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SEMINÁRIO INTERNACIONAL INCLUSÃO EM EDUCAÇÃO:
Universidade e Participação 2

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Universities & Participation

~ From 'Exclusion' towards 'Social Justice' or 'Utopia'?

A Critical Narrative

Presented by

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"A scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it." – Max Planck

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[1] Fernando Almeida Diniz is a British academic psychologist who has extensive international experience in universities in the United Kingdom, European Union and the USA. He was a senior academic member of staff at The University of Greenwich (London) and then at The University of Edinburgh (Scotland) until his retirement. Fernando has been an active member of LaPEADE (UFRJ) since its foundation in 2004 and acts as International Research Consultant on the current research projects that LaPEADE is leading concerning *Inclusão nas Universidades* in Brasil, Spain and Cabo Verde. This paper will be published after the Conference on *Universidade e Participação 2*, which takes place in May 2010, organised by LaPEADE (UFRJ).

INTRODUCTION

Global context

I have been invited to talk about *Universities & Participation*. But, first allow me to issue a health warning? *"Engaging in the contemporary discourse on 'university participation' can damage your health"*. Whereas there is overwhelming research on inequality and discriminatory barriers within traditional University systems, *Widening Participation*, in current discourses, is a relatively young field of public policy development (*a Journey of Faith?*); there are numerous reports and policy papers but a shortage of soundly based research evidence (HEFCE, 2006a-b). From reading the academic literature, press coverage and internet blogs, it is evident that this is a deeply contested and polarised discourse, marked by moral panic: about the impact of neo-liberal market competition, the 'academic' versus 'vocational' education divide, political correctness and interference, lowering of standards and academic drift, how should research funding be distributed and whether universities have an explicit role in social mobility and cohesion.

Despite these tensions, we know enough to recognise that:

- University reforms need to be judged against the background of the political and economic imperatives associated with population trends, global competition[2], technological change, the challenge of the knowledge economy and employability, social inclusion and citizenship.

- Universities across the advanced and emerging economies are undergoing major changes and finding themselves under sustained scrutiny by politicians, the tax-paying public and students.

- More young people than ever before are demanding equality of opportunity to university education and there are pressures from employers for higher skilled graduates to maintain the nation's dominance in economic growth and wealth.

- Governments are responding by expanding university provision but face many contradictions and obstacles. For instance, is it possible to widen participation in higher education whilst at the same time requiring the nation's universities to compete in the global market to achieve world ranking status? Are there 'winners' and 'losers' and does it matter?

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[2] The rapid progress that China (including Hong Kong) and India have made in scientific research is causing concern in western academic and government circles. It is claimed that between them, Universities in these 'giant economies' produce 4 million science graduates per annum and that there are strategic research partnerships between key Asian universities. China now ranks second in the league table for international citations, having overtaken the United Kingdom, and India is set to overtake the world's leading economies in terms of research output by 2020, according to Global Research Report from Thomson Reuters (see, Baty, P, 8 October 2009.*The sleeping giant is rising to challenge world order* . www.thes.ac.uk . There is now talk of a 'redistribution of brains', with Asia in the ascendency.

Structure of the Presentation

In my presentation, I will offer a critical narrative[3] on the changing scenario of educational reforms that are taking place in the UK and Europe to *'Widen Participation in Higher Education'* **(WP).** I will attempt to relate what I say to the results of the Lapeade international research project[4] and hope this will enable delegates to probe areas of convergence and divergence between what is happening 'over there' and in Brasil, Spain and Cabo Verde.

I commence by focusing on **Model 1: The Age of 'Elitism' & the 'Gold Standard' University -** a deconstruction of the historical exclusionary forces that have operated within traditional university systems and continue to dominate. Second, on **Model 2**: **Increasing 'Access' to the University System for the 21st Century -** a comment on University Reforms intended to maintain Global Economic Dominance. Next, I look at **Model 3: Widening Participation & Lifelong Learning -** asking whether it represents a significant transformation in the quest for social inclusion. Finally, I will conclude with a few key messages from research before inviting discussion by delegates.
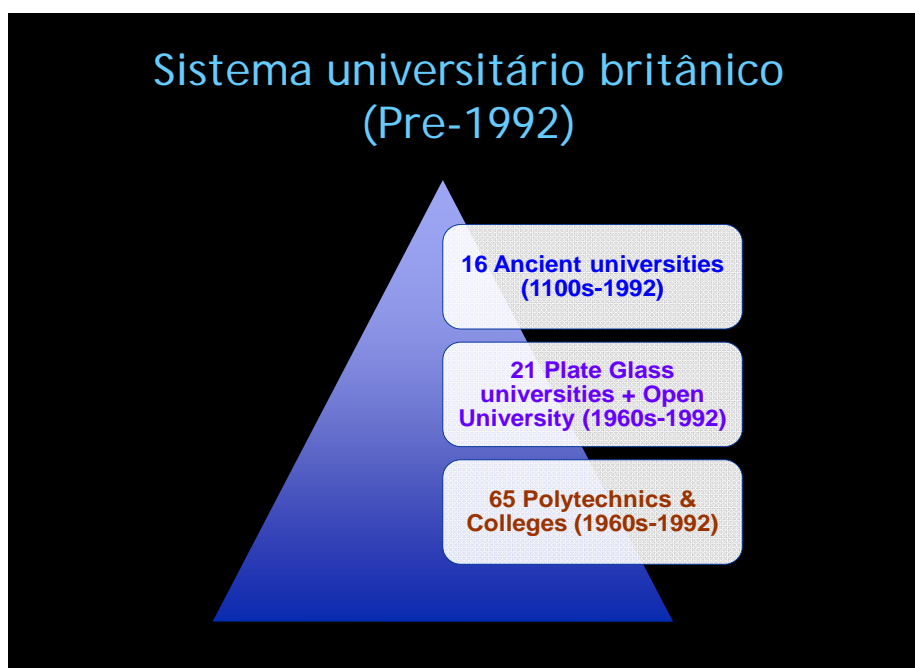
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[3] *University Participation* is a complex and far reaching topic and I do not claim to present a thorough research review of the literature. My 'critical narrative' is meant as a discussion paper which derives from my selection of key policy and evaluations reports and research literature which I have reflected on, from the perspective of someone with 35 years of experience of academic life in the British and European university systems.

[4] Monica Periera dos Santos (co) *Inclusao/Exclusao no Formacao Inicial de Docentes de Universidades Publicas: Brasil, Cabo Verde,Cordoba e Sevilha.* Relatorio Final, Mayo 2010. www.lapeade.educacao.ufrj.br

Model 1: The Age of 'Elitism' & the 'Gold Standard' University?

Deconstructing Historical Institutionalised Exclusion

Sistema universitário britânico (Pre-1992)

- 16 Ancient universities (1100s-1992)
- 21 Plate Glass universities + Open University (1960s-1992)
- 65 Polytechnics & Colleges (1960s-1992)

Why are universities and what they do under scrutiny by politicians, the tax-paying public and students across the globe? It wasn't long ago when life seemed much simpler: Universities were those 'ivory towers' where the best brains resided, where the pursuit of knowledge was paramount (not teaching quality nor social inclusion), where it was self-evident who should gain entry to study for degrees and where questions about the social impact and labour market value of degrees achieved by graduates were not regarded as the prime concern of universities or academics. This may sound like a caricature, but the scenario represents an 'elite model[5]' of a British (and western European) university system developed over centuries and characterised by institutional status, ethos, culture, remit and resources. It is a system within which many of today's university leaders and academic staff - including me - were educated...and still are? Here are examples of the historical **exclusionary forces** that have shaped and continue to dominate our university systems**:**

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[5] 'Elite': I have been influenced by the work of M Trow (1973, 1999) referred to by Osborne, M (2003).

- **Unchallenged Institutional hierarchy/elite status/power**:

Until the mid-60s,'Universities' in Britain were a small group of 16[6] 'centuries-old'(11th-19th), high prestige, research based academic institutions, which provided high level **Degree** courses of **academic** study, organised in 'traditional' subject departments[7]. In the 1960s, there was an expansion of universities when 20 'plate glass' universities[8] were established in the same academic mould, the exception being the Open University, which is committed to 'educational for all'. Universities had maximum autonomy in governance to decide what courses they offered, peer-review of quality was the norm, students did not pay tuition fees, as grants were available if needed, and universities were trusted by society to get on with the job as they saw fit.

- **Unchallenged restrictive criteria for Entry**:

The sole entry route to university was educational achievement in national higher level entrance examinations, set by high status Universities and later Examination Boards. Admissions systems were essentially bureaucratic, though prospective candidates were interviewed for places, a practice still unique to British universities. What this apparently 'objective' entry system to university education masked were the social and institutional barriers that excluded major sections of society from enjoying the benefits of university education and social mobility.(Ogg et al, 2009; The Panel on Fair Access to the Profession, 2009).

- **Unchallenged Student Composition/ Social capital bias**:

Up to 1990s, between 5-10% of 'selected academic' school leavers were admitted to universities. They were mainly children of higher-economic and professional families, male, white and educated in private and state grammar (gymnasium) schools. Brown et al(2004) have called this the 'royal route', i.e., students from well funded private or state schooling, with high examination grades in academic subjects, following fulltime degree study at a reputable university. The 'excluded majority' were destined for non-university diploma vocational training....*Courses for other peoples' children* (Wolf, 2003)? While individual academic researchers were aware of the social capital bias and exclusion involved, the issue was unacknowledged in university institutional practice, though some did devise compensatory measures to improve access (Lampl, 2008; Millenium+, 2009).

- **Unchallenged University cultures, curriculum and outcomes**:

The idea that students and others might question the practices of academics' teaching approaches, assessment, curriculum relevance and outcomes was met with bewilderment in some institutions . Entry to the university academic profession and promotions are still entirely dependent on subject knowledge at doctoral level and research reputations, not

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[6] Ancient universities - *the six universities founded between the 11th and 16th centuries.*+ The University of London, The University of Wales, The University of Wales, Lampeter and Durham University - *which were chartered in the 19th century.*+ Red Brick universities - *the six large civic universities chartered at the turn of the 20th century before World War I and had strong industrial/engineering roots.*
[7] There are equivalents of the Anglo-Saxon 'elite' universities across other Western European states and the USA.
[8] Plate Glass universities - *the twenty universities chartered in the 1960s* + The Open University - *Britain's 'open to all' distance learning University (est. 1968, highly successful in widening participation through 'open' entry.*

teaching skills. Non-retention and non-completion rates of students were regarded as a matter of 'private grief', not institutional accountability.

It would be over-simplistic to portray traditional Universities and their academic staff as the sole agents of 'social exclusion', since they operate within a wider social, political and economic context that governs national government policy. However, it is not possible to ignore the extensive research evidence that has identified inequalities in university participation and social mobility, related to a multiplicity of factors. **Socio-economic class and family structure, parental education, type of school attended, place of residence & housing tenure, health, sex, race & ethnicity, disability, criminal history and religious background are all significant indicators for University entrance and outcome** (Chowdry et al, 2009; Godard, et al, 2006; HEPI, 2009; Wakeling, 2009)

Despite this, there are some who recently believe that in an 'age of equality', the historical legacy of 'exclusion' – if not elitism - is over, that the university systems in Britain and western Europe are now 'meritocratic'; a few national governments even claim that their system is 'democratic' and 'universal'. How would we know?
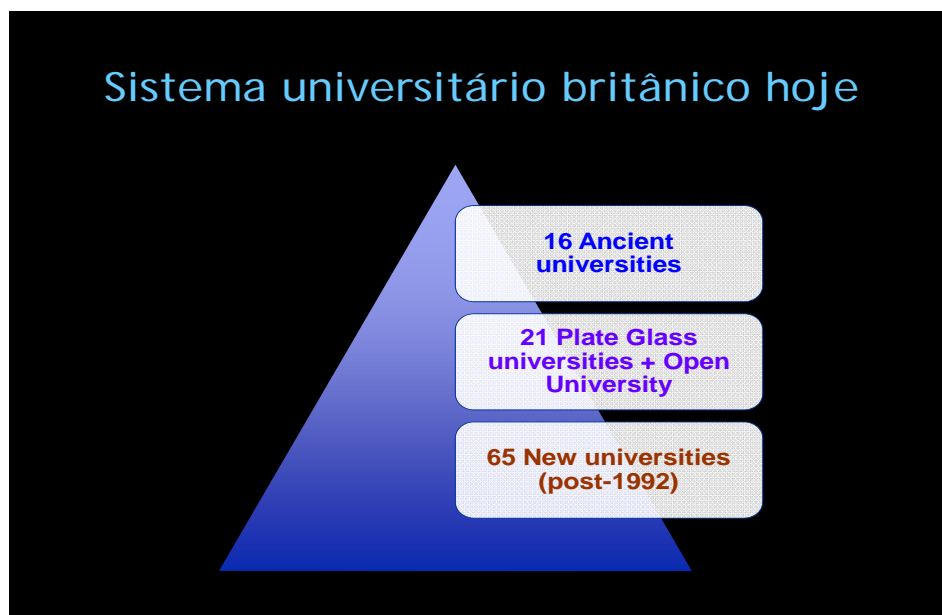
DISCUSSION POINTS:

- **How is 'exclusion' manifested in your experience of universities and in the data from the Lapeade study?**

- **How would you characterise your current University system: 'elite' - 'meritocratic' - democratic' - 'universal'?**

Model 2: Increasing 'Access' to the University System for the 21st Century.

Creating a 'unified' University system to maintain Global Economic Dominance?

The 'elite' University system, described above, prevailed until the early 1990s, with little formal connection with the 'other' side - the Polytechnics and Colleges[9], the providers of vocational education and wider access to a larger number and diverse range of students. The latter's lower status (non-university), lack of degree awarding powers and their distinctive contribution to social mobility of working class communities was not seen by traditional universities or government as meriting equitable financial recognition. A radical cultural change came when the Conservative Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, who had a strong preference for neo-liberal economic theories, put greater emphasis on the role of the formal university sector in developing Britain's vocational and technological human capital in order to maintain the nation's global economic dominance (Wolf, 2003)[10]. In 1992, she abolished the divide between 'academic' vs 'vocational' education by granting university status to all Polytechnics and Colleges. Thus the UK now has, in theory, a 'unified' system of currently 105+ UK Universities, all of which are 'equal competitors in the neo-liberal open market' of delivering degree-level education to a wider group of 'customers'.

Sistema universitário britânico hoje

16 Ancient universities

21 Plate Glass universities + Open University

65 New universities (post-1992)

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[9] Polytechnics or colleges of Higher Education which became the New Universities - the Post-1992 universities. There are currently approximately 65 new universities, which between them cater for the overwhelming number of students from *'under-represented and lower socio-economic'*, backgrounds; particularly, poorer white and black minority ethnic communities. Million+(2009) *Social Mobility-Universities Changing Lives.* www.millionplus.ac.uk

[10] Since the 1990s, universities have been seen as the main engine for individual prosperity and national economic development- the *'market model'*. See, Wolf, Alison (2003), *Does Education Matter? Myths about education and economic growth.* London: Penguin.

Since the Labour Party-led government took office in 1997, it has encouraged the rapid expansion of the 'new' universities, developed an integrated model of FHE, which includes the Further Education vocational sector, and signalled its emphasis on Higher Education links with the Business world by moving cabinet ministerial responsibility for universities from the Department of Education to the Department of Business, Innovation & Skills.[11]

Do we now have a New Hierarchy of Universities?

Unsurprisingly, the traditional universities have expressed serious reservations about the damage that this structural change has had on the direction, international reputation and future of UK universities. This has led to a stratification of universities with the top 20 long established and internationally rated research intensive institutions forming an elite *The Russell Group[12]* to distinguish themselves from 'the others' and to maintain the major share of the UK research funding. The group commands dominant power and the confidence of the wider public, particularly middle class parents. Yet, as research has shown, it is the New University sector that has offered large numbers of graduates opportunities to gain degrees and have contributed significantly to social mobility in the UK (Million+, 2009).

DISCUSSION POINTS:

- **Should there be a clearer distinction between 'Academic' Universities and Institutes for 'Vocational & Technological' Education (Polytechnics)?**

- **Where do Universities stand in the New Global Economic Order?**

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[11] This is a significant shift in government thinking about responsibility for the Higher Education system. See, www.bis.gov.uk

[12] The Russell Group represents the 'elite' 20 major research-intensive universities of the UK, the overwhelming majority of which were established by the early 20th century. This includes Edinburgh University but not two of the ancient Scottish universities – St Andrews and Aberdeen. Representing just 12% of the UK higher education sector, in 2008 over 60% of the UK's very best ('world leading') research took place in Russell Group universities. The group has 20% of the total HE population and remains under scrutiny regarding its contribution to social inclusion and widening participation. See, www.russellgroup.ac.uk

Model 3: The 'New' Vision: Widening Participation & Lifelong Learning

University for the 'Masses' or Transformation for Social Justice & Democracy?

In the more recent European discourses on *Access & Participation in Higher Education*[13], a distinction is made between **increasing access** - more of the same for the 'deficit masses' - and **widening participation** within the larger banner of **lifelong learning for social justice** [Osborne, 2003] . Osborne notes that the drive towards equity and social cohesion is certainly a clear political goal at European level, citing the Budapest Declaration of the Council of Europe for *a new strategy for social cohesion promoting a more tolerant and just European society based on solidarity, shared values and a common cultural heritage; education for democratic citizenship as a lifelong experience fostering active participation of Europeans in all spheres of life; extensive use of information and communication technologies maximising their educational potential* (Rougaas, 2001, in Osborne 2003, p 6).

In 2003, the Labour government published its Widening Participation[14] strategy which saw Lifelong Learning as an integral component of its wider 'social inclusion' agenda. It introduced legislation and an integrated post-compulsory school system of Further & Higher Education[15] to widen participation in higher education, as a means of helping more people from under-represented groups, particularly lower socio-economic backgrounds*,* to participate successfully in higher education. In his discussion of the policy, Watson[16] adopts the definition of '**Widening Participation'** used for a programme of research projects[17].

Access for the 'Have-nots'?

Here is my breakdown of the composition of **'under-represented'** groups included in above definition of WP:

- Those from diverse subject backgrounds, families, groups and communities and positively enabling such people to participate in and benefit from Higher Education.
- Those from socially disadvantaged families and/or deprived geographical areas, including deprived remote, rural and coastal areas.
- Families that have no prior experience of Higher Education may be of key concern.
- Diversity, in terms of ethnicity, gender, disability and social background in particular Higher Education disciplines, modes and institutions.

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[13] I strongly recommend reading Osborne, M (2003) Increasing or Widening Participation in Higher Education? — a European overview: *European Journal of Education,* Vol. 38, No. 1, 2003.

[14] For UK government legal & policy framework on WP, see, HEFCE (2006a) Widening Participation – A Review. www.hefce.ac.uk

[15] FHE Model: Further Education colleges are traditionally the providers of education of students from 14 onwards, and in areas of non-degree level vocational training and adult continuing education. More recently, some FE colleges have links with HE universities to offer foundation degree courses.

[16] For an overview, I strongly recommend David Watson's discussion paper for HEFCE (2006b)*How to think about widening participation in UK higher education.* www.hefce.ac.uk

[17] Teaching & Learning Research Programme (TLRP, jointly funded by HEFCE and the Economic and Social Research Council).

- Access and participation across the ages, extending conceptions of learning across the life course, and in relation to family responsibilities, particularly by gender and maturity'.

The definition comprises of a wide mixture of social factors and groups: culture x gender x race x socio-economic class x disability x geography, each of which has been found by social researchers to explain inequality (Broecke and Nicholls, 2007**;** Gibbons and Vignoles, 2009**;** Gorard, et al, 2006). What about the 'new under-class', that is, indigenous white working class boys who are reported to be failing to prosper is now a pressing issue in the UK? Others see these debates as evidence of undue political correctness about racial[18] 'minorities' and a negation of their rights. Their preference is for the 'status quo', to wait for another generation to grow when 'things will improve' in the wider world over time. Few governments across the world can afford such advice, given the reality of global changes and pressures from the UN and other bodies.

Researchers and policymakers across Europe continue to grapple with the dilemma of using social categories in national and international research[19]: choice, terminology, single or multiple categories and ethical difficulties in public discourse. As will be indicated, below, there are forms of 'multiple' inequality as well as differences within and between particular social groups.

University for the 'Masses' or Transforming Institutions?

The government announced a policy of increasing the University intake of those aged **18 to 30 to 50% by 2010** and looked to the Higher Education Funding Council in England (HEFCE)[20] to achieve this ambitious target. In its response consultation paper, the Council said that the university sector had reached saturation point with regard to **traditional** students, and that, to fulfil the Government's 50 per cent target, institutions would need to recruit and retain students from non-traditional backgrounds. As most of the student growth for this age group would be in the lower socio-economic groups, they would thereby **not only increase participation** in Higher Education but also **widen** it (my emphases).

This raises several dilemmas for policy leaders. Are they advocating a University system which uses a deficit description of the **'Have-nots'** to be included in unreformed university institutions, or a transformation and removal of structural and institutional barriers in the Higher Education system to make it responsive to a diverse and changing population, new modes of community provision, inclusive teaching and learning approaches and democratic

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[18] Until recently, 'Race' in Brazil has had a long history of invisibility in academic discourse. I have frequently encountered the moral panic about the injustices of the affirmative action measures   of '**quotas'** for Afro-Brazilians and other minorities, despite extensive research evidence of endemic institutional racial inequality in Brazil (see, Marcelo Paixao & Luiz Carvano, 2009)

[19] Social categories in 'race' research: International comparisons are problematic because of the varied systems of racial classifications adopted in different countries. In Brazil the terms 'Negro', 'preto', pardo', 'branco', 'amerelo', 'indio', indigeno', etc appear (often inter-changeably). In Britain, the term 'Black minority ethnic' includes all people of non-European (white) origin, with heritage origins in Africa, Asia, Caribbean and Latin America. The UK Census uses a combination of 'colour/ethnic' categories: white-British, Black-British, Black African -Caribbean; South-Asian, Chinese, etc. The common denominator in political discourse is the socially constructed category of 'race', racism and antiracism.

[20] HEFCE funds Universities and Further Education Colleges; Scotland has a separate funding system.

cultures and power relations?(Miriam David et al, 2009; Foster, 2009; Langa Rosado and David, 2006)[21]?

Financing Wider Participation?

Widening Participation in Universities is now linked to the introduction of variable tuition fees and loans for students entering undergraduate courses. The government has also put in place a number of strategic measures and initiatives to ensure that Universities implement the new legal requirements ; for example, there are financial penalties and incentives for Universities to achieve their agreed annual targets to increase recruitment of students from state schools**.**

Is Widening Participation Working in Britain[22]?

It is too early to judge the effectiveness of this major shift of policy that was introduced in 2003, given the shortage of soundly based research evidence (HEFCE, 2006a)**.** In the first evaluation report conducted by the National Audit Office (2008), it states: Here is a selection of its principal findings:

- *Over the past five years there have been improvements in the participation of some groups in higher education, but not for all groups and some remain significantly under-represented in higher education.*
- *The attainment of qualifications by students at secondary school or college plays a critical role in gaining access to higher education.*
- *Family expectation or tradition of higher education involvement is particularly significant in encouraging young people to undertake higher education*
- *People from lower socio-economic backgrounds and older applicants who are not in school or college are less likely to have access to advice and assistance when applying to higher education*
- *There is variation across higher education institutions in recruiting students from under-represented groups and insufficient information about institutions' activities to widen participation.*

The Labour government's target for 50 per cent of 18- to 30-year-olds to attend university has not been met. According to the most recent government statistics, participation among this age group stood at 43 per cent in 2007-08. And in terms of participation in higher education, the UK has slipped from seventh place among Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries to 15th place (see, Attwood, 2010).

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[21] What can be learned about Universities as 'inclusive institutions' from the experiences and aspirations of students in universities in Brazil, Cabo Verde and Spain who participated in the Lapeade research project?

[22] Other European Countries are facing similar challenges in their programmes for Widening Participation(see Osborne, 2003); for Spain, (see, Langa Rosado and David, 2006)

DISCUSSION POINTS:

- **Does Increasing Access for the 'Masses' address the Causes of Social Inequality?**

- **What do you think of this broader definition of *Life Long Learning delivered through* an integrated *Further & Higher Education* system?**

Conclusions: Some Key messages.

Current Discrimination & Institutional Barriers to be tackled

Social inequalities and institutional barriers to university participation and social mobility are complex and long-term in their impact. These are the main areas to be tackled:

- Socio-economic class, parental education and influence, as well as sex, race and disability are key factors in determining who are the 'winners' and 'losers'

- Inequity between students from State vs Private education is a major barrier

- There is a lack of 'Diversity' in University training courses for high status Professions

- Promoting 'inclusion' in the Culture & Curriculum practices in Universities is a means to Widening Participation.

Widening Participation: Research, Policy & Provision

Rebecca Attwood's[23] article titled, *Mind the Gap*, suggests that a real shift in the substantive debate about 'Widening Participation' is beginning at a time when the Labour government has introduced severe cuts in the funding for Higher Education. Citing a significant array of sound research and reports, by key experts in leading research intensive universities in England, Atwood's article highlights the complex inter-play of barriers that impede genuine equality of opportunity in university participation and social mobility. Here is selection of direct extracts[24] taken from her article:

- *Poorer students are more likely to study at "lower status", less selective institutions, and this affects their life chances[25]. The divide is widest in "elite" universities, particularly Oxbridge - a high-profile issue regularly in the public eye. It is here that widening participation collides with "fair access".*

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[23] Attwood, Rebecca (2010) 'Mind the Gap' in *The Times Higher Education Supplement,* 25 February 2010. www.thes.ac.uk

[24] Note: The quotations are from various pieces of research and reports reviewed by Attwood.

[25] Entrants to high status universities, including Oxbridge, are primarily from private fee paying schools.

- *The biggest differences in earnings are by subject rather than institution, but students from disadvantaged backgrounds take less "economically valuable"[26] subjects in many cases. The net result, she says, is that such students are more likely to receive little economic benefit from their degrees.*

- *In the US[27], elite universities unashamedly compete for the best students from minorities and disadvantaged communities "because they are trying to construct a 'class' that will be representative of the best and brightest that American society can offer in the future".*

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[26] There is a shortage of candidates from state schools entering the high status professions, e.g., medical sciences, engineering. British born students of Indian and Chinese origin – like Nipo-Brasileiros in Brazil - are highly represented in these professions, but not other black minority ethnic and white working class groups. Edinburgh University has an innovative project that has succeeded in recruiting students from local state schools. www.ed.ac.uk

[27] 'Positive discrimination', as practised in the USA, Brazil and India is illegal in Britain and other European countries, though 'positive action' strategies for institutional change are permitted. There may also be cultural differences?

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Postscript (written in May 2012)

I presented my paper (3 May 2010) at a time when there was widespread preoccupation in the United Kingdom about the future direction, structure, purpose and funding of the British University Education system. Immediately following the UFRJ conference in May 2010, the United Kingdom elected a new coalition government, led by a Prime Minister of the Conservative Party and a deputy from the Liberal Party. It passed legislation in Parliament which introduced radical systemic changes concerning the future public funding of Universities and the challenges about **Particpation in University Education**. Central to these changes are two significant questions:

- *Who should study in a University, and why?*

- *Should students pay for the costs of their University studies, and how?*

A new *Model 4* has emerged which will result in a very different University system across the United Kingdom in the years ahead. The impact is already in evidence!