Using contextual data to make admissions fairer

Reforming Higher Education Admissions Conference: 24th April, 2012

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The P-word outline -

- Principles – *in general*
- Practicalities – *at Bristol*
- Problems – *again at Bristol*
- Potential – *back to the general*

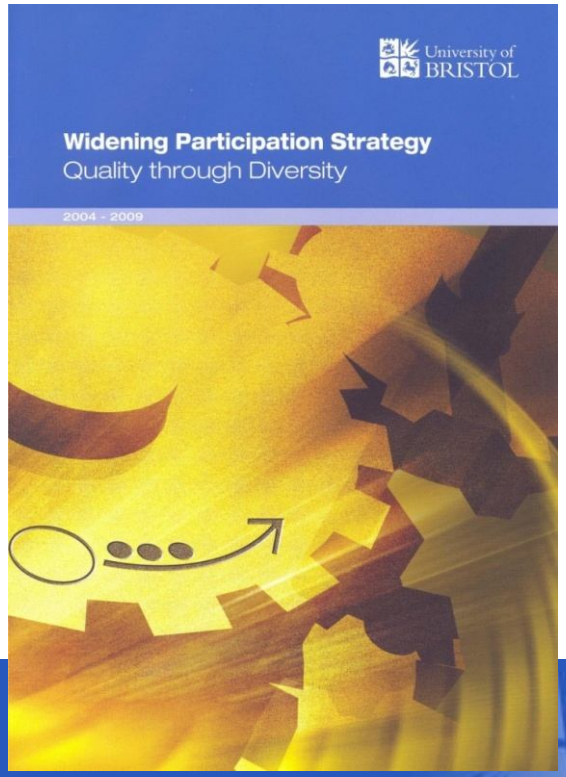
Principles 1

- Why ? – selection of applicants based on academic potential - a ‘win-win’ outcome
- How ?

  i) Transparency

  ii) Holistic judgements

  iii) Evidence base



Principles 2

- Who ?- Autonomy of individual HEI decision-makers

SPA Consultants' review (2012) finds a wide range of 'on the ground' experiences

i) in data used for WP 'flags'

ii) and in stages in the admissions process where employed

Practicalities – 2 uses of contextual data

1. To specify candidates' educational context – 'flagging' (which *might* affect their academic potential)

2. To specify whether it *does,* and so how HEIs should and could respond.

Practicalities – three ‘should’ and ‘could’ questions

...from UoB’s evidence-based approach:

i) which WP criteria (flags) should we use?

ii) how much ‘contextual compensation’ is appropriate?

iii) how should we specify our intake milestones?

Question 1

Two key criteria:

i) visible at the point of decision-making

ii) evidence of ‘educational disadvantage’ by entry-to-exit changes in relative attainment of ‘WP’ and non-WP students

Practical question 1 – the Bristol outcome

- Decision to focus on candidates' school performance
- *Relative-to-national* performance of schools on:

  i) per student attainment

  ii) per exam attainment

  iii) UCAS applications rates

Question 2 – equi-potential groups

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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Question 3 – how to set intake milestones?

- Of the peg - via national averages (eg national school populations, HESA PIs)
- Bespoke – from local experiences:

  i) compromise of ambition and experience

  ii) using those equi-potential groups

Practical question 3–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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Practicalities - monitoring

- To check on the evidence base for the most recently available UoB data
- To reflect changes in the schools environment...
- ...and UoB's applications profile
- To check the methodology
- To revisit advice to admissions officers

Problems 1

- Playing catch-up – need evidence from ‘entry and exit’ cohorts
- Qualifications issues over time:

  i) Fragmentation

  ii) Grade inflation (and maybe deflation?)

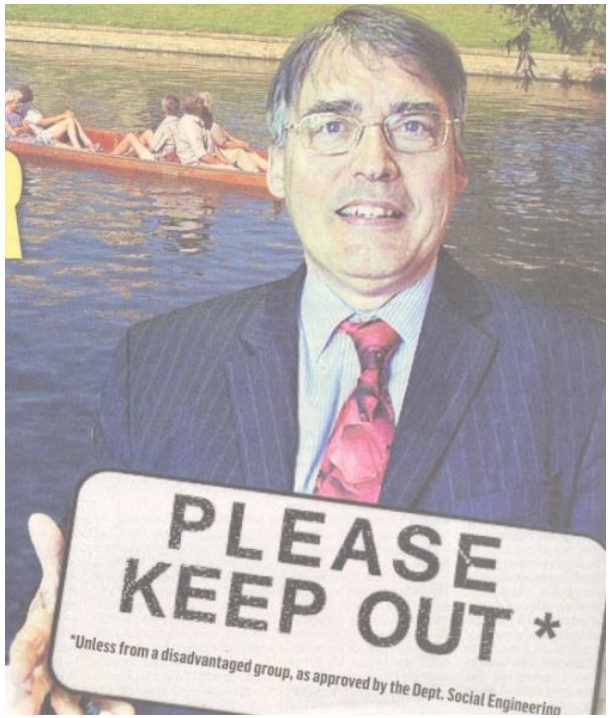
  iii) New A* grade

Problems 2

- Differences among the UK nations in schools data availability – especially Welsh schools for UoB

- Decreasing ability to identify candidates' schools – newcomers, on-line applications

Potential 1



- Important pre-requisites:

  i) good local datasets

  ii) institutional buy-in
- Benefits of a wider WP research approach - puts 'CD' in its place
- Evidence-base approach combats 'social engineering' charge

Potential 2

- Cost-effective – relatively cheap; limited leakage
- So opportunity to demonstrate effectiveness as ‘outputs’ become more important.
- Critical mass of HEI adoptors now

Daily Mail

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2003 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.

More than a dozen cases came to light of high-flying candidates rejected out of hand in favour of applicants from 'disadvantaged' backgrounds.

Experts believe this figure is just the tip of the iceberg. And they warn that many middle-class pupils from state schools are also being denied places on degree courses in the name of so-called social justice.

They are losing out under a 'post-code' system which is heavily weighted in favour of those from poorer backgrounds.

Yesterday it emerged that Bristol University, attacked earlier this week for turning down a high achiever from a private school, has snubbed a clutch of equally outstanding candidates.

While Bristol is seen as the worst offender, it is not alone. At least six other top universities are believed to have discriminated against middle-class applicants in the scramble for the admissions cow-ie likely to increase antipathy between the Government and Middle Britain voters who feel under attack from all sides.

Last night, parents and teachers

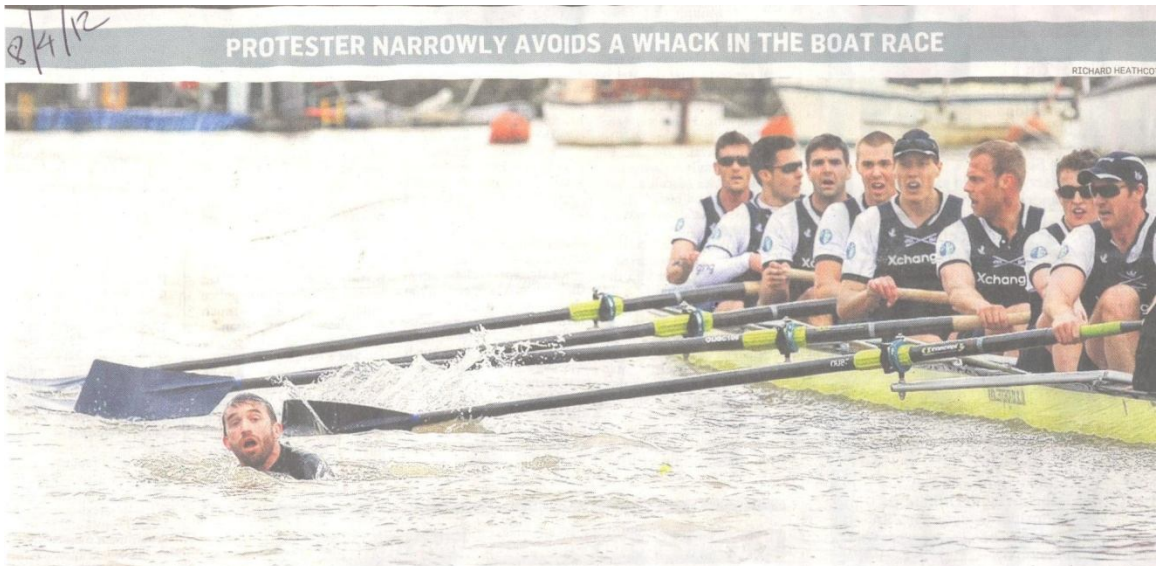
Turn to Page 6, Col. 1

Hammer murder victim Marsha McDonnell in a picture released for the first time yesterday

Marsha: Has her hammer killer struck again?

FULL STORY – PAGE SIX

- And as responses to ‘elitism’ go, it’s not as life-threatening as some



Protester Trenton Oldfield comes close to being hit by an oar as he attempts to sabotage the Oxford-Cambridge boat race yesterday. The race came to a temporary halt

- And for more, please do email me at... A.G.Hoare@bristol.ac.uk