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Established to promote excellence in research and teaching. To enhance student and staff experience within our universities and to set the agenda for higher education.

Policy Brief
December 2010

Widening participation through targeted outreach programmes

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The 1994 Group

- > The 1994 Group is established to promote excellence in university research and teaching. It represents 19 of the UK's leading research-intensive, student focused universities. Around half of the top 20 universities in UK national league tables are members of the group.
- > Each member institution delivers an extremely high standard of education, demonstrating excellence in research, teaching and academic support, and provide learning in a research-rich community.
- > 1994 Group Universities achieved outstanding results in the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2008. 1994 Group members are UK leaders in seventeen major subject areas, achieving 1st place in their field. 57% of the 1994 Group's research is rated 4* world-leading or 3* internationally excellent.
- > The 1994 Group represents: University of Bath, Birkbeck University of London, Durham University, University of East Anglia, University of Essex, University of Exeter, Goldsmiths University of London, Institute of Education University of London, Royal Holloway University of London, Lancaster University, University of Leicester, Loughborough University, Queen Mary University of London, University of Reading, University of St Andrews, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of Surrey, University of Sussex, University of York.

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Widening participation through targeted outreach programmes

This is a report by Mark Fuller, Katherine Harris, Tom Norton, and Paul Marshall on behalf of the 1994 Group's Student Experience Policy Group.

Introduction

Widening Participation (WP) is a key concern for all involved in Higher Education (HE). Universities, as well as Ministers and Whitehall officials, are committed to making sure that the opportunity to study at top class institutions is available to all with the right ability, regardless of their background. As the UK HE sector undergoes fundamental changes, with the bulk of university funding being transferred from direct grants to graduate contribution, it is more important than ever that efforts are made to open up access routes. This is a political imperative, with Ministers keen to ensure that funding mechanisms are progressive; and an academic one, with universities determined to recruit from the widest possible field of talent.

This 1994 Group Policy Brief sets out the role that outreach programmes can play in WP. It demonstrates the work 1994 Group universities have been carrying out to recruit students who would otherwise face barriers to study. 1994 Group institutions are committed to outreach activity as a fundamental part of their strategies to widen participation in higher education our institutions invested over £45m last year in student support and outreach activity, as well as offering a range of scholarships and bursaries that continue to grow annually. We believe that targeted outreach activity has had a profound effect on widening the pool of applicants to the most selective universities. Most member institutions operate a wide range of activities which aim to enhance the aspirations and academic performance of children and young people both locally and nationally. The commitment of our institutions can be seen clearly through the considerable amount of resource dedicated to outreach activity, and also the number of young people who come into contact with our universities through participation in these activities.

The case studies throughout this paper demonstrate best practice, and exemplify the principles that effective outreach work should follow.

It is vital that the value of outreach is understood. The increase in graduate contributions will rightly be accompanied by a greater obligation on universities to ensure that no one is deterred from applying based on ability to pay. It would be a mistake however for these obligations to take the form of blanket requirements for all universities to contribute to national schemes; or for crude output targets to be imposed. Not only would these be ineffective, they would detract energy and resources from the types of successful outreach programmes detailed in this paper.

Ministers must ensure that no obligation is imposed that would hamper universities' ability to carry out excellent, and autonomous, outreach work.

Types of outreach activity

All 1994 Group institutions have supporting staff who organise, implement and administer widening participation strategy and activities. Many have entire teams and departments dedicated to this purpose. It is also common for many of the activities in question to be delivered, at least in part, by members of individual academic departments.

1994 Group universities are involved in a wide variety of outreach activities which range from personal support for disadvantaged students in local schools, to campus tours and HE fairs which reach thousands of young people from all over the country every year. The great variety in the nature of the events which take place reflects the fact that universities are attempting to address a number of different issues that affect the progression of students to HE. Details of the most common features of university outreach strategies are given below.

1. Providing information to prospective students and their advisers

The lack of good quality advice and guidance available to students throughout secondary education was a particular area flagged in the NAO's report *Widening Participation in Higher Education* (2008). This lack of information is one of the main issues that universities are trying to remedy. A number of 1994 Group universities send admissions specialists to sixth forms and HE fairs throughout the country to explain the UCAS application system and answer queries from prospective students. Many also offer campus visits to schools and colleges to give students an idea of what to expect from university life.

Durham University undergraduates take prospective students on a walking tour of the university, preceded by talks from an Admissions Advisor about applying to Durham and the financial support available at the university.

In addition to tours, **Lancaster University** Law School and European Languages and Cultures department run 'taster days' attended by hundreds of students every year where they can experience the kind of lectures and seminars that form a large part of the undergraduate experience.

The recent best practice guidance issued by OFFA, *How to increase awareness, knowledge and take-up of bursaries and scholarships* highlighted the problem that in order to be most effective, HEIs should not only focus outreach activities on prospective students, but also on advisors in schools who provide students with much of their information about higher education. As such, universities have not only endeavored to provide the best possible information directly to students, but a number of institutions actively liaise with teachers, parents and secondary school staff.

Durham University sends staff to the Annual Teachers' Conference organised by the Young, Gifted and Talented programme to give information and advice to teachers about how best to support their students when applying to a high demand university.

Queen Mary, University of London publishes a quarterly newsletter called 'OnQ' which provides information to teachers and careers advisors. It gives details of the financial support available at the College and more general advice on the admissions procedure and UCAS applications designed to help teachers and school advisors best support their students. The College also organises general information, advice and guidance talks to students and parents on a range of themes aimed at raising awareness of higher education opportunities in the UK. The team typically delivers around 300 school talks a year, mainly in London and the South East, including 80-90 for parents at school HE evenings. Many parents attending these events are not graduates and find the information highly beneficial.

Loughborough University has links with some teacher groups through the Local Authority and also sends staff to parents' evenings at local schools where they are available to answer questions from students and their parents about university life, funding and the application process.

2. Working directly with underrepresented groups

The National Audit Offices' 2008 report *Widening Participation in Higher Education* particularly highlighted groups such as those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and those living in deprived areas as being underrepresented in UK HEIs. 1994 Group institutions take their commitment to widening participation within these groups very seriously.

The University of Surrey tries to ensure that approximately two-thirds of the student beneficiaries of outreach schemes are from target groups, specifically those from the National Statistics Socioeconomic Classification (NS-SEC) groups 4-7 but also include first generation students, local authority care leavers and travelers. The university uses POLAR2 (Participation of Local Areas) data to assist in targeting schools and colleges from low participation areas, and has a Compact scheme offering a reduced UCAS tariff to qualifying students from member institutions.

Queen Mary, University of London has been involved as a co-sponsor in a major initiative to establish a new Academy school in Havering. The College is working with the Drapers' Company to sponsor this new science and mathematics specialist school, which aims to improve educational standards in an area of high unemployment, economic deprivation and low participation rates in higher education. Students from the new school who meet the appropriate academic requirements will be supported by the development of a progression agreement to higher education.

Lancaster University's Student Ambassador's project is currently running a project which focuses on recruiting Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students to Lancaster. Lancaster undergraduates from BME backgrounds visit schools, colleges and HE fairs nationwide to promote the benefits of HE.

Sociology undergraduates from the **University of Leicester** have been involved in a volunteering programme whereby they can meet and shadow children from disadvantaged inner-city schools in Leicester. Students from the Student Community Action Group in Leicester's Students' Union are now coordinating a local 'partnership through progression' project under a national initiative supported by the Government and run by the NUS, the National Bureau for Students with Disabilities (SKILL), and Student Volunteering UK. The project aims to combat social exclusion and elitism in higher education, and to widen access to under-represented groups. The scheme specifically targets those in socioeconomic groups three to five, students with disabilities, African-Caribbean males and Bangladeshi females. Mentors work in local schools helping to motivate 13-16 year olds, engage them in education and dispel any myths surrounding higher education.

3. Promoting academic achievement

Academic achievement before university is another key area in which universities are focusing their outreach activities. The NAO report *Staying the Course: the retention of students in higher education* (2007) showed that prior attainment was the most significant factor in the retention rates in HE with students who achieved three A grades at A level or equivalent being more than twice as likely to continue into their second year of university than those with two D grades or equivalent. In light of this, it is clear that any sustainable widening access policy must take into account the academic achievement as well as aspirations of prospective students in WP target groups. Inspiring enthusiasm about academia and helping young people to perform well whilst still at school is a central part of university outreach projects. Resources are often dedicated to individual departments who run their own activities aimed at encouraging school age students who may not have considered HE to develop a passion for their subjects and a desire to pursue them further.

Queen Mary hosts and supports the Centre of the Cell, an innovative bioscience education centre at the heart of its medical school, which is designed as a resource for schools to stimulate awareness and understanding of bioscience and the careers to which it can lead. Academic departments at Queen Mary work with the Centre of the Cell to deliver outreach activities to inspire young people to study bioscience subjects, and to understand the opportunities that they can offer.

Durham University offers a medicine e-mentoring service to local students, putting them in contact with Undergraduates from the Durham Medical Programme. Via a virtual learning environment Durham Undergraduates are able to support the local students who want to learn about applying for and studying medicine.

*In order to assist school age students to achieve more, the **University of Surrey** commits £100,000 pa to academic departments to create curriculum support material for schools. This money has been spent on projects such as creating software for children aged 12-13 years to assess the impact of the school run on local transport and air quality, and producing DVDs and workbooks in Spanish which were offered to schools nationwide. Staff from the Health and Medical Sciences department at the University also run on-campus revision lectures which reach over 700 students every year.*

Lancaster University runs a Further Maths Education Centre for students who wish to take Further Maths A-Level but whose schools do not currently have provision for this.

*The **University of Essex** runs a similar program for local students, as well as organising a sociology sixth form conference, political talks in schools and colleges, and a Biological Sciences Schools Link project.*

*A number of universities also work with local schools to run volunteer placements for undergraduates. For example, students from **Goldsmiths** and **Queen Mary** Colleges are involved in the Lewisham A* Academy in which student ambassadors work in schools to help year 10 students gain A and A* grades at GCSE.*

4. Special admissions schemes

Some 1994 Group universities run special admissions schemes designed to make university more accessible for students with the potential to progress to higher education, but who may need extra support. The schemes give students the opportunity to develop new skills whilst gaining a qualification which will assist them in applying to universities.

Durham University is now running a “Supported Progression” pilot scheme for Year 12 students in County Durham. The scheme is open to those with the ability to do well at a leading university who would benefit from additional help and support to reach their full potential. The scheme offers guidance about admissions and a substantial package of academic and financial support to aid progression to Durham University. Students will take part in a two-year, structured programme of events including an assessed summer school in Year 12. Those who successfully complete the programme will gain a qualification equivalent to 40-60 UCAS tariff points that can contribute towards meeting the entry requirements for a programme of study at Durham University, along with a guaranteed offer and bursaries of up to £2000 towards university costs.

The **University of Leicester** runs the Leicester Progression Accord for year 12 and 13 students, which is intended to make university education seem a more attractive and achievable goal for those who might not otherwise have considered it. Students who complete modules in Careers and Guidance (e.g. Career Education and Management, or Making Choices), Enrichment (e.g. a Taster Course on Work Experience) and in the Wider Key Skills (e.g. Working with Others, Improving own Learning and Performance or Problem Solving). Applicants with the Accord Award will be given an enhanced offer of a reduction of 30 UCAS tariff points or one grade at A Level (or equivalent).

The **University of Lancaster** offers a PASSPORT to Higher Education Certificate each summer for students hoping to enter higher education in the autumn. The scheme offers a number of academic and study skills modules designed to give candidates an extra qualification and prepare them for university life. Those students who successfully complete the required modules will be awarded a certificate which demonstrates their ability to study at university level and the award is accepted by many HEIs alongside A-Level results as supplementary evidence of a student’s ability to succeed in higher education. This scheme offers free tuition and sometimes free accommodation to students who meet a number of criteria targeted at attracting students from low participation backgrounds (e.g. they are from lower socioeconomic groups, have a disability, or are the first in their family to enter higher education).

5. Partnerships

1994 Group members work in partnership national organisations to work with schools, and colleges in delivering the best possible events and schemes as part of their widening participation strategies.

*Member institutions participate in Higher Education Fairs organised by UCAS, which reach up to 50,000 students every year, where university representatives are sent to engage with students from schools all over the country. Many institutions also work in partnership with regional Excellence Hubs to provide outreach activities, taster days and workshops for gifted and talented students from all social and ethnic backgrounds. **Loughborough University**, for example, offers activities to students from across the East Midlands in a range of subject areas including Materials, Design and Technology, Sport, Chemistry and Mathematics.*

*Some 1994 Group universities also work in partnership with the Nuffield Foundation to provide opportunities for sixth-form students in the sciences. At **Lancaster University** the Nuffield Bursary Scheme gives four local high school students the opportunity to experience working in the Biomedical lab during the summer, gaining access to the world class facilities that the university can offer and experiencing the kinds of opportunities for study that are available in higher education. **Queen Mary** also offers year 12 students the opportunity to participate in the Nuffield Bursary placement scheme.*

Measuring success

Most universities are carefully targeting outreach work at their own local communities. This means that programmes are more effective, as they are tailored to the specific aspirations and needs of a local area, but it also makes overall success difficult to measure. The lack of a single overarching programme model means that no one set of benchmarks can be applied. This should not be used as an excuse to counter autonomy and innovation.

The best measure of success is to look at the outcome each university achieves through each of its own outreach programmes and the overall progress it is making in widening participation. This more reflective of success than a simple measure of outputs and money levied to national schemes.

The following are two sets of data which show the progress two 1994 Group universities are making with their outreach work.

The University of Essex has seen a substantial increase in the number of applicants and acceptances from the areas in which it focuses its outreach activity with schools, as the table below demonstrates:

Applications and acceptance from areas where Essex University is delivering activity with schools and colleges.

	Essex		London Bor- oughs		Suffolk	
Year of Entry	Total Appli- cations	Total Ac- cepts	Total Appli- cations	Total Ac- cepts	Total Appli- cations	Total Ac- cepts
2004	1380	423	754	149	333	91
2009	1746	617	1324	391	452	149
Percentage Change %	26.5	45.9	75.6	162.4	35.7	63.7

The University stresses that it is very problematic to assess the impact of outreach activities aimed at the 11-16 age group on applications to the university, as many of the students involved will go on to a number of different post-16 providers before entering HE. Essex has however kept records of the numbers of applicants from post-16 providers that the school works with directly and which are the major post-16 providers of the 11-16 schools that the University works with. These are shown in the following table:

Applicants from a local school sixth form, FE college and sixth form college with whom the University of Essex has delivered intensive outreach activity and/or who are the post 16 provider for the 11-16 schools the University has worked with.

	Year of Entry		
School/College	2004	2009	Percentage Change %
Local School Sixth Form	11	23	109.1
Local FE College	38	145	281.6
Local 6th Form College	165	228	138.2

These figures suggest a substantial improvement in recent years.

Queen Mary, University of London has seen similar increases in the number of students who apply and are accepted into the college from schools with a high proportion of students from the widening participation target groups. The following table lists application and acceptance figures from such schools with whom their Education Liaison team has worked intensively.

Applications and acceptances in 2005 and 2008 from schools with which the Education Liaison team at Queen Mary, University of London has worked intensively.

	2005		2008	
School	Applications	Acceptances	Applications	Acceptances
Mulberry School, Tower Hamlets	55	9	119	32
St Marylebone School, Westminster	17	8	46	13
Palmer's College, Thurrock	27	4	67	14
Highams Park School, Waltham Forest	13	3	27	6
Dunraven School, Lambeth	6	2	18	5
St Angela's and St Bonaventure's Sixth Form, Newham	62	8	72	14
NEWVIC, Newham	217	45	295	57
Bexley Grammar School, Bexleyheath	11	3	29	9

The most recent HESA data (2007/8) also confirms that the percentage of young undergraduate students recruited to Queen Mary from state schools increased by 3.6 percentage points from 2006/7 to 2007/8, to 87.3% in 2007/8. The percentage of students from lower socioeconomic groups also increased over the same period.

Conclusion

This briefing paper sets out how effective outreach schemes can be in fulfilling WP ambitions. It details a wide variety of activities which have been devised and implemented by a range of different institutions. Universities are each unique and their approach towards WP and access will depend on a range of factors including their history, location and entry standards. Although the diversity of work being carried out makes a single set of measurements difficult, a close look at the outcomes specific institutions have achieved shows promising results.

Efforts of the nature demonstrated in this paper should be encouraged and supported. It is right that each institution be allowed to spend an appropriate percentage of its income to target WP entrants, using institutional resources including donor-giving, at levels which universities feel are appropriate. It is the progress made towards achieving goals set out in the institutional WP strategy that is the central concern of institutions and Government, not the drawing of arbitrary expenditure targets. Any move to impose blanket output obligations on universities would erode individual institutions' ability to innovate and tailor programmes to suit particular circumstances.

The 1994 Group looks forward to working with Ministers and Officials to ensure that the maximum value can be achieved from outreach programmes across the UK HE sector.



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