



University of the  
West of England

*Two tales of a city: Widening  
Participation in the universities of  
Bristol*

Dr Tony Hoare (UoB), Dr Richard  
Waller (UWE), Chris Croudace (UWE)  
and Betsy Bowerman (UoB)





## Benefits of a comparative study:

- Our students' lifeworlds intersect
- A 'proximate other' sharpens the analysis of each
- We interact and collaborate already



# Different Contexts 1

- Bigger (c2x total students)
- Newer (by a century)
- More part-timers (10-fold)

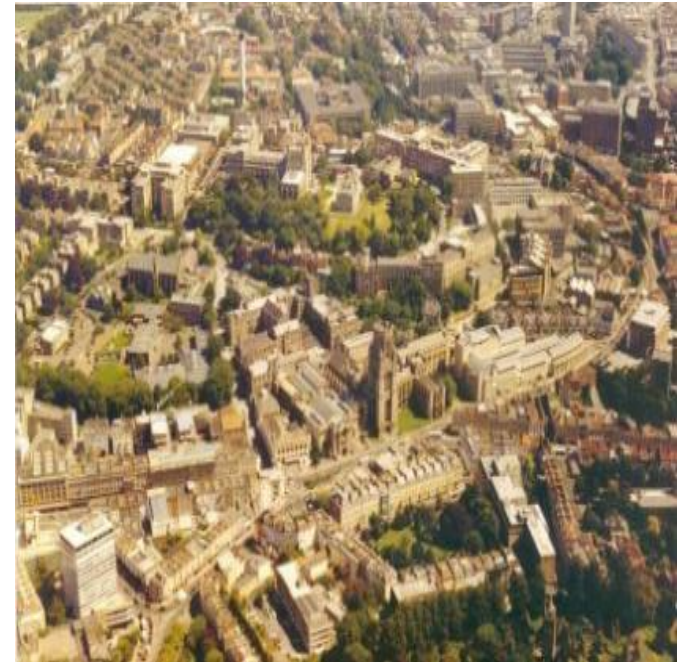


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# Different Contexts 2

- City centre site
- Traditional academic fare
- Strong research focus  
(c9x UWE's QR)



# Different Contexts 3

## WP Performance Indicators:

- UWE higher HESA PIs (though both usually below benchmarks)
- UWE higher non-completion rates (over 2x)
- UWE higher HEFCE WP income (c6x)
- Both have range of WP 'milestones' etc but UWE's extend beyond registration

**So fairly stereotypical 'Old' and 'New' HEIs**

**Now for our **Three As...****

# **A**ctions 1 – Mainstreaming evidence

**Clear case for mainstreaming in both HEIs:**

- WP strategies
- Dedicated WP teams
- Horizontal and vertical linkages
- Echoes in related policies

# **A**ctions 2 – Mainstreaming processes

## **Long chronologies:**

- UWE – 1995+ ...2006-12
- UoB – 1999+ ...2009-16

## **Research foci:**

- UWE – eg ‘Four Cities’, Aimhigher
- UoB – direct links to own WP experiences especially since 2006 (eg WP Research Cluster)

# **A**ctions 3 – Coverage and engagement

## **Delivery mechanisms:**

- Some in common, some individual
- Coverage of 3 (UoB) and 4 (UWE) life-cycle stages

## **Resource commitments:**

- Hard to compare, but UWE's WP expenditure was c2x UoB's – claims 4<sup>th</sup> highest outreach + bursary HEI spend
- Both into school Academy support (UWE first in country)

# Assessment – Enabling factors

- Independence within national parameters
- Both have SMT buy-ins and successful grass-roots ‘hearts and minds’ campaigns
- Geographical reach – local/regional (UWE) and national (UoB)
- Motivations differ – financial dependence (UWE); personal drive, win/win ‘quality + diversity’ agenda (UoB)
- Different media profiles...

# Media interest



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- **UWE is Xcel Widening Participation University of the Year!**
- UWE named 'Best Institute of Widening Participation' at 2009 Awards. Two UWE students also won individual awards



# Media interest



**Daily Mail**  
WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 25, 2011 40p

What kind of law is it that fails to lock up burglars but destroys innocent men like Matthew Kelly?  
**LYNDA LEE-POTTER** SEE PAGE 13

## REJECTED

More students are being turned down by universities just for being middle-class and doing too well in exams

By Rebecca English and Laura Clark

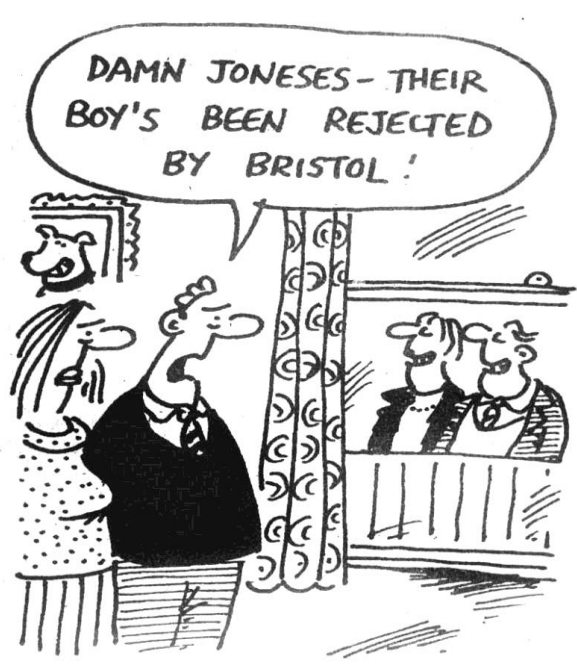
**DAMNING** evidence emerged yesterday that increasing numbers of pupils from fee-paying schools are being systematically discriminated against by universities.

When Chris O'Grady, headmaster of a top public school, mentioned a reported case of being in favour of applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds, O'Grady believes that there is just the tip of the iceberg, and that many more cases will emerge as more schools are forced to reveal their internal records.

There are fears that under a post-19 reforms, schools will be required to disclose to the public the names of their pupils who have been accepted by universities, and that this will lead to a more open market for places at universities.

The suggestion of the selection was made by O'Grady in a letter to the headmaster of a public school, where he had earlier attacked the policy.

Turn to Page 9, Col. 1



# Bid to ease university entry for poor pupils

**Jack Grimston**

THE most senior figure in higher education has sparked a new row over bias in university admissions with a call for a huge increase in the use of preferential offers to benefit applicants from under-performing comprehensive schools.


Steve Smith, president of Universities UK, said research from Bristol University justified offering places to candidates from poor schools whose A-level results are up to three grades lower than those who are better educated.

The policy is likely to provoke claims from grammar schools and the independent

**Places at Bristol**

Usual offer for course	Special offer*
AAA	1-2 grades lower
AAB	2 grades lower
ABB	3 grades lower

\* offers suggested by university to admissions tutors for candidates from poorly performing schools



Steve Smith, president of Universities UK

Source: University of Bristol

Tony Hoare, director of widening participation research at Bristol, accused opponents of his policy of following a "grade fetish approach" that gave unjustified importance to raw exam results.

Bristol has advised its tutors to use Hoare's research in deciding their offers. The university insists this will be only one factor and that it has not adopted a "blanket" policy favouring one group of applicants.

Hoare said his findings could lead to tutors either making offers at different levels depending on the candidate's school or offering a place to a pupil from a poorly performing school in preference to one who had

# Assessment – Successes and challenges

- Both have WP strategies firmly in place
- UWE – clear growth in scale of Outreach, Bursaries and PIs
- UoB – also Outreach growth but less in PIs
- UoB – robust counter to ‘social engineering’ charge through contexting methodology
- But both face sector-wide and locally-specific challenges

# Association

- Discipline support for local schools – WP spin-offs
- Unintended ‘leakages’ between HEIs
- Collaboration on range of Outreach work
- Joint WP research group – *Paired Peers* 3yr project beginning Sept 2010



# Conclusions

- Of course we're different – in motives, resource levels, media interest and geographical reach
- But we're surprisingly similar too – strong, long-lasting commitments, firm embedding and support, positive messages
- And we enjoy working together...

# Maybe you would too...

