Widening Participation in a Changing Landscape – 19/05/11

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Summary:

1. Widening participation to higher education is not simple, there are no easy solutions, and no single approach or answer – but we have learnt a great deal about what can be achieved through working in collaboration with partners.

2. There is no quick fix – instead a long-term and progressive approach is essential.

3. WP is not something we can afford to lose sight of in the Government's race to a market-based higher education system, where the individual interests of institutions will come to dominate unless appropriate action is taken.

Widening participation, how we approach this as a country, goes to the core of our society and our aspirations for social mobility. Universities like UWE are committed to this agenda. We want to make this work, we want to play our part in improving society and the economy, and we want to continue to transform lives.

To do this requires a sustainable funding stream, investment in partnerships and collaborations, and a new language about what it means to be a 'top' university in the market-based system.

Recommendations to Government:

- Government funding should be provided to support collaborative arrangements based on partnerships that make sense for universities and colleges within their geographies.
- Those with a strong track record on the widening participation agenda, for example, through working with schools, colleges and communities, should lead these collaborative partnerships.
- If the Government chooses to follow a core and margin approach to student numbers, they should consider promoting WP by ensuring that those universities that are successful at WP receive redistributed places.

In Bristol the higher education participation rate ranges from below 5% to 99%, across wards. It is my opinion that this inequality is unreasonable and not acceptable for a modern and prosperous society.