Building a comprehensive partnership programme

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Systemic partnership?

- All HEIs have ‘school links’
- So what would be the features and the purposes of a ‘deeper partnership’ and how does it relate to the ‘mission’?
- What is the ‘proper relationship’ between schools and HEIs?
- How does the involvement of HEIs impact on relationships between schools?
- Where do FECs fit?

University of Bedfordshire

- Formed 2006 from merger of University of Luton and Bedford Campus of De Montfort University, Leicester
- Four faculties
- 20,000 students
- c. 3,500 Partnership students (2,400 PT, 1,100 FT)
- (Significant proportion of student population)

Universities as agents of social transformation

- “(Universities) are most successful in widening access where the impulse to do so flows from the essential character of the institution and is fully embedded in its core values. Universities are good at widening access when they clearly understand that this is one of the main things they are for. Universities are, in our view, agents of social transformation. Excellence in the generation of opportunity is, or should be, of equal importance with excellence in innovation and research, excellence in teaching and learning, excellence in employer engagement or excellence in international reputation.”

Ebdon and Kendall, *Unfinished Business in Widening Participation: the end of the beginning,* Learning and Skills Network, 2008

Achieving transformational change

- Embed the University in the community as an open, accessible centre of culture and knowledge and as a partner with the public services

- Bridge perceptual and attitudinal barriers between higher education, further education and school education in the minds of learners, their families and staff in educational institutions

- Place the learner at the centre of all partnership planning and functioning with the aim of improving their life chances and giving opportunities to those who otherwise would not have them

Schools, the University and the Bedfordshire Question

- Three unitary authorities (since April 2009)
- Luton:11 – 16 schools + VI form college/FEC
- Central Beds: Three tier system – retaining
- Bedford: Three tier system – plans to reform
- Three academies open + one to start 2010 (UoB sponsor of one, partner of another)
- Four trust consortia of lower, middle & upper schools – UoB major role in all trusts

A preference for incoherence?

- Changes in the school sector “are potentially so profound that it is more and more difficult concisely to define the totality of arrangements for the provision of school-based education. The boundaries between sectors and between providers are less clear and the expectation that Universities will engage with schools is more intense than it has ever been”.

A preference for contest over compact?

- Competition
- Differentiation
- Permeability of boundaries
- HEIs rather than Aimhigher partnerships

Contest or compact?

- Why work together?
  - integrity, consistency, values
  - widening participation, progression
  - higher skills, social justice, economic good sense
- What will we lose if we don’t?
  - energy, clarity of purpose, the moment
  - coherence, public acceptance, sense

Characteristics of ‘deep’ HEI-school partnership

- The learner’s voice is heard
- The learner’s voice travels
- Information flows readily between partners and from partners to learners (and vice versa)
- Understandings are shared and honoured
- Collaboration is ‘business as usual’

Building ‘deep’ partnership

- Listening to the voice of the learner
- Coherent IAG
- Teacher exchange
- Engaging with the Children’s Workforce
- Curriculum links
- Joint work to secure HE progression

A University Education is worth at least £9,000 a year

- Because it improves life chances, broadens horizons, improves employment prospects and future income, develops higher level skills, promotes personal growth, widens your social circle and increases your knowledge .....
- Higher Education is “A Very Good Thing”

Higher Education is a ‘good’ which is unevenly distributed

- This is: -
  - A Bad Thing
  - Counter to our economic interests as a nation
  - Going to be very difficult to change unless we can expand access

Private goods rather than public ‘good’

- Higher Education is becoming a transaction between the individual learner and the University (or other HE provider)

Disengagement of the state

- State control rather than state investment
- Elite higher education rather than mass higher education – ‘engineering’ the terms on which access to the elite is granted.
- [Yet the cost to the Treasury may increase!]

New geographies

What is to be done?

- Aim wider
- Build partnership – local authorities, schools, FECs, HEIs
- Weave ‘Aimhigher’ into Access Agreement

Aim Higher Still

- Targeting
- Partnership
- IAG, Masterclasses and campus visits
- ‘Associates’
- Summer schools
- Work with the vulnerable
- Progression (apprenticeships)
- Research into wider access

Partnership : ways and means

- Partnership Office
- Higher Education Progression Officers (boundary spanners)
- Transition Learning Mentors
- Education Champions
- Student Ambassadors
- Aimhigher Associates
- Schools Partnership Group
- JDs of School of Education lecturers

…

Challenges to resolve

- Simplifying collaborative links
  - Collaboration-seeking activities of WP and supporting schools lack cohesion
  - Build on the School of Education contact with 500 schools
  - Sharing information across the University
  - Overcoming different geographies
- Building capacity to collaborate
  - Rapid expansion and threat of breaking promises
  - Focusing activity on trust consortia?
  - Avoiding duplication and seeking synergy

Successful collaboration

- Transparent strategic advantages from collaboration for all partners
- Strategic fit
- Senior manager endorsement of partnership working
- Representation appropriate to meetings' primary tasks
- Agreed lines of communication and named contacts
- Recognising and respecting differences in organisational and sectoral culture
- Systems to contain and resolve tensions
- Being patient: taking a long-term perspective

Access to what? Transforming HE – towards an enlarged vision

- **We need to transform higher education so that**
  - **it fits into people's working lives**
  - **exploits the new communication channels**
  - **is delivered in partnership across sectors**
  - **is progressive (in both senses)**
  - **makes sense of the relationship between funding and time**
  - **is both accessible and desirable.**