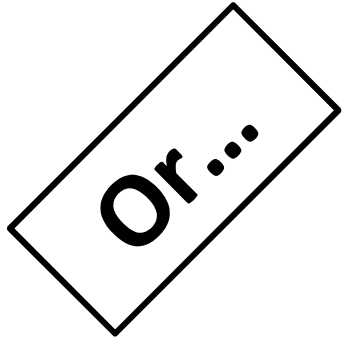


Comparative evaluation of the effects on widening participation of outreach work and bursaries

Richard Harris & Sara Davies



Personal Finance Research Centre



Bursaries are an important component of widening participation in Higher Education and their funding should be maintained

Richard Harris & Sara Davies



Personal Finance Research Centre

‘Milburn Report’

“if real progress is to be made on widening participation and fair access, the balance of expenditure needs to move more towards outreach activity... Universities should now act to switch expenditure in this way” (p.38)



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University Challenge: How Higher Education Can Advance Social Mobility

A progress report by the
Independent Reviewer on
Social Mobility and Child Poverty

October 2012

Have Bursaries Influenced Choices Between Universities? (OFFA, 2010)

- bursaries have not influenced the choice of university of disadvantaged young people
- applications from disadvantaged young people have not changed in favour of universities offering higher bursaries
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BURSARIES DON'T WORK

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2. Evidence that bursaries 'have not worked' is not proof that outreach will
3. Evidence that bursaries have not influenced choices does not mean they aren't working

Widening Access

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Widening Participation



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University of
BRISTOL

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“ My flatmates are all quite well off, and all get their rent paid by their parents ... I probably wouldn't have been able to live with them had I not had the bursary because the rent would have been too much (Year 3, UoB Bursary). ”

“ There were days when I actually, I didn't come into university because if I had 1 or 2 lectures I'd say well I'm not paying the train fee because I can't really afford this “
(UoB Bursary, year 2)

“ Living at home was a bit of a struggle, I didn't realise how exhausted I was until I like, until I moved out and realised that it was just I was getting up at 06.30 in the morning to get the bus ”
(Year 2, A2B bursary)

“ I thought if I could get a bursary I could get my gym pass for £150 or whatever it is and then get to do that, because I got sort of into running just before I came to Uni, and yes it's just nice to not have the pressure of where is it all coming from and I think it has helped me (Year 1, UoB Bursary) ”

“ You'll be surprised at how much like random costs come up at university, because I thought it was initially a lot of money but then it's been so useful in helping me pay for rent, deposits and stuff like that, just to help me get by (Year 2, UoB bursary) ”

“ I don't feel as stressed about money constantly, I don't worry as much, just by knowing that I've got a few months there will be another £1000 coming in ”
(Year 3, UoB Bursary)

“ At the end of the first year I was talking to them about reducing the hours I was working anyway, so I definitely couldn't have done more but without the bursary it might have been harder to reduce the hours (Year 3, A2B Bursary) ”

“ I've had to work since I was like 16 so I didn't want to work during university, I've had enough of part-time work so I wanted to take a break during Uni and study and just focus on my studies and do extracurricular as well (Year 3, UoB bursary) ”

“ I am going on the ski trip and I guess I wouldn't be able to without the bursary... I'd kind of defend it as in I saved up some money from when I was working at the same time... ”
(Year 3, A2B bursary)

“

As a much older student I think it's very important that the younger graduates are able to participate [...] I think it's vitally important if you're first time away from home, your first time at Uni that they have the opportunity to be involved with their friends, because this is where you can build, you know, friendships for life (Year 3, A2B bursary)

”



Bursary Vs Outreach

- It's a false choice
- They are complementary but also different
- Evidence that Access to Bristol scheme (which combines both) can influence student choices
 - encouraged students to believe that they were 'good enough' to attend Bristol.
 - attraction of the contextual offer
 - Ability to 'try out' a subject at University level



Conclusions

- The results of our research broadly support what others have shown: bursaries (in and of themselves) generally do not influence choice of university
 - Any information that is found regarding eligibility for bursaries is often found too late in the process
 - However, we do not see this as a justification for preferring outreach instead. The failure appears to be one of information and communication.



Conclusions

- Our research suggests that students, as a whole, are not convinced that financial considerations should play a big role in their choice at university
 - Location, reputation, the course offered and, most particularly, the grade requirement are equal if not greater factors



Conclusions

- Our research supports a more rounded view of widening participation, which is not just about diversifying intakes at the point of admission.
 - **It is also about helping those from less traditional backgrounds to participate fully in the life, community and opportunities offered by a university, many of which are extra-curricula**
 - **The impact of receiving a bursary on the experience, and the level of participation that eligible undergraduates had while at university was very clear from the findings.**



Conclusions

- Outreach can influence choice but...
 - The biggest barrier to school students from low-performing schools is the high academic performance at both GCSE and A levels that is required
 - There is only a small pool of students who are both eligible for support as part of Bristol's widening participation activity and are likely to achieve the grades required for the University
 - Outreach tends to target high achievers



Policy implications

1. The **bursary and fee waiver system** across the university sector is **complicated** and **uncertain** – eligibility may not be confirmed until a student is enrolled at a university. This **complexity should be reduced to allow for bursaries to influence university choice.**

Policy implications

2. Although the existing bursary system may have little effect in widening access to universities, it does not follow that outreach programmes alone will do any better. **Bursaries should not be replaced by outreach programmes, as is proposed, without further evaluation.**

Policy implications

3. The effect of cutting back on bursaries and financial support would be to leave students from less advantaged backgrounds **more vulnerable to financial uncertainty** and less well equipped to succeed at university. It would limit the opportunity for those students to participate fully in the life and community of the university. **Removing bursaries would diminish the student experience.**



Policy implications

4. The pool of school pupils who are from less advantaged backgrounds, who can meet the grade requirements of an elite University and who live nearby may not be large. **Local outreach programmes will therefore struggle to diversify intakes.**

Contextual offers that make lower grade offers to the higher-performing students from more deprived neighbourhoods can help.

Policy implications

- 5. Bursaries and outreach programmes should not be viewed in the context of an either-or.** They are complementary tools that can widen intake and participation within universities and should operate alongside one another to widen access to and participation within universities.

Full report

- <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/geography/research/pfrc/themes/finexc/widening-participation-exploring-the-effect-of-financial-support-and-outreach-on-the-choices-and-experiences-of-students-in-bristol/>



See also

- Timely – in the Times Higher Education
 - “Larger bursaries ‘boost students’ chances of getting good degree”
 - <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/larger-bursaries-boost-students-chances-getting-good-degree>