programmes at Cardiff University. Consent will be requested from the data controller.

No other data was requested. The data of outreach participants was anonymised before I received it: all three cohorts were extracted into one dataset with all other personal information removed, thus rendering it impossible for any participant to be identifiable.

### 5.13 DATA STORAGE AND MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

Robust data storage and management procedures are key for maintaining the integrity of data and keeping it safe. This was an essential consideration for the study, given human participants were involved in the research. All data was managed and stored in line with Cardiff University's data protection policy and Data Handling Policy (both of which comply with the Data Protection Act 2018).



According to Cardiff University's data classification system, the data collected and stored as part of this study is 'Classified C2: Confidential' due to the following reasons: the data contains private information about living individuals; they may be identifiable by the data; and the data has potential to cause 'minor' or 'moderate' harm either to the individuals or organisation (Cardiff University 2019). Table 5.7 Outlines the considerations for data storage and management for Classified C2 data, and how these were dealt with throughout the research.

**Table 5.8 – Data storage and management procedures**

<b>Handling data in the field</b>	This applied to the recording of interviews on a Dictaphone – the majority of which were held off-site. When it was taken into the field to record interviews, I always kept it on me (i.e., it was never left in a bag unattended). As an additional measure of security, I was able to lock the Dictaphone to prevent anyone else from accessing the contents.
<b>Physical security</b>	When not in use, the Dictaphone was stored in a locked university cupboard that only I had access to. The laptop that the data was stored on was either kept with me or locked in a separate drawer to the Dictaphone (again, only accessible by me). The laptop was never left unattended. The physical storage spaces used for the Dictaphone and laptop were in an office that required key-card access, adding an additional level of security and protection.
<b>Data access and storage</b>	As the data was Classified C2, I kept it within the University's managed digital environment. I transferred the data from the Dictaphone to a University-managed laptop as soon as possible after the interviews were completed (always on the same day – usually within an hour of completing the interview). The recordings, subsequent transcripts, and quantitative data (e.g., the postcode data of participants) were kept in a password-protected file stored in a digital space that only I had access to. The laptop was encrypted, and password protected. A Virtual Private Network was always used when connecting to the internet off-site as an additional measure of security.

## 5.14 LIMITATIONS

All studies have their limitations, and so I conclude this Chapter with four key limitations that I think need to be acknowledged.

Ideally, the study would have incorporated a larger sample of community practitioners, but due to reasons of time, this was not possible. The study set out to interview community practitioners from a more comprehensive geographic selection of areas, but this became increasingly difficult due to the Communities First programme ending and many staff losing their jobs. As a result, I needed to be sensitive to potential job losses when inviting practitioners to take part in this study and when conducting the interviews. A sampling bias is also likely with the community practitioners, as I worked with practitioners who already knew me. While I attempted a snowballing strategy to gain further participants, this was unsuccessful. Furthermore, due to the stratified purposive sampling strategy, there may be a sampling bias between the practitioners who decided to take part in the study and those who did not respond (I did follow up to see if I could correct this, but none of them chose to engage with the study).

The second limitation relates to the policy tools. Chapter 6 will compare two area-based policy tools: WIMD and Communities First. WIMD is used to assess the efficacy of Communities First, but both will suffer from issues of ecological fallacy. Nevertheless, the comparison is still useful for understanding how policy tools are used in implementing WA policy.

The third limitation relates to the ability to generalise the findings of the study. The WA policy landscape of Wales, and in particular the study's focus on South-East Wales, is unique. This makes for an interesting research project but limits the extent to which the findings can be generalised. However, there is a lack of research on WA policy implementation, so this study offers a framework for WA policy implementation that other researchers can empirically test and adapt for different contexts.

Finally, and perhaps one of the main limitations I have given considerable thought to, is my positionality – my multiple roles, insider knowledge and familiarity (of the WA policy landscape in Wales and existing professional relationships with participants). I believe I have successfully adopted strategies that have allowed me to mitigate the risks and draw on the strengths of this positionality, allowing easier access to participants and secondary data and more rich responses from the semi-structured interviews. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that for some readers this lens will continue to exist as a limitation, and it is important this framing of the study is acknowledged.

# Chapter 6: Widening access policy interventions

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## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 6 is the first of two empirical chapters. The chapter draws on qualitative and quantitative data to explore widening access policy implementation. Specifically, the chapter will 1) use empirical data to map WP interventions to the WP Policy Implementation Framework and 2) assess the efficacy of the policy tool (Communities First) for targeting and meeting the primacy policy goal. The chapter will address RQ1 and RQ2 and is structured accordingly.

To address RQ1, the Chapter will draw on interview data with practitioners to analyse their interpretations and understandings of the policy interventions (and how this relates to the official policy documentation and literature that was reviewed in Chapter 3). The data is used to empirically test the framework for WA policy implementation that is developed throughout Chapter 4. The analysis of interview data reveals several different ways interventions have been designed to meet the policy goal. Four specific examples are given.

To address RQ2, one of the policy interventions is chosen as a case study. Quantitative administrative data and student postcode data is analysed through Geographic Information Systems (GIS) techniques - a method that provides a

means of illustrating the efficacy of Communities First as a policy tool through geospatial analysis. Two issues are highlighted by the data analysis. Firstly, there are substantial variations in what the WA intervention does in different areas (i.e., the efficacy of the area-based tool in capturing those living in the highest levels of deprivation varies substantially by area). Secondly, the analysis illustrates that the tool hides difficult decisions that practitioners must make about who is and is not included in an initiative (and this second issue is explored further in Chapter 7).

## 6.2 THEORISING WA POLICY INTERVENTIONS USING THE WA POLICY IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

HEFCW stipulates that Communities First and WIMD are the policy tools (the priority areas for institutions to focus on, measured by application rates, enrolments, and graduate outcomes). However, their guidelines as to how the policy tools should be used is ambiguous and varies across university and Reaching Wider guidance (this is highlighted in Chapter 3 – see Section 3.4 for a specific example). As a result, the policy is implemented in various ways through different interventions. The practitioners were asked to comment on the interventions they had designed, and the ways in which Communities First and/or WIMD were used as a tool. The data shows that none of the interventions were designed specifically to target WIMD, nor was WIMD data monitored by the practitioners (although interestingly it is monitored by institutions, as shown in Chapter 3, suggesting a disconnect between the practitioners and their institutions – this will be discussed in Chapter 7). Communities First was the primary target for all practitioners, despite the inclusion of WIMD in policy guidelines. Through the interview data, four cases of WA policy interventions are identified, as outlined below. These four cases are mapped to the WA policy implementation framework (see Figure 4.3) based on the defining characteristics (allocation of resource; top-down power and leverage; contextual conditions and narrative; local coalitional strength).

## INTERVENTION 1: REGIONAL responses to the policy landscape

The first intervention identified through the interview data is the First Campus intervention:

So...First Campus is the HEFCW-funded South East Wales Reaching Wider project [laughs] we're good at reciting that as we have to put it on everything! It's quite.... Yeah, it's quite unique, I guess. Usually there's ... well, as you know there's a lot of competition between the unis sometimes, isn't there? But HEFCW funds the partnership ... it's amazing what a bit of money will do! (...) but then you're sort of bending and bowing and trying to you know (...) [um] the goal posts change quite frequently. And [um] it's tricky as .... [um] we just have to go with it because they give us the money.

**Natasha** – First Campus Practitioner

So... I work for First Campus (...) [um] We're a widening access programme (..) and yeah... Basically HEFCW, well, to be blunt I think they give us money so we'll all play nicely together [laughs].

**Cara** – First Campus Practitioner

The first intervention outlined is First Campus – the regional Reaching Wider partnership between HEIs in South-East Wales. As the extracts above illustrate, the practitioners felt that funding was a mechanism used by HEFCW to encourage the universities to work together. Based on the defining characteristics outlined in the WA Policy Implementation Framework (Figure 4.3), this appears to be policy implementation through 'top-down power and leverage' – the defining characteristics of Political Implementation (high conflict, low ambiguity. HEFCW uses funding as leverage to encourage the HEIs to work together. All First Campus practitioners were aware of their funding source. They also demonstrated awareness of the competition between institutions, which, according to the WA Policy Implementation Framework, could be classed as high conflict – another feature of Political Implementation.

Conflict within this example relates to the three HEIs in the region competing to recruit Communities First students (a goal that is monitored by HEFCW via HESA

returns – see Chapter 3). So rather than reporting on the numbers of Communities First students recruited by each institution through the partnership - which might be contentious and create more conflict - the First Campus practitioners explained that their interventions were designed to use the policy tool (Communities First) in a less direct way: through a targeted-schools approach. Schools with a population of 30%+ Communities First pupils were targeted and any pupil within that school could take part in First Campus programmes. First Campus reports on the students who have engaged with them, but only pupils with Communities First postcodes count towards overall targets (as stipulated by HEFCW). This was explained by Cara:

Any school that has 30% Communities First pupils [um] or above then we would look to target them [the school]. But within that it's quite difficult because you can't guarantee that it's those 30% that will attend the programme...there's only so much you can do to ensure that you're meeting that postcode lottery target

**Cara** – First Campus Practitioner

One of the problems with this targeted-schools approach is that practitioners cannot guarantee that the pupils engaging with their interventions will be the x% of pupils who live in Communities First areas. This targeted-schools approach adopted by First Campus produced mixed feelings from practitioners as to whether it works. For Cara, while it provides a means of targeting, the postcodes of pupils were only checked *after* an interaction, and this meant there was no way of ensuring in advance that those pupils taking part were from Communities First areas<sup>13</sup>. As a result, it became a 'postcode lottery', and many of the students who participated did not count towards the overall First Campus targets.

The extracts above also illustrate a problem with the use of Communities First as a tool: the practitioners define Communities First by postcodes – there is no awareness that they are using postcodes as a proxy to identify Communities

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<sup>13</sup> The postcodes were checked afterwards as the practitioners struggled to get sign up forms before an event. As they explained – teachers are already really busy so asking them to collect sign-up forms before activities was not realistic.

First areas i.e., that postcode areas are much smaller geographic areas that will make up an LSOA – the WIMD scale (which Communities First is based on) does not have postcode granularity (see Chapter 3 section 3. for an explanation of the nesting of postcodes, LSOAs, Communities First and WIMD).

## INTERVENTION 2: SINGLE INSTITUTION INTERVENTION

The second intervention identified through the data was the first of two that was managed by Cardiff University:

**Harri:** So our main WP programme aims to raise aspirations and ideally get kids from Communities First areas into Cardiff (...)

**Researcher:** Where does the funding come from for the programme?

**Harri:** Oh it's a Cardiff programme, we don't have any funding from HEFCW or anything. But I think that's good as [um] well... It's so much easier for us to make changes as it's Cardiff Uni funded.

**Harri** – Practitioner – Cardiff University

We now have a strict eligibility criteria. So... yeah... although we will visit any school in Wales, only pupils who have a Communities First postcode can join our programme (...) We used to target schools with a high percentage of Communities First pupils, but we just ended up with loads of pupils who weren't actually eligible based on postcode ... and they didn't count towards our targets either (...) We ended up in a situation with thousands on the scheme, but only about 600 or something actually had the right postcode!

**Efa** - WA Practitioner - Cardiff University

The practitioners at Cardiff University explained that their main intervention (the WP Scheme – as discussed in Chapter 3 section 3.5) was funded through their own institution, and they appeared to have a fair amount of control over the design of the intervention. According to the WA Policy Implementation Framework (Figure 4.3), this kind of control and allocation of resource is a defining feature of Administrative Implementation (low conflict, low ambiguity).



In the extract above, Eva provides an explanation as to how the WP Scheme is designed in relation to the tool (Communities First). Cardiff University used to operate a targeted-schools approach (in a similar way to First Campus as discussed above) but that resulted in lots of students outside of Communities First areas taking part in the intervention. To tackle this issue, a decision was taken to implement strict eligibility criteria for accessing the WP Scheme—students had to live in a Communities First area (and this was identified through postcodes). Efa explains that there were reservations to implementing such a drastic change, but that using Communities First as the eligibility criteria for the programme was transparent and interventions were designed and promoted in a way that made this clear.

According to the WP Implementation Framework, Administrative Implementation is likely to be low in conflict and ambiguity. The extract from Eva does implicitly suggest there is goal congruence: the design of the intervention and use of the tool appears to flow in a hierarchical manner (similar to that outlined by Rainford 2019 in Chapter 4 – see Figure 4.1). Implicit in Eva’s response is the awareness that recruiting and engaging Communities First students is the priority. The intervention is designed in such a way that it should meet the requirements of the policy goal. As a result, the practitioners at Cardiff University had high confidence that the pupils on their scheme should all have Communities First postcodes. However, despite the strict use of the policy tool, the GIS analysis in this chapter will show this approach is not 100% accurate for capturing Communities First students (see Section 6.4).

### INTERVENTION 3: TWO-INSTITUTION INTERVENTION

The third intervention is also managed by Cardiff University, but this intervention is different as it is a partnership programme that has been designed by two HEIs:

**Efa:** Yeah.... we also run a programme in partnership with Cardiff Met. I think it's been running for ... yeah, it's over twenty years I think.

**Researcher:** Where does the funding come from for that?

**Efa:** I think both unis pay into it equally, but it's managed by us [Cardiff University]

**Efa** – Cardiff University Practitioner [clarification added]

The third intervention identified through the interviews was a partnership intervention between two HEIs: Cardiff University and Cardiff Metropolitan University, and it was mentioned by three of the practitioners working at Cardiff University (Efa, Steffan, and Harri). This intervention is called the Roadshow intervention and is particularly interesting given it is a partnership between two institutions.

Yeah so it's a great project (...) And it's quite funny really, sometimes we show up at events where other unis are attending, and they are ... well, I think they are quite surprised sometimes that two institutions have chosen to work collaboratively (...) But I think it works because there's very little competition and overlap of degree subjects between the two unis(...) and... well personally I think it's better for the students too!

**Steffan** – Cardiff University Practitioner

Like the WP Scheme at Cardiff University, the Roadshow intervention appears to be defined by allocation of resources (as highlighted in Efa's extra above). This

aligns<sup>14</sup> the intervention to Administrative Implementation (low conflict, low ambiguity). Despite it being a joint project with another HEI, the universities appear to have the same goals, and do not perceive any conflict with each other when pursuing these goals. Ambiguity is also low for this intervention – the practitioners were able to outline exactly what the overall policy goal was (to recruit Communities First students), and they understood how the intervention linked to that goal (by working with all schools in Wales).

The practitioners from Cardiff University explained that for this project all schools in Wales are eligible to participate, but staff focus their attention on trying to engage with schools that have the highest percentage of pupils living in Communities First areas. Unlike the WP Scheme at Cardiff University, which operates by excluding students without a Communities First postcode, this approach took an inclusive approach: i.e., by working with all schools in Wales, the staff were confident that the intervention would be supporting all students from Communities First areas, but other students who might be from groups under-represented in Higher Education were also able to benefit.

This does problematise the definition of Administrative Implementation slightly. The conceptual, ‘ideal’ Administrative type suggests the policy tool would be adhered to strictly – so you might expect the kind of approach adopted by the WP Scheme at Cardiff. The Roadshow intervention, however, seems to align to Administrative Implementation but the use of the policy tool is broader. This illustrates that the reality of such a framework may not fit the ideological concept perfectly.

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<sup>14</sup> The term ‘align’ is used throughout the empirical chapters. The term does not have a precise meaning, so a definition is provided here.

I use the term ‘align’ to explain when my analysis of data indicates that a particular empirical example reflects the characteristics of one type of policy implementation, according to the WA Policy Implementation Framework I developed throughout Chapter 4. The example may be of an intervention, or of a practitioner,

## INTERVENTION 4: A COMMUNITY INTERVENTION

The final intervention identified through the interviews relates to the Communities First programme. It was delivered collaboratively between Community Practitioners and the Universities. Although it was difficult to find information about these interventions online (as mentioned in Chapter 3), the practitioners provided more detail:

...yeah, so Communities First is a Welsh Government deprivation project ... communities are picked by their level of deprivation (...), so the main strands of work are education, health, and employment. Basically trying to get people to better themselves in all walks of life (...) we'll do a bit of everything – if it helps somebody, we'd have a go at doing it.

**Mari** – Community Practitioner

... we've run a homework club for years (...) I guess there are two main aims really ... Yeah, like we want to help students do well in their GCSEs and A levels. But the reason we work so closely with universities and use uni students as volunteers is coz we want to raise the kids' aspirations ... y'know, we want them to believe they can go into uni if they want (...) it works really well, we've got all the contacts in the communities and the unis have the expertise and knowledge. I'm fairly sure all the Clusters run this programme, but it'll be slightly different in each Cluster.

**Rees** – Community Practitioner

The interventions described by the community practitioners align to Symbolic Implementation (high conflict, high ambiguity). Mari links to the big goal of reducing poverty, and Rees talks about using homework clubs to encourage young people to go onto university as part of the wider goals of Communities First. These defining characteristics - of highly symbolic goals and strong, local-level partnership - align with Symbolic Implementation. As would be expected with this type, Rees' extract highlights the multiple sites (the Cluster areas) operating in slightly different ways with their homework club programmes.

...and we did have some kind of targets, but we could meet them in a flexible way really. We could be quite innovative with projects we could offer in order to meet the outcomes. It is an outcome-based project but [pauses] I think they are quite malleable.

**Mari** – Community Practitioner

The community-based widening access interventions were characterised by high ambiguity (the links between the interventions and overall policy goal were there but lacked detail). Mari continues to explain that her interventions would be promoted to everyone within their Communities First Cluster areas, and on the day, anyone was able to show up and join in. Postcodes would not be checked unless it was for financial support, in which case evidence would be required that the individual lives in a Communities First postcode area.

These four examples of policy interventions illustrate how, in responding to the WA policy landscape, interventions can be designed in a variety of ways and use the tools differently. A summary of how the empirical data and findings presented above maps to the WA Policy Implementation framework is summarised in Table 6.1. The four policy interventions appear to fit with three of the four types of implementation (see Figure 4.3 and Table 4.5). None of the interventions appeared to align with Experimental Implementation, but Chapter 7 will draw on practitioner data to discuss this further.

<b>Table 6.1: Applying widening access interventions to the WA Policy Implementation Framework</b>	
<b>Four types of implementation</b>	<b>Access Intervention and Characteristics</b>
<b>Administrative Implementation</b>	<b>WP Scheme &amp; HE Roadshow (Cardiff University)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broadly hierarchical and linear response to policy landscape</li> <li>• Resource is allocated by the institution(s)</li> <li>• Clarity of policy goal and targets</li> <li>• Focus on developing partnerships that will enhance ability to reach target</li> <li>• Low conflict between institutions (goal congruence)</li> </ul>
<b>Political Implementation</b>	<b>First Campus</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflict between institutions</li> <li>• Funding used as leverage to encourage regional cooperation</li> <li>• Proxy indicators and measures of success</li> </ul>
<b>Experimental Implementation</b>	(No correlating intervention – discussed further in Chapter 7)
<b>Symbolic Implementation</b>	<b>Community WA Intervention – Homework club</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highly symbolic goals</li> <li>• High ambiguity (unclear how interventions finally link to overall policy goals)</li> <li>• Different clusters respond to policy in different ways</li> <li>• Strong local relationships (community relations)</li> <li>• Difficulty demonstrating impact</li> </ul>

To address RQ2, the four interventions discussed above can be categorised according to how closely the design of them matches the policy goal (to improve access to higher education for the most under-represented groups, which is defined by HEFCW as people living in areas of high deprivation).

The analysis of data shows that the policy aim (improve access to Higher Education for under-represented groups) is addressed (through policy interventions) in four different ways, leading to a variety of approaches and outcomes. Some of these approaches appear more likely than others to meet the policy measures of success (increased access to Higher Education from individuals living in Communities First areas), due to the ways in which they use the policy tool (Communities First).

The Roadshow intervention adopts the least strict approach to the postcode system, where schools with a high percentage of Communities First pupils are given priority, but anyone is able to benefit from the programme. First Campus has the second-to-least strict design: the practitioners only work in schools with 30%+ Communities First pupils, but anyone within that school can take part in the programme. The Homework Club (Community WA Intervention) takes the second most strict approach: events and interventions are only promoted to people living in Communities First areas, but addresses are only checked where financial support is being given. Cardiff University has adopted the strictest approach, whereby only those with a Communities First area are eligible to participate in the programme.

The next section of this chapter will use GIS as a means to map out the geographies of deprivation of students who took part in Cardiff University's WP Scheme. The WP Scheme is chosen as this was the only example from practitioners where eligibility to join a programme was based strictly on Communities First. As such, the scheme at Cardiff University can be used as a case study to illustrate a 'best case scenario' for the extent to which Communities First as a policy tool is effective for targeting under-represented groups (defined by HEFCW as people living in areas of high deprivation – see

Chapter 3). Due to the way the other interventions use Communities First as a tool for targeting, they are likely to experience far more leakage and wastage, thus reinforcing social inequalities (Harrison and Waller 2017).

### 6.3 USING GIS TO EXPLORE THE EFFICACY OF COMMUNITIES FIRST

This section uses GIS techniques to explore geographies of participation in university access programmes. The aim is to better understand whether the policy tool, Communities First, is effective for targeting under-represented groups for university access programmes.

The GIS analysis is used to develop the student-area matrix. The matrix provides a way of understanding the relationship between the geographic location of students and the schemes they are on. An initial analysis is provided for each of the local authorities in South-East Wales; three of these areas are chosen as mini case studies, and a more detailed analysis is given.

#### MAPPING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNITIES FIRST AND WELSH INDEX MULTIPLE DEPRIVATION (WIMD)

This section builds on the policy review that is provided in Chapter 3 (see Section 3.3 for a detailed explanation of WIMD). Figure 6.1 provides an example of how Communities First and the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) LSOAs relate to each other. The individual LSOAs that make up two Communities First Cluster areas (STAR – Splott, Tremorfa, Adamsdown and Roath, and BRG – Bute, Riverside and Grangetown) are shown with yellow boundaries. WIMD quintiles for each LSOA are highlighted, with quintile 1 (darkest blue) showing the highest levels of multiple deprivation, through to quintile 5 (lightest blue/white) showing the lowest levels of multiple deprivation.



Figure 6.1: BRG and STAR WIMD Quintiles

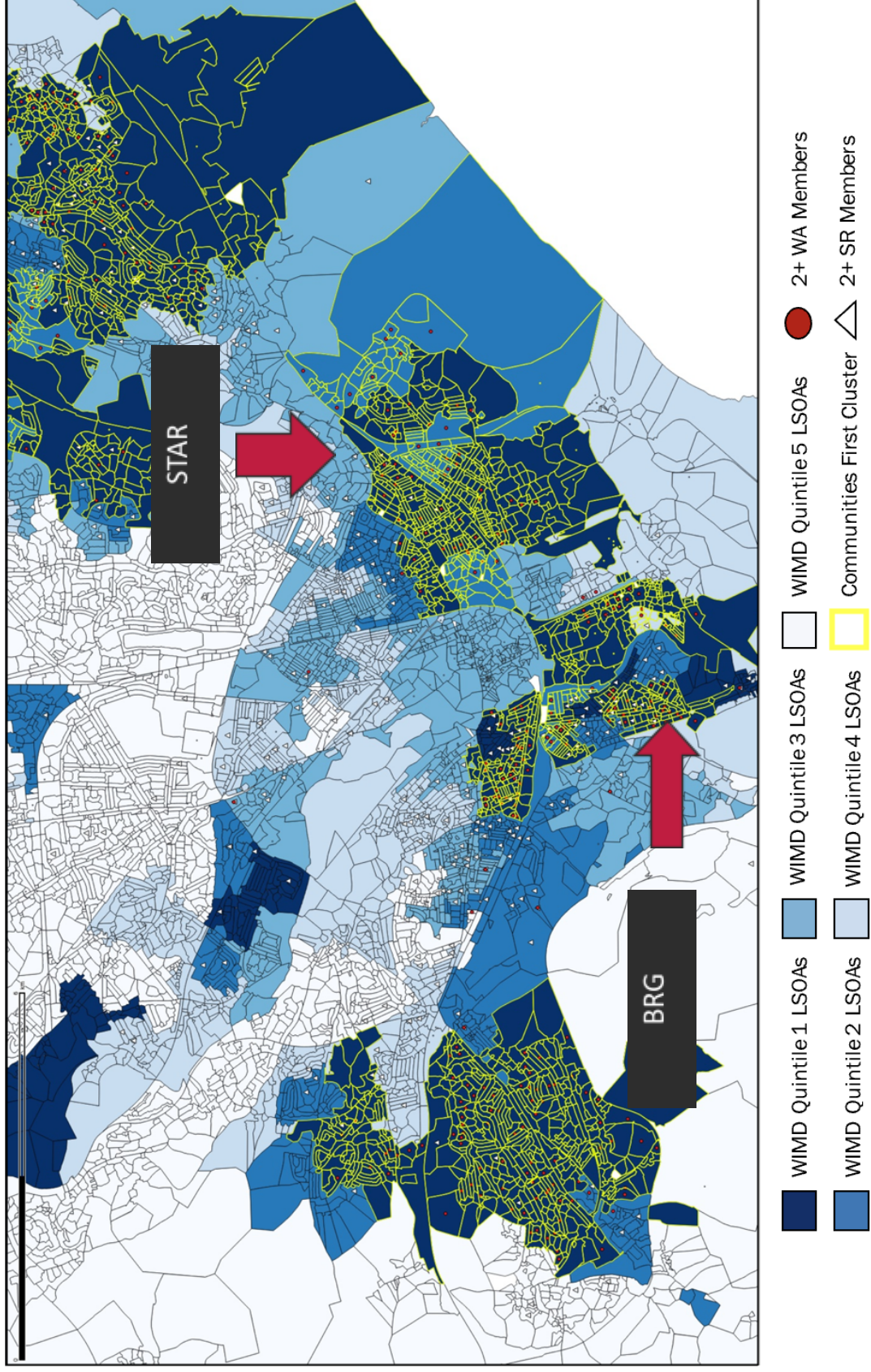


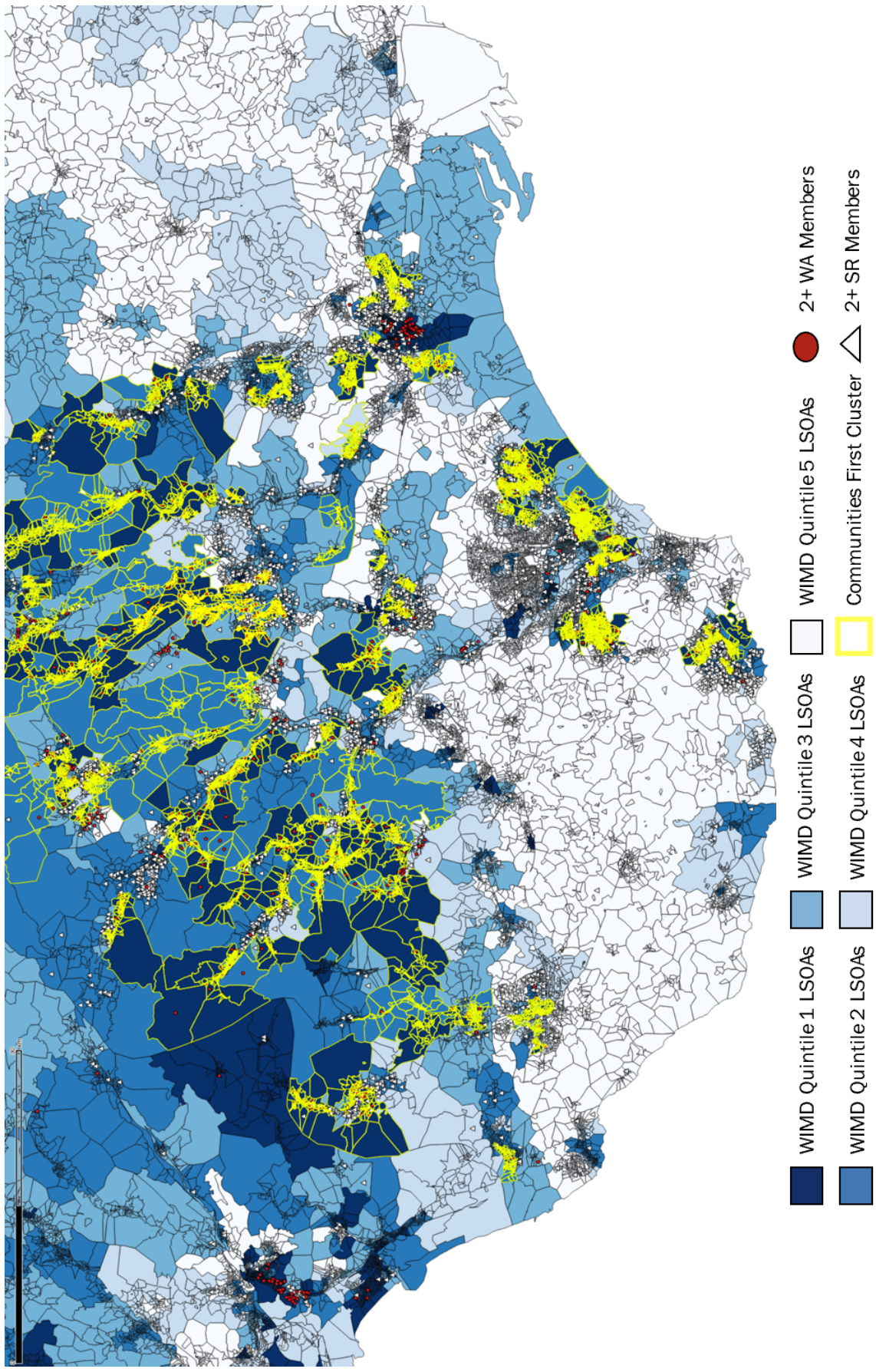
Figure 6.1 shows that all areas within the yellow boundaries (the Communities First LSOAs) are dark blue– these are the areas with the highest levels of deprivation. In theory, this is helpful – it suggests that by targeting these Communities First areas, interventions should be targeting those people who most need support as the areas are relatively homogenous in terms of their levels of relative multiple deprivation.

However, Figure 6.1 also highlights an issue with using the Communities First tool: there are a number of LSOAs around Cardiff that are in quintile 1 (the highest level of multiple deprivation) but fall outside of the Communities First areas mostly in and around the BRG area and to the North of BRG). Students living in these LSOAs would not be eligible to participate in the WP scheme at Cardiff University, despite living in an area of high deprivation (thus a primary target according to the primary policy goals). This chapter explores the issue further, using three different areas to explore the extent to which Communities First as a tool allows practitioners to meet the primary policy goals.

To do this, Communities First and WIMD LSOA data have been translated into postcode data, and this is mapped out alongside the home postcode of participants, as displayed in Figure 6.2 (see Chapter 5 section 5.6 for further information on the population).



Figure 6.2: Participant locations by Communities First and WIMD



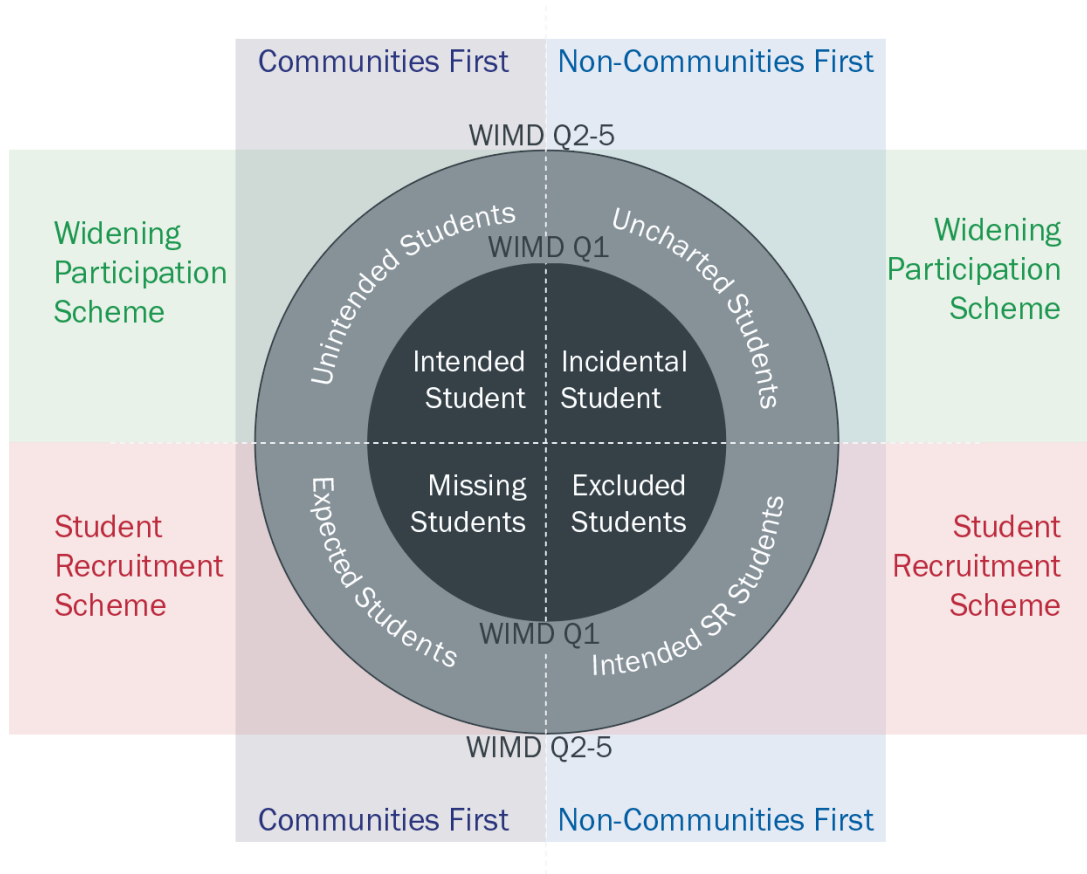
## DEVELOPING A MATRIX TO ANALYSE THE EFFECTS OF AREA-BASED TOOLS

When reporting to HEFCW, universities often report on the number of ‘eligible students’ who have participated in a WA programme – this is deemed as an appropriate short-term indicator of success as it might be a number of years before a student actually attends university. For example, Table 6.3 illustrates that of all participants on the WP scheme at Cardiff University, 95.7% live in a Communities First area (The reason it is not 100% will be explored further in Chapter 7). This figure would be reported to HEFCW. At 95.7% eligible participants, the figure would be well received with no cause for concern. Throughout this chapter, this is referred to as the ‘initial analysis’. However, this initial analysis fails to recognise that there are students who are missing out due to the limitations of the Communities First tool – it does not capture all deprivation (nor is it designed to), and it sometimes includes those who are not deprived.

This chapter seeks to overcome this issue and uses the smaller level geographies of WIMD, combined with the SR scheme, to analyse the efficacy of the Communities First as a policy tool for targeting those most under-represented. A matrix of student-area identities has been developed, providing a means of describing how students intersect with each of the categories used for the analysis: WIMD; Communities First; WP or Student Recruitment Scheme. The matrix provides eight possible outcomes (see Figure 6.3). The reasons behind why these occurrences happen will be explored further in Chapter 7 – for now, the analysis is more descriptive in nature.

**Intended Students:** These students are the intended beneficiaries of the widening participation programme. The students fall both within Communities First and WIMD Q1 areas and are correctly placed on the Widening Participation scheme.

**Figure 6.3: Student-area matrix**



**Excluded Students:** These students should be part of the widening participation scheme but are not. They live in WIMD Q1 areas, but unlike the ‘missing’ students they fall outside Communities First areas; as a result, their postcodes ‘lock’ them out of the WA provision. Based on the current system, they would not count towards institutional targets, despite living in the areas of high multiple deprivation.

**Unintended Students:** These students live within Communities First areas and benefit from the WA scheme but based on WIMD status might be deemed ‘unintended’ as they live in quintiles 2-5 (i.e., not in the highest levels of deprivation). While this might not meet the original policy goal, the students themselves, of course, might be very deprived (this returns to the issues of ecological fallacy as discussed in Chapter 2).

**Uncharted Student:** These students should not be on the WA scheme under either the Communities First or WIMD criteria, yet they are. Based on geographic eligibility, these students are not the intended beneficiaries of WA programmes and would not count towards targets.

**Expected students:** These students live in Communities First areas (so are eligible for WA programmes) but fall within WIMD Q2-5. Based on WIMD, they do not live in areas of high deprivation. However, according to the current system, they live in a Communities First area and would count towards institutional and governmental targets. These students benefit from the scheme as a result of the way the policy tool is designed.

**Intended SR Students:** These students are not eligible based on either criterion (WIMD or Communities First). They are correctly placed on the Student Recruitment scheme according to geographic deprivation.

## 6.4 GEOGRAPHIES OF ACCESS INTERVENTIONS IN SOUTH-EAST WALES

The initial analysis provides an overview of the geographies of students from SE Wales who participated in the WP and SR schemes. Following the initial analysis, three of the regions are selected as mini case studies, offering a more detailed analysis using the matrix developed above.

Table 6.2 shows the number of participants on each scheme by local authority and reveals a difference in the distribution of participants. Monmouthshire is the smallest group of the dataset with 15 participants, through to Rhondda Cynon Taf with 1100 participants. This may partly be explained by some areas having higher numbers of Communities First clusters than others (see Chapter 3). The table also shows a general trend that the greater the distance from Cardiff, the fewer the participants from that area, except for Rhondda Cynon Taf. However, the interview data reveals that there has been an active effort by the WA team at Cardiff University to engage pupils from this area due to it having a high concentration of Communities First postcodes.

<b>Table 6.2: Participants numbers by scheme and area</b>			
<b>Area</b>	<b>No. of WA Participants</b>	<b>Number of SR Participants</b>	<b>Total No. of Participants</b>
Blaenau Gwent	77 (74.8%)	26 (2.2%)	103 (2.37%)
Bridgend	93 (32.9%)	190 (67.1%)	283 (6.50%)
Caerphilly	334 (38.5%)	533 (61.5%)	867 (19.91%)
Cardiff	393 (51.5%)	374 (48.8%)	767 (17.61%)
Merthyr Tydfil	115 (49.1%)	119 (50.9%)	234 (5.37%)
Monmouthshire	0 (0.0%)	15 (100%)	15 (0.34%)
Neath Port Talbot	53 (55.8%)	42 (44.2%)	95 (2.18%)
Newport	98 (27.1%)	263 (72.9%)	361 (8.29%)
Rhondda Cynon Taf	496 (45.1%)	604 (54.9%)	1100 (25.26%)
Torfaen	61 (33.3%)	122 (66.7%)	183 (4.20%)
Vale of Glamorgan	49 (14.1%)	298 (85.9%)	347 (7.97%)
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1769 (40.5%)</b>	<b>2586 (59.4%)</b>	<b>4355</b>

Table 6.3 provides a breakdown of WA scheme participants by WIMD quintile, illustrating the distribution of participants across WIMD quintiles for each area. The analysis shows that the majority (81.3%) of those on the WA scheme do live in WIMD Q1 LSOAs (areas of highest relative deprivation). However, the table also reveals that 18.7% of students on the WA scheme live outside of Quintile 1.

<b>Table 6.3: WP students in Communities First Clusters by WIMD</b>						
<b>Area</b>	<b>% of WP students in each WIMD Quintile</b>					<b>Total (100%)</b>
	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>	<b>Q5</b>	
Blaenau Gwent	71.4%	26.0%	2.6%	0.0%	0.0%	77
Bridgend	94.6%	2.2%	3.2%	0.0%	0.0%	93
Caerphilly	58.4%	39.8%	0.3%	1.5%	0.0%	334
Cardiff	95.7%	2.5%	1.0%	0.5%	0.3%	393
Merthyr Tydfil	73.9%	15.7%	4.3%	0.0%	6.1%	115
Monmouthshire	0	0	0	0	0	0
Neath Port Talbot	96.2%	3.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	53
Newport	86.7%	12.2%	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%	98
Rhondda Cynon Taf	79.6%	17.1%	1.2%	0.8%	1.2%	496
Torfaen	98.4%	1.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	61
Vale of Glamorgan	98.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	49
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>81.3%</b>	<b>16.0%</b>	<b>1.2%</b>	<b>0.7%</b>	<b>0.8%</b>	<b>1769</b>

The analysis of Table 6.3 indicates there may be issues with the Communities First tool: it cannot be assumed that LSOAs in Communities First clusters are all in WIMD quintile 1.

Table 6.4 provides an overview of participants who registered for both schemes and ended up on the Student Recruitment scheme. The analysis reveals that 192 people on the SR scheme (8.5%) live in WIMD Q1 – these students are under-represented in Higher Education (according to HEFCW – see Chapter 3) but have been placed on the SR scheme. The analyses so far help to identify such anomalies, but the question remains as to whether the Communities First tool can overcome these issues, and why WIMD Q1 LSOAs are not targeted by the practitioners.

The analysis shows a pattern emerging whereby those areas that have the highest accuracy for WP scheme participants living in a WIMD Q1 LSOAs also appear to have the largest number of participants ‘missing out’, as is the case with Torfaen: 98.4% on the WP scheme live in Q1 (Table 5.3), and 11.9% of SR scheme participants live in WIMD Q1 (Table 5.4). The inverse is also true: areas that are only moderately accurate for ensuring those on the WP scheme live in WIMD Q1 areas are less likely to have individuals ‘missing out’ because they have the wrong postcode, as seen in Merthyr Tydfil: 73.9% of those on the WP scheme live in WIMD Q1 (Table 5.3), and 0% of SR participants live in WIMD Q1 (Table 5.4).



<b>Table 6.4: Percentage of participants on SR Scheme by Local Authority and WIMD quintile</b>						
<b>Area</b>	<b>% of SR students in each WIMD Quintile</b>					<b>Total (100%)</b>
	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>	<b>Q5</b>	
Blaenau Gwent	0.0%	52.6%	47.4%	0.0%	0.0%	19
Bridgend	8.3%	34.6%	17.3%	21.2%	18.6%	156
Caerphilly	5.6%	18.7%	26.7%	19.9%	29.1%	498
Cardiff	15.5%	25.5%	23.1%	18.3%	17.6%	290
Merthyr Tydfil	0.0%	26.6%	30.3%	24.8%	18.3%	109
Monmouthshire	6.7%	6.7%	26.7%	13.3%	46.7%	15
Neath Port Talbot	2.9%	34.3%	42.9%	11.4%	8.6%	35
Newport	6.9%	25.5%	23.1%	12.5%	31.9%	216
Rhondda Cynon Taf	9.9%	45.9%	22.8%	13.0%	8.4%	545
Torfaen	11.9%	32.1%	12.8%	24.8%	18.3%	109
Vale of Glamorgan	8.3%	34.3%	7.9%	10.6%	38.9%	265
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>8.5%</b>	<b>31.2%</b>	<b>22.0%</b>	<b>16.4%</b>	<b>21.8%</b>	<b>2257</b>

This trend continues into the three largest regions of the study (by sample size): Cardiff (17.61% of the sample), Caerphilly (19.91% of the sample) and Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) (25.26% of the sample). Given that they reflect the trends already observed and make up almost two-thirds of the entire data set, these three areas are chosen as mini case studies for further analysis. The student-area matrix has been applied to the data for Cardiff, RCT and Caerphilly regions, to allow further analysis, as shown in Table 6.5.

**Table 6.5: Applying the student-area matrix to the chosen regions**

Area	Scheme	Communities First		Non-Communities First	
		WIMDQ1	WIMDQ2-5	WIMDQ1	WIMDQ2-5
Cardiff (100%)	WP Scheme	Intended 48.9%	Unintended 0.7%	Incidental 0.1%	Uncharted 1.6%
	SR Scheme	Missing 10.7%	Expected 0.3%	Excluded 5.9%	Intended SR 31.9%
RCT (100%)	WP Scheme	Intended 35.7%	Unintended 7.1%	Incidental 0.2%	Uncharted 2.1%
	SR Scheme	Missing 4.3%	Expected 1.1%	Excluded 4.9%	Intended SR 44.6%
Caerphilly (100%)	WP Scheme	Intended 22.4%	Unintended 15.0%	Incidental 0.1%	Uncharted 1.0%
	SR Scheme	Missing 2.4%	Expected 1.6	Excluded 3.2%	Intended SR 54.2%

There is, however, a key pragmatic point to make here. Communities First was not intended to be a scientific capture of deprivation – the areas follow real-world definitions of communities and natural boundaries (particularly the third development phase of Communities First – see Chapter 3). The Clusters also need to be contiguous – they will naturally include some less deprived ‘bits’ to avoid strange ‘holes’. However, the application of this contiguous approach is not equal across Communities First areas (as Figure 6.1 Illustrates). This may cause problems for using Communities First as a tool for targeting.

## CASE STUDIES: CARDIFF

Cardiff has the highest population of all areas in the study at 362,800 people and is the most densely populated local authority of the sample with 2,574 people per km<sup>2</sup> (ONS 2019). It is also home to Cardiff University where the WP and Student Recruitment schemes that form the dataset for this research are based. It has the third-highest number of participants for both schemes combined (see Table 6.2: WA = 334, SR = 374), making up 17.61% of the dataset. The split of participants between the two schemes is relatively even, with the

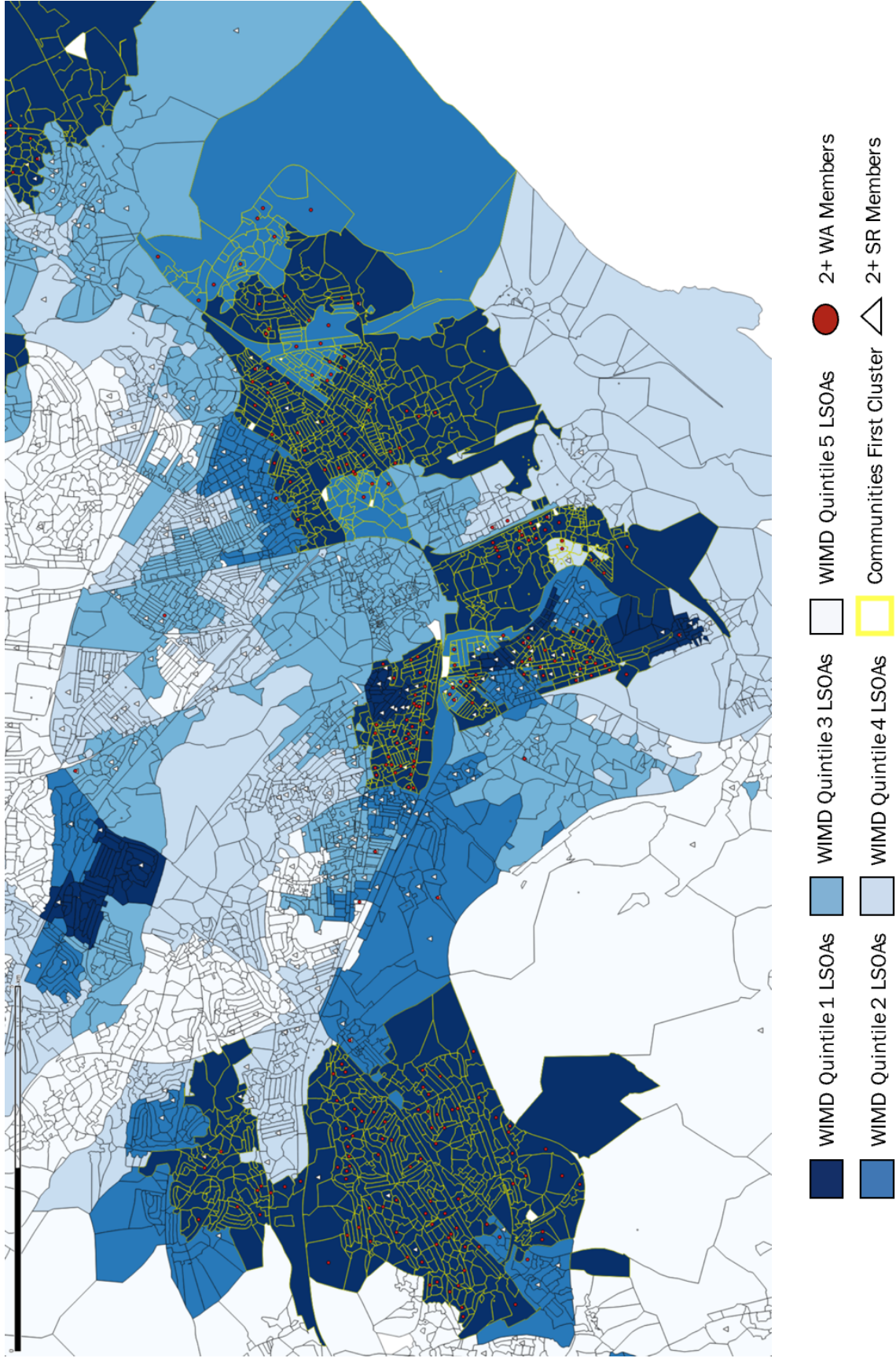
WP scheme comprising 51.5% of Cardiff participants and 48.5% making up the SR scheme cohort.

In Cardiff, the Communities First policy tool appears to work well for those who live in Communities First areas (see Table 5.3): 95.7% of participants on the WP scheme do live in the areas of highest deprivation, and as a result, Cardiff has a low proportion of students on the scheme living outside of WIMD Q1 areas (4.3%). From this initial analysis, a conclusion might be drawn that the way in which Communities First has been implemented as a tool for targeting is effective in Cardiff as a high proportion of those on the scheme do live in areas of highest deprivation.

However, effective area-based tools should not only be accurate for those on the scheme but also those outside of the scheme to ensure no one is missing out. To do this, the SR scheme is used as a comparative tool. The analysis in Table 3 demonstrates that 15.5% of students on the SR scheme live in WIMD Q1; based on their WIMD area, these are students who could be benefiting from the WA scheme but are not. This is represented visually in Figure 6.4.

The visualisation of the data through GIS also highlights that there are students on the SR scheme living in Communities First LSOAs. Two possible reasons are offered for this. Firstly, it could be a result of individual agency: a decision by the individual not to participate in the WA scheme, which is highly difficult to account for and falls outside the scope of this research. Secondly, it could be the result of a systematic problem, either with the policy itself, or implementation through interventions or enactment. This might be incorrect postcode data provided by the individual, out-dated databases used by the institution, the student may have moved house so no longer lived in a Communities First area, but the school/practitioner/university did not want to exclude them, or a problem with the design of the intervention or enactment by practitioners (e.g. a simple admin error). The use of the student-area matrix to analyse student data, alongside the interview data from practitioners, allows these issues to be explored further.

Figure 6.4: Participants by Communities First and WIMD (Cardiff)



**Table 6.5a:** Applying the student-area framework to the chosen regions (Cardiff)

Area	Scheme	Communities First		Non-Communities First	
		WIMDQ1	WIMDQ2-5	WIMDQ1	WIMDQ2-5
Cardiff (100%)	WP Scheme	Intended WP 48.9%	Unintended 0.7%	Incidental 0.1%	Uncharted 1.6%
	SR Scheme	Missing 10.7%	Expected 0.3%	Excluded 5.9%	Intended SR 31.9%

The data for Cardiff (Table 6.5a) reveals that 48.9% of all participants are ‘intended WP students’ and correctly placed on the WP scheme. 31.9% of all participants are ‘Intended SR students’, also correctly placed as they did not fulfil the criteria for socio-economic deprivation (based on postcode – the proxy for LSOA). The overall percentage of students who are placed correctly as a result of the area-based tool (whether on the WP scheme or the SR scheme) is the overall percentage for Intended WP, Intended SR, and Incidental students, and for Cardiff comes to 80.9% of all students. This means that 19.1% of students across both schemes in Cardiff are on the ‘wrong’ scheme - they are either missing out on the support they should be receiving, or they are receiving support that is not necessarily intended for them (based on the Communities First policy tool).

The 19.1% of students who are placed incorrectly encompass five of the student-area categories: unintended; uncharted; missing; expected and excluded. Two of these categories are students who are left out of the WP scheme but currently eligible and thus indicate problems with the implementation of the Communities First policy as a tool for targeting: expected and missing students. 10.7% of the Cardiff students are missing and live in Communities First WIMD Q1 areas but are on the SR Scheme. 0.3% are expected students, and whilst these are technically eligible by having a Communities First postcode and would count towards national targets, they do

not live in WIMD Q1 areas. This equates to 11.0% of all students in the Cardiff dataset that are currently eligible to receive support but are not.

In addition to this, 5.9% of the students in Cardiff are excluded; these students miss out on support as a result of ecological fallacy: they are locked out of the support because they do not live in a Communities First LSOA, regardless of the fact that they do live in WIMD Q1 areas. Unintended students are also a consequence of ecological fallacy, but in this case, they are benefitting from it because the wider poverty of their surrounding areas place them in a Communities First area, regardless of the fact they live outside of WIMD Q1.

While the initial analysis might indicate that the Communities First tool in Cardiff is fairly effective for targeting under-represented students, with 95.5% of students on the WA scheme living in WIMD Q1, the application of the student-area matrix allows efficacy of the tool to be re-defined based on those missing out. Doing so illustrates that in Cardiff, 80.9% of students are correctly placed; 19.1% of students are incorrectly placed (i.e., because the policy excludes them, some students may be missing out on joining a scheme that could be useful to them). This indicates that the programme is not as effective in Cardiff as first assumed. Two further areas are analysed as a means of comparison.

## CASE STUDIES: RHONDDA CYNON TAF

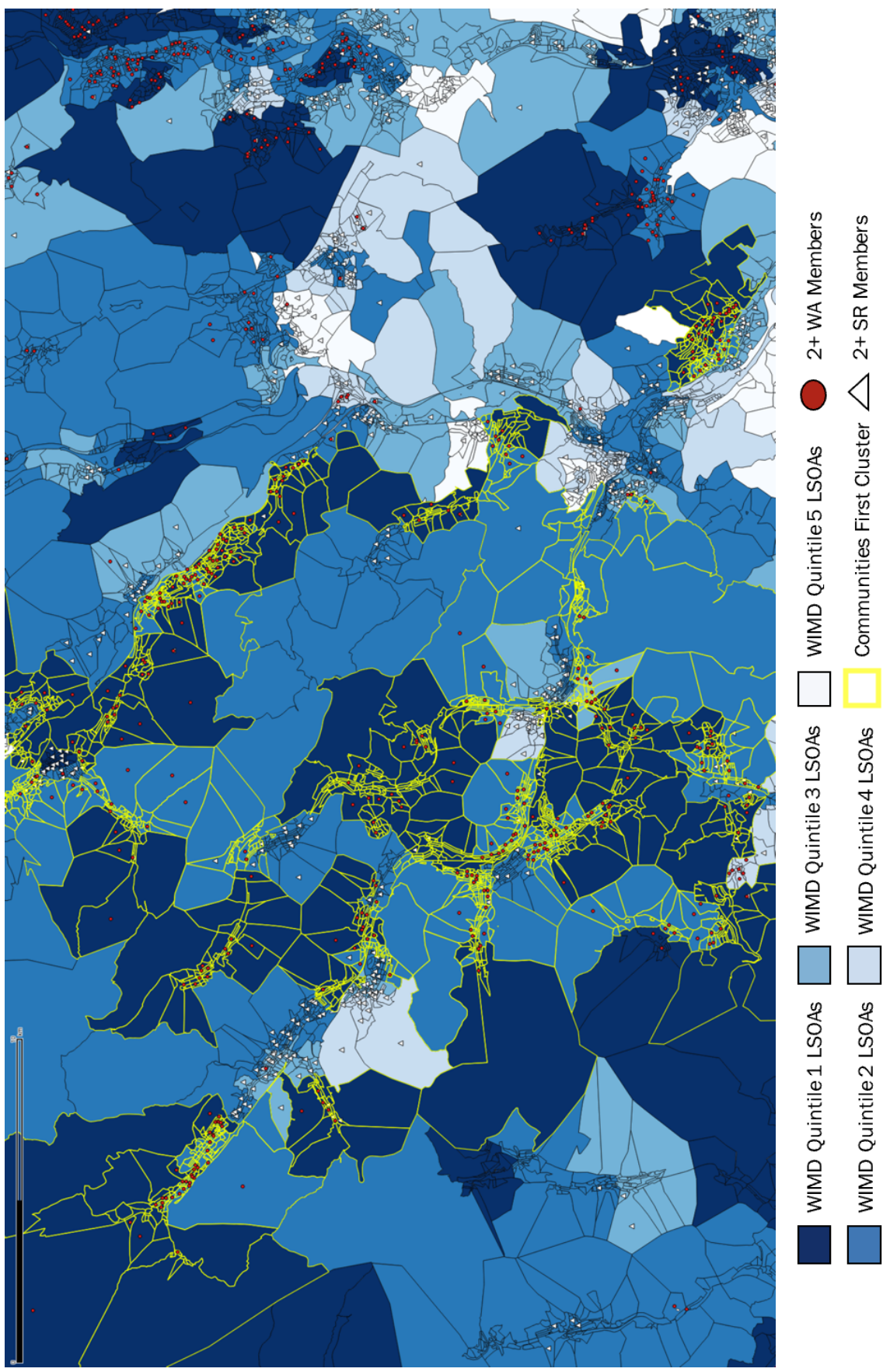
Rhondda Cynon Taf is the second regional case study for this chapter. The ex-mining area consists of five valleys, and, due to high levels of deprivation following the closure of mines, the area has been a major focus of regeneration (Welsh Government 2016). With a population of 239,000, Rhondda Cynon Taf is the third-largest region in Wales and has a population density of 563/km<sup>2</sup> (ONS 2019). It is the second-largest local authority area in this study and, as seen in Table 6.2, the sample from Rhondda Cynon Taf has the highest number of participants in the dataset, (n= 1100), making up 25.26% of the research population. This includes 496 (45.1%) participants on the Widening Participation scheme and 604 (54.9%) on the Student Recruitment scheme.

Unlike Cardiff, at first the Communities First tool in Rhondda Cynon Taf does not appear to be as accurate for identifying those living in highest levels of deprivation: 79.6% of participants on the Widening Participation scheme live in WIMD Q1, resulting in RCT having a higher proportion of students on the WA Scheme living in WIMD Q2-5 (20.4% in RCT in comparison to 4.3% in Cardiff – see Table 6.3).

There are also students who live in WIMD Q1 areas on the SR scheme, as seen in Table 6.4 and visualised in Figure 6.8: 9.9% of participants on the student recruitment scheme are missing out (5.6% less than Cardiff).



Figure 6.5: Participants by Communities First and WIMD (RCT)





Applying the student-area matrix (Table 6.5b) shows that 80.5% of students in RCT are correctly placed – this encompasses intended WA students (35.7%), intended SR students (44.6%) and incidental students (0.2%). Interestingly, this is a similar figure of correctly placed students to Cardiff (80.9%). However, RCT has a higher percentage of unintended students on the WA scheme (7.1%) and fewer missing and excluded students. The analysis suggests that in order for area-based approaches to be accurate across all the population (not just for those on the scheme), there might be a trade-off and a need to admit more unintended students onto the scheme to reduce the proportion of students who are missing or excluded. This is visually represented in Figure 6.5.

**Table 6.5b: Applying the student-area matrix to the chosen regions (RCT)**

Area	Scheme	Communities First		Non-Communities First	
		WIMDQ1	WIMDQ2-5	WIMDQ1	WIMDQ2-5
RCT (100%)	WP Scheme	Intended 35.7%	Unintended 7.1%	Incidental 0.2%	Uncharted 2.1%
	SR Scheme	Missing 4.3%	Expected 1.1%	Excluded 4.9%	Intended SR 44.6%

The incidental students are those who fall outside of Communities First yet have been placed on the WA scheme. They do, however, live in WIMD Q1 areas so are eligible based on socio-economic deprivation. For RCT, incidental students make up 0.2% of the group. Uncharted students are a slightly more ‘problematic’ group to define. These students fall outside of the eligibility of both area-based tools (Communities First and WIMD). It is impossible to know from the quantitative data why these students have been placed on the WA scheme. However, it became clear when talking to practitioners throughout the interviews that, on occasion, they use their discretion to admit students to the WA scheme -even when they fall outside of the area-based criteria. Whilst rare, this finding is interesting and brings into question how the practitioners, through enactment,

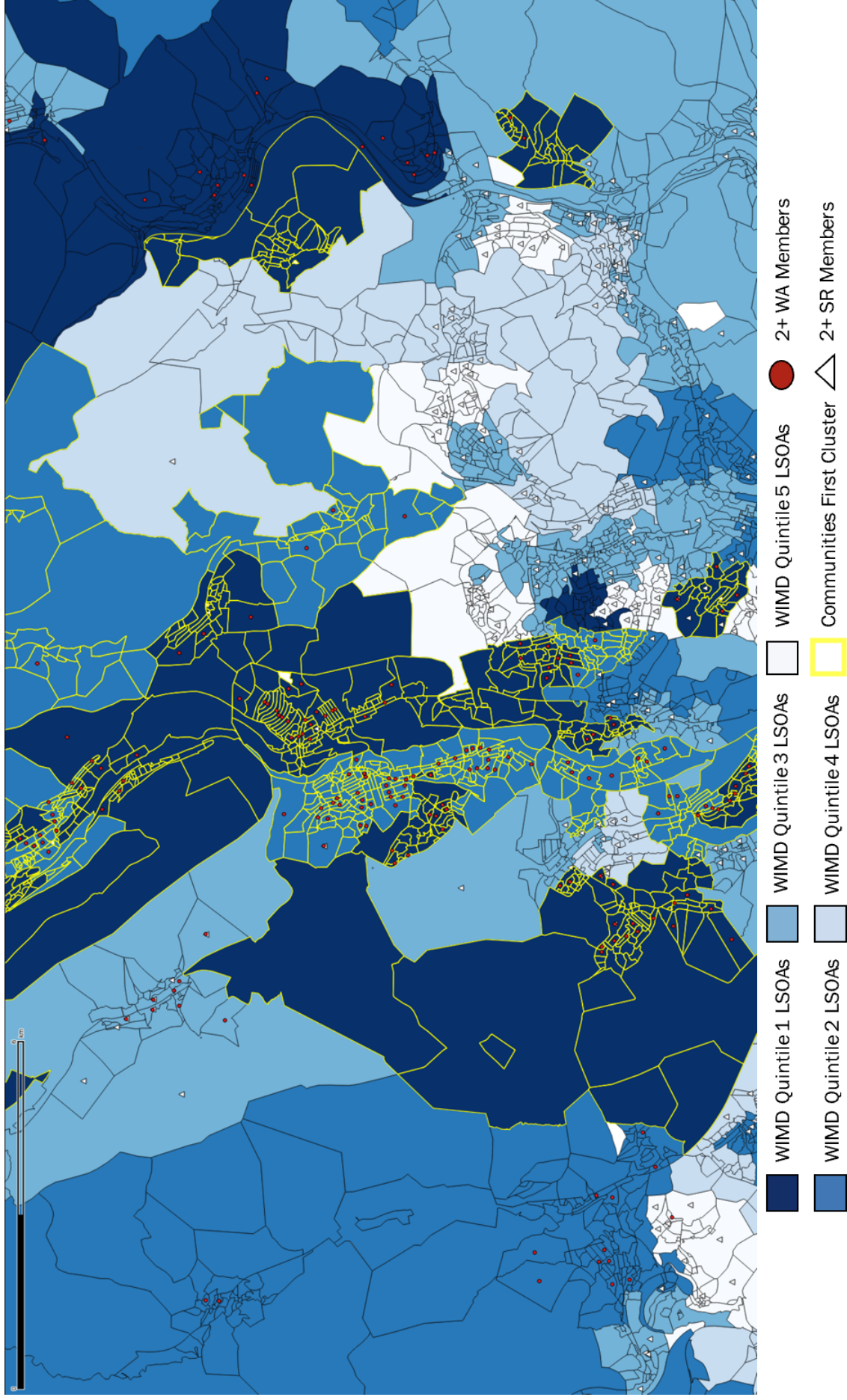
can use their own expertise and knowledge to mitigate against the risks of area-based approaches, or indeed whether they might reinforce inequalities – this will be discussed further in Chapters 7 and 8. If we are to mitigate against the risks of area-based tools by drawing on practitioner knowledge, we might expect to see an increase in the proportion of incidental and unchartered students, but this might also have implications for fairness, transparency and parity.

The analyses for both RCT and Cardiff have demonstrated that assessing the effectiveness of area-based tools is more complex than simply reporting on the eligibility of students who have participated in an intervention. To gain a more detailed understanding, it is necessary to look at the implications for those within and without the Communities First areas. Whilst Communities First in Cardiff is particularly effective for ensuring the majority of those on the WA scheme do live in WIMD Q1 areas, the Communities First tool in RCT was less accurate. The subsequent analysis for Caerphilly suggests that a high percentage of unintended students might not be as bad as it may seem at first. While initially, it appears that the area-based tool is weakest in Caerphilly, applying the student-area definitions offers an alternative way to both analyse the data and consider how to assess the ‘effectiveness’ of the Communities First tool.

## CASE STUDIES: CAERPHILLY

Caerphilly is the fifth largest district of Wales and the third largest sample for this research. It has a population of 180,000 and a population density of 563 per km<sup>2</sup> (ONS 2019). The sample from Caerphilly consists of 334 on the Widening Participation scheme and 533 on the Student Recruitment scheme (see Table 6.4). When used as a tool for targeting in Caerphilly, Communities First appears to be least accurate for targeting those most in need. 58.4% of participants on the Widening Participation scheme are correctly targeted, resulting in 41.6% of students on the WP scheme who live in WIMD Q2-5 (see Table 5.3).

Figure 6.6: Participants by Communities First and WIMD (Caerphilly)



Through the initial analysis, Caerphilly appears to be the least accurate based on the higher proportion of students living in WIMD Q2-5 on the WA scheme. Applying the matrix, we see that 76% of students in Caerphilly have been placed correctly on the schemes (22.4% Intended WA students, 0.1% Incidental students and 54.2% Intended SR students). This is slightly lower than the overall percentage of correctly placed students for Cardiff and Rhondda Cynon Taf. Given that no baseline data is available, it is difficult to assess whether this level of accuracy is tolerable. However, we do know that Cardiff University has taken the strictest approach to using the Communities First tool, so it is possible to cautiously assume that the three other policy interventions (First Campus, Community, and the Roadshow interventions) would be less accurate – although further research would be needed to confirm this. This analysis is visually represented in Figure 6.6.

**Table 6.5c:** Applying the student-area matrix to the chosen regions (Caerphilly)

Area	Scheme	Communities First		Non-Communities First	
		WIMDQ1	WIMDQ2-5	WIMDQ1	WIMDQ2-5
Caerphilly (100%)	WP Scheme	Intended 22.4%	Unintended 15.0%	Incidental 0.1%	Uncharted 1.0%
	SR Scheme	Missing 2.4%	Expected 1.6	Excluded 3.2%	Intended SR 54.2%

Caerphilly has the highest percentage of unintended students (15.0%) and the lowest proportion of Intended WA students (22.4%). Whilst at first this appears ineffective, Caerphilly has the lowest percentage of Missing students (2.4%) and Excluded students (3.2%). Most likely as a result of the heterogeneity of the Caerphilly region, the Communities First tool, whilst at first appearing less effective because it has admitted more ‘unintended students’ onto the scheme, has reduced the proportion of Missing and Excluded students whilst also securing a higher percentage of Intended SR students.

This definition can be used to analyse the efficacy of Communities First for Cardiff (Missing =10.7%; excluded = 5.9%) and Rhondda Cynon Taf (Missing =4.3%; excluded = 4.9%) to understand that Caerphilly (Missing = 2.4%; Excluded = 3.2%) might actually be the area where Communities First is most effective for ensuring the lowest proportion of missing and excluded students. This produces an alternative narrative for understanding what ‘success’ for the policy tool is – importantly, this new narrative is inclusive of those who fall outside of the existing Communities First postcode system but live in WIMD Q1 LSOAs (which aligns with the primary policy goal). The current narrative used by Cardiff University ignores the fact that even with 90% of students on a programme coming from a Communities First area, there is a high population living in deprivation who are not captured by the Communities First tool.

Using the framework, it is possible to redefine the ‘efficacy’ of the Communities First policy tool as a tool for targeting in relation to the proportion of students who are either missing or excluded from the WA intervention. Doing so provides a very different narrative: Cardiff goes from being the most effective to the least, and vice versa for Caerphilly. The reason for defining ‘efficacy based on those who are missing or excluded is relatively obvious but easily overlooked: the focus is to ensure the use of the tool allows the primary policy goals to be met, but it does not necessarily need to exclude groups (this will be discussed further in Chapter 8). Students living outside of WIMD Q1 areas may require the support for other reasons beyond area-based deprivation, and we should be encouraging practitioners to use their expertise and knowledge to identify individuals outside of the area-based tool.

## 6.5 GIS ANALYSIS

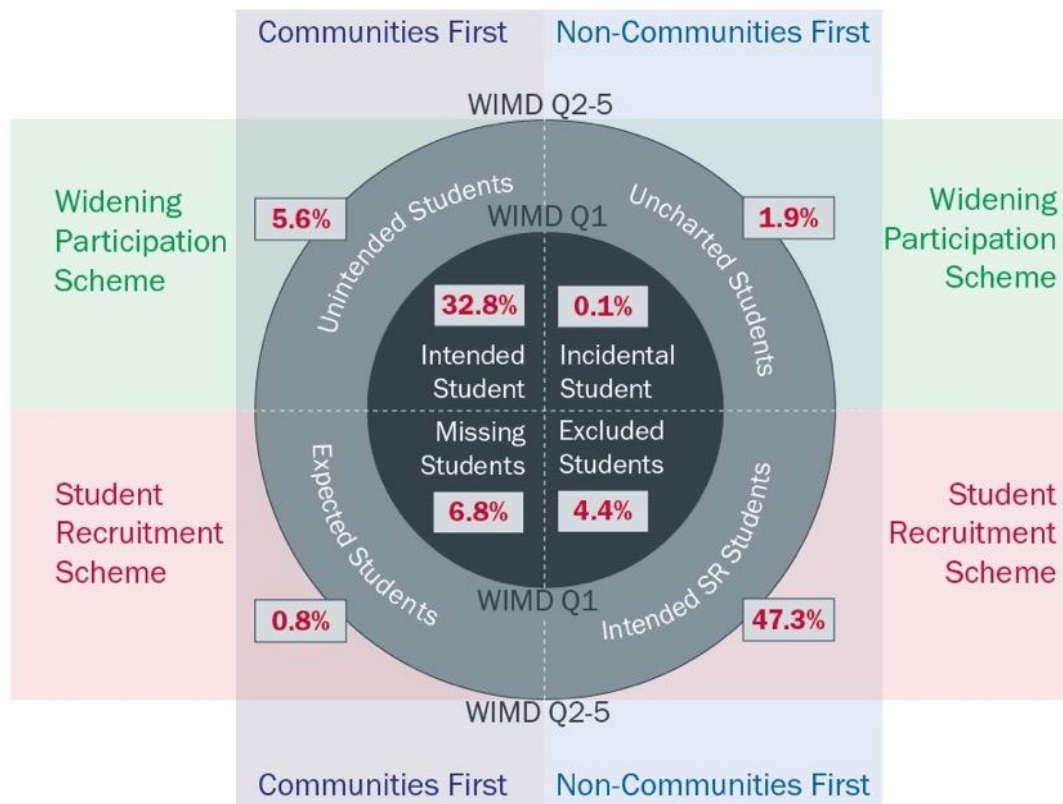
The full analysis of the three regions through the student-area matrix is summarised in Table 6.6 and Figure 6.7, which now also include the overall percentages of students from the case studies used for this chapter.

**Table 6.6: Applying the student-area definitions to the chosen regions**

Area	Scheme	Communities First		Non-Communities First	
		WIMDQ1	WIMDQ2-5	WIMDQ1	WIMDQ2-5
Cardiff (100%)	WP Scheme	Intended 48.9%	Unintended 0.7%	Incidental 0.1%	Uncharted 1.6%
	SR Scheme	Missing 10.7%	Expected 0.3%	Excluded 5.9%	Intended SR 31.9%
RCT (100%)	WP Scheme	Intended 35.7%	Unintended 7.1%	Incidental 0.2%	Uncharted 2.1%
	SR Scheme	Missing 4.3%	Expected 1.1%	Excluded 4.9%	Intended SR 44.6%
Caerphilly (100%)	WP Scheme	Intended 22.4%	Unintended 15.0%	Incidental 0.1%	Uncharted 1.0%
	SR Scheme	Missing 2.4%	Expected 1.6	Excluded 3.2%	Intended SR 54.2%
ALL DATA (100%)	WP Scheme	Intended 32.8%	Unintended 5.7%	Incidental 0.1%	Uncharted 1.9%
	SR Scheme	Missing 6.8%	Expected 0.8%	Excluded 4.4%	Intended SR 47.3%

To date, reporting of university access programmes to HEFCW is based on the percentage of students engaging in programmes from Communities First areas. The development of the student-area matrix as an analytical tool demonstrates that this current approach masks some of the risks of using Communities First as an area-based policy tool in this way; it hides the proportion of students who are missing out on support. The application of the area framework provides a way of re-framing this – rather than efficacy being measured as the percentage of eligible students from Communities First areas, it could be measured in terms of reducing the number of students who are missing out on support. The three case studies also demonstrate that the more inclusive the system is (i.e., casting the net wider), the less likely there are to be students who are missing out.

**Figure 6.7: SE Wales student-area matrix**



**Table 6.7: Eligible students vs Exclusion/Missing Rate by area**

Area	% of eligible students	Exclusion rate (missing + excluded)
Cardiff	95.7%	16.6%
RCT	79.6%	8.2%
Caerphilly	58.4%	5.6%

The data presented in Table 6.7 shows that whilst the Communities First tool might appear to be most effective in Cardiff (95.7% eligible compared to 79.6% in RCT and 58.4% in Caerphilly), Caerphilly has the lowest proportion students excluded by the intervention (5.6% in comparison to 8.2% RCT and 16.6% in Cardiff). The more heterogeneous the area, the less likely there are to be students missed by the tool.

The following have been observed through the geospatial data analysis:

1. Communities First has higher accuracy in urban/high population density areas for ensuring those on the WA schemes live in areas of high deprivation (WIMD Q1)
2. The more homogenous an area is, the more accurate the Communities First tool for identifying students living in areas of high deprivation.
3. However, areas that are homogenous are also more likely to have a higher percentage of students who live in nearby areas of high deprivation missing out
4. The inverse to (3) is also true: areas that are heterogeneous (with a lower percentage of WA students living in WIMD Q1 areas) have fewer students missing out.
5. The disconnection between the design of the intervention and the primary policy aims means that some students are excluded (4.4%) from the intervention, despite meeting the policy aim of WIMD Q1, because the intervention was only designed to capture Communities First students.

The analysis helps to re-frame the narrative: while the Communities First tool may appear to be accurate in some areas (e.g., Cardiff) and less accurate in others (e.g., Caerphilly), this narrative fails to recognise the students who are missing out.

The data in Figure 6.7 shows that Communities First is somewhat effective for targeting: 80.2% of students across both schemes being correctly placed: 32.8% are intended WP students, 47.3% are Intended SR students and 0.1% are incidental students. However, 19.8% of students could have been placed on the other scheme: of most concern is the 6.8% that are missing students (this is not due to the design of the policy tool, but rather the design of the intervention and use of the tool by practitioners) and 4.4% that are excluded students (a result of ecological fallacy and the design of the intervention) – a combined total of 11.2% of students who could be on the WA scheme – and would meet the primary policy goal - but are not.



The data indicates that improvements could be made to how the Communities First tool is used, and this would enable practitioners, through suitably designed interventions, to meet the primary policy goals. However, the data also shows that Communities First varies across Local Authorities in its ability to capture students living in areas of high deprivation. While Cardiff is more accurate for identifying WIMD Q1 areas, more students missed out. Conversely in Caerphilly, there were more unintended students benefiting from the programmes, but a lower proportion of students missing out.

## **6.6 APPLYING THE GIS ANALYSIS TO THE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX**

The GIS analysis takes one example of a widening access intervention (Cardiff University) and uses it as a case study to explore the efficacy of the Communities First tool for targeting those most under-represented in Higher Education. The intervention at Cardiff University aligns to the Administrative Implementation and is characterised by low conflict and low ambiguity. This results in a highly structured programme that closely follows the policy intention (to support those from Communities First areas). The intervention is designed – in theory at least - with strict adherence to the policy, permitting entry to the programme only with the right postcode. Despite strict use of the area-based tool, this results in 80.2% accuracy. While it was not possible within the remit of this study to replicate the GIS analysis for the other three cases of policy intervention, it is possible to draw on interview data to theorise the efficacy of Communities First tool for the remaining three cases: First Campus; Higher Education Roadshow; and Communities First homework club (see Table 6.1 for a summary of the policy interventions and their approach to implementing the policy tool).

We can expect the efficacy of the interventions to vary depending on how the area-based tool is used. The Cardiff University intervention is likely to have the highest efficacy. After Cardiff University, the homework club has the strictest criteria for participating in programmes. Most of the time they do in Communities First clusters do not require evidence of postcodes, but as their

programmes are heavily place-based (i.e., they promote specifically to all houses in Communities First areas and run programmes out of community centres in the Communities First areas), there is a high likelihood that the majority of participants will have a Communities First postcode.

The next is the First Campus programme, which takes a priority-schools-based approach to targeting. Rather than admit students to the programme based on individual postcodes (like Cardiff University), the programme has a list of eligible schools that can participate. These schools have 30% or more students from Communities First areas. The issue is that any student within that school can participate in the programme, making it difficult to ensure it is the Communities First students who are benefiting most from the programme.

Finally, the Higher Education Roadshow takes an all-schools approach but gives priority to schools with a high percentage of Communities First students. As a result, this intervention is likely to show the lowest efficacy for targeting students living in Communities First areas.

However, the GIS analysis shows that solely working within Communities First areas is problematic. As the efficacy of the interventions decreases (from Cardiff University with the highest efficacy through to the Higher Education Roadshow with the lowest efficacy), the flexibility for the intervention to work outside of the postcode systems increases. This is an important point, as the GIS analysis shows that some flexibility might be needed to mitigate against the pitfalls of area-based policy tools. However, this would also increase leakage and waste as resources would be allocated to young people living in affluent areas. The WA Policy Implementation framework and role of practitioners may provide a solution to this problem.

## **6.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has shown how the widening access policies (specifically the use of Communities First as the policy tool) is implemented in a variety of ways. The first research question addressed is to investigate how widening access policy is

turned into policy interventions, and how appropriate these interventions are for meeting the overall policy goal using the stipulated policy tool. Four cases of policy intervention are illustrated: Cardiff University, First Campus, the Roadshow and Community homework club interventions. The examples demonstrate that 1) the policy landscape can be interpreted in many ways, as evidenced by the variety of interventions, 2) that the design of each intervention affects its ability to target students living in Communities First areas most effectively (as a result of high conflict and/or ambiguity), and 3) perhaps most significantly, that none of the interventions were designed specifically to target WIMD, despite it being a stipulated priority in the policy documents, reflecting a disconnection between the design of interventions and the policy documents.

To summarise the findings of the GIS analysis, even where the policy tool is strictly adhered to (low ambiguity and conflict) there are problems of leakage, wastage, and exclusion. Consideration should be given to whether Communities First is a suitable policy tool, and how the different types of policy implementation might be used to ensure successful implementation of the policy. While Administrative interventions (such as Cardiff University) align closely to the policy goal, it is impacted by the issues of ecological fallacy that exist with any area-based approach. While the other types of intervention are less strict in their approach to the policy tool, they may be more inclusive (although inevitably, this will increase the risk of 'leakage').

Chapter 7 will draw on interview data to explore practitioner enactment. The focus on enactment will provide a means to explore the role of practitioners in implementing policy, and whether practitioner knowledge can be used to mitigate some of the risks of area-based tools.

# Chapter 7: Policy Implementation and practitioner perspectives

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## 7.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 7 explores widening access policy implementation through the perspectives of the university and community practitioners. As highlighted in Chapter 4, individual practitioners are instrumental in deciding the fate of policies and whether they largely succeed or fail. Regardless of how a policy intervention is designed, it requires practitioners to enact them in an appropriate way (i.e., with reference to the WA Policy Implementation Framework, the practitioner enactment needs to align with the type of the intervention). The Chapter builds on the analysis and discussion in Chapter 6, which focussed on policy interventions and revealed issues with the policy tool that might be explained at the enactment stage. This Chapter addresses RQ2, RQ3, and RQ4.

In Section 2, drawing on an initial analysis of the interview data, it will be argued that area-based policy tools are only partially effective instruments to capture potential students of Widening Access (WA) interventions. This reflects the findings in Chapter 6, but with a narrative that the GIS analysis could not provide.

Sections 3.3 – 3.7 will provide a deeper analysis by using the WA Policy Implementation Framework as a lens (see Figure 4.3). It will explore how

practitioner enactment of the policy impacts attempts to reach the original policy goal – and whether certain forms of enactment offer an alternative way of implementing the policy (for example, alternatives for targeting under-represented students who are not captured by area-based policy tools or defining outputs and measures of success differently). These sections are structured according to Administrative, Political, Experimental, and Symbolic Implementation. While 'top-down' approaches are prevalent throughout WA policy interventions and enactment, the potential benefits and risks of increasing 'bottom-up' approaches will also be explored.

Section 3.8 outlines some of the issues with aligning the data to the framework. Section 3.9 weaves together the analysis of interview data to present three key findings.

Section 3.10 is the discussion section of this thesis. The findings from both empirical chapters are drawn together through the WA Policy Implementation Framework. The Chapter concludes by suggesting that all four types of policy implementation might be used as part of a structured 'design process' for the overall policy goals of Widening Access to be met.

## **7.2 PROBLEMS WITH AREA-BASED TOOLS: INITIAL PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVES**

The practitioners widely discussed the problems of area-based policy tools, and an initial analysis of the data shows their concerns broadly fall into two categories – both of which are linked to ecological fallacy and resource allocation: leakage and exclusion.

Firstly, many practitioners had the experience of running events where some of the students attending did not need additional support; in their own words, this often related to 'wealthier families'. This problem is referred to by Harrison and Waller (2017) as 'leakage'. Mari explains this issue:

Everyone in our area has a Communities First postcode, but we've got the extremes from refugees and asylum seekers all the way through (and everything in between) to quite well-off families. We've got quite a few pockets of wealth, yeah... you know, we've got doctors, vets, headteachers and all sorts living in our [Communities First] area (...) sometimes they [the wealthy] live in them houses on purpose (...) the brighter families know where to go to buy a house because you get things like the childcare paid. That's a big difference if you've more than one child and want to go back to work.

**Mari** – Community Practitioner [clarification added]

All practitioners claimed, to some extent, to know families who 'played the game' to access resources, as illustrated by Mari. Recognition must be given to the fact that some wealthier families will 'play the game' and acquire a property in a location that gives them access to certain benefits (for example, see Galster and Killen 1995; Rosenbaum et al. 2002). It is possible to explore the problem through interview data and the experiences of the practitioners. Just as Gorard et al. (2019) state:

it is an 'ecological fallacy' to assume that people have the modal characteristics of those who live in the same area (or attend the same school of course)

Gorard et al. (2019, p.108)

The issue for the practitioners is that all households within one location are categorised the same, no matter if they are high or low income. As a result, wealthy families can access their programmes (and these families are not the under-represented (deprived) groups that the practitioners were aiming to engage with).

Secondly, the practitioners shared concerns about deprived students 'missing out' on the support they could be receiving because they fell outside of Communities First areas. This is referred to by Harrison and Waller (2017) as 'exclusion'. This was first evidenced by the analysis in Chapter 6: the aggregate data for Communities First applies a category to an area based on averages; it cannot provide insight into the distribution of deprivation at an individual level. While other measures, such as eligibility for Free School Meals, can provide this

granularity, Free School Meals does not form part of the overall policy guidance and tools (see Chapter 3).

Concentrations of the most deprived, for example within urban areas, are relatively easy to target within area-based tools (see Chapter 6). The issue is that this approach does not capture all people who live in high deprivation. In rural areas, in particular, people experiencing high levels of deprivation are more likely to be spread out, as Llio comments:

Communities First might work in certain areas, so Cardiff being one. You can go to university, and you can move just a short distance to go to university. And I think that leaves a... a ghetto and that becomes a Communities First area. It's much harder to do that in the valleys. Because of the geography of the valleys, things are more spread out, and the communities are more mixed, but there are people living in deprivation. It's just not as concentrated as the city. These places end up getting left out of the Communities First programme.

**Llio** – First Campus Practitioner

Llio draws on her own experiences to emphasise the difference in the efficacy of the Communities First tool between rural and urban areas. She claims that those living in high deprivation in rural areas are far less likely to be captured within area-based policies<sup>15</sup>. Many researchers have shown that the majority of deprived families do not live in the lowest quintile (and Communities First was not designed to capture all people living in deprivation), so area-based approaches can often 'miss' just as many of the intended people as they 'hit' (Rees et al. 2007; Harrison and Hatt 2010; Gorard et al. 2019). Considering this evidence, practitioners may need to work outside of the postcode areas to reach as many WA students<sup>16</sup> as possible – the WA Policy Implementation Framework may offer a way of doing this.

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<sup>15</sup> While Llio refers to the valleys as 'rural' much of these areas are officially defined as 'rural-urban' areas (UK Government 2016)

<sup>16</sup> Here, WA is meant in the broader sense of those who are under-represented and in need, rather than only people living in Communities First and WIMD Q1 LSOAs

Chapter 6 presented evidence that may suggest some practitioners were already operating outside of the Communities First tool. This is evidenced in the interview extracts throughout this Chapter; some practitioners knowingly engaged with students who were not from Communities First areas. This often happened in cases where practitioners identified a reason (outside of the Communities First tool), and they felt that the individual's circumstances justified access to an intervention. As the extracts will show, the reasons are often vague and while practitioners might use the terms 'deprived' or 'under-represented', these terms often lacked precise definitions (of course, the practitioners may have clear definitions, but these were not provided throughout the interviews). If practitioners are using their own, personal perspectives of deprivation and under-representation, this model of enactment may have significant negative implications for transparency and fairness.

Applying the empirical interview data to the WA Policy Implementation Framework offers a way of exploring practitioner enactment further to identify potential problems and opportunities for better understanding practitioner enactment.

### **7.3 ANALYSING POLICY ENACTMENT IN WIDENING PARTICIPATION: REVISITING THE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK**

As discussed in Chapter 4, the WA Policy Implementation Framework can be used to explore whether policy success can be achieved by ensuring the components of policy implementation (the policy interventions, tools, and practitioner enactment) are aligned according to the four types of implementation. The next sections will draw on interview data to further unpack the implications of the four different types of policy implementation through the lens of the practitioners. The sections are structured according to the categories of top-down, bottom-up, institutional-led and government-led (i.e., the vertical and horizontal groupings of the WA Policy Implementation Framework - see Figure 4.3 for the conceptual framework and Table 6.1 for a reminder of the



mapping of the empirical data to the framework). The framework provides the structure for analysing the practitioner responses.

Fifteen themes are identified through the analysis, and these are indicated through roman numerals throughout the following sections.

## 7.4 TOP-DOWN (ADMINISTRATIVE AND POLITICAL IMPLEMENTATION)

The data analysis of top-down approaches produces five key themes, which are summarised below under the following headings: benefits of a framework; an imperfect tool; technical problems; gatekeepers and structural barriers; and measuring success.

### i. Benefits of a framework

Firstly, the practitioners that align to top-down modes of implementation all perceived benefits of using the area-based tool:

But I don't know what the answer is. But we need some sort of target. If we didn't have Communities First what would we have?"

**Cara** – First Campus Practitioner –  
Political Implementation

It goes back to the benefits - it's something, you know, you can focus on. You know - you're given a target to get them [Communities First students] onto our programmes.

**Natasha** – First Campus Practitioner –  
Political Implementation

**Researcher:** What was the reason for introducing the eligibility criteria?

**Efa:** Well... I guess we realised that HEFCW were monitoring us [the university] on the numbers of Communities First students who applied. So..., yeah well it kind of made sense for us to change our eligibility criteria to match that (...) coz before we'd be putting in lots of effort but working with the wrong students. If HEFCW are going to [um] monitor us on Communities First it made sense to introduce the eligibility criteria

**Efa** – Cardiff University Practitioner –  
Administrative Implementation

At the enactment stage, they felt it was helpful and essential to have an area-based tool as it provides a structure for delivery. While the practitioners were able to articulate some of the problems with area-based tools (some of which are discussed below), they were keen to keep some sort of parameter for targeting, as illustrated by Natasha, Cara and Efa.

These practitioners not only saw the benefits of using area-based tools for targeting, but there was a general concern about how they could target students if they did not have the postcodes to go on – this is discussed below (see 'v. Measuring Success'). Efa also explained that having a framework 'external to the university' was helpful – she felt it was transparent and an easy way to communicate to students, parents, and teachers the eligibility criteria for the programme.

## **ii. An imperfect tool**

Despite seeing the benefits of using area-based tools for targeting and measuring success, the practitioners shared problems with using Communities First as a tool:

We certainly do [um] yeah, we need a guide, almost a framework of ways we should be targeting. So Communities First is good for that. But solely working in Communities First areas means we're neglecting other areas. There's a 'missed middle' I'd call it, of people who aren't in Communities First areas, but they also aren't well-off, so they do need our support.

**Dylan** – Cardiff University Practitioner –  
Administrative Implementation

So it isn't-it isn't a hard and fast rule just because you live in a Communities First area that you are not giving your children the opportunity? ... even if you are 100% targeting people that live in Communities First areas, you're not necessarily targeting the people that we mean to target.

**Cara** – First Campus Practitioner –  
Political Implementation

But the drawbacks [of using Communities First], as we keep saying, it may not mean you are still hitting the right people.

**Natasha** – First Campus Practitioner –  
Political Implementation

While these practitioners aim to admit only those who have a Communities First postcode to the WA programme, they felt this approach was difficult to manage in practice, as evidenced by the extracts from Dylan, Cara, and Natasha. The practitioners appreciate the framework that is provided by Communities First tool but articulate two main issues. Firstly, they felt some people are excluded by this system who need support.). Secondly, they felt that some people would benefit from this approach but may not really need the extra help (it is likely Cara is referring to students who are not themselves deprived, despite living in an area of high deprivation). Both of these are issues of ecological fallacy: those living outside Communities First areas are 'locked out' from support, and all those within the Community First areas benefit, regardless of their personal circumstance.

Implicit in the practitioners' responses was the notion that they would like more flexibility to be able to work outside of the parameters of the Communities First tool in certain circumstances. They believe that the Communities First tool creates a 'missed middle' – students who become more-deprived because they fall just outside of the Communities First areas so cannot access that support.

However, there was evidence that some flexibility was already built into the design of the interventions:

We do include ‘extenuating circumstances’ in our list of eligibility criteria... I think that’s really important, yeah (...) it gives us a bit of flexibility to admit students to the programme even if they don’t have the right postcode ... like... maybe they have a disability, or they [um] they come from a poor household but live outside of CF [Communities First] areas or something...

**Dylan** – Cardiff University Practitioner –  
Administrative Implementation

Dylan’s explanation goes some way to explaining the results in Chapter 6. The intervention at Cardiff University was designed in a way that enabled practitioners to use their judgement to by-pass the Communities First eligibility criteria if students could present extenuating circumstances. While Dylan’s example includes students with a disability or students who come from low-income households (and these may align to broader policy goals of ‘under-represented’ or ‘hard to reach’ students), it was not evident from the interviews that a structure was in place to help practitioner identify what classed as ‘extenuating’. This approach is vulnerable to inconsistencies in decision-making and may be highly influenced by individual practitioner perspectives and values. This also highlights issues around terminology within the policy (and whether the target is students who are under-represented, disadvantaged, deprived, or something else – as discussed in Chapter 3). While it was only Dylan that mentioned this, his interview suggests that it was common for practitioners at Cardiff University to operate in this way.

### **iii. Technical problems**

Some of the practitioners also highlighted technical issues they faced when using the tool in practice.

We sometimes have issues when the Communities First postcodes are updated. We might have been working with some pupils for three years and all of a sudden, they are no longer in a Communities First area, so they won’t count towards our targets, even if they come to university. That’s not ideal really.

**Efa** – Cardiff University Practitioner –

It is an absolute nightmare trying to keep track of the postcode changes with Communities First (...) There are so many pitfalls.... Like we discovered we were using an outdated list of postcodes [laughs] but it was so difficult trying to find out what the right list was! (...) And we might do it one way, but then the admissions team or people reporting to HEFCW and HESA might do it another way and use a different list! (...) then we face the question of if a student moves to Cardiff from a CF [Communities First] area, are they even a CF student anymore? (...) It might sound simple but ... yeah ... it's so complicated to implement in practice.

**Steffan** – Cardiff University Practitioner –  
Administrative Implementation

Efa and Steffan outline problems relating to the use of the Communities First tool over a period of time. These technical problems faced by the practitioners highlight that even where guidance is relatively unambiguous and the practitioners understand what tool they should be using, the reality of using that tool at the enactment stage can be complex and problematic. This will inevitably have implications for the success of the overall policy implementation.

This issue may also provide a reason as to why the GIS findings in Chapter 6 showed that the WP scheme at Cardiff University was not 100% accurate in capturing students from Communities First areas – if a student has been on the scheme for a couple of years, they may have previously been in a Communities First area, but that was no longer a Communities First area following an update to the list. However – this is not the only explanation, and further reasons are explored below.

Although conceptually this issue may apply to both Administrative and Political forms of implementation, there was no evidence from the First Campus practitioners that they experienced this problem. This is most likely as the First Campus practitioners relied on proxy measures of success – this is discussed below – see Section 7.7 on Government-Led implementation. Once again, this illustrates that the social reality does not always align perfectly to the conceptual

framework. Nevertheless, the framework provides a useful structure for analysing the data and drawing out findings.

#### iv. Gatekeepers and structural barriers

The practitioners aligning to top-down cases of implementation were also more likely to rely on gatekeepers to access students:

...although we try and encourage teachers to target pupils who need the extra push, or who need to be inspired, or who fall within our remits (...) [but] it doesn't necessarily mean that those are the people who attend our events

**Gwen** – First Campus Practitioner –  
Political Implementation

I've been to schools in Cardiff and the valleys, and you can tell sometimes that the background is quite disadvantaged. Some are alright, but others.... Yeah... I guess you'd call them... 'rough schools' or whatever (...) and we target these schools, but the problem is that teachers, when teachers hear that universities are coming in, they assume we want to work with the best group, or highest levels or whatever, so they don't understand we are trying to work with the other side – the ones that are struggling a bit more.

**Dylan** – Cardiff University Practitioner –  
Administrative Implementation

...perhaps the kids that we do want to work with are less well behaved. They have more challenging behaviour. And you can't blame teachers if they are bringing a group of say 30 kids out of school onto a bus into a university (...) they don't wanna be bringing 30 (..) y' know (..) 30 challenging kids, do they? They want to bring the best-behaved ones.

**Cara** – First Campus Practitioner –  
Political Implementation

This created several issues at the enactment stage. Despite knowing they needed to engage students from Communities First areas, the practitioners relied on teachers to facilitate access. What is expressed by the practitioners, albeit somewhat awkwardly, is the point that structural barriers to higher education are an issue and that these may be reinforced by teachers. Rather

than recognizing the barriers faced by underrepresented students (identified by using Communities First as a proxy indicator for deprivation), the practitioners felt that teachers would sometimes prevent those students from engaging with the practitioners in an attempt to present 'the best students' at their schools – it appears this was an attempt to protect the reputation of the school (and is perhaps an indication of the various pressures that teachers are under).

Cara explains that a difference in background is why it is often difficult for them to engage with the right people when enacting the policy.

it isn't always the case but (..) you know as a general rule of thumb I think that these kids are from background which you know (..) they are not going out \*\*to the theatre are they darling\*\* [said imitating 'posh' voice] you know? They are not sort of-not having all of these wonderful experiences outside of school.

**Cara** – First Campus Practitioner –  
Political Implementation

The correlation between teacher expectations of Communities First students (with poor behaviour, a lack of ability, or lack of 'good' experience - articulated by Cara in terms of going to the theatre) was made – in some way - by all practitioners who aligned to Administrative and Political forms of implementation. Cara's imitation of a 'posh' voice is reflective of these practitioners' awareness of some of the structural barriers faced by young people from deprived backgrounds, but within the confines of the interviews, the practitioners were not able to articulate how to overcome these issues.

This data from practitioner enactment suggests that these forms of implementation are more likely to rely on gatekeepers to access students (possibly because they are mass programmes), but that this creates an extra barrier to engaging with the students. If teachers are actively choosing not to prevent certain groups from engaging with practitioners, the delivery and enactment of interventions may be reinforcing inequalities (a point made by Burke (2017)).

#### v. Measuring success

The practitioners within these types did demonstrate some desire to work outside of the Communities First tool, but they had a very literal understanding of the overall policy goal, and this influenced their definitions of success:

It's capturing the soft skill too. This is the debate that keeps going on isn't it. But the hard outcome is they are at university and were involved in the programme so that is a success isn't it.

**Natasha** – First Campus Practitioner –  
Political Implementation

I know that without our intervention, or some intervention (...), they will not end up in Higher Education. Well - I don't know that for sure, but I highly suspect that would be the case. And actually, with the intervention, they do end up there \*and\* they stay in the course. I know that because they've graduated.

**Cara** – First Campus Practitioner –  
Political Implementation

It's so hard to measure success. We do try to track students into uni... but... yeah, I don't think there are suitable processes in place for it (...) Like we rely on students telling us they've applied or giving us their UCAS number so we can track them. Even if they don't do that, we'll check our applicant data (...) but it's like finding a needle in a haystack!

**Harri** – Cardiff University Practitioner  
Administrative Implementation

For these practitioners, their remit is to work with Communities First students, and if a student progresses to university it is a success, even if there is little evidence that the intervention of the First Campus programme was the cause of progression to university.

For the First Campus practitioners, the overall goal of improving access to Higher Education for Communities First students has been replaced by a proxy – programme attendees from Communities First areas – and this became the focus for the practitioners. These practitioners were aware of the long-term goal of improving access to university but often discussed in a way that disconnected



it from WA interventions. Instead, the practitioners used short-term indicators of success - 'eligible'<sup>17</sup> attendees, which resulted in broad-brush assumptions about the longer-term impact of programmes, as the example from Cara illustrates.

Cara works to an interpretation of success which she feels can be evidenced: A Communities First student attended her event and then, at some point in the future, progressed to university. For Cara, the causation is her programme, and she believes this can be evidenced. The evidence, however, is never particularly clear, even after several probing questions from the researcher.

There are subtle differences between the Administrative and Political types. Cardiff University practitioners did have more ownership over the tools, but they still had issues tracking students. It appears that the lack of linked data prevents the practitioners from being able to effectively track students from the interventions into university.

Relating back to the framework, top-down models are characterised by low ambiguity. HEFCW stipulates the overall goals and the tools by which the goal should be achieved (Communities First). HEFCW want improved access to HE, but these practitioners do not own the tools to measure or influence that, so they have to settle for a percentage of 'eligible attendees' at their events (or for Cardiff University, attempting to solely target Communities First students through using strict eligibility criteria). As a result of this, practitioners make broad sweeping claims about the impact of their programmes (as the examples from Natasha and Cara illustrate). However, the practitioners did demonstrate a desire to capture other measures of success, but the interview data suggests they felt constrained by the parameters of the policy tool, so had to focus on 'hard' targets.

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<sup>17</sup> As explained in Chapter 6, 'eligible' is defined as people with a Communities First postcode.

## 7.5 BOTTOM-UP (EXPERIMENTAL AND SYMBOLIC IMPLEMENTATION)

Through the data analysis of bottom-up cases of implementation, two key themes are identified: Relaxed use of the tool; and a focus on street-level knowledge. Due to the absence of an Experimental intervention (see Section 6.2), the analysis in this subsection relies solely on data that are aligned to one type (Symbolic Implementation). The findings could have been strengthened had an intervention aligning to Experimental implementation been identified through the data. Nevertheless, the conceptual and theoretical development of the framework (see Figure 4.3), provides a way of analysing this data even with the absence of a corresponding intervention for Experimental Implementation.

### vi. Relaxed use of the tool

Practitioners aligning to this type were much more relaxed in their use of Communities First as a tool:

Personally, I'll work with anyone, regardless of where they live. If they need the help then I'll offer it. Because sometimes there is no difference between families in terms of deprivation, the only difference is the postcode and they haven't reached the criteria for the LSOA and that sometimes locks them out.

**Daf** – Community Practitioner –  
Symbolic Implementation

We have people from other Communities First areas, and even non-Communities First areas taking part in our programmes. We don't exclude anyone, but we only actively promote within our cluster. Though I've had people living further afield who have accessed my programme.

**Ellis** – Community Practitioner –  
Symbolic Implementation

These practitioners understood Communities First as a proxy indicator and more of a guide rather than a hard rule, and they were willing to bend the rules to engage students, even if it did not fit with the targets they were set. The issue, however, is that there is not a suitable space within the broader policy landscape

to recognise the value of this. The practitioners understood that Communities First was a priority, but their focus on supporting people (possibly combined with ambiguous targets) meant they were unlikely to turn anyone away from their programmes.

#### **vii. Focus on developing street-level knowledge**

The community practitioners emphasised the importance of developing street-level knowledge and local networks:

The Communities First programme fits really well with the Widening Access agenda. (...) I find it really easy myself to engage with these communities because I'm from here. I've built up the trust and relationships across the areas I work in. (...) When people are trying to engage with communities, I become the pipeline and the key to the community. I know it well; I understand the make-up of it and know the leaders of the group (...) I find out what opportunities are available and introduce the universities to the people in my area.

**Daf** – Community Practitioner –  
Symbolic Implementation

It's all about networking and developing links. So when I came into the community I went around the centres of the community to find out who was working there and who worked in the community. A lot of it is word of mouth so it's important to know who you need to speak to. So that was a lot of my job.

**Ellis** – Community Practitioner –  
Symbolic Implementation

Daf and Ellis talk, in detail, about their well-developed understanding of the local communities – knowing who the leaders are and being able to go to their very local spheres (such as schools, mosques, temples or churches) to build and develop relationships. They support the university practitioners by promoting programmes to the right groups within their communities. The success of this enactment relies heavily on local relationships and partnerships, and implicit in the replies from the practitioners are notions of trust, reliability, experience, and reputation, both for practitioner-practitioner relationships and practitioner-community relationships. This defining feature of local coalitional

strength aligns to Symbolic Implementation, where contextual conditions and the strength of local partnerships determine the outcome. This differs from Political Implementation (First Campus), where the partnership is at the macro level between HEIs.

These practitioners all emphasised the importance of their role in being a gatekeeper to the community, as evidenced by Rees and Mari:

University is scary for some people and seems beyond their reach. So I think there's a need for things to start in the local community. It's so important that anyone engaging with communities understands the intricacies and complexities of those communities. And people in my kind of role can help with that. It's important for my role to develop partnerships with local communities and with the universities.

**Rees** – Community Practitioner –  
Symbolic Implementation

I think (...) universities really need to make good links with the individual community practitioners around education like me. That's key, because if you haven't got that link it's hard to promote the work (...) we are doing all the networking and recruiting for the programmes. If you haven't got that relationship, it doesn't matter if you run a programme in an area because you can't hook people into it.

**Mari** – Community Practitioner –  
Symbolic Implementation

This requires effective relationship building both with members of the local community and university practitioners. The practitioners aligning to Symbolic Implementation were heavily focused on building relationships to find out the needs of students on an individual basis. Implicit in the responses was the notion that the success of projects relied on this street-level knowledge. Rather than being driven by hard targets, they were far more interested in why an intervention worked (or not).

The data also suggests that within bottom-up approaches, practitioners might be able to work beyond the constraints of an area-based tool:

But I give priority to people living in my cluster... when I get to know people I learn more about their needs and how I can help (...) There are pockets of deprivation everywhere (...) but we know there are pockets of deprivation in other parts of the city that aren't receiving Communities First funding.

**Ellis** – Community Practitioner –  
Symbolic Implementation

According to the conceptual framework (Figure 4.3) this might be particularly relevant to Experimental Implementation (as the focus is on developing knowledge) – although there is no data to test this. However, the current policy definitions and metrics of success (Communities First participants in events or university enrolments from Communities First students) do not allow the outputs of this approach (the knowledge developed) to qualify as an indicator of 'success'.

If we continue to work with area-based policy tools and interventions, then street level practitioners might be needed. They work on the 'ground', developing their local-level knowledge and expertise, and they may be able to provide more nuanced targeting through developing knowledge of individual contexts (thus overcoming issues of ecological fallacy). These practitioners use Communities First as a guide, but also engage with learners outside of Communities First areas based on the context of each learner. However, there may be risks to this approach – these will be discussed in Section 7.9.

## **7.6 INSTITUTIONAL-LED IMPLEMENTATION (ADMINISTRATIVE AND EXPERIMENTAL)**

One theme is identified through the analysis of cases aligning to institutional-led implementation: agile work. As with the bottom-up approaches, the absence of an Experimental intervention is slightly problematic, but the conceptual framework (Figure 4.3) is used to support the analysis.

## viii. Agile

The risk of doing the wrong thing comes down to the flexibility that is afforded to Administrative and Experimental implementation. This form of policy implementation is more likely to be led by the institutions (and less likely to be externally funded), so there is less need to compromise with various partners. With this flexibility is the possibility to be more agile – to adapt quickly to situations as they happen.

Yeah... so generally the groups we work with are set by HEFCW.... but um... I guess, yeah – they can be quite slow at giving us new groups to work with. So sometimes we just decide to react more quickly and get ahead of them (...) Carers are a really good example of that. We identified this as a group we needed to support through speaking to people in the local community and meeting young people with caring responsibilities (...) So we included them as a group for our programmes. But it took HEFCW another couple of years to include carers as a group in their guidance

**Del** – Cardiff University Practitioner –

Yeah.... [um] I think there are benefits when we are in charge of the programme. Like .... we're able to make changes quite quickly, yeah ... A bit like introducing the eligibility criteria. We didn't have to ask permission from HEFCW like we'd have to for the First Campus programmes (...) yeah... we just make the change. I like that about our programmes (...) It feels like [um] we have more control I guess.

**Efa** – Cardiff University Practitioner –  
Administrative Implementation

The combination of Administrative and Experimental Implementation is particularly interesting – it has been identified by other researchers as a potentially powerful combination for implementing policies. For instance, as discussed in Chapter 4, Coleman et al. (2020) suggest the combination of these two types of implementation could form a 'design process' for interventions. Experimental implementation might be useful for gathering information in a pilot (or in Del's example, identifying new groups to work with). But there are limitations to this mode of implementation for scaling up. Coleman et al. (2020) suggest that after a pilot phase (Experimental Implementation), it might be more

suitable to shift an intervention to align more closely to Administrative Implementation, where there is less ambiguity. This process facilitates the scaling up of an intervention; the clear guidelines and measures associated with Administrative Implementation would enable easier comparison and benchmarking, but the knowledge developed through the Experimental Implementation could inform the design of the Administrative Implementation. The central, internal control that Efa discusses could form part of the design process for implementing policies internally within HEIs: Experimental Implementation for the pilot shifts to Administrative Implementation for full roll-out.

## 7.7 GOVERNMENT-LED IMPLEMENTATION (POLITICAL AND SYMBOLIC)

The First Campus and community interventions are characterised by external funding and strong collaboration (in both cases the funding is used as an incentive/leverage to encourage partnership working). These practitioners described collaboration and partnership working as key to the enactment of their interventions. The analysis is summarised under the following four headings: Perception of trust; compromise; proxy measures; and long-term funding

### ix. Perceptions of Trust

These practitioners all felt there were clear benefits to the strong collaborative nature with which they enacted the policy:

Oh yeah... there are definitely, [um], yeah there are benefits to working as a partnership (...) Sure there are some challenges... like... well, you probably know that already! [laughs]... but [um] yeah, I think schools appreciate universities working together (...) We don't go in representing one uni, but all unis (...) I think being part of a partnership means we're... yeah I guess a bit more respected or reputable.

**Cara** – Cardiff University Practitioner –  
Administrative Implementation

At this enactment stage, they felt that partnership work made it easier to engage key gatekeepers and helped strengthen trust in their work. Daf also shared the same view from a community perspective (as evidenced in his previous quote about being from the community and being trusted by community members). It appears for Daf that it was his local background combined with a national programme that meant it was easier to build and establish relationships with key gatekeepers and locals within the community – it gave the impression of a reputable project.

#### x. **Compromise**

A second issue that came through from modes of enactment with strong partnerships related to compromise:

Well we've [The First Campus Partnership] been running for years. And we know that we've done really good work in that time. But [um]... yeah I s'pose it's a bit disappointing that I can't tell you exactly how many students we've supported into uni (...) Gosh, that's a bit embarrassing really, isn't it? (...) We just haven't been able to monitor that ... I think [sigh].. yeah... sometimes it's maybe seen a bit contentious for us to monitor that as it'd look bad if one uni recruits loads more Communities First students than another.

**Natasha** – First Campus Practitioner –  
Political Implementation [clarification added]

Ideally, the hard outcomes HEFCW look for is that they [Communities First students] are at university and were involved in our programmes - so that is a success, isn't it? Although we can't track them into uni at the moment, so our targets are based on eligible attendees.

**Natasha** – First Campus Practitioner –  
Political Implementation

While these strong collaborative models may build trust, the practitioners all shared concerns that measures of success were not appropriate, and it was implicit in the responses that compromise might be the cause. This is reflected in the extracts above from Natasha. The WA Policy Implementation Framework can be used to offer a possible explanation: as a result of high ambiguity and/or conflict, the agreed targets are often those that will cause less conflict. For



instance, focusing on the percentage of eligible attendees is far less contentious than comparing undergraduate recruitment figures between institutions. This finding also aligns with the review of the policy literature in Chapter 3, where First Campus guidelines from HEFCW were ambiguous in terms of how the policy should be implemented. This issue was prominent throughout the interviews.

Compromise is a common issue with partnership working. Harrison and Waller (2017) interviewed practitioners and managers who had taken part in Aim Higher, a similar partnership approach to WP in England.

...the practicalities of a complex organisational framework often muddied the waters and created a 'partnership of least resistance' where sub-optimal activities were tolerated to maintain harmony.

Harrison & Waller (2017, p. 151)

Once again, this problematises the WA Policy Implementation typology as the empirical data is used to illustrate that ambiguity might be present even in the 'low ambiguity' type of Political Implementation (ambiguity in this sense relates to the use of the tool).

#### xi. Proxy measures

As discussed in Chapter 6, the First Campus programme creates a list of 'eligible schools', based on the percentage of Communities First students in that school:

...any school that has 30% of communities first pupils or above (...) we would look to target them. But within that, it's quite difficult because you can't guarantee that ... that it's those 30% that will attend the programme, but there's only so much you can do to ensure that you...you know, that you're meeting that postcode lottery target (...)

**Cara** – First Campus Practitioner –  
Political Implementation

so we have, you know, a spreadsheet that has all the schools within the area that we work in and the percentage of pupils with communities first postcodes. It doesn't necessarily mean that Communities First pupils attend our events.

**Gwen** – First Campus Practitioner –  
Political Implementation

The First Campus practitioners – as illustrated by Cara and Gwen (and Natasha under the theme 'x. Compromise' above) – explain that any student within that school can participate in First Campus programmes. Within this approach, students may be participating in a First Campus programme but not have a Communities First postcode – it becomes a 'postcode lottery'. HEFCW has approved this approach, but still expects the partnership to achieve a high percentage of Communities First students in their programmes, creating conflict between the overall goal and the means used to achieve it.

The issue of measuring the impact of these policy interventions was also shared by the community practitioners. Each Communities First cluster was organised differently, had developed distinctive policy interventions based on individual interpretations of the policy, and these interventions were enacted in various ways by the practitioners. Despite there being a straightforward area-based approach to the programme, the community practitioners found it challenging to demonstrate 'success' due to the high levels of policy conflict, ambiguity, and the use of proxy measures:

For the uni homework club, I'd have to .... umm... have so many children through the door. And um, they wanted to see an improvement in their numeracy and literacy and their attendance and attainment at school. But they didn't say how they wanted that recording. So it could be attendance or self-assessment.

**Mari** – Community Practitioner –  
Symbolic Implementation

um, we could be reaching a lot more people with our own targets – we could be more ambitious. (...) Communities First is ending, and I think this is because, um... they struggled to demonstrate success. But if I could do things differently, I would put in real target-driven approaches and

activities. And I think before it [Communities First] was removed, they really should have consulted on a local level to find out what the issues were. The more [local] you engage, the more you will understand the community. You'd need people who understand that to reach the targets.

**Daf** – Community Practitioner –  
Symbolic Implementation [clarification added]

This lack of an overall target (ambiguity) results in difficulty demonstrating the success of the Communities First programme overall, as articulated by Daf and Mar.

We have heard and seen examples of the life-changing impact that Communities First has had on individuals, and the great work that it has done in the communities across Wales (...) However, it is concerning that despite this investment, it is difficult to make an overall assessment of the success of the programme. At best, we are left with the sense that there have both been effective and less effective interventions.

Welsh Government (2017 p12)

Communities First was set a near-impossible task. One single programme, especially one with a community development focus, never had the ability to make significant in-roads into poverty reduction on a local or national scale. (...) In future, the approach to tackling poverty should be built on a sound evidence base. The Welsh Government should set specific, achievable, and measurable aims, underpinned by clear actions as to how they will be achieved ...

Welsh Government (2017 pp 18-19)

The Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee was tasked with leading an inquiry into the lessons learnt from the Communities First programme. The report comments on the lack of clarity in terms of aims and the lack of a clear action plan (i.e., high policy conflict and ambiguity). Whilst the report claims the success of the Communities First programme on a national level is almost impossible to demonstrate, there are many local-level examples of the positive work achieved by Communities First. Much of this relates to the policy enactment, whereby relationships were developed within local communities – this is not only a reflection of the practitioners' skill at developing relationships but also a reflection of the design of these policies (they were

designed to encourage strong partnership working). The data suggests this is made possible through the programme's flexible approach (flexibility which is primarily possible due to having high policy conflict and ambiguity).

While there is evidence of less ambiguity for the First Campus partnership (the overall goal was more easily articulated by the practitioners as increasing access to HE for Communities First students), lower levels of ambiguity (such as the lack of an appropriate tool or mechanism to monitor and track this target) contributed towards proxy measures being used, and the practitioners shared frustrations about this being inappropriate to evidence success.

#### **xii. Long-term funding and the risk of losing the local knowledge**

The final implication of these implementation types is related to funding. Both First Campus and the Community Practitioners received their intervention money from the Welsh Government (via HEFCW for First Campus). The WA Policy Implementation Framework helps to explain that funding is often used as leverage or an incentive to encourage actors to work together. However, there is a risk that funding will discontinue if these partnerships cannot demonstrate progress against the overall goal. If funding ends, there is a risk of losing the knowledge that has been built up by the practitioners – this has certainly been the case following the ending of the Communities First programme:

Yeah... I think um... [pause] Behind Communities First... we always knew that this is a government project, and they don't last... so behind Communities First we've got this.... 'So what happens when it ends?' (...) There's definitely a big risk. But it doesn't all have to disappear. So, like my new job is a good example now. I'm now employed by a [different institution], but my role is the same – to be the key link to the community I'm based in. I think that's so important.

**Daf** – Community Practitioner –  
Symbolic Implementation

but our funding is so sporadic and -y'know although that we've been going for such a long time -y'know it's almost sort of-it's so uncertain whether it is gonna continue, especially where things like communities first-the funding is drying up. But these long-term things although you can see the benefit of them y'know it is quite hard to establish [um] sort of- looking to the future [um] (..) to enable success.

**Cara** – First Campus Practitioner –  
Political Implementation

These concerns were also shared in the inquiry into the Communities First programme:

There is a significant risk that valuable community assets will be lost without Communities First funding (...) Communities First was often the 'glue' holding together a jigsaw of other programmes. The loss of Communities First risks having a significant impact on the effectiveness of other programmes.

Welsh Government (2017 p.11)

There are slight differences between Communities First and First Campus, as outlined in Chapter 3. Since its inception, First Campus has received funding on an annual basis, and the practitioners all shared their frustrations with this. Such short-term funding made it difficult to plan and monitor over a longer-term period. However, there was less ambiguity in the goal of First Campus, so practitioners were aware of the need to monitor progress to HE in some way (and many of them did this anecdotally in the absence of linked datasets). Communities First did have more stable funding (as the review in Chapter 3 shows), but the goal was more ambiguous, meaning it was more difficult for practitioners to illustrate how they contributed to the goal over time.

## **7.8 EXPLAINING ANOMALIES IN THE DATA: LOW-LEVEL CONFLICT AND THE WA POLICY IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK**

Through the analysis of the interview data, there were instances where the accounts of the practitioners did not neatly align with the framework and the implementation type of their intervention. There are three practitioners in

particular where this happened consistently: Llio, Del, and Rhian. The use of the framework is helpful to articulate differences between what the practitioners were saying and the design of their interventions (the latter aligned to Administrative and Political Implementation – see Table 6.1).

I was introduced to him [a community worker], and he gave me an 'in' - he gave me a good piece of advice. He said 'the people (...) have had so much regeneration that they don't want. So there's a sense in which they are Communities First and 'we've gotta fix it'. 'Let's build them a pool!' 'but we don't want a pool!' So there's a sense of sort of - don't tell them how you're gonna change them. Ask them how they want to be changed. Ask them what they want (...) because then they will buy into it.

**Llio – First Campus Practitioner**

Llio draws on the idea of regeneration to explain that her role is to be a listener and a facilitator and to develop programmes based on what the community want (rather than telling them what they need). This link to regeneration is a helpful tool to frame these practitioners' responses and is discussed further in Section 7.9.

This extract from Llio's interview is illustrative of the perspective adopted by this group of practitioners that was not expressed by those in the Administrative and Political types of implementation; they demonstrate a deeper level of engagement with the communities and a desire to develop knowledge and understanding – a feature that is not usually associated with Experimental Implementation (see Figure 4.3). Llio likens Widening Participation to regeneration and explains that it does not work if practitioners go in trying to 'fix' something with no real understanding of what the learners want. She believes that doing so might disengage people and achieve the opposite of what Widening Participation sets out to do.

What was it about the intervention that helped? It's a much harder question to ask, but a much more fruitful one ultimately because then you can replicate the part of that intervention that worked. So you can't... you can't just say 'we did this, and this many children went on '... ask those children - what specifically was it that they enjoyed? What specifically was it that made them consider Higher Education? What

specifically helped them to make that choice? (...) if you went back and asked all those students who now are at university 'how did you arrive here?', they may say 'somebody suggested it, so I just applied' - are you enjoying your course?' not really, but this is what I've been told to do'. So then, have you met your objective? No. You've ticked a box but, you know, you'd have to ask them how they came to that decision.

**Llio – First Campus Practitioner**

Llio also stresses the importance of understanding *why* something worked. For her, the progression of a Communities First student from her programme and onto Higher Education is not enough (although this would count under the current First Campus targets). Llio needs to understand what precisely was it about the intervention that helped that child to progress, and this is illustrative of Rhian and Del, too. A key feature within Experimental Implementation is a focus on asking questions to understand local context (rather than hard metrics and outputs) – and this is clearly the focus for these practitioners:

...cherry-picking students can be terrible for the students and it can be really difficult for those who, maybe don't live in a Communities First postcode but actually their teachers know their home life isn't supported or they aren't getting the support they need. Or maybe they need an additional push. We can only know that through individual relationships... yeah, either with the teachers, or ideally with the students

**Del – Cardiff University Practitioner**

These practitioners believe they need to get to know local communities to understand what they really need. Within Experimental Implementation, the definition of the intervention is dependent on the practitioners at the microlevel, their understanding of the policy, and the resources available to them. The three practitioners appear to align to this way of implementation. Despite not having an intervention in this implementation type: Llio (First Campus Practitioner), Del (Cardiff University Practitioner) and Rhian (First Campus Practitioner).

These cases are particularly interesting as they do not have a corresponding 'Experimental' intervention (see Section 6.2), nor is there a space for Experimental Implementation within the broader policy landscape (see Chapter 3). The literature used to inform the development of the WA Policy

Implementation framework in Chapter 4 argues that a successful outcome relies on the alignment of policy enactment and intervention with the policy intention. Without a corresponding intervention, these cases of practitioner enactment are problematic and unlikely to produce a successful policy outcome (because 'lessons learnt' or 'knowledge developed' – the suitable outcomes for Experimental Implementation - are not recognised as a suitable output in the policy guidance – see Chapter 3).

When there is tension between the approaches of the practitioners and the design of their intervention, it creates the possibility for practitioners' enactment to shift into a different implementation type. The matching of types across policy interventions and enactment is important in the implementation process: when the implementation types for the intervention and enactment align, policy implementation success is more likely (as highlighted by Coleman et al. (2020) in Chapter 4). Where they are not aligned, the conflict (in this case, low level conflict) can force the enactment into a different implementation type. This incongruence *between* components of policy implementation is problematic and makes it difficult for the policy goal to be achieved. A practitioner may 'rebel' against the policy, or even the policy intervention, and choose to enact the policy in a way that they see best by promoting their own values and perspectives. As a result, the practitioner may be operating within a different implementation type of the framework to that of their intervention. This is likely to lead to further goal incongruence and incompatibility of measures of success.

As outlined in Chapter 4, several authors who have developed Matland's framework have highlighted that both ambiguity and conflict in policy implementation create the possibility for practitioners to push their own perspectives and values (Northway et al 2007; McCreadie et al. 2008). In the case of these three practitioners (Llio, Del, and Rhian), they have developed their own understanding of the policy goal. As a result, these practitioners shift from the implementation type of their corresponding interventions to a different type; they have developed approaches to policy enactment that deviate from Administrative and Political Implementation. Instead, these practitioners appear to align more closely with Experimental Implementation.



Despite the initial tension there is low conflict (the overall goal is still to try to encourage progression to Higher Education for students from underrepresented backgrounds) but high ambiguity in terms of how 'under-represented' is defined, what counts as success, and how the goal is to be achieved. This low-level conflict was also identified in the review of literature in Chapter 4, and it can be used to explain why the practitioner enactment is different. The practitioners do not perceive there to be conflict – they believe they still align with the overall policy goal, which they interpret as supporting students to reach their potential. The framework here is useful as a diagnostic tool to identify and explain the misalignment

As the examples below will illustrate, these practitioners appear to be pushing their own values, and this did not necessarily align with the type of their interventions.

#### **xiii.     Rejecting top-down approaches**

The following extract from Llio offers an insightful narrative as to why some of the issues within Administrative and Political (top-down) implementation exist, and why she rejects them:

you know - really HEFCW never asked us if it [the First Campus programme] was effective and I don't think they really wanted to know. Don't tell them that! But I don't think they did. I think they just wanted to shift the money and make a token gesture (...) as long as we could say we've worked with X number of children and this is what we've done with them, they were happy with it.

**Llio - First Campus Practitioner**

While Llio is somewhat dismissive of HECW's intentions, this is her perspective (and it was not clear how much interaction Llio had with HEFCW). However, it is true that the outputs recognised (and thus 'valued') in the policy guidance is narrow and limited in that it tends to prioritise proxy measures. While direct tracking of students did not take place, HEFCW have monitored the national picture and there has been an increase in the proportion of Communities First students studying at university over the duration of the Reaching Wider

programme (however, there is no evidence to suggest whether or not the partnerships influenced this trend).

Llio continues to explain that this method of working may stigmatise the students they are attempting to support:

And I do think sometimes they feel very stigmatised. For no reason whatsoever. There's this sense of 'there's something wrong with you, and we're gonna fix it'. And 'we're gonna send this bunch of experts in who know nothing at all about, you know.... [to] your little community, to give you all these things that you don't flipping want. I would be cheesed off!! I'd think "I'm not swimming in that pool!" You know? That is my experience.

**Llio** - First Campus Practitioner

Unlike the practitioners who aligned to Administrative and Political Implementation, Llio, Del, and Rhian (practitioners who perhaps align more to Experimental Implementation and bottom-up approaches) could articulate slightly more nuanced understandings of what WA is (beyond the basic post-code definition adopted by the top-down practitioners). As the extract from Llio illustrates, their definitions are not solely based on postcodes, as was the case for those in the top-down cases, but more importantly, they acted on this in some way.

#### **xiv. Focusing on local-level knowledge**

Another example of the problematic alignment of these practitioners with their interventions was their focus on developing street-level knowledge (a feature more closely associated with Experimental Implementation). This led to these practitioners articulating what 'success' might look like beyond the postcode targets, instead defining it in a learner-centred way:

...on a more philosophical note, if a child consciously chooses not to go to university because they just see another option that's more beneficial to them ...Facilitating that in a child, so that they are not just doing what they think they have to do, would be okay too! But in a sense, if they have made that as a conscious choice, and it's not just, (um) a given for them. So, helping them to (...) yeah giving them the skills that they need to make decisions about what they wanna do with their life I think could be measured as success. But then how do you measure that with within our targets?

**Llio** - First Campus Practitioner

From a teacher's perspective I think that is a really hard task. Because cherry-picking students can be terrible for the students and it can be really difficult for those who, maybe don't live in a communities first postcode but actually their teachers know their home life isn't supported or they aren't getting the support they need. Or maybe they need an additional push.

**Del** - First Campus Practitioner

Llio suggests there are other ways of measuring success that could be used where Higher Education is not the right option for a student. Llio re-defines success as the students' capacity for active decision making (i.e., understanding the variety of options available before deciding, and not just going to university because that is the 'done thing'). A decision not to go to university is acceptable if that decision is active and the options are considered in full. Under Political Implementation (where First Campus and Llio's colleagues are situated) this would not count as success. However, within Llio's model of working (more closely aligned to Experimental policy implementation), she deems this a success because it is right for the learner, and she knows that because of the individual relationships she builds with learners. Despite Llio adopting a slightly different understanding of the policy goal to her colleagues in First Campus, Llio perceives her goals to be congruent with the overall policy goals (to do what is right for the student). This is particularly interesting, as it emphasises the difference between the macro goal (empowering young people and supporting opportunity) and a 'meta' goal (directing interventions at certain communities). The application of the WA Policy Implementation Framework provides the lens

for articulating this difference by differentiating between types of implementation. However, the evidence for this would primarily come from Experimental Implementation where there is a strong focus on developing knowledge (but there is no intervention aligned to Experimental Implementation, so this is problematic).

While this finding may also apply to Symbolic Implementation, there was no evidence of this throughout the data, once again illustrating the ‘messiness’ of reality when applying empirical data to the framework.

#### xv. Demonstrating Success

In comparison to Political and Symbolic enactment (where strong collaboration is a defining feature), these practitioners appeared to be more in control of the targets and measures they used at the enactment stage:

We’re asked to come up with targets for our First Campus programmes. But ... yeah, I guess I find this difficult. I don’t think it’s really possible to just decide what our programmes or targets should look like.... I mean, how can we do that, you know? We should be going and talking to individuals in the community and.... and finding out from them what they need. That should decide what our projects and targets look like, not us. And that might not have anything to do with university, but if it helps that kid develop that’s amazing.

**Rhian** – First Campus Practitioner

...if you've had a chat with one of the pupils and they've said 'oh yeah doing this has really made me want to study this subject' for me, nothing beats that. You just feel like you've made some kind of impact on one young person who needs it

**Del** – Cardiff University Practitioner

However, this does not mean that control had been given to them – it is possible they were pushing their own perspectives through enacting the policy. This might manifest through softer measures of success – such as focussing on the lessons learnt or developing local contextual knowledge of individuals. Where independent/institutional action is a strong characteristic, it should be easier for

practitioners to measure and demonstrate success as they do not have to compromise with partners.

There are also risks to this: these practitioners have developed their own interpretation of the policy goal (to do what is 'right' for the student – but this is only what the practitioner believes is right, i.e., their own perspective). With this came the risk of these practitioners going 'off-piste' altogether. While the extract from Del above illustrates she was more interested in finding out what worked (but aligned success to the overall policy goal of access to HE), Rhian was not so aligned.

Rhian's sense of social justice appears to be so strong that it dominates her enactment of the policy. Her interpretation of the policy goals is so ambiguous she is no longer aligned to the primary policy goal (access to HE) but focuses purely on wanting to help individuals develop – no matter what that looks like. Due to the independent characteristics of Administrative and Experimental enactment (i.e., they are institutional-led), there is less need to compromise on targets and programmes, meaning there is always a risk that the wrong path could be chosen. This highlights some risks with bottom-up approaches and will be discussed in further detail at the end of this chapter.

This suggests caution is needed, even when using the WA Policy Implementation framework: results can differ because of practitioner enactment. The framework is not a perfect tool, but it does help to diagnose possible issues.

## 7.9 FINDINGS: THE RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES IDENTIFIED THROUGH PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVES

Three main findings are identified through the data analysis, discussed below.

### FINDING 1: PROXIES, BINARY DEFINITIONS AND STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

Both Administrative and Political mode of policy implementation can be categorised as 'top-down' approaches. The data indicates that these cases of implementation are broad-brush: Communities First is used as a blunt tool for targeting, and the detail of individual context and circumstance is left out because the target is purposely a community. This is an issue that many other authors have highlighted (see Rees et al. 2007; Harrison and Hatt 2009; Harrison 2012a, b; Taylor et al. 2013; Harrison and McCaig 2015; Gorard et al. 2019). For the practitioners in this study, Communities First is the principal tool for both targeting and measuring success, and there is limited capacity to work outside of this system. The practitioners represented within the Administrative and Political cases of implementation recognise some of the limitations of area-based tools, but struggled to challenge definitions, policy, programmes (policy interventions) and practice (policy enactment).

These practitioners recognised that they were not fully in control of achieving the target. For example, they often relied on teachers as gatekeepers to access young people, and this highlighted further structural barriers to engaging with Communities First students. The practitioners recognised that teachers were faced with difficult decisions, too, and that teachers would often select those students who were most likely going to display 'good' behaviour and represent the school appropriately. This would potentially exclude Communities First students and those who most needed the support.

The analysis also suggests that using Communities First as a measure of success in WA is not only often misused, but as a proxy, it encourages practitioners to use simplistic and binary approaches to Widening Access (i.e.,

for the practitioners, they recognised that the 'success' of their work was predicated on whether or not a student has a Communities First postcode). Despite practitioners wanting to define success more broadly, they felt constrained by the parameters of the policy tool. The purpose of WA - to make "a significant contribution to the society and economy of Wales, and support social justice, social mobility and economic upskilling" (HEFCW 2020b, p. 6) – appears to be misaligned or reduced to solely to chasing the right postcodes – despite practitioners' awareness of the limitations of this. The practitioner act of chasing postcodes may, in fact, serve to "reproduce inequalities through homogenising technologies and dividing practices" (Burke et al. 2018, p. 18).

This concern is also shared by the practitioners, as illustrated by Llio. The data analysis indicates that within top-down approaches, practitioners treat learners in Communities First areas as one homogenous group in need of 'treatment' (WA interventions). This issue is highlighted by Kirton (2002) in her thesis: *Access to Higher Education: a case study of policy intentions and policy effects*. Kirton notes the recognition-redistribution tensions and draws on empirical data to demonstrate that the very act of targeting under-represented students may contribute to stigmatisation as it draws attention to their 'difference'. In their chapter on policy tools, Jann and Wegrich (2007) draw attention to the same issue, highlighting the risks of policy tools, specifically that tools lead to particular assumptions about 'problems, people and behaviour'.

All but three of the university practitioners used a model of enacting policy that used a binary definition of a widening access student, based on whether or not students have a Communities First postcode. However, the practitioners understood that Communities First was limited in its ability to define students, but they struggled to articulate any alternative options and felt restrained by the stipulated policy tools.

## FINDING 2: POLICY LIMITATIONS: FLEXIBILITY AND APPROVED OUTPUTS

HEFCW sets the Widening Participation policy goal (to improve access to Higher Education for students in Communities First areas). The empirical data is applied to the WA Policy Implementation Framework (developed in Chapter 4) to explain that there are two policy interventions operating in different types of the framework: Cardiff University, under Administrative Implementation, and First Campus under Political Implementation. The corresponding cases of enactment and practitioners operating within these types could see the benefits of these approaches, and many of them felt there was a need for this kind of framework. However, the interview data shows practitioners wanted some flexibility to work beyond these measures – but they could not articulate how this should be done. There is limited capacity for practitioners within Administrative and Political Implementation to work outside of the postcode measures and targets (based on the measures of success adopted). There are clear targets based on Communities First (either university enrolments from students in Communities First areas, or percentage of programme participants from Communities First areas). These top-down approaches do not provide the flexibility needed to be able to work beyond the postcode systems – although practitioners at Cardiff University had attempted to build in some flexibility, but it is unclear whether this was successful. The practitioners operate within relatively strict frameworks, with clear targets set for measuring success and benchmarking (i.e., using Communities First postcodes as an indicator).

Perhaps the policy is less important than the enactment: a competent practitioner with sound knowledge and skill-base should be able to see the advantages and disadvantages of an area-based policy tool, design a suitable intervention to mitigate against the risks and evaluate the outcomes. Whilst the practitioners operating under Political and Administrative Implementation were unable to do this, those under the bottom-up cases of implementation could. There was limited empirical evidence that this would be successful but adopting the design approach advocated by Coleman et al. (2020) might facilitate this (see Chapter 4 Section 4.5).



Trowler's work (2002) on HE policy intentions and outcomes reminds us that despite some authors seeing policy implementation being delivered with 'machine-like precision', it is, in fact, messy and unintended consequences of 'seemingly straightforward' policies are likely. This would seem to be the case for WA policy. Communities First is intended to be a tool to help practitioners identify the right people (and for institutions and government to somehow monitor and benchmark this). But the tool has become a restraint for some practitioners, in some cases preventing them from working beyond the tool to target those most in need. The GIS analysis in Chapter 6 illustrates this issue: even where it appears that the policy is being followed in a hierarchical, linear manner, there were 'wrong' students benefiting from the intervention at Cardiff University. There is a major question around the ethics of practitioners using their own knowledge (framed by their perspective and values) to target students and decide what counts as an 'extenuating circumstance'. This will be explored further in Section 7.9.

### FINDING 3: THE POWER OF STREET-LEVEL KNOWLEDGE

The data analysis suggests that the risks of top-down approaches can possibly be overcome with appropriate bottom-up approaches in place. In discussing how policy might fail, Hudson et al. (2019) draw attention to the importance of those at higher levels having an understanding of what happens on the frontline – a concept that Lipsky (2010) refers to as the 'street-level bureaucrat'. These frontline workers can exercise "discretionary powers". On an individual level, this may seem insignificant, but the aggregate result has the potential to significantly change policy intention (Hudson et al. 2019; Hudson 1993). As highlighted by Allcock et al. (2015), those on the frontline - in this case, the practitioners - will know more about the local context and challenges of delivery. Not only do practitioners need support to develop the relevant expertise, but they need the freedom to exercise them. This is reflected in the interview data: the practitioners representing bottom-up cases of implementation had developed strong local relationships that gave them access to contextual knowledge, and this was not seen through the top-down cases of enactment.

Two options from regeneration literature are offered here to overcome such implementation gap problems. Adamson and Bromiley (2013) suggest improved training opportunities for practitioners and better support mechanisms for participants. Focussing on regeneration, Gore and colleagues (2007) emphasise the importance of identifying solutions 'internal to the area itself'. Their research recommends that *"there should be greater recognition of the essentially local sphere in which many people still live and work"* (Gore et al. 2007, p. 69).

This aligns with the accounts of practitioners within Experimental and Symbolic implementation types, who emphasise the value of developing local relationships and a 'street-level' understanding of local communities. It is easy to look from the outside in and make recommendations for improvements, but Llio believes that practitioners need to get into the 'local sphere' (i.e., develop networks within the local communities) and talk to people in order to develop an authentic understanding of what is needed in the community. Adopting this approach could enable practitioners to identify individuals who live outside Communities First areas yet require additional support. The section on Symbolic enactment highlights some of the benefits of training people who are from the local area to work as community practitioners and gatekeepers.

There are, however, limitations of bottom-up approaches. The Community Practitioners struggled to demonstrate an impact on a national level. Further research would be required to identify whether the limitations of the top-down approaches can truly be overcome with bottom-up approaches, such as hiring practitioners to be frontline workers who can develop the expertise and knowledge of local spheres to move beyond the constraints of area-based approaches. It must be acknowledged that the ability for frontline practitioners to significantly change policy intention could be both positive and negative – while it may strengthen the policy implementation through the development of local-level knowledge, it also risks pushing the intervention further from the policy goal – particularly if a practitioner were to push personal perspectives that did not fully align to the primary goal.

The analysis illustrates that practitioners (and specifically how they enact policy) are instrumental in determining whether the policy is implemented successfully. It appears that the majority of practitioners (twelve out of the fifteen) were mostly operating within the type of their intervention. When the tools, interventions, and enactment are aligned to the same type, success is more likely. That is not to say their enactment was faultless– as the GIS analysis in Chapter 6 showed, even minor deviations from the intervention design can affect progress against the overall policy goal. But for the most part, the interventions were enacted according to their design.

For three of the practitioners, however, the ways in which they enacted the policy suggest they might be operating within a model that aligns to a different implementation type of the framework to that of their intervention (i.e., their approach to enactment and understanding of the interventions aligns to Experimental Implementation, not Political or Administrative Implementation where their interventions sat). The analysis suggests that low levels of conflict have resulted in practitioners promoting their own values, which appear to align to a different type.

The WA Policy Implementation Framework can be used in this way as a diagnostic tool. In this case, it helps to illustrate that practitioners have the ability to both undermine and strengthen the likelihood of successful implementation.

## **7.10 REVIEWING THE WA POLICY IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK**

In Chapters 6 and 7, empirical data is used to generate knowledge on the implementation of widening access policy in Wales. For the study, WA policy implementation is split into three components: policy interventions, policy tools, and practitioner enactment. The development of the WA Policy Implementation Framework, informed by Matland’s ambiguity-conflict matrix (Matland 1995), provided a theoretical lens through which the data has been analysed.

Chapter 6 illustrated how the WA policy landscape (summarised in Chapter 3) has the potential to be interpreted in a variety of ways. In this study, four cases of

policy interventions are outlined, each with varying ability to meet the policy goal. The definitions provided by practitioners showed that the policy goal itself is often understood in different ways throughout the policy implementation process. This manifests through different intervention designs, varying use of the policy tool, and, ultimately, alternative approaches to enacting the policy by practitioners. The approaches to enactment have the potential to both undermine and strengthen the likelihood of implementation success.

For widening access policy in Wales, the stipulated tools are Communities First and WIMD. There was a disconnection between the interventions and the institutional measures: none of the practitioners used WIMD as a tool, nor was it monitored through their interventions, but it was used by HEIs and included in HESA returns. It was not clear why this had happened, but the GIS analysis illustrates that it did have implications for meeting the primary policy goal.

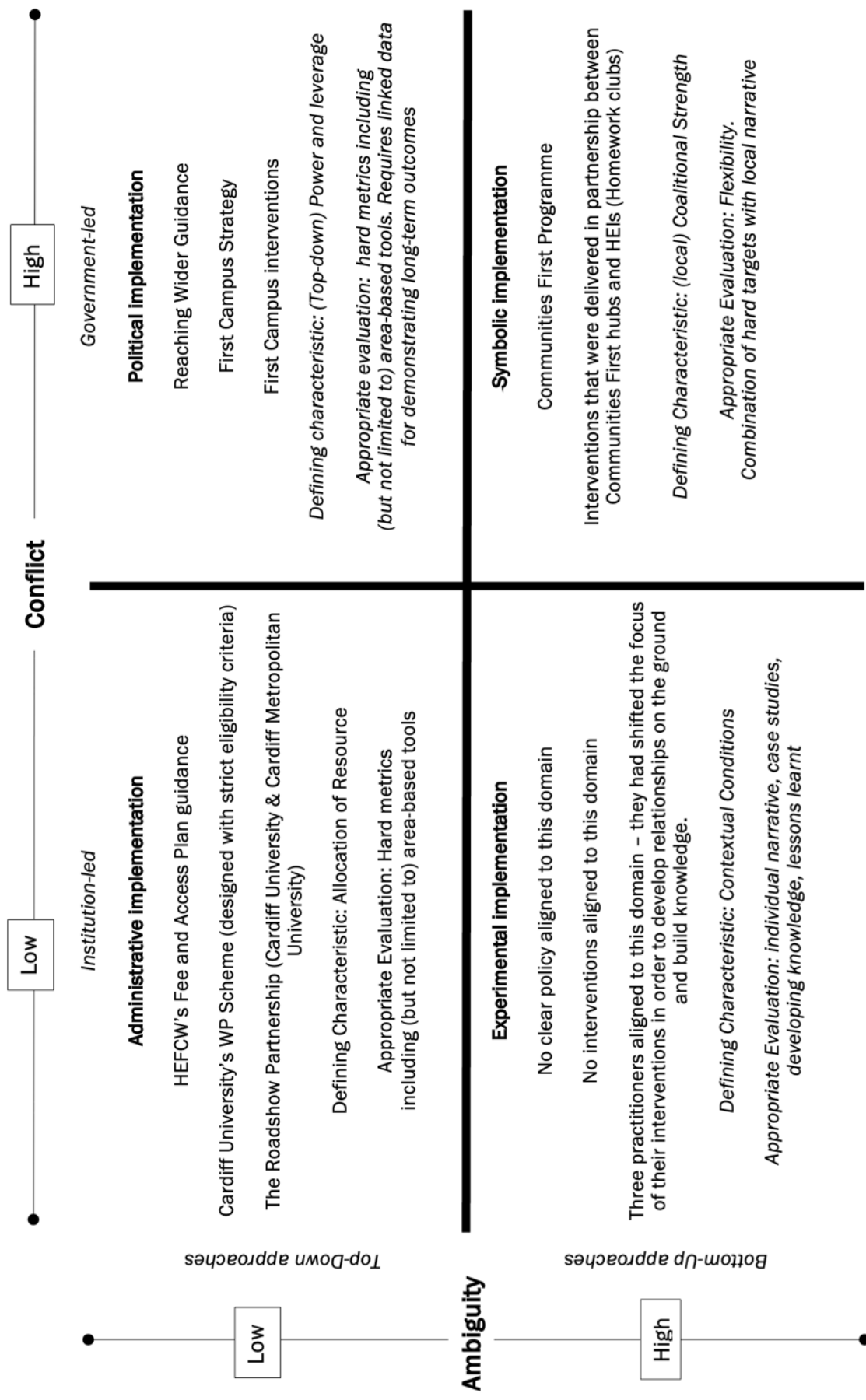
Despite the practitioners only using Communities First as a tool to target students, the geospatial analysis shows that 1) the efficacy of Communities First varies as a tool for capturing deprivation across regions 2) that the design of the interventions were not fully aligned to the policy goal (as practitioners did not use WIMD to target) and 3) that counting 'eligible' students may not be the best way to measure success – this method masks the problem that many students are excluded by the approach. Instead, it offers a solution that considers how inclusive a programme is (thus aiming to reduce the proportion of underrepresented students who are missing out). Through GIS techniques, the findings demonstrate the limitations of area-based tools. Not only is it an imperfect tool for capturing deprivation (evidenced by Communities First Cluster areas containing LSOAs in WIMD quintiles 2-5), but there is also evidence to suggest issues at the practitioner enactment stage.

Chapter 7 focused on practitioner enactment of policy. The Chapter applies empirical data to the WA Policy Implementation Framework to illustrate benefits and weaknesses to each of the four types of implementation. The analysis demonstrates the importance of having both collaborative and individual approaches to policy implementation. As a partnership, Reaching Wider

incentivises institutions to work together for the benefit of students, despite any competition for recruiting students that may exist. Equally, the community programmes offered strong local-level partnerships, giving institutions access to groups which they may otherwise struggle to engage. On the other hand, individual actors have far more flexibility to react quickly to policies, without the need for compromise.

While top-down approaches enable national monitoring and benchmarking, there is a current weakness in bottom-up approaches in the policy landscape. There is a need to strengthen bottom-up approaches to WA policy implementation, and this might facilitate a design process for policy implementation that mitigates some of the risk of using area-based policy tools and top-down approaches. There are risks to bottom-up approaches, too, particularly regarding fairness, transparency, monitoring, tracking, and demonstrating success. Whether these risks can be fully mitigated would require further research, but the WA Policy Implementation Framework offers a possible design process for managing these risks.

Figure 7.1 – Applying empirical data to the WA Policy Implementation Framework



## OPERATIONALISING THE WA POLICY IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

This thesis is not only intended as an academic study but set out to provide useful tools for policy and practice, too. This can be done through operationalising the WA Policy Implementation Framework. Figure 7.1 illustrates how the empirical data analysed throughout this thesis can be applied to the WA Policy Implementation Framework.

Administrative implementation is generally identified by allocation of resource (i.e., institutional control), and generally is associated with low conflict and ambiguity. This tends to be characterised by a top-down approach, institutional funding, and more independent action (i.e., the institution has a fair amount of control over how they implement and who they work with, as long as they align to the policy goal/tool). Under this implementation type, interventions can be closely aligned to the policy goals and tools. Resources are made available through Fee and Access Plan requirements (which ensure there is budget for this kind of activity), and hard targets (including the use of area-based policy tools) are an appropriate form of measuring success. This type is suitable where national benchmarking, monitoring and comparison is a requirement.

Political Implementation is characterised by strong regional partnerships and tends to be government-led. There is low ambiguity because there is general agreement around supporting under-represented students to progress to Higher Education, and the goals are somewhat clear (to focus on recruiting Communities First students). However, the conflict comes from competition between institutions to recruit these students to their programmes. As a result, government funding is provided as a means of encouraging HEIs to work together through strong regional partnerships (Reaching Wider and First Campus). There is some clarity of goal, but the issue is that the partnerships do not have the power (access to data) to fully track students from their programmes into Higher Education. As a result, practitioners often rely on proxy measures. Area-based tools may be appropriate for this implementation type (and they assist in demonstrating impact to government funders), but this is

most effective when datasets can be linked to enable the full tracking of students –although there was no evidence this had been done, which meant the First Campus practitioners struggled to articulate the long-term outcomes of their interventions. This type is most suitable where a collaborative approach between institutions is required but there is conflict between those institutions.

Experimental Implementation is characterised by a focus on developing knowledge at the local level. Here, there is low conflict and high ambiguity. Policy implementation within this type is likely to be institution-led (and funded). Conflict is low because there is general agreement around the goal (to support under-represented and/or deprived students to progress to Higher Education). The ambiguity, however, comes from varying interpretations of the policy goal. The strength in the Experimental implementation is in its ability to work outside stipulated policy tools to develop street-level knowledge and individual relationships. In doing so, these interventions and practitioners may be able to identify students who need additional support – whether or not they fall within the parameters of the primary policy goals – and feed these findings back to influence future policies and/or interventions (for example, this type creates an opportunity to identify new groups that require support, and to scale this up into the policy guidelines). National comparison and benchmarking are not possible in this type. Instead, the focus is on knowledge, individual narrative, case studies and lessons learnt. This type is suitable for pilot interventions where, for example, there may be a lack of knowledge around the barriers to HE for certain groups.

Symbolic Implementation is characterised by strong local level partnerships in multiple sites. There is high conflict and high ambiguity, resulting in government funding and strong community networks to affect change and combat deprivation. While disagreement with the overall goal is unlikely, developing an implementation plan to meet the goal is likely to be problematic. Various groups within the communities and universities will have different ideas as to what the goal means and how it should be achieved. The provision of government funding is used as leverage to foster strong community partnerships. This type is suitable for bringing together a wide range of organisations, sectors, and



individuals to work towards a meta goal (such as reducing poverty – where improving access to HE might contribute to the overall goal).

By using the WA Policy Implementation Framework, policymakers, institutions, and practitioners can ensure that a variety of suitable interventions and modes of enactment are used with appropriate evaluation methods. Doing so is likely to strengthen the outcomes of WA policy implementation. The creation of these types of WA Policy Implementation could be used as part of a design process to ensure implementation design is suitable for the context and expected outcomes.

## **7.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The interview data presented in this Chapter is analysed through the WA Policy Implementation Framework. This offers a means to test the conceptual framework that was developed in Chapter 4. Not only does the data show how each type of the framework is used for one policy, but it suggests that for the overall policy aim to be successful, all four types of the framework might be needed. Employing all four types as part of an implementation design process may help to limit the disadvantages whilst preserving the advantages of each ideal type. This could become a structured form of implementation – a design process for scaling up pilot phases to full programmes (as advocated by Coleman et al. 2020).

Evidence from the data presented in this Chapter suggests that there are improvements to be made in WA policy implementation, and there is currently an over-reliance on the top-down approaches. An area-based policy tool requires measures and outcomes (target setting), and suitable interventions, but it also needs a suitable form of infrastructure for enactment. The top-down approaches discussed in this Chapter are directly linked to the efficacy of area-based policy tools: the 'success' requires both an effective programme and practitioners who are willing to execute the plan (and Chapter 6 illustrates what happens when the plan is not executed 100% accurately). The practitioners operating within

bottom-up approaches felt they could 'plug the gap' where area-based tools are limited, but there are significant risks to this. Nevertheless, if the design of policy implementation is managed appropriately across the four types, successful implementation of the macro and meta policy goals may be more likely. Further research would be needed to further explore this.

# Chapter 8: Recommendations and Conclusion

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## 8.1 INTRODUCTION

This study set out to explore the widening access policy implementation process in Wales and provide a framework that can be used to make recommendations for policy and practice. The thesis adapts Matland's policy implementation matrix (Matland 1995) to provide a theoretical framework for interpreting and analysing the data.

This final chapter will outline how the research questions have been addressed. Limitations of the study will then be presented, followed by recommendations for policy, research, and practice. Before concluding, the chapter provides a summary of the contribution to the field and suggestions for further investigation.

## 8.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This section outlines how each of the research questions have been addressed, drawing on the findings from the study.

**RQ 1: How is Widening Access policy implemented through differing institutional interventions, and how appropriate are these interventions for meeting the overall policy goal?**

The data from Chapter 6 illustrates how the policy goal – to improve access to Higher Education for underrepresented groups – is broadly understood in the same way by different practitioners. However, it is addressed through policy interventions in four different ways. This results in one policy with a variety of approaches and outcomes (four specific examples are provided).

Judging the appropriateness of these interventions for meeting the policy goal is complex. The data illustrates that practitioners interpret the policy goal in different ways. If adopting a broader definition of the policy goal (to improve access to Higher Education for under-represented groups), then a strong narrative could be offered for each policy intervention to illustrate how it meets this goal.

If, however, a literal interpretation of the policy goal is adopted (to improve access to Higher Education for students from Communities First and WIMD Q1 areas), then there is a considerable difference in each intervention's ability to do so. Crucially, none of the interventions were designed to engage with students from WIMD Q1 areas – all use Communities First as their primary (and only) tool. Practitioner interview data is presented to show that Cardiff University has adopted the strictest approach to implementing the policy tool – entry to their programme is based on strict criteria (students with Communities First postcodes are permitted to join the programme). Cardiff University is then chosen as a case study for further analysis – while on paper it may seem like this approach is suitable, the GIS analysis explores this further.

**RQ 2: To what extent is Communities First an effective area-based policy tool for targeting those most under-represented in Higher Education?**

This research question has been addressed through both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. In Chapter 6, quantitative data was analysed through GIS techniques, which enabled the linking of administrative datasets to assess

the efficacy of Communities First as an area-based policy tool. Communities First and WIMD Quintiles were compared through the analysis. This illustrates the efficacy of using Communities First (which, by design, is based on the most deprived LSOAs of the WIMD). Even for the strictest intervention case (Cardiff University), the analysis reveals that the use of the Communities First tool is not 100% effective: within Communities First areas, students were placed correctly in 80.2% of cases.

There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, as evidenced through the GIS analysis, the tool itself is not fully accurate and there are WIMD Q2-5 LSOAs within Communities First Clusters. Secondly, as evidenced in Chapter 7, practitioner use of the tool at the enactment stage varied. The data in Chapter 7 illustrates some of the issues that the practitioners faced in using the tool. Sometimes this was ‘technical’ issues and the messiness of trying to use this kind of tool in practice (particularly when working with students over time when the areas change, or students might move addresses). The practitioners also admitted to allowing some students who were not from Communities First areas onto the programme due to ‘extenuating’ circumstances. In these cases, the practitioners often referred to the specific context of individuals – such as a student coming from a poor family but living outside of the Communities First areas. While the practitioners felt it was important to be flexible with the use of the tool, this does raise questions around fairness and equity.

In all cases, practitioners had experience of students who, despite having the ‘right’ postcode, were not the intended beneficiaries of widening access schemes – this is described as problems of leakage and exclusion by Harrison and Waller (2017).

The analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data reveals evidence of ecological fallacy, demonstrating that area-based policy tools are only partially effective instruments to capture potential recipients of WA interventions. This issue has been highlighted by many other researchers (Halpin et al. 2004; Rees et al. 2007; Van Gent et al. 2009; Harrison and Hatt 2010; Harrison 2012b; Harrison and McCaig 2015). This illustrated a mismatch between the original

policy goal and the policy interventions, despite the prescribed policy tool being used.

**RQ 3: To what extent does the practitioner enactment of the policy impact the original policy goal?**

Chapter 7 focused on the enactment of WA policy. The data illustrated the very social nature of policy implementation at the enactment stage: enactment is open to interpretation by the practitioners. Policy can be enacted in a variety of ways, and this can be influenced by the disposition (values, perspectives, and experiences) of each practitioner. It is vital for the success of the policy that the ways in which practitioners enact the policy align with the broader typology of the WA Policy Implementation Framework. For three practitioners this is not the case – they adopted approaches to enactment that aligned to Experimental Implementation, but there was no alignment for this approach in the broader policy landscape. When the interventions, tools, and enactment are misaligned, policy implementation failure is more likely.

The data also demonstrates that not all policy interventions can be assessed against one overarching measure of success – doing so has resulted in proxy measures and limited evidence for demonstrating impact in some cases (particularly for Communities First and First Campus cases). There are a variety of possible reasons for this explored through the data. Firstly, with this kind of collaborative approach to implementation, actors are more likely to have to compromise – and sometimes this compromise results in ‘watered down’ or more ambiguous targets. Secondly, the focus on area-based policy tools does not provide sufficient space for reflecting on the knowledge that has been developed and any lessons that have been learnt (Experimental Implementation).

However, while there may be some benefits to the bottom-up approaches, they are more susceptible to practitioners pushing personal perspectives and values, and this might not always align with the policy tool. In the case of targeting students, this raises questions of transparency and fairness.

#### **RQ 4: How can the implementation of widening access policy be improved?**

The mapping of empirical data to the WA Policy Implementation Framework through Chapters 6 and 7 demonstrates that there is a place for area-based tools and ‘top-down’ interventions. However, lessons learnt through practitioner ‘street-level’ expertise and commitment may have an important role to play in the design process - while these might be integral to policy implementation success, it needs to be carefully managed as there are risks associated with this approach too. The data shows that there is currently an over-reliance on top-down interventions and enactment (demonstrated by the lack of bottom-up approaches in the policy literature in Chapter 3 and the empirical data in Chapters 6 and 7 – particularly as Communities First has now ended). There is work to be done to strengthen bottom-up approaches to policy implementation in Widening Access. Possible solutions are outlined in Section 8.4 (Recommendations).

### **8.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The size and scope of this study led to five main limitations. Firstly, the study is situated in Wales. While Matland’s Policy Implementation Framework has been used in a wide range of fields, further research would be required to identify whether the findings in this study can be applied to WA Policy Implementation in other locations.

Secondly, the data for the study focuses primarily on South-East Wales. This is the most populated region of Wales, and this will have an impact on the analysis of the efficacy of Communities First. The practitioners interviewed and the universities within which they are based are all categorised as being in urban or urban-rural areas – this misses some of the complexity of the Welsh sector with institutions and practitioners based in more rural areas.

Thirdly, this study is focussed on a policy tool which is no longer in use (Communities First). This is reflective of the broader issues of policy research: the dynamic and politically expedient world of policymaking means that policies

often change quickly. This can make it challenging to conduct a robust analysis of specific policies. Nevertheless, the analysis of Communities First as a policy tool is still relevant for broader considerations of widening access policy implementation. Additionally, the Implementation Framework is used to recommend that there is still a place for programmes such as Communities First.

The fourth limitation returns to the policy implementation literature (see Chapter 4). Much of the literature stresses that any model that tries to simplify the policy implementation process is likely to be 'clean' and will fail to account for the reality and messiness of policy-doing (Ball 1994). The researcher acknowledges these limitations: rather than attempting to present a clean policy process, the WA Policy Implementation Framework is intended to be illustrative. It is a tool that can be used by policymakers and practitioners to improve widening access policy implementation, but the reality is likely to be much 'messier' as the social world is more complex, and real-world examples are unlikely to align perfectly to one typology. The boundaries between the policy, strategy, interventions, and enactment are blurred, and the implementation process will deviate from the model depending on the social context. No policy framework should be taken as absolute, but the research presented illustrates that each component of policy implementation needs to align with the others based on the four types of WA policy implementation. This study has focussed on interventions, tools, and enactment, and the topic would benefit from further research into using the framework for policymaking and strategy creation.

Finally, there are methodological limitations - several of which have already been highlighted in Chapter 5. Two are highlighted here. Firstly, the researcher's position and familiarity must also be acknowledged as a limitation. While strategies were implemented to fight some of these limitations (as discussed in Chapter 5 Part 2), the researcher's position within the field of practice will inevitably have implications for the knowledge generated and framing of the study. The researcher's positionality both gave access to specific data (such as the interview practitioners) while at the same time limiting other possibilities (weaker networks within the local communities resulted in fewer community practitioners being interviewed). Secondly, the study would have been



strengthened had it included more community practitioners from a more comprehensive selection of areas. This, however, was not possible due to the Communities First programme coming to an end.

## 8.4 RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The recommendations for policy implementation are separated into national, institutional, and individual.

### NATIONAL

#### i. **Improve National Strategies and the Policy Landscape**

There is a need to ensure that national WA strategies are relevant and up to date. At the time of conducting this study, the national strategy dated back to 2013 and it was becoming outdated and less relevant (particularly given the closure of the Communities First programme, which featured heavily within the strategy).

The policy review in Chapter 3 illustrates that there is not one overarching policy for widening access in Wales, but rather a landscape containing various policies and guidelines. The relationship between these was not always clear. It would be useful for policymakers to clearly outline how these various strategies relate and overlap.

Finally, the new strategy could be strengthened by providing space for bottom-up approaches and valuing knowledge developed, as well as ‘hard’ target-setting. This is unpacked in more detail in recommendation iii).

#### ii. **Continue to support Regional Partnerships but ensure linked data is available to support longer-term monitoring and tracking**

The empirical data demonstrates that there is a benefit to having regional partnerships, and that providing funding was in some way effective to foster relationships. However, both Reaching Wider and Communities First had

experienced difficulties in demonstrating long-term impact. Practitioners for First Campus discussed how they could only use proxy measures (e.g., focussing on the percentage of eligible students), and the link between the Community interventions and access to HE was even more tenuous. It is recommended that HEFCW provide a suitable tool for linking data and tracking students to strengthen the ability of partnership programmes to demonstrate success. Subscription services such as the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT), and facilitating access to linked administrative data, might enable this.

### **iii. Expand definitions of success**

The application of empirical data to the WA Policy Implementation Framework highlights some weaknesses – specifically the narrowly defined definitions of success (and predominantly a lack of space for bottom-up approaches to implementation). It is recommended that a broader range of ‘success’ criteria is adopted, and the framework may offer a structured way of doing this. While there are some practical benefits to using area-based policy tools, a more diverse range of measures are required to enable practitioners to work beyond postcode systems and to recognise knowledge as an output of delivery. This must include the flexibility to experiment, develop ‘street level’ knowledge, and value the lessons learnt (not just the hard targets). While there are risks with these bottom-up approaches, adopting a design process through the use of the WA Policy Implementation Framework provides a mechanism for mitigating risk (for example, by recognising when the implementation should shift from Experimental to Administrative).

### **iv. Provide more clarity with definitions and terminology**

The review of the policy literature in Chapter 3 and the analysis from Chapters 6 and 7 highlight issues of terminology. Deprivation and under-representation are used throughout the policy documents. It is not clear whether the target is under-represented students (and those living within Communities First and WIMD Q1 areas are under-represented, hence the focus on deprivation), or whether the focus is on improving access to HE in deprived areas is a goal in

itself. Or indeed there might be a dual focus on under-representation and deprivation. This lack of clarity filtered through to the practitioner interviews, where the terms were used almost synonymously. It is recommended that further clarity is provided with the terminology used in policy documents, specifically around the purpose of WA policies and the target audiences.

## PARTNERSHIPS, INSTITUTIONS, AND TEAMS

### **v. Translating and implementing policies**

The data in Chapters 6 and 7 shows that top-down approaches are prevalent, but there is a gap in bottom-up approaches. There is a recommendation for the national policy landscape to reflect both top-down and bottom-up modes of implementation, and this also needs to be extended to partnerships and institutions. Institutional strategies should value both qualitative and quantitative measures of success, creating a space for Experimental Implementation and recognising the importance of 'street level' practitioner knowledge. These lessons can feed into - and strengthen - future institutional strategies and interventions.

There are risks associated with bottom-up approaches. Some of these have been highlighted through the empirical data chapters, so it is important that institutions provide a structured framework to mitigate these risks. The analysis in Chapter 7 suggests that it might be possible to use the WA Policy Implementation Framework to create a design process, providing a structured way to move from pilot modes of implementation (Experimental Implementation) to full roll-out (Administrative Implementation). The use of the framework will also help to ensure that the intervention design, measures of success, and practitioner enactment are all aligned.

Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in HE (TASO) advocates for a Theory of Change model. The describe Theory of Change as:

a visual representation of a programme's inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and underlying causal mechanisms (...) [It] describes the underlying assumptions about how planned activities will lead to intended outcomes. By developing a model setting out your Theory of Change, you can understand how different aspects of your programme fit together to achieve your final goal.

TASO (2021 pp 2-3)

Further research would be beneficial to identify whether a Theory of Change model such as TASO's could be adopted alongside the WA Policy Implementation Framework to draw on the strengths of the four types of implementation while mitigating the risks.

## PRACTITIONERS

### **vi. Developing Professional Knowledge**

Actively work to professionalise widening access practice by committing to continued professional development and seeking to fully understand indicators and proxy measures. In developing their understandings of these measures, practitioners can become aware of potential pitfalls and use their professional judgement to mitigate these risks and move beyond the limitations of area-based policy tools and the four types of implementation.

### **vii. Act as agents of change**

The data in Chapter 6 and 7 shows how significant practitioner enactment is – it can influence attempts to meet the policy goal both positively and negatively. Practitioners should continue to push back against strategies and targets that only value quantitative measures of success. Practitioners should recognise the importance of their street-level knowledge and use this to drive change. Practitioners are at the coalface, and their interactions with students provide an opportunity to understand the barriers to Higher Education in such a nuanced way. It is vital, through reflective practice, to draw on this information and be drivers for change for their own interventions, institutional strategies, and

national policies. This will be most successful where institutions provide a structured way for practitioners to provide this feedback. Without such a structured approach, there is a risk that conflict will lead to practitioners promoting their own values and perspectives, which may be detrimental to the policy goals.

## 8.5 CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIELD

The study's contribution to the field can be split into three categories: developing knowledge around the relationship between policy and practice; methodological contributions; and theoretical contributions. These are summarised below.

### UNDERSTANDING OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WA POLICY AND PRACTICE

At the forefront of this study is a drive to develop knowledge of the policy implementation process for widening access. This research links policy, tools, interventions, and practitioners together to develop an understanding of how these elements relate to one another and impact the ability to meet the policy goal. There is little research on the role of the practitioner in WP (Burke 2013) or the policy implementation process (Evans et al. 2019).

Not only does this study develop knowledge for widening access policy and practice, but it is grounded in theory, policy, and practice. This has provided an opportunity to make concrete recommendations for both policy and practice, while still providing an academic and theoretical contribution.

It is not enough to research policy interventions in isolation. This study contributed to the wider field by emphasising the importance of the wider policy landscape and three components of policy implementation (interventions, tools, and practitioner enactment). The research has demonstrated the significance of practitioner enactment for ensuring the policy goal is achieved – and of the importance of alignment between interventions and enactment according to the

WA Policy Implementation Framework to operate across various types of policy implementation.

## METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION

In adopting a mixed-methods approach, the study makes two key methodological contributions. Firstly, there are few mixed-method studies in WA – they tend to be either qualitative or quantitative. Secondly, the use of GIS techniques for geospatial analysis and visualising data is uncommon in widening access research. Not only did this allow the researcher to analyse the data in an original way, but it has allowed the data to be visually communicated to practitioners and policymakers – some of the spatial analysis has been used in Cardiff University Fee and Access Plan returns to HEFCW, illustrating the geographic reach of the programmes with relation to Communities First and the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation.

## THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

Much of the research into widening access and participation relies heavily on Bourdieu to describe trends in participation (Burke 2013). This study contributes to widening access theory by providing an alternative theoretical grounding in policy implementation. This is achieved by adapting Matland's conflict-ambiguity framework to apply it to the field of widening access. By heavily drawing on policy implementation theory, the findings of the study offer an alternative narrative as to why participation in Higher Education continues to be problematic by considering key components of policy implementation.

The study also develops discourse around area-based policy tools. Many studies suggest that area-based initiatives are problematic (Smith 1999; Halpin et al. 2004; Andersson and Musterd 2005; Rees et al. 2007; Harrison and Hatt 2009; Van Gent et al. 2009; Harrison 2012b; Harrison and McCaig 2015), but these studies often fail to account for the reality of these policies at the practitioner level (how they manifest through interventions and enactment). This study

contributes to the theory of area-based tools by offering a framework that provides a space for area-based tools while managing the associated risks.

## **8.6 AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Four areas for further research are suggested.

First, this thesis highlights some of the issues relating to widening access policy implementation in Wales, using data from South-East Wales for the analysis. It would be beneficial for further research to be conducted to explore the extent to which the findings hold true for other regions of Wales. There may be differences for institutions in more rural parts of Wales. A national study of Wales would also help to develop an understanding of who the widening access practitioners are and how they enact the policy. Doing so would provide a full picture of the (Welsh) national context of widening access policy implementation, strengthening any findings or recommendations.

Second, given the study's focus on young people, it would be helpful to understand the issues of widening access policy and associated tools from a school perspective. Involving teachers, careers advisors, or teaching assistants would offer another perspective to that of the practitioners.

Third, the analysis in Chapters 6 and 7 highlighted the absence of an intervention aligning to Experimental Implementation. Further research that uses empirical data to test the conceptual framework for Experimental Implementation would strengthen the framework.

Finally, given the topic of widening access policy implementation is an under-researched area, it would be beneficial to adopt a research approach that involves widening access practitioners, managers, and policymakers. Doing so might provide the opportunity to effectively align the policy and its implementation to the four types of policy implementation.

## 8.7 CONCLUSION AND FINAL REFLECTIONS

The thesis was undertaken during a key change in Wales where the Communities First programme was disbanded after 18 years of funding. Despite some of the issues reflected around the use of Communities First as an area-based tool (the efficacy for identifying under-represented students, the possibility to generate proxy understandings, and the limitations for demonstrating success), the thesis shows that there is a place for this kind of Symbolic policy implementation. It is just as important as the other three types of policy implementation. Without a suitable community programme, there remains a gap in widening access policy implementation where street-level practitioner knowledge is needed.

Drawing on all four types of WA Policy Implementation might improve the likelihood of implementation success through a design process. While the top-down Administrative and Political modes of implementation continue to be strong, there is a need to strengthen the 'bottom-up' approaches so that knowledge and local community links continue to be developed and valued, just as much as quantitative measures of success.

During the very final stages of writing this thesis, the COVID-19 outbreak occurred. This is a global pandemic that is likely to have an impact on societies for years to come (if not decades), so it seemed important to include a final commentary and relate the findings of the study to this new social world. There is some early research on the impact of the pandemic for society's most vulnerable (Blundell et al. 2020), but the long-term impact is yet to be seen. However, from past experience, we know that pandemics are likely to exacerbate inequalities, and there is an early indication that the same is happening this time (McKenzie 2020). If this holds true, widening access will be more important than ever.

It is also possible that the indicators used to identify 'widening access' students may no longer be appropriate, or simply might exclude students who really are



disadvantaged because of the pandemic. The findings of this study offer a way of identifying students beyond simple postcode measures. The WA implementation can be used as a design process, determining when area-based policy tools are most appropriate (Political and Administrative Implementation), and where developing knowledge is most appropriate. Strengthening these two (bottom-up) approaches provides a framework that grants practitioners the freedom to use professional judgement in deciding who would benefit most from their programmes, but caution is needed, and practitioners still need to be aligned to the macro or meta policy goals. As the impact of Covid19 continues to unfold, we may need to rely on practitioner expertise over national indicators more than ever before.

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# Appendices

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## APPENDIX 1: INFORMATION SHEET



School of  
Social Sciences  
Ysgol y Gwyddorau  
Cymdeithasol

### Information Sheet for Participants

#### 1. Research Project Title

A critique of the use of area based approaches to widening participation in higher education in Wales

#### 2. Invitation

You are invited to take part in a research project as part of an EdD (Doctor of Education) within the School of Social Sciences at Cardiff University. It is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve before you decide whether or not to take part. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If you would like any more information, or if anything isn't clear, please ask.

The research is led by Scott McKenzie - a Doctor of Education student, funded by Cardiff University. Scott is also the Head of Widening Participation and Community Outreach, employed by Cardiff University, to run programmes to improve access to university for young people from under-represented groups. The research is being conducted as part of a doctoral thesis, which aims to find out more about the use of area-based approaches as an attempt to widen access to university (for example, targeting specific regions such as Communities First areas in order to engage with under-represented groups and encourage them to progress to university).

There has been very little research conducted in this area. It is hoped that this study will generate important evidence for policy-makers, universities, practitioners and community workers to address educational inequalities.

#### 3. Aims of the research

The main aim of the project is to critique the use of area-based approaches and better understand how 'disadvantage' is understood in relation to widening access in the Higher Education sector in Wales.

#### 4. Why have you been selected

You are invited to take part in this research project as you have been identified as having a key role in one or more of the following areas:

- Policy-making and/or implementation in Welsh higher education – specifically widening access
- Designing institutional strategies for widening access
- A practitioner or manager, responsible for implementing widening access strategies 'on the ground'
- Working in a community with people who are targeted by area-based approaches and widening access strategies

#### 5. Who else can participate?

The study will involve approximately 30 people. Whilst certain people have been specifically invited to take part, it is expected that further contacts will be made and others who work in the areas listed above may be invited to take part.



## **6. What will taking part involve?**

Taking part in the study is completely voluntary, and there are no consequences for declining to participate. You will be given a copy of this information sheet and a signed consent form to keep should you choose to participate. You have the right to withdraw at any time and will not be required to give a reason for doing so.

In taking part in this research, you are agreeing to being interviewed for a period of approximately 45 – 60 minutes. The interview will take place at a time and location that is convenient for you. The interview is likely to be a one-off, but you may be asked at a later date to clarify the meaning of your answers. The interview is semi-structured, and both open and closed questions will be asked. Questions will not be available in advance, but they will be based around the use of area-based approaches to widening access to higher education.

## **7. Recording, confidentiality and anonymity**

With your permission, the interview will be recorded onto a digital Dictaphone. This will allow the conversation to flow freely without the need for note-taking. The recording will be uploaded to an encrypted university computer. Both the sound file and the computer will be password protected. In the transcription, your personal identity will be replaced with an alias so that you are not identifiable. If you are not happy for the interview to be recorded, please say so and notes will be taken instead. All information obtained through interviews will be kept strictly confidential – your comments will not be able to be identified in the final thesis or any other work relating to this research.

## **8. Right to decline / opt out**

Participation is entirely voluntary. Participants will not be identifiable in any research or report publication and participants can withdraw from the study at any time without explanation.

## **9. Are there any risks to taking part?**

There are no foreseeable disadvantages or risks of taking part. If you feel unable to answer any of the questions asked, please say so. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not wish to, and the interview can be stopped at any point.

## **10. Are there any benefits to taking part?**

There are no immediate benefits to taking part in this project, but it is hoped that the process will be interesting and engaging for participants, allowing them to reflect on their areas of work and the ways in which disadvantaged groups are targeted in order to encourage educational attainment.

## **11. Contact details for further information**

### Researcher:

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### Supervisors:

Dr. Dean Stroud. Cardiff University, School of Social Science - Email: [StroudDA1@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:StroudDA1@cardiff.ac.uk)

Prof. Chris Taylor – Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data & Methods (WISERD) - Email: [TaylorCM@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:TaylorCM@cardiff.ac.uk)

## APPENDIX 2: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM



School of  
Social Sciences  
Ysgol y Gwyddorau  
Cymdeithasol

### Participant consent form

**Research Project Title:**

A critique of the use of area-based approaches to widening participation in higher education in Wales

**Name of Researcher:** Scott McKenzie

**Participant Research ID Number:**

**For the Participant:**

You should read the accompanying information sheet before signing this consent form.

*Please read the below statements and sign below if you consent to taking part:*

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet that accompanies this consent form and outlines the research project. I understand what is involved in taking part.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may cease to take part in this research study at any time and without giving a reason.
3. I understand that notes may be taken during the interview. Should I initial the box below, interviews will also be recorded on a Dictaphone for transcription. This means that Scott McKenzie will write up everything that I say. The audio recording will be saved to an encrypted university workstation / laptop and deleted from the device as soon as possible after the interview.
4. I understand that all data will be stored securely once it has been collected. My name will be replaced with a pseudonym so that my personal identify is protected. If I decide to withdraw my data I should send the request to Scott McKenzie on McKenzieSD1@Cardiff.ac.uk.
5. I understand that all information relating to the interview that appears in the final thesis, conference presentations or publications will be anonymous. This means there will be nothing published that can be traced back to me.
6. I confirm that all my questions about the study have been satisfactorily answered.
7. The researcher will treat my participation in this study confidentially and that anything I say in the interview will be treated confidentially, unless it leads to belief that my safety is in danger. In this case it will not be possible to keep information confidential. If this happens, I will be informed that my information will have to be shared.
8. Please initial in the box to the right if you consent to the interview being digitally recorded. If you do not consent to the audio recording, the interview can still go ahead and notes will be taken instead.

☐

I have read and understood the above, and agree to take part:

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I have explained the above and answered all questions asked by the participant:

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

S. McKenzie Information Sheet and Consent Form: Standard interviews

Autumn 2016

## APPENDIX 3: CONSENT FROM DATA CONTROLLER



Scott McKenzie

Tue 30/05/2017 10:43

To: Amanda Coffey



Hello Amanda,

As you may know, I'm currently on the EdD Prof. Doc. in SOCSI. As I work in Widening Participation, I have chosen to base my thesis on area-based approaches to WP. I'm particularly interested in Communities First areas and Low Participation Neighbourhoods - exploring where specifically within these wards we tend to recruit students from.

In order to do this, I would like to use 3 years of postcode data of students who have enrolled onto the Step Up scheme and of current Cardiff University students. As PVC for this area, my supervisor, Chris Taylor, has suggest I contact you to seek permission to use the data.

The postcode data will be used to map out where our students come from, and this will be linked to Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation data. No other sensitive / personal data will be required and students will not be identifiable.

I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Best wishes  
Scott

Scott McKenzie  
Widening Participation Manager

Scott McKenzie  
Rheolwr Ehangu Cyfranogiad



Simon Wright

Wed 14/06/2017 17:08

To: Scott McKenzie

Cc: Amanda Coffey



Dear Scott

There is widespread support for your proposed research and as data owner I am content to approve your use. I do need to ask for confirmation that in doing so all research ethics and data protection issues have been considered and addressed.

I look forward to seeing the outcomes.

Best wishes  
Simon

Simon Wright  
Academic Registrar  
Cardiff University  
  
Tel: +44(0)29 2087 5829  
-  
Cardiff University is a registered charity no.  
1136855

Simon Wright  
Colfrestrydd Academaidd  
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Ffôn: +44(0)29 2087 5829  
  
Mae Prifysgol Caerdydd yn elusen gofrestredig rhif 1136855

## APPENDIX 4: ETHICAL APPROVAL

Cardiff School of Social Sciences  
Head of School Professor Amanda Coffey FAcSS  
Ysgol Gwyddorau Cymdeithasol Caerdydd  
Pennaeth yr Ysgol Yr Athro Amanda Coffey FAcSS



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Cymru Y Deyrnas Unedig

29<sup>th</sup> November 2016

Our ref: SREC/2144

Scott McKenzie  
PhD Programme  
SOCSI

Dear Scott,

Your project entitled '*A critique of the use of area-based initiatives in widening participation policy and practice in Wales*' has now been approved by the School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of Cardiff University and you can now commence the project.

If you make any substantial changes with ethical implications to the project as it progresses you need to inform the SREC about the nature of these changes. Such changes could be: 1) changes in the type of participants recruited (e.g. inclusion of a group of potentially vulnerable participants), 2) changes to questionnaires, interview guides etc. (e.g. including new questions on sensitive issues), 3) changes to the way data are handled (e.g. sharing of non-anonymised data with other researchers).

In addition, if anything occurs in your project from which you think the SREC might usefully learn, then please do share this information with us. All ongoing projects will be monitored and you will be obliged periodically to complete and return a SREC monitoring form. Please inform the SREC when the project has ended. Please use the SREC's project reference number above in any future correspondence.

Yours sincerely

Professor Alan Felstead  
Chair of School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

cc: C Taylor  
D Stroud  
H Vincent

## APPENDIX 5: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Hello colleagues

I hope you're well. I'm currently undertaking some research as part of my doctoral studies. The research is based on the use of Communities First areas to help widen access to university (I've attached an information sheet for reference).

As you work with groups in Communities First areas and are familiar with some of the work we do, I wondered if you would be willing to take part in an interview?

The questions will be based around your role, the groups you work with, and access to university. I'm expecting the interviews to last around an hour, but I can be flexible to suit your availability. I can book a room at Cardiff University for us to meet in, or alternatively I'm happy to come to you if there's a suitable space.

There's no pressure at all to take part, so please do feel free to say no.

I look forward to hearing from you

Best wishes

Scott

## APPENDIX 6: INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

### COMMUNITY INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

#### Introductory Questions

- Could you confirm your job title and how long you have worked at X?
- Tell me a little bit about yourself - your background, and how you come into this role / why?
- Could you give me a brief overview of your role (and how it relates to increasing access to university/education)?

#### Targeting

- What is your understanding of Communities First and the background of it?
- Who do you work with within the area? (Prompts: individuals, groups, areas, institutions, organisations, other partners etc.)
- How do you access people within your area to offer them services/opportunities/support?
- Is there anyone you don't work with in the area? If so, why?
- Are people in the area generally aware that they are living in a Communities First area? What do you think it means to them?
- Is there a difference between 'Communities First' and 'the community'?

#### University

- What experience do you have of working with universities?
- To what extent is engaging people with education a priority for your work / the Communities First programme? Is progression to university a priority?
- How do you think university is perceived amongst the groups you support?
- Do the groups you support have any engagement with universities? What kind of engagement do they have? Do they benefit from it? How do you know they benefit?
- What do you think widening access/participation is?
- How do you access/engage people in Communities First areas with university projects/activities? Who do you choose? Is there anyone you wouldn't include? Do some people choose not to participate in free university activities? Why?
- Do you think the people you work with are aware of the support that universities can offer them?
- What do you think are the challenges for using Communities First as a target group for widening access activities?
- Are there any benefits to using Communities First as a target group?

#### Closing Questions

- If you worked at a university, how would you target those groups who are more under-represented and/or vulnerable?
- We've talked about Communities First coming to an end – what would you put in its place? How would this fit with what we've been doing in widening access?



## UNIVERSITY INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

### Introductory Questions

- Could you confirm your job titles and how long you have worked at X?
- Tell me a little bit about yourselves - your background, how you come into this role and what your role entails?
- Could you talk me through your team/organisation's annual cycle of WP activities?
- What are [name of organisation]'s priorities for widening access?

### Targeting

- Is Communities First a target for you?
- We've talked about targets and the priorities for the organisation, but who do you actually work with? (Prompts: individuals, groups, areas, institutions, organisations, partners, age etc.)
- How do you access/engage with people in Communities First areas with your projects? How do you know they are from a Communities First area?
- Why do you think we have Communities First as a target?
- Do you feel that Communities First is the right target group for WP activities?

### Understanding Deprivation

- Most literature on widening access tends to differentiate between economic, social, and cultural factors – which do you think are the most important on impacting success in university?
- Do the people that you target usually know if they live in a Communities First area?
- How do you think university is perceived amongst the groups you work with?
- Do you identify other individuals or sub-groups within the area? Do you worry about excluding any groups that may benefit from your projects?

### Impact

- How would you define 'success' in relation to WP?
- How do you measure the impact and know if something is successful?

### Alternatives

- What do you think are the challenges for using Communities First as a target group for widening access activities?
- Are there any benefits to using Communities First as a target group?
- Are there any alternatives to Communities First that you have used in the past as a target? Were they successful? Why / why not?

### Closing Questions

- Where do you see WP going in the next five years?
- If you could start all over again, what would you do differently?
- Are there any questions or topics you expected me to cover that I didn't?

## APPENDIX 7: NVIVO CODING NODES:

Nodes	Number of coding references	Aggregate number of coding references	Number of items coded	Aggregate number of items coded
Nodes\\Barriers	2	56	2	6
Nodes\\Barriers\\Attainment	1	1	1	1
Nodes\\Barriers\\Capital	7	32	3	6
Nodes\\Barriers\\Capital\\Cultural	6	6	3	3
Nodes\\Barriers\\Capital\\Financial	3	3	2	2
Nodes\\Barriers\\Capital\\Human	9	9	3	3
Nodes\\Barriers\\Capital\\Social-Family	7	7	4	4
Nodes\\Barriers\\HE Structural	5	5	3	3
Nodes\\Barriers\\Money motivation	6	6	3	3
Nodes\\Barriers\\Perceptions of uni	7	7	3	3
Nodes\\Barriers\\School	3	3	2	2
Nodes\\Credential Inflation and Employability	2	2	1	1
Nodes\\Definitions of Deprivation	14	14	4	4
Nodes\\Geographies	18	18	5	5
Nodes\\Impact Evaluation	17	17	4	4
Nodes\\Policy funding strategy	9	9	2	2
Nodes\\Raising Aspirations and Deficit	18	18	6	6
Nodes\\Res Methods	3	3	2	2
Nodes\\Targeting	40	49	5	5
Nodes\\Targeting\\Ethics	7	7	4	4
Nodes\\Targeting\\Missing Out	2	2	1	1
Nodes\\WP Aims	1	1	1	1
Nodes\\WP and Class categorisation	18	33	5	5
Nodes\\WP and Class categorisation\\Other and Labelling	15	15	3	3