



# SUPPORTING STUDENT SUCCESS: Lowering academic standards or promoting equality of outcomes?





# Education Education Education





# Labour Party Manifesto 1997

- ❖ Education will be “the number one priority”
- ❖ Target of 50% HE participation by 2010



Nov. 2007  
27 Issues  
10 Issues 2007  
**£1.50**

# PRIVATE EYE

## BLAIR TO NAME THE DAY



Oh look -  
it's my legacy!



## Ten years on

“Education is the most precious gift a society can bestow on its children. When I said the top three priorities of the Government in 1997 would be education, education, education I knew then that changing educational opportunity was the surest way to changing lives, to social justice.”

PM Tony Blair

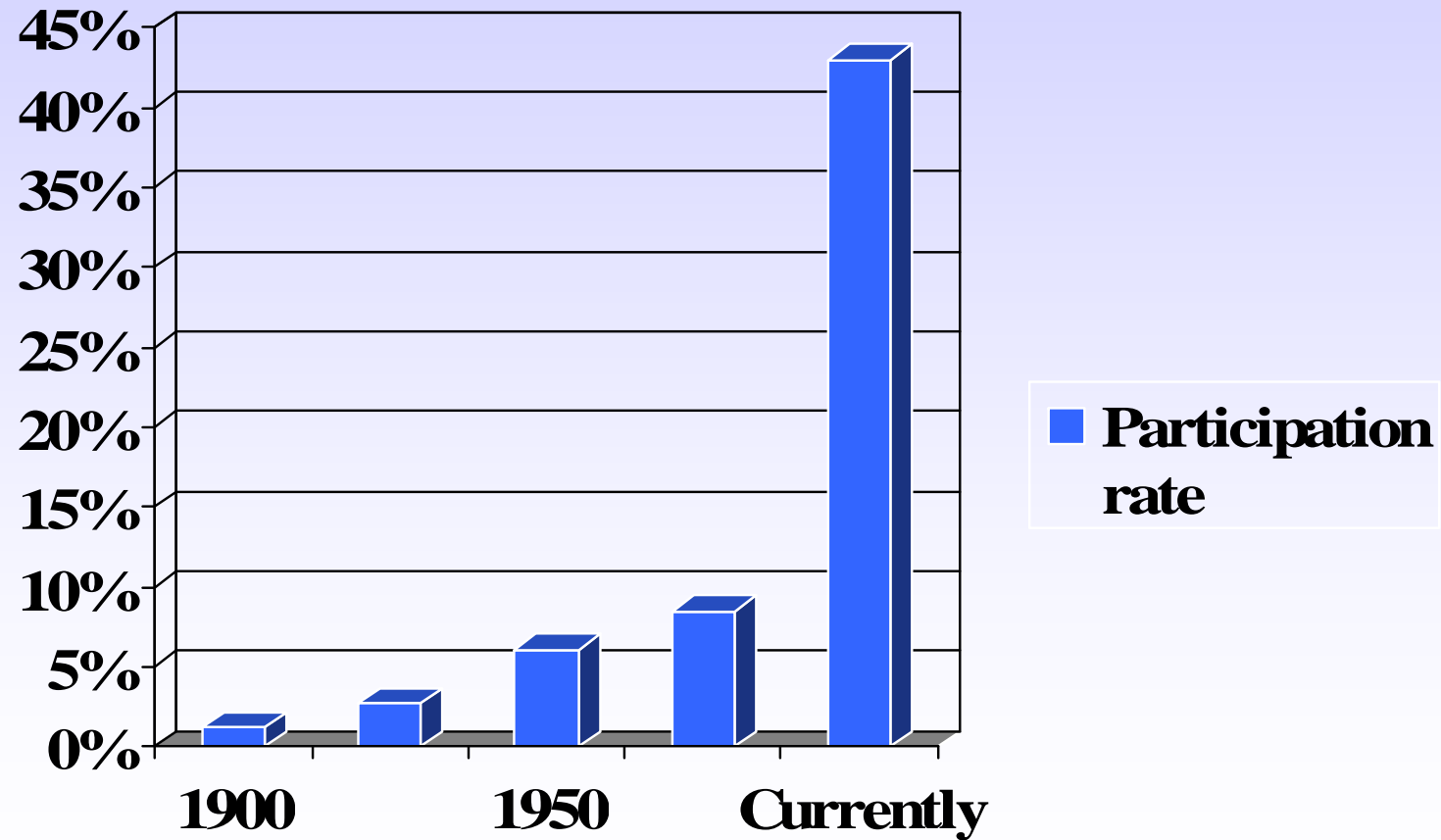


# Benefits

- ❖ Graduates earn on average more than £100,000 than similar non-graduates with A levels in their lifetime
- ❖ Graduates pay 11% tax above the cost of their higher education
- ❖ Society benefits from a more skilled workforce (NAO 2007)



# Some Success





## Some Success – But...

- ❖ Mostly from the middle classes
  - Currently only 10% of those from poorest fifth of the population get a degree compared with 44% of those from the richest fifth
    - (Sutton Trust 2008)



# It is not enough to Recruit ... We need to Retain

- ❖ There is little improvement in student retention since 2001
- ❖ UK had the fifth highest 'survival' rates in 2004 behind Japan, Ireland, Korea and Greece
- ❖ Nationally 22% - nearly a quarter of students do not graduate



# Risk Factors

- ❖ Part time students more at risk
- ❖ Poor entry qualifications
  - A level grades correlate with social class and with progression
- ❖ White Male poorer social classes

(NAO, 2007)



## National Picture

- ❖ 30,000 UK students fail to get a qualification (NAO, 2002)
- ❖ HEFCE Strategic Plan 2006-2011
  - “We think that a high proportion of students completing their courses is an important indicator of good quality learning, teaching and student support.”



# Widening Participation

- ❖ HEFCE has given £392 million to universities between 2001-2008 to widen participation and retain students (NAO 2008)



# What Works

- ❖ “But I would be the first to admit that we still do not know, in any definitive way, what works.”

Sir Howard Newby (2004), former Chief Executive HEFCE



In other words...

I haven't a clue !





# University of Westminster Progression 2008/09

- ❖ 73% progressed into year 2
- ❖ 545 students did not return to the University in 2008/09
- ❖ Resulting in a loss to the university of £4.4 million pounds in HEFCE funding and lost fees



# Summary of Risk Factors

- ❖ Significant Indicators whether students consider abandoning their course:
  - Poor mental health
  - Poor student satisfaction
  - Poor institutional integration



# Predictors of Success

- ❖ **Awarded Marks correlated significantly with:**
  - **Quality of Teaching**
  - **Satisfaction with Course**
  - **Perception of Debt**



# Strongest Predictor of Success

- ❖ In relation to **Awarded Marks...**
  - the strongest correlation was found with *Staff Concern for Students Development*



## Lessons from survey

- ❖ Students at risk of dropping out:
  - Poorer mental health
  - Poorer integration into University
  - Low satisfaction with University
  - Perceive debt as problematic
  - Do not feel supported by staff



## Implications

- ❖ Greater integration leads to greater satisfaction with the University
- ❖ Greater satisfaction leads to higher rates of persistence
- ❖ Staff support for students of central importance



## Good Idea – But ...

- ❖ Large student numbers
- ❖ Limited resources
- ❖ How can we provide additional support for students which is beneficial but cost effective?



# Where is the line?

- ❖ How do we provide equality of outcome?
- ❖ By providing additional support/tuition for some do we discriminate against others?
- ❖ How far is far enough in retaining students?