

# The role of Student Ambassadors in HE



**TOWARDS MAINSTREAMING WIDENING  
PARTICIPATION?**

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# Outline



- **Context – Student Ambassadors (SAs) in HE**
- **Research aims and methods**
- **Findings:**
  - Why do students want to become SAs?
  - What is the learner/SA relationship like?
- **Future of the scheme – some possible case scenarios**
- **Conclusions**

# SAs in HE



- **The SA scheme – longer-term origins, but has expanded along with the Aimhigher programme**
- **SAs play an important role in widening participation**
  - Selection from students in HE
  - Short, but intense training
  - One-off and sustained activities (e.g. Open Days, school visits, Summer schools, mentoring)
- **Flexible role, which fits around studying**

# Aims and methods



- **Focus on one Aimhigher partnership in South London (4 HEIs)**
- **Main aims to find out:**
  - What motivates students to become SAs
  - What the relationship between SAs and learners is like
  - How the work of SAs impacts on learners
- **In-depth interviews with 11 SAs in 2007**
- **An internet-based survey sent to new SAs (N=380) in 2009 in one Aimhigher partnership area (31% response rate)**
  - A follow-up survey in the spring/summer 2010

# Why become a student ambassador?



- **Various motivations/reasons reported, but in general intrinsic/instrumental dichotomy**
  - Interviews: money an important factor, but so is helping others
    - ✦ ‘I know the number one reason is money because you are well paid. Also it looks good on CV, and you can help other students. The first thing about being a student ambassador is the money.’
    - ✦ ‘When you work as an ambassador you just have a great job satisfaction and you feel good about the job...so it is a great experience.’
  - Survey: top 4 reasons ‘work experience’ (72%); ‘earning money’ (71%); ‘interest in the scheme’ (66%); ‘CV’ (53%)

# Why become a student ambassador?



- A follow-up survey question:



# The SA/learner relationship



- **More equal and casual than that between teachers and learners:**
  - Smaller age gap
  - Status – approachability/accessibility
  - Trust
- **Impact/consequences: SAs able to reach out to the more disadvantaged young people**
  - Role models
  - Motivation/inspiration
- **But also, can create some tension/confusion within the role: should SAs lead or follow?**

# The SA/learner relationship



- **Two interviewee SAs commented:**
  - ‘Because we are in the same situation as the students themselves – we go through the same hardships as they do. So it’s not like we are patronizing or talking out of place – we know we can relate to them’.
  - ‘Student Ambassadors didn’t treat them as if they were in detention – they treated them as if it was their own time for learning which I think made them a lot calmer and they did get a lot more from it...there is not that divide of student versus teacher’.
- **Bridging the gap between schools and academia?**

# What does the future hold?



- **Aim higher funding coming to an end in 2011 – what are the consequences on WP/SA schemes?**
  1. Will HEIs find alternative funding?
  2. Will there be a significant reduction of SAs?
  3. Will there be an emphasis on volunteering?
- **Remains to be seen, but:**
  - Feasible in the current climate (option 1)?
  - Undermines WP; SAs fundamental to WP (option 2)?
  - Practical constraints (option 3)?

# Conclusions



- **Can SA's provide the means to mainstream WP?**
  - **Yes. SA's play an important role in WP:**
    - ✦ Bridge the gap between schools and academia
    - ✦ Central role in many WP activities
  - **Maybe. Practical constraints:**
    - ✦ Financial uncertainty - the future remains unclear
- **It remains to be seen what the future holds for the SA schemes across the country**