

# ‘Blurred boundaries – Encouraging greater dialogue between student recruitment and widening participation’

9th May – NEON Event, London  
Chris Bayes, Lancaster University

# Introduction

---

## What prompted me to do this research?

Student Recruitment (SR) & Widening Participation (WP) teams should be working together more effectively – “The Elephant in the room in many places”

Involvement in HELOA & NEON – Shared membership, shared expertise, but no sharing!

HEFCE/OFFA Joint Strategy – 2014 – “Greater partnership and collaboration at every level” – Are we there yet?

# What did I want to achieve through the research?

---

- Start a conversation between SR professionals and WP practitioners about how their roles can crossover and be mutually supportive in an institutional and sectoral context.
- I also wanted to answer the following questions:
- *Is the current approach to policy working?*
- *Through consultation with professionals working within the field, can the sector learn lessons which can influence future policy?*
- *How can SR & WP work together to become more fully integrated into the wider student life cycle/journey?*

# Research Context

---

- ‘We know where we’re going, but we don’t know where we’ve been...’
- The paper firstly examines the last 50 years of government policy and its effect on institutional practice and the wider policy landscape. Key policy reforms investigated involve:
  - *The Robbins Report*
  - *The Further and Higher Education act of 1992*
  - *The Dearing Report, New Labour and Aimhigher*
  - *Beyond Aimhigher – The ‘Brave New World’ of HE since 2010*

# Research Context

---

Following the policy context analysis, I move on to explore the experiences of colleagues working in SR and WP in 2017.

*The research highlights the universities succeeding in the modern landscape are those operating in a holistic manner supporting the 'Student Lifecycle' from pre-entry to post-graduation.*

*The expertise within SR & WP are integral to a university being able to deliver this model.*

*However, to do this successfully, we cannot continue to operate in silos, both within institutions and at a national policy level.*

# Summary of findings – The challenges

---

*“WP and SR’s conflicting objectives mean that they cannot usually complement each other”*

*“An impartial message from a WP practitioner is always going to be at odds with an admissions-focused message.”*

*“For access to be widened, there has to be a full understanding across an institution of what WP is and too often there isn’t.”*

*“In my experience, too many academic departments interpret WP as a proxy for recruitment.”*

# Summary of findings – The challenges

---

When analysing the responses, it is clear there a number of themes related to WP and SR which need further exploration:

- Collaboration at pre-entry level
- The growth of a mass marketplace within HE
- Policy drivers and how they are interpreted
- Moving towards ‘A student lifecycle approach’

# Moving beyond old norms

“The WP team did the pre-16 work and the SR team did the post-16 work.”





# Moving beyond old norms

---

*“Student Recruitment is a function that is carried out by people in universities that are spread over a number of areas and it is Recruitment, Widening Participation, Academic areas and even admissions, and this is the tension of the moment.”*

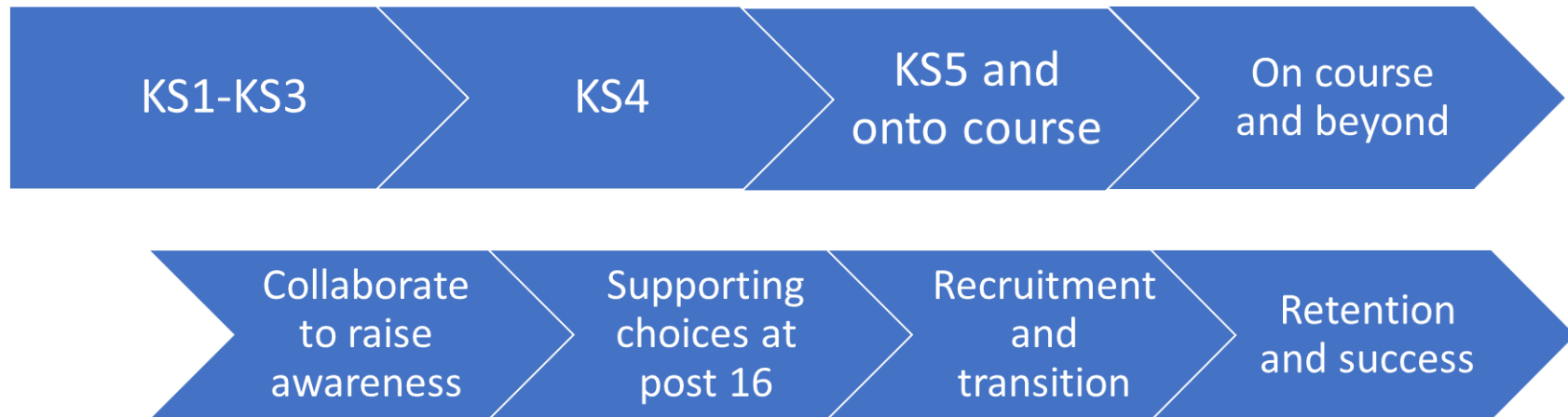
Is it really a tension, or is it an opportunity?

*“We are now in this absolute state of flux where we are asking what is Student Recruitment? What is outreach? What is WP?”*

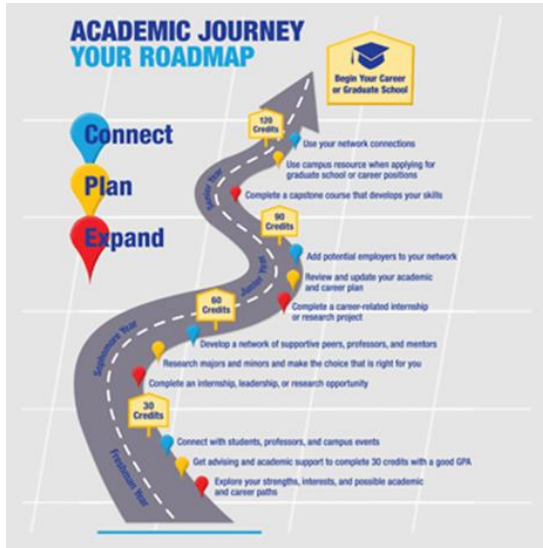
*“What does WP mean? What does it actually mean? In the current landscape, I’m not sure if there is an up to date definition?”*

What does the fact we are struggling to define previously accepted norms show us?

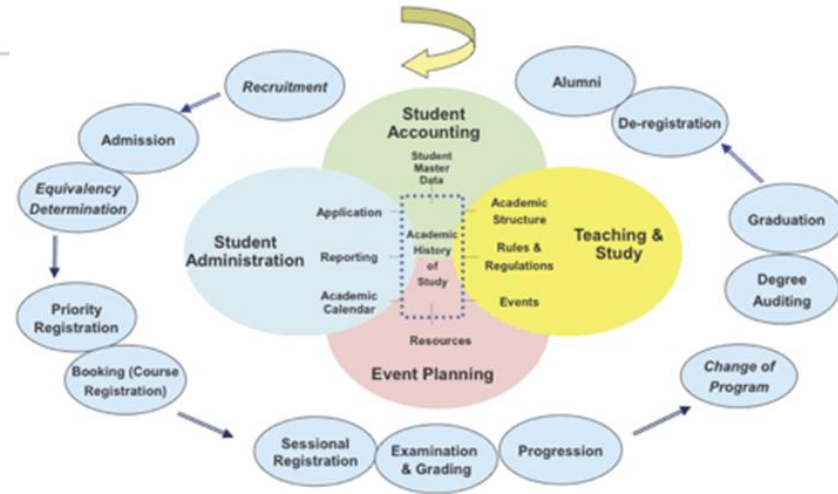
# Moving beyond old norms



# Conclusions from research



## Student Lifecycle Management



1. Students are now extremely demanding consumers. The days of separated SR and WP teams are over. Both are part of the same institutional and sectoral mission.

The smarter universities have already bought into the 'student journey' concept, this needs to be developed further to encompass the best practice from across all professional service functions.

# Conclusions from research



"The secret of **CHANGE** is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old, but on building the new."  
-SOCRATES



. To survive and prosper, WP needs to change its focus. Engagement with young people in deprived communities needs to start earlier and be sustained throughout their education, during and beyond university.

Continually chasing fixed term funding is unhelpful and engenders instability to the social mobility agenda, especially when projects such as NCOP come at the wrong stage of the student journey.

# Conclusions from research



3. Collaboration is crucial, between universities themselves and the public, private and third sectors. Too often, this is inhibited by the competitive market place. Therefore, collaboration should only occur where it is adding value to existing work.

Future collaborative outreach needs to take heed of The Sutton Trust's work and focus on younger students (KS1 to KS3) before obsession over targets interferes.

# Thank you

---

Any Questions?

Email: [c.bayes@Lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:c.bayes@Lancaster.ac.uk)