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West of England

Widening Participation in Bristol's two universities

*Dr Tony Hoare (UoB) & Dr Richard
Waller (UWE)*

Paired Peers Dissemination Event,
Burwalls, July 1st 2011



Benefits of a comparative WP study:



- Our students' lifeworlds intersect
- A 'proximate other' sharpens the analysis of each
- We interact and collaborate already



Different Contexts 1

- Bigger (c2x total students)
- Newer (by a century)
- More part-timers (10-fold)



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Different Contexts 2

- City centre site
- Traditional academic fare
- Stronger research focus



Different Contexts 3

WP Performance Indicators:

- UWE higher Performance Indicators (though **both** usually below 'benchmarks')
- UWE higher non-completion rates (over 2x)
- UWE higher HEFCE WP income (c6x)
- Both have range of WP 'milestones' etc but UWE's extend beyond registration

So fairly typical 'Old' and 'New' Universities

Now for our Three As...

Actions 1 – Mainstreaming evidence

Clear case for mainstreaming in both Unis:

- WP strategies
- Dedicated WP teams
- Horizontal and vertical linkages
- Echoes in related policies

Actions 2 – Mainstreaming processes

Long WP chronologies:

- UWE – 1995+ ...2006-12
- UoB – 1999+ ...2009-16

Research foci:

- UWE – eg ‘Four Cities’, Aimhigher
- UoB – direct links to own WP experiences especially since 2006 (eg WP Research Cluster)

Actions 3 – Coverage and engagement

Delivery mechanisms:

- Some in common, some individual
- Coverage of 3 (UoB) and 4 (UWE) life-cycle stages

Resource commitments:

- Hard to compare, but UWE's WP expenditure was c2x UoB's – claims 4th highest outreach + bursary Uni. spend
- Both into school Academy support – UWE 3 (incl first in country), UoB 1

Assessment – Enabling factors

- *Independence* within national parameters
- Both have strong senior management *buy-ins* and successful grass-roots ‘hearts and minds’ campaigns
- *Geographical reach* – local/regional (UWE) and national (UoB)
- *Motivations* differ – financial dependence (UWE); personal drive, win/win ‘quality + diversity’ agenda (UoB)
- Different *media profiles*...

Media interest



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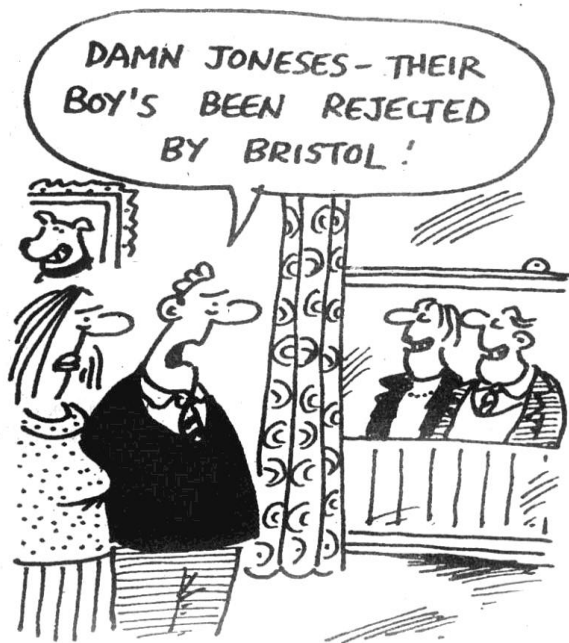
- **UWE was recently Xcel Widening Participation University of the Year!**
- UWE named 'Best Institute of Widening Participation' at 2009 national awards. Two UWE students also won individual awards



Media interest



By Rebecca English and Laura Clark
DAMNING evidence emerged yesterday that increasing numbers of pupils from fee-paying schools are being systematically discriminated against by universities.
More than a dozen recent offers at top of high flying universities rejected out of hand in favour of applicants from 'disadvantaged' backgrounds.
Students believe that there is just the sliver of the iceberg, and they worry that many middle-class pupils from state schools are being left behind. Some say the rejection is based on 'class' and 'social background'.
There are fears that under a 'post-19' system, schools will be targeted to favour those from 'disadvantaged' backgrounds.
Yesterday it emerged that Bristol University awarded further the week for having done a bit better than a private school, but not a school of 'disadvantaged' background.
It is not clear, at least the school's reputation, and the school's reputation, and the school's reputation, and the school's reputation.
The rejection of the application was the first of its kind, and the school's reputation, and the school's reputation, and the school's reputation.
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Bid to ease university entry for poor pupils

Jack Grimston

THE most senior figure in higher education has sparked a new row over bias in university admissions with a call for a huge increase in the use of preferential offers to benefit applicants from under-performing comprehensive schools.

Steve Smith, president of Universities UK, said research from Bristol University justified offering places to candidates from poor schools whose A-level results are up to three grades lower than those who are better educated.

The policy is likely to provoke claims from grammar schools and the independent

Places at Bristol

Usual offer for course

Special offer*

AAA

1-2 grades lower

AAB

2 grades lower

ABB

3 grades lower

* offers suggested by university to admissions tutors for candidates from poorly performing schools

SOURCE: University of Bristol



Steve Smith, president of Universities UK

Tony Hoare, director of widening participation research at Bristol, accused opponents of his policy of following a "grade fetish approach" that gave unjustified importance to raw exam results.

Bristol has advised its tutors to use Hoare's research in deciding their offers. The university insists this will be only one factor and that it has not adopted a "blanket" policy favouring one group of applicants.

Hoare said his findings could lead to tutors either making offers at different levels depending on the candidate's school or offering a place to a pupil from a poorly performing school in preference to one who had

Assessment – Successes and challenges

- Both have *WP strategies* firmly in place
- UWE – clear *across-the-board* growth in Outreach, Bursaries and ‘PIs’
- UoB – also *Outreach* growth but less in ‘PIs’
- UoB – robust counter to ‘social engineering’ charge through *contexting* methodology
- But both face sector-wide and locally-specific *challenges* which may be shaped by the ‘imminent’ White Paper and revision of ‘Access Agreements’

Association

- *Discipline support* for local schools – WP spin-offs
- *Unintended* benefits between Unis
- *Collaboration* on range of Outreach work
- *Joint WP research group* – ‘Paired Peers’ as part of a bigger agenda



Conclusions

- Of course we're *different* – in motives, resource levels, media interest and geographical reach
- But we're *surprisingly similar* too – strong, long-lasting commitments, firm embedding and support, positive messages
- And we *enjoy* working together...

Maybe others would too...

