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**Abstract**

The first half of the 1990s saw a substantial increase in the number of people participating in higher education, though without a substantial alteration in the social profile of the English student population. However, today, with the Government target of 50 per cent of 18-30 year olds having some experience of higher education by 2010, the sector faces a new challenge in broadening as well as expanding its social base. This article traces different phases in the evolution of the HEFCE widening participation policy and strategy, including its response to the recommendations of the Dearing Report and, more recently, to the joint proposal with the Learning and Skills Council for a strengthening of partnerships between higher education, further education and schools. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)