Admission of responsibility: Selective and non-selective institutions and the 'balancing' of social justice and excellence

John Rose-Adams and Dr Liz Marr
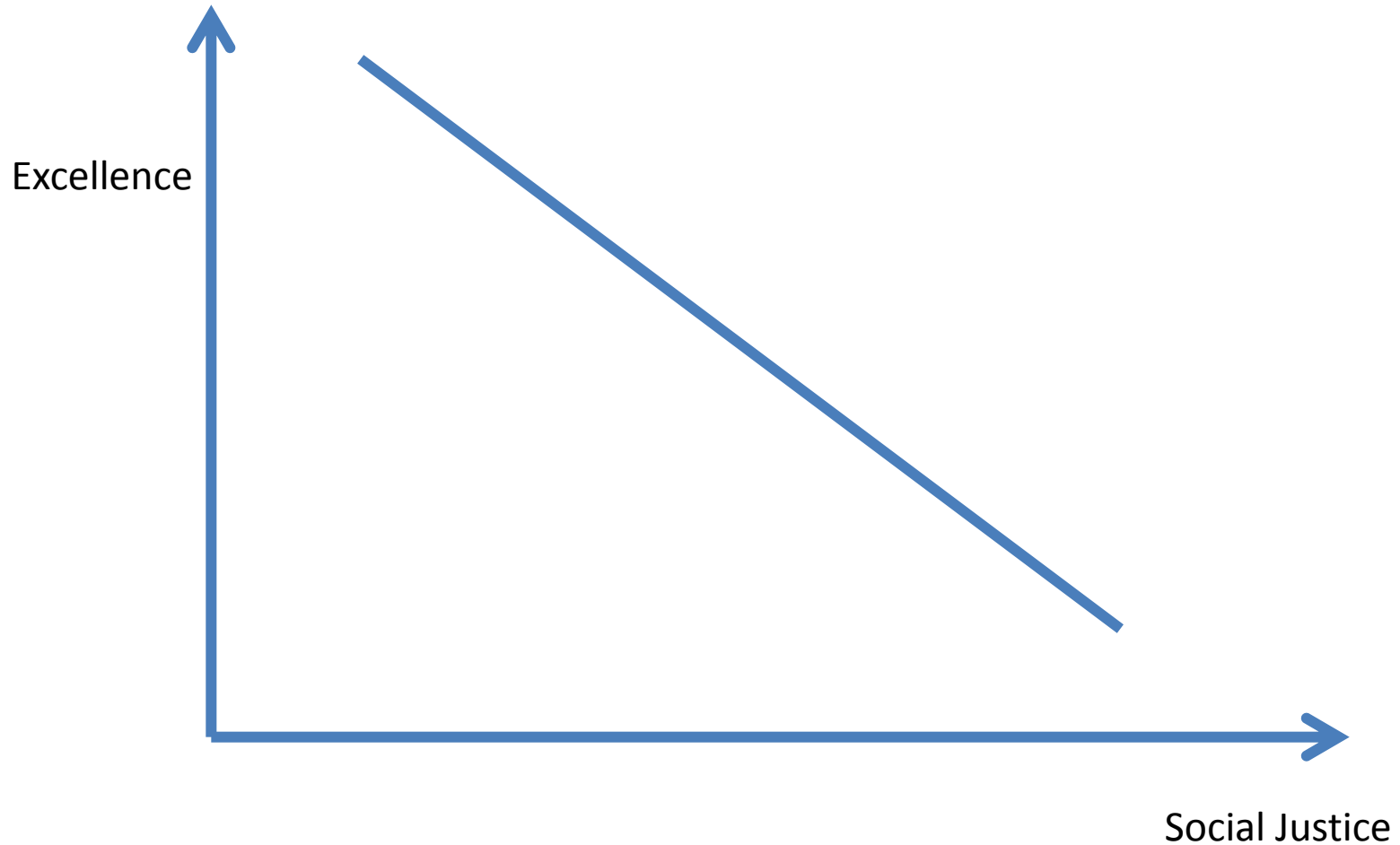Centre for Inclusion and Curriculum
www.open.ac.uk/cic
The Open University, UK

The Evidence Base for Fair Admissions, Manchester
July 2011

Can we achieve excellence and social justice in admissions?

Objectives

- Question relationship(s) between social justice and excellence
- Taking admissions out of the equation
- Outline how Social Justice relates to university, widening participation, fair admissions and excellence
- Case study of a non-selective institution – social justice and excellence?
- Discussion: social reproduction, meritocracy, what role for admissions?

Meritocracy and Social Justice

'a social system where individual talent and effort, rather than ascriptive traits, determine individuals' placements in a social hierarchy' (Alon and Tienda, 2007)

Selective

Meritocracy + University ≠ Social Justice

Non-Selective

Meritocracy + University ?= Social Justice

Social justice and the university

- What is a University for?
- Public vs private good? Both constituted in economic terms.
- New role for Universities: bright kids to elite institutions (Social Mobility)
- Injection of For-Profit to force market behaviours.

"Widening participation is at death's door. Social mobility is the new Holy Grail."

Social Justice and Widening Participation

- Troubled relationship with social justice?
  - Increasing and/or widening participation – which wins out?
- Confusion of tongues
  - 'A battery of reports, exhortations and policy proposals' (Hoare and Johnston, 2010)
  - Messy – between policy makers, HEIs and inside institutions.
- New threats to continuing progress – cuts, fees and the White Paper
- Marketing and Finance rules OK?
  - Greenbank (2006) institution's strategic frameworks 'based on economic grounds rather than widening participation'
  - Coates and Adnett (2003) 'a freer market will encourage HEIs to concentrate upon high ability, low-problem entrants'

Social Justice and Fair Admissions

- …and shifting relationship with widening participation
- Decreasing commitment to *admissions* for diversity (hinted at in Schwartz Report, 2004; confirmed by Adnett et al, 2010)
- Missed opportunities
  - what does fair mean and how can it be measured? (Watson, 2006; Adnett at al, 2010)
  - Office for Fair Access
- Suitability of the meritocratic impulse?

Definition of terms

Social justice

- Postcode data
- Low participation neighbourhoods
- Indices of multiple deprivation
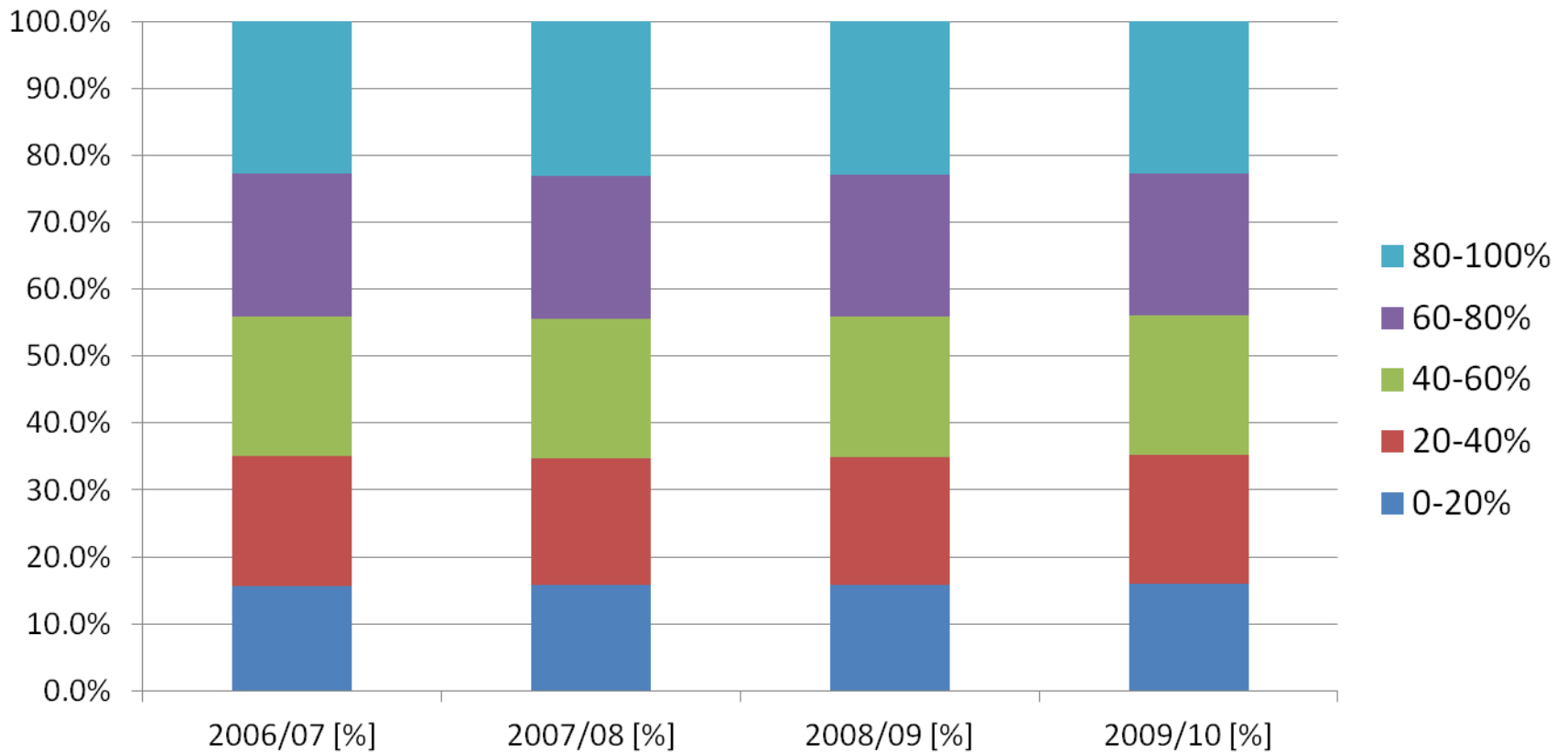- Low previous educational qualifications?

Excellence

- Research excellence?
- Student measures?
  - Satisfaction
  - Institutional surveys
  - Careers and Employment
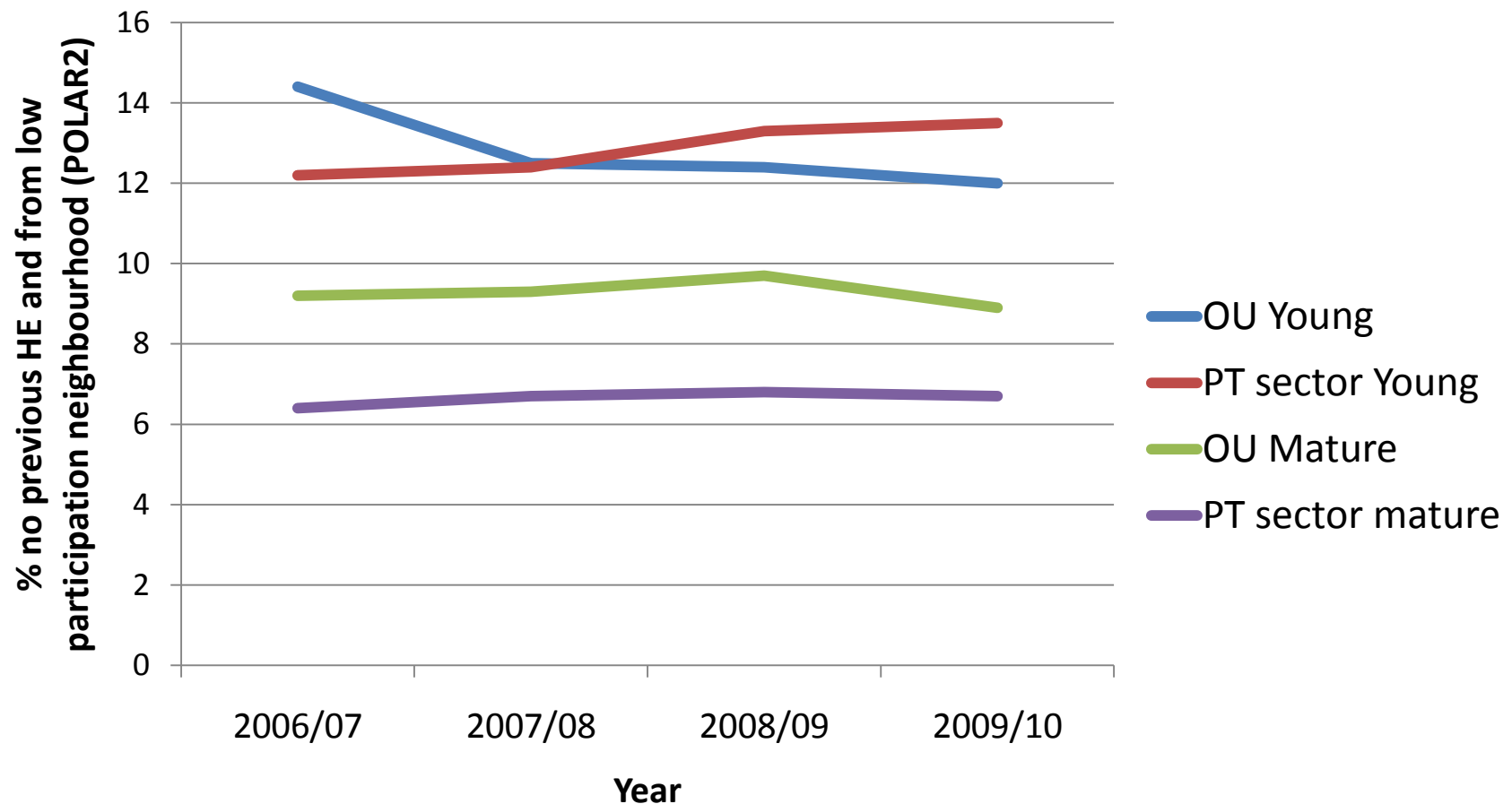
Social justice @ OU
2. Social representation

All New OU undergraduates embarking on full 'Year 1' study,
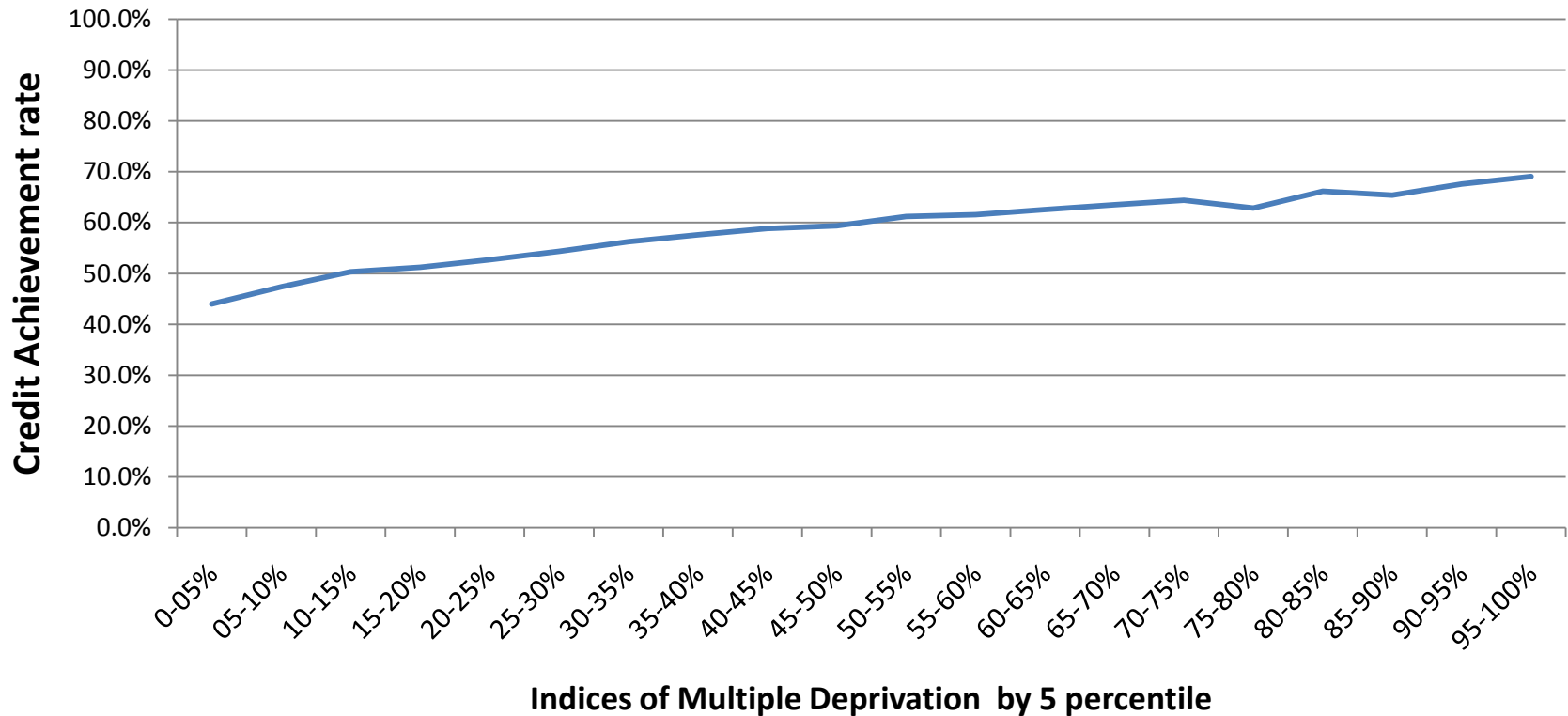Proportion of students within each IMD quintile, by year

Social justice @ OU
1. Part-time 'WP' participation rates

Social justice @ OU
3. Socially just outcomes?

All New level one undergraduates, credit achievement rate from module start by IMD 5 percentile, 2009-10

Excellence and the student experience

- Functional distance between student experience and admissions
- Renewed and increasing interest in student experience, so Excellence = Teaching Excellence?
  - Shifting Widening Participation emphasis across UK.
  - National Student Survey
  - Key Information Sets
  - Employability
  - White Paper *'Students at the Heart of the System'* extends these
- National Student Survey (NSS)
  - Open University has 15 of 50 highest scoring courses on NSS
  - OU is Consistently top three overall – 93% satisfied
- Employability – increasing work-related reasons for study, even for OU (52% to 63% in 5 years).
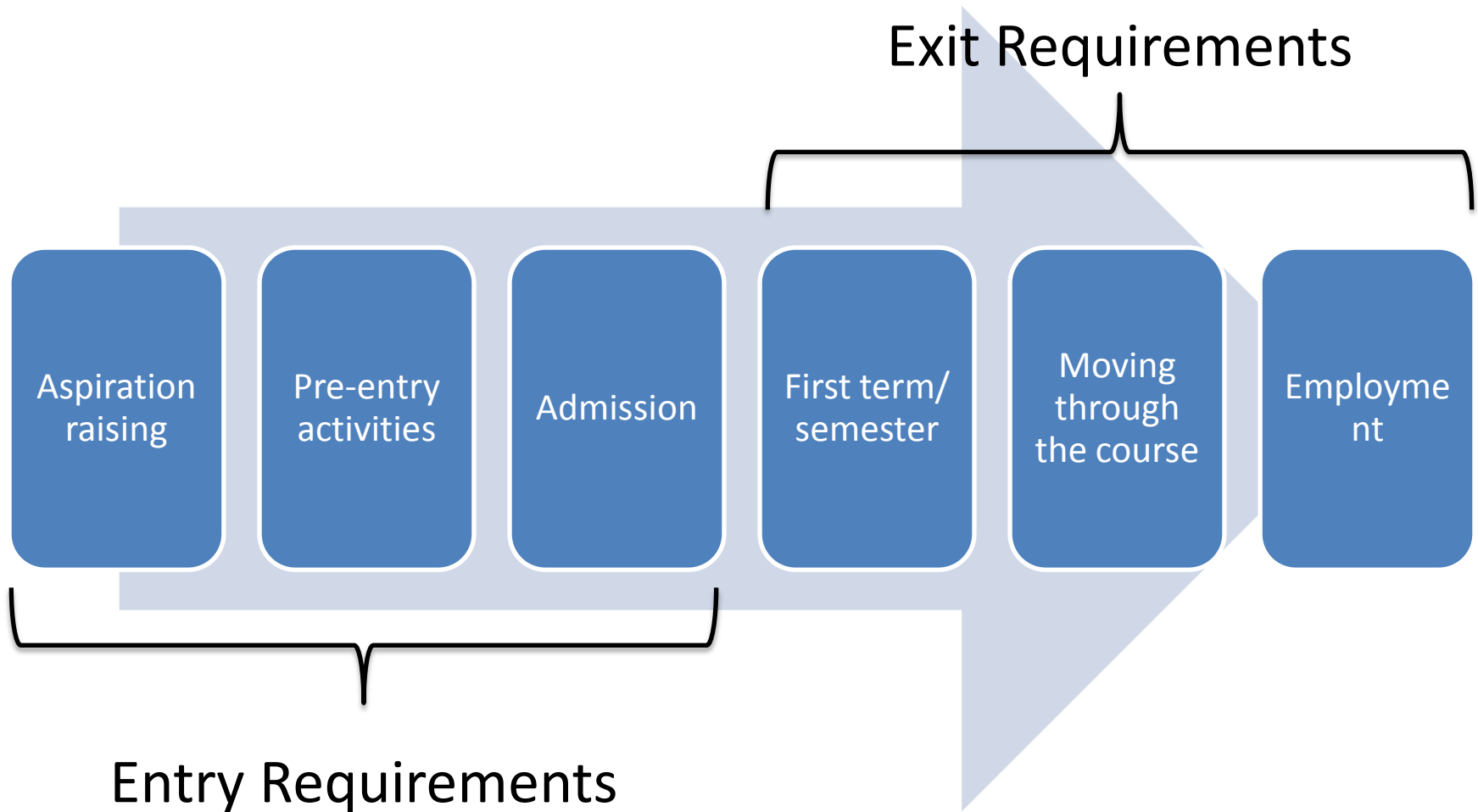
Discussion – What of access?

- Large numbers of students with low previous educational qualifications are **capable of success** in higher level study **given appropriate preparation and support** (Levy and Murray, 2005)

- 'Access' curriculum provision at Open University confirms
  - Significantly more likely to achieve if you start with an Access module, rather than jumping straight in **if lower previous educational qualifications.**

Discussion – Entry and exit requirements

Admission

Discussion – Entry and exit requirements

Exit Requirements

| Aspiration raising | Pre-entry activities | Admission | First term/ semester | Moving through the course | Employment |

Entry Requirements

What if No Higher Education Institutions were selective?

Excellence

Social Justice

Contact details

John Rose-Adams
j.rose-adams@open.ac.uk

Dr Liz Marr
e.a.marr@open.ac.uk

Centre for Inclusion and Curriculum
www.open.ac.uk/cic

References

- Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group (2004) *Fair admissions to higher education: Recommendations for good practice.* The Schwartz Report. Nottingham: Department for Education and Skills

- Adnett, N. et al., 2010. Achieving "Transparency, Consistency and Fairness" in English Higher Education Admissions: Progress since Schwartz? *Higher Education Quarterly*, p.no. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2273.2010.00468.x.

- Alon, S. and Tienda, M. (2007) Diversity, Opportunity and the Shifting Meritocracy in Higher Education. American Sociological Review, 72 (4), pp. 487–511 http://asr.sagepub.com/content/72/4/487

- Coates, G., & Adnett, N. (2003). Encouraging Cream-Skimming and Dreg-Siphoning? Increasing Competition between English HEIs. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 51(3), 202-218. doi:10.1111/1467-8527.t01-1-00235

- Greenbank, P (2006b). Widening participation in higher education: an examination of the factors influencing institutional policy. Research in Post-Compulsory Education, 11(2), p.199. Available at: http://www.informaworld.com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/10.1080/13596740600769123

- Watson, D. (2006) How to Think About Widening Participation in UK HE, HEFCE Discussion Paper. Available from http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2006/rd13_06/