The evidence base for fair admissions: Bristol fashion

University of Manchester, July 2011

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Outline

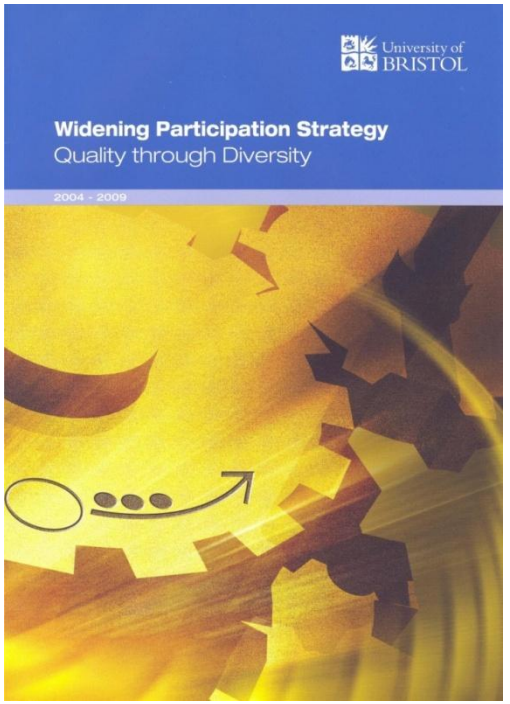
- Bristol's institutional setting to WP research
- Some examples
- The evidence base for fair admissions through contexting
- Interim assessment

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’.

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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.'

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Contexing 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

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Contexting methodology 1- Equi-potential groups by example

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

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Contexting methodology 2 – generating an Intake Milestone

Students	Entry grades	UOB applications
NON-WP	**AAB +**	**6000**
WP	**BBB +**	**4000**

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

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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

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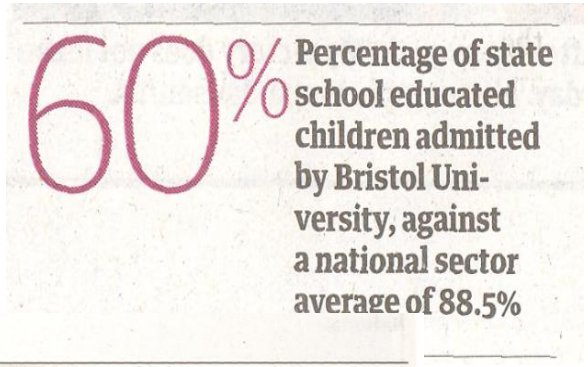
Alternative Milestone approaches

- 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

The Radcliffe Camera in Oxford, where the university does not believe in admissions quotas Photo: Oli Scarff/Getty Images

60% Percentage of state school educated children admitted by Bristol University, against

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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