

Institution: University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol
Unit of Assessment: 25 – Education
Title of case study: Improving Young Peoples' Engagement with Education
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>This case study has two strands:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Young peoples' educational participation and achievement across Bristol has been improved through changes in school governance processes and structures within the city, as informed by UWE's research evidence. Many local schools now work in partnership with or are sponsored by local Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) institutions. 2. The policies of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) have been influenced in two ways: firstly, they now take a positive view of universities sponsoring and supporting school academies as part of an extended school partnership; and second, they have changed their priorities in favour of funding evidence-based, theoretically informed investigations into educational participation. Policy debate on local education provision has been influenced in various areas, and at the UK Government level.
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The research was led by Prof Lynn Raphael Reed (Head of Department of Education). She and all other researchers were employed by UWE throughout the duration of the project. They were Dr Neil Harrison (Senior Research Fellow in Education); Chris Croudace (Head of Widening Participation and Outreach); Arthur Baxter (Principal Lecturer in Sociology) and Kathryn Last (Research Fellow in Education).</p> <p>Based on UWE's earlier record in research into widening participation in education, HEFCE commissioned a report on why HE participation rates in the Bristol South parliamentary constituency were, at 10% against a then national average of 42%, one of the lowest in the country. The research (conducted October 2005 to June 2006) developed a socio-cultural model to establish why this was so. While 'barriers to participation' is a well-used term, UWE research succeeded in promoting a more holistic approach, affording a better understanding of the local socio-cultural environment in which young learners live. The data used in the study includes socio-demographic and educational statistics for the constituency; an attitudinal and experiential survey of young people in the area's schools matched to outcomes at Key Stage 3 and GCSE; and semi-structured interviews with almost 100 young people and 50 adults living and/or working in the area.</p> <p>Its findings (published as reference [R1] below) were as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The processes underpinning the low rate of participation of young people in higher education in Bristol South were location-specific: they were situated within these particular local communities and dependent upon local characteristics rather than generic issues. 2. There was evidence of a greater degree of agency informing young people's actions than often is assumed even by professionals such as teachers, social workers and the police. 3. Young women in the area have tended to buck the national trend of out-performing their male peers educationally. High levels of early parenthood, unpaid carer responsibilities and a general lack of employment opportunities were found to underpin this. 4. Family and peer expectations reinforced this situation: they place a high value on an early transition to employment and to family life. Progression to further and higher education therefore had less appeal. More immediate benefits, including early earning potential, have greater attraction. Early employment or teenage parenthood, for example, offered a sense of choice, control and agency, and were perceived as addressing a lack of 'familial attachment'. 5. Levels of stated satisfaction of life in the area decline once individuals become aware of the conditions pertaining in other parts of the city, for example in relation to educational standards; a recognition of negative views of the area by those outside may also have led to reduced educational expectations.

6. The report identified the central importance of developing respectful and relational strategies with the potential to build and align diverse forms of capital (social, cultural, economic and emotional) in support of school improvement in the area without reinforcing deficit models of the young people, schools, families and communities.

The study emphasised how economic, social and cultural infrastructures in the area inter-relate with each other to configure relatively restricted 'horizons for action' (as another academic study put it) for many young people living there. This is important in making sense of why so few young people in the constituency aspire to and participate in higher education.

The research offered clear strategic interventions to address these issues. In particular, it recommended new models of school governance 'to align educational, community and business interests in extended forms of partnership in support of educational improvement, including a visible presence for FE and HE in the constituency'. This could take the form, for example, of HE and FE institutions being represented on school governing bodies, offering their experience and expertise in the running of the schools. It also proposed changes in educational provision and approaches schools could use to engage parents and the community to address this situation.

The Bristol South research project was considered so valuable by HEFCE that they then commissioned UWE to produce a second synoptic report, the 'Four Cities' report [R2], which analysed, interpreted and synthesised the findings of reports on three other cities conducted by researchers elsewhere.

3. References to the research

R1. Raphael Reed, L., Croudace, C, Harrison, N., Baxter, A., and Last, K. (2007) **Young Participation in Higher Education: a Socio-cultural Study of Educational Engagement in Bristol South Parliamentary Constituency**. Bristol: HEFCE & UWE.

<http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/6599/> [Included in UWE's RAE 2008 submission for Education, which saw 65% of the work rated at least internationally recognised quality; none was unclassified].

R2. Raphael Reed, L., Gates, P. and Last, K. (2007) **Young Participation in Higher Education in the Parliamentary Constituencies of Birmingham Hodge Hill, Bristol South, Nottingham North and Sheffield Brightside**. Bristol: HEFCE. <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/10461/>

Following the two research reports' publication, Raphael Reed was awarded a highly prestigious *Leverhulme Trust* personal scholarship (c£30k) (Sept 2008-Aug 2009) to further develop this work and underpinning research approach. The project grant was entitled *Education, class & respect: a sociocultural study*.

4. Details of the impact

This has two separate strands, each set out under its own subheading below.

1. Improvements to learning outcomes in Bristol schools by changing governance systems

As recommended in the research findings, UWE itself entered into 'extended partnerships' with local schools. This began in the South Bristol constituency, the location of the research itself, with the Bridge Learning Campus (BLC), and went on to include a major initiative beyond that area, the Cabot Learning Federation (CLF). It has also influenced the 'widening participation' (WP) practices of other universities. For example, the neighbouring University of Bristol has entered into a similar partnership with another school academy in the city.

All this happened after Raphael Reed was invited to present the research findings at Bristol Local Authority and regional School Leadership events. As a result, she was invited to advise a number of local schools and academies to set up new governance systems, including those mentioned above; these are now set out in more detail below.

Bridge Learning Campus (BLC)

Hengrove Secondary school in South Bristol had been identified as a failing school. In 2009 it was replaced by the Bridge Learning Campus (BLC), an innovative school providing for pupils across

the entire age range from 4 to 19 years old. It was set up after the research – its governance system was heavily influenced by the findings. The innovative Trust partnership running the school, *Trust in Learning* (TiL), includes UWE, City of Bristol College and Bristol City Council. TiL was seen as a solution to the distinctive challenges facing this school, and another in north Bristol, Orchard Academy, which similarly served a predominantly white working class community. UWE's Prof Ron Ritchie was chair of the partnership, and Raphael Reed was on the board of TiL and a BLC governor until her retirement from UWE in 2012.

The effect at BLC has been profound – its Chief Executive describes it as 'transformational' [source S1 below] – radically improving both community expectations and the standards actually achieved (compared with the secondary school that it replaced). For example, in 2012, 45% of students achieved five or more A*-C GCSE grades, compared with only 11% in 2006.

The school has changed its approach to parental and community engagement as a consequence of the research. According to its Chief Executive, the implementation of the UWE report's recommendation to have FE and HE providers involved in the management of the school has aided its work in 'supporting lifelong learning and engaging our hard to reach and vulnerable families to be more resilient in looking for learning opportunities' [S1].

Cabot Learning Federation (CLF)

John Cabot Academy, Bristol, is a successful school located outside the south Bristol area. It entered into a partnership with a weaker nearby school, seeding what was later to become the Cabot Learning Federation (CLF). By July 2013 this had grown into a federation of 11 schools across Bristol, including six secondary academies. It has a central chief executive, and each school has its own principal.

Primarily as a result of the research findings, UWE became a principal sponsor of CLF, developing the extended form of partnership employed by TiL. UWE is represented on the governing bodies of all of CLF's schools, providing expertise to meet the particular needs of each one. For CLF, the implementation of the new governance arrangements identified in the research have given a clearer chain of accountability for the senior staff in the federation, and was a key factor in raising standards for its pupils. The Principal of John Cabot Academy says '...UWE's engagement with the federation in this way uses the knowledge and skills of its staff at a strategic level to raise the attainment and standards, which then helps more students have the necessary qualifications as well as the confidence to apply for HE'.

This has caught the attention of policy makers nationally: it has twice been highlighted as an example of good practice in Michael Gove's Academies Annual Reports to Parliament (June 2012 [S2] and especially 2013 [S3]), by the recent Universities UK report on widening participation to HE [S4], and by the Milburn 2012 report on the role of universities in advancing social mobility [S5].

Elsewhere and more generally in south Bristol

The innovations at BLC described above drew attention to the research that had inspired them. As a result, Raphael Reed was asked to present the findings to various key stakeholders, including a seminar called by the then Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education, the Rt Hon Bill Rammell, and also at the Teaching and Learning Research Programme's 'Diversities in HE seminar' series. The findings were welcomed by HEFCE, OfSTED and the DfES.

Crucially, Bristol South's MP, Rt Hon Dawn Primarolo, recognized their importance, and drew them to the attention of others both locally and nationally. This gave impetus to the development of CLF as described above, and also to further local developments.

For example, the research led another south Bristol school, Brislington Enterprise College, to reconsider its approach to raising its students' aspirations. As a direct result of the findings, they appointed new members of staff with that specific brief. The College has also strengthened links with local businesses and other providers of post-16 educational opportunities. Its Vice-Principal (Learning) has confirmed that this was a direct result of the research findings [S6].

Dawn Primarolo sums this up as follows: 'Since the publication of this study we have seen a

change in the delivery of education in South Bristol with many schools now working in partnership with or sponsored by local Further Education and Higher Education institutions and I know this piece of research was influential in bringing about these significant changes' [S7].

2. Influence on the policies of HEFCE and on debate on local education provision

The research's influence extends beyond the effects it has had in Bristol. Dawn Primarolo goes so far as to say that 'the research was highly valued by Education Ministers in the previous Labour Government in which I served and am aware that the study informed and influenced policy in this area at the time. The findings of this work...continue to prove invaluable to schools, policymakers and Higher Education institutions' [S7].

The research has influenced the policies of HEFCE and other government departments. As a result of Raphael Reed's 'Four Cities' overview report (see section 3 above), HEFCE's strategic approach was changed so that its priorities shifted in favour of evidence-based, theoretically informed research. The first instance of this was the expansion of its commissioned research into another five studies (undertaken by various organisations and subsequently supplemented by yet further studies), adopting the socio-cultural model developed at UWE (see section 2 above). It also led to HEFCE commissioning a series of studies of extended forms of partnership between schools and universities based on UWE's work with BLC and CLF, one of which [S10] was done by UWE.

The influence on HEFCE's policy is corroborated by its then Chief Exec, who said the research was 'enormously helpful in informing policy and enabling us to evaluate and prioritise interventions. Of all the research sponsored, this was one of the most valuable and valued reports' [S8].

Raphael Reed's synthesised findings in the 'Four-cities' report (see section 2) have influenced policy debates on local education provision in various parts of the country. HEFCE's then Head of Widening Participation has corroborated its effect on Nottingham and other areas: 'The Four Cities Research... provided a model for others to undertake similar work... in Hastings, Leeds, East London and Salford, and indirectly in other towns and cities... In Nottingham the Report was taken up by Graham Allen MP...it became the basis for discussions in the city...it certainly stimulated city-wide discussions and about how widening participation could be effectively extended' [S9].

Another senior HEFCE manager, the then Director of Education and Participation, noted that the detailed understanding of local contexts in the Bristol South and the 'Four Cities' reports has informed policy: 'Widening participation practice is certainly more subtle and sophisticated than it was before the research was carried out.'

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Testimonials listed below are available from UWE, Bristol.

S1. **Testimonial** [1 on system] from Chief Executive, Bridge Learning Campus, Hartcliffe, Bristol.

S2. Michael Gove's Academies Annual Report to Parliament, June 2012

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175360/academies_annual_report_2010-11.pdf (pp32-33 highlights CLF's success and UWE's contribution).

S3. Michael Gove's Academies Annual Report to Parliament, June 2013

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/206382/Academies_Annual_Report_2011-12.pdf (see p22 highlights CLF's success and UWE's contribution).

S4. Universities UK report on widening participation to HE

<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Documents/2013/SpendingRoundWideningParticipation.pdf> (p7 highlights CLF's success and UWE's contribution).

S5. Milburn 2012 report on the role of universities in advancing social mobility.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/80188/Higher-Education.pdf (p88 acknowledges UWE's research evidence).

S6. **Testimonial** [2 on REF system] from Vice Principal (Learning), Brislington Enterprise College

S7. **Testimonial** [3 on REF system] from Rt Hon Dawn Primarolo MP.

S8. **Testimonial** [4 on REF system] from former Chief Executive of HEFCE.

S9. **Testimonial** [5 on REF system] from former Head of Widening Participation, HEFCE.

S10. [Developing Enhanced University Partnerships with Schools in Bristol](#)