Widening Access: what works?

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Access to higher education by postcode area – 15 year trend

Source: OFFA
Access to the 30 most selective universities by postcode area – 15 year trend

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Need for evidence is greater than ever

- Lack of progress on some measures
- Tight public spending environment – value for money counts

But
- lacking rigorous academic evaluations in this area, e.g. RCTs, large-scale longitudinal trials

However
- Shouldn't be paralysed into inaction
- Much good practice learnt over years
- Promising individual projects – ‘Beacons’
Outreach is key to widening access

• More evidence supporting outreach than financial aid … so far at least
  – 2009 Offa research: bursaries didn't impact on student behaviour

• New fees regime may have altered picture
  – But no evidence around fee waivers etc

• Targeted outreach grows talent pool
• But just £100m vs £600m of OFFA spend
Sutton Trust Approach

• Funded well over 100 programmes reaching 100,000s of children throughout age range

• In HE access:
  – Shorter programmes at key junctures to raise aspirations and ‘switch’ choices;
  – Sustained programmes, starting earlier, boosting both attainment and aspirations

• Supporting ‘non-privileged’ as well as disadvantaged, teachers as well as students

• Balance of costs vs benefits
Sutton Trust Programmes – 1
UK Summer Schools

• 2,000 places a year, across 9 universities
• Subject-specific residential events
• Prioritises first generation student from low attaining schools
• Individual autonomy for universities in common framework for PR, evaluation and monitoring

• Many evaluations over fifteen years:
  – Three quarters go to selective universities – 50% up-lift compared to control group
  – Particular benefits to host universities
  – 14:1 return on financial investment
Sutton Trust Programmes – 2
Reach for Excellence

• Example of sustained initiative over sixth form: master-classes, advice sessions, summer school, mentoring
• Piloted at Leeds University, 400 students over three cohorts
• Now embedded at the university
• Targets those from homes below £25k of income and first generation

• Independent five year NFER evaluation:
  – Participants more likely to go to on HE
  – Twice as likely as control group to go to research intensive university 45% vs 21%
Sutton Trust Programmes – 3
STAR

• Piloted at Leeds and Exeter Universities – 150 students
• Innovative approach:
  – earlier start
  – guaranteed ‘pathway’ to a reduced offer
  – Not the ‘usual suspects’ – objective student selection within targeted schools

• Evaluation by Durham University
  – Randomised Control Trial pathfinder
  – Engaged new schools and students
  – Some transformative stories
  – High attrition rates
  – Time and resource intensive
Conclusions

- Access challenge still stark, and arguably could become more of a problem in the future
- Too much activity going on - confusing landscape for teachers, parents and students; small projects harder to evaluate
- Some evidence that targeted outreach work does have an impact
- Developing an evidence base is crucial – Sutton Trust Toolkit forthcoming from Durham University
Evidence-based outreach

- Higher education access toolkit
- Review of worldwide research evidence
- Best bets for outreach interventions
- To consider for your own context

The ‘Learning Loop’

Pilot intervention and evaluate

Consider evidence for impact

Reflect on outcomes