



# **The evidence base for fair admissions: Bristol fashion**

**University of Manchester, July 2011**

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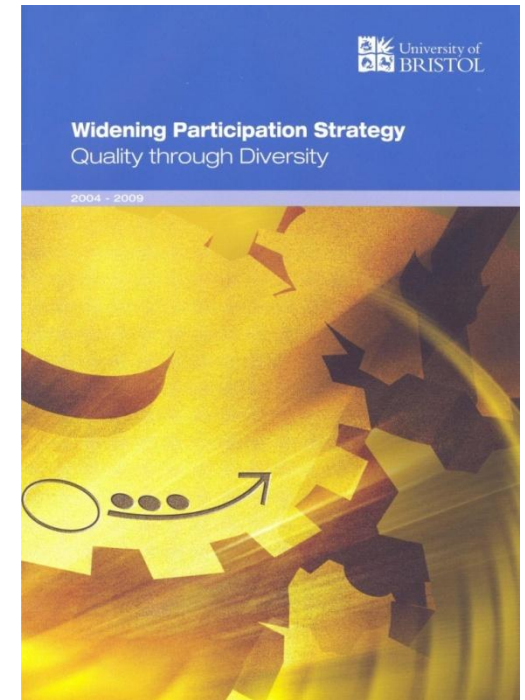
# Outline



- Bristol's institutional setting to WP research
- Some examples
- The evidence base for fair admissions through contexting
- Interim assessment

# The Bristol setting- the 2004/09 WP Strategy

- Identified the need to adopt *‘an evidence-based approach to widening participation activity’*,
- And confirmed, via its Objective 10 :  
*‘ the University will develop and disseminate research that is linked to policy and practice regionally and nationally, and make use of this research in its own widening participation activities’*



Reinforced by the revised WPS for 2009-2016

# 🌿 Bristol background - wider and deeper embedding

- WP Management Group
- Regular reports to two WP and Admissions Committees
- Supporting WP Statistics Group
- Faculty and Department WP reps and Forums
- Engagement with other administrative areas – Accommodation, Student Finance...



# 🔥 Types of WP research to date

- **Monitoring and fact-finding** – at undergraduate and postgraduate levels: Postgraduate profile, Paired Peers...
- **Outreach impacts**: Sutton Trust Summer Schools...
- **Alternative admissions approaches**: Admissions tests, PQA, Contexting...





# Contexting - The HE sector speaks (1)

- Support in principle From Schwartz (2004) ...

*‘ [we] believe that it is fair and appropriate to consider **contextual factors** as well as formal educational achievement, given the variation in learners’ opportunities and circumstances’.*

# 🔥 Contexting - the HE sector speaks (2)

- ...to NCEE (2008,2009)...

*‘HEIs should continue to use, and where possible expand, the range of, all information available to them to identify the best students with the greatest potential and ability to reach the highest academic achievement...[The Milburn Report] gave clear and strong support for universities using data that take account of the **educational and social context** of pupils’ achievement in their admissions process.’*

# 🔥 Contexting admissions decisions – Rationale

- Based on identifying **academic potential**
- Recognition of potential for **Educational Disadvantage** – prior attainment/degree attainment gap
- Variety of possible **sources**
- Necessity for supporting **evidence**
- **Non-mechanistic** – autonomy of admissions tutors based on holistic assessment
- **Transparency**



# Contexting methodology 1- Equipotential groups by example

Students	Entry grades	Exit - % above cohort median
<b>NON-WP</b>	<b>AAB +</b>	<b>50%</b>
Non-WP	ABB +	45%
WP	AAB +	65%
WP	ABB +	60%
<b>WP</b>	<b>BBB +</b>	<b>50%</b>

# Contexting methodology 2 – generating an Intake Milestone

Students	Entry grades	UOB applications
<b>NON-WP</b>	<b>AAB +</b>	<b>6000</b>
<b>WP</b>	<b>BBB +</b>	<b>4000</b>

So a representative offer profile would be 60% to Non-WPs and 40% to WPs

# 🌟 Contexting methodology

## 3 – the outcomes

- Advice to Admissions Tutors - depending on normal offer level

- Revised Intake milestone (2016) – 40% from low performing schools

Normal offer	Differential for 'low' schools
AAA	1 – 2 grades
AAB	2 grades
ABB	3 grades



# Alternative Milestone approaches

- **HESA Benchmarks** (school type, social class low participation neighbourhoods)
- **National young-person profiles** (eg The Access Tsar)
- **DIY**, based on past performance and future aspirations



## National

### Must do better: elite universities fail to work out solution to low admissions among underprivileged

Intake rate below 5% at seven of Russell Group Only 180 a year get into Oxford or Cambridge

Rachel Williams

Many elite universities still admit few pupils from underprivileged backgrounds in spite of repeated attempts to boost their participation, official statistics show.

At seven of the Russell Group universities – the 18% to 20 leading research institutions – less than 5% of students came from neighbourhoods that traditionally see few youngsters studying for a degree.

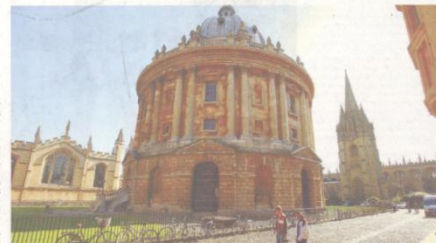
Just 2.7% of full-time undergraduates at Oxford in 2005/06 – around 75 students out of an intake that year of around 2,875 – were from those disadvantaged areas. At Cambridge, the figure was 3.7% – around 10 students of about 2,800.

Bristol, Imperial College, King's College London, the London School of Economics and University College London were also among universities where less than 5% of the intake came from "low participation neighbourhoods".

Agreed from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) reveal. Across the UK, only one in 10 students came from such areas, even though they represent 20% of the nation's youth.

The figures reveal that one-tenth of young people who do go to university from low participation backgrounds drop out after their first year. The total dropout rate across the UK fell to 2.2% in 2005/06 from 2.4% the year before.

The data also shows the majority of



The Bodleian library in Oxford, where the university does not believe in admissions quotas. Photo: Oli Scarff/Getty Images

Cambridge and Oxford saw increases from 57% to 59.3% and 53.4% to 54.7% respectively – they were far short of their targets, which this year stood at 65.8% for Cambridge and 65.7% for Oxford.

Many universities now offer summer schools and courses to try to increase the number of students who come from underprivileged homes, and take into account background when making offers.

Cardiff, Glasgow, Liverpool, Queen's University Belfast, Sheffield and Southampton were the only Russell Group universities to exceed their benchmarks. At Bristol the percentage of students from state schools was 60%, and at Imperial it was 61.1%. Nationwide, the figure was 48.6%, up from 48%.

Oxford and Cambridge said further alterations were needed. The Russell Group said its universities were doing everything they could to increase participation from "under-represented groups", but that issues of low expectations and underachievement at school could not be tackled by universities alone.

A Cambridge spokesman said: "The university welcomes the way in which this year's performance indicators reflect its effective outreach participation. The same

applied to maintaining those efforts." Oxford said it was committed to working to attract the best candidates from all backgrounds. "In the last year the university spent more than £2.5m on outreach activities designed to encourage the best candidates to apply, whatever their background," a spokesman said. "Our final admissions decisions are based on academic ability and potential alone, and we do not believe in admissions quotas."

Sally Hunt, general secretary of the University and College Union (UCU), said: "UCU firmly believes that we need to look at a whole range of information when considering students for university."

"Students from poorer backgrounds do often need more support in terms of mentoring as well as financial support at university. Research has shown students from state schools outperform their independent-schooled contemporaries when they reach university. It is absolutely vital that students are not priced out of university by any new measures from the forthcoming fees review."

In Leo Elliot Major, director of research and policy at the Sutton Trust, which promotes social mobility through education, said the country's leading research universities had not increased their proportion of underprivileged students to the same extent as the wider university sector.

"The fee must be that a two-tier university system will develop, with the social class, 'head', the answer lies in improving recruitment and advice at school, and redoubling outreach efforts to ensure people with a level 2 grade do not slide themselves out of the most academically demanding degree courses because they feel they won't fit in."

Oxford, it is worth noting, took only 5% of

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## the guardian weekend edition

### Universities must cut private school intake, warns Hughes

Colleges 'failing miserably' to reflect society, says Lib Dem deputy leader

Jeevan Vasagar  
Education editor

Universities should drastically limit their intake of privately educated pupils if they want to change undergraduates up to £9,000 a year, the government's adviser on access to higher education says today. Simon Hughes, also the Liberal Democrat deputy leader, warns that universities need to be far more active in seeking out the brightest state school pupils.

He said: "I think my message to the

universities is: You have gained quite a lot in the settlement. Yes, you've lost lots of state money, but you've got another revenue stream that's going to protect you. You now have to deliver in turn: You cannot expect to go on as you are. It has failed miserably."

Just over 7.2% of pupils in England attend private schools but make up over a quarter of the intake at the 25 most selective universities, and 46.6% at Oxford.

Before his first meeting next week with Vince Cable and David Willetts, the coalition ministers who oversee universities,

**MP jailed for fraud**

Former Labour MP David Chaytor has been jailed for 18 months after admitting he submitted false claims for rent and IT services totalling more than £200,000. The judge said a prison sentence was one of the first steps in securing public faith in the parliamentary system.

Hughes told the Guardian: "Every university should, wherever their fee level is, but specifically for a fee level above £6,000, recruit on the basis of no more people coming from the private sector than there are in the public as a whole... I don't believe you have to look to the private sector to give you the quality of exam results and ability to make up the numbers to fill the places."

One of Hughes' key tasks in his new

Continued on page 6

# Extending contexting

- Annual **monitoring**
- Methodological **refining**
- **Extension** to Level 2 qualifications
- **Comparison** of outcomes with other HEIs

# Assessment - some caveats

## Gove pledges to tear up 'discredited' exam system

Attack comes in middle of GCSEs and A levels

Greg Hurst, Rachel Sylvester  
Alice Thomson

The examinations system is "discredited", the Education Secretary has told *The Times*, as hundreds of thousands of teenagers across the country finish taking their A levels and GCSEs.

Head teachers, parents and students

There will also be structural changes to A levels, with pressure on awarding bodies to return to end-of-course examinations after two years, which will mean AS levels disappearing in some subjects.

He also wants coursework dropped from many GCSEs and a similar switch back to final examinations after two

## A sharper tool

Leading UK universities may scrap degree classifications for GPA

- *Inform*, not *form*, university policy and practice
- Memorandum of Understanding very appropriate
- 'Beck and call' ?
- Parochial perspectives ?
- Needs wholesale institutional buy-in
- ...and good database support
- 'High-viz' profile and scrutiny – FOI requests
- Vulnerable to 'system change'



# 🔥 Assessment – the value of the evidence-base approach

- Potential effective **internal guidance** on what and what not to do
- Robustness against external charge of ‘**social engineering**’
- Contribute nationally to identification of **best practice**
- **We’re a university** – it’s what we do



✶ For more details (as available)...

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