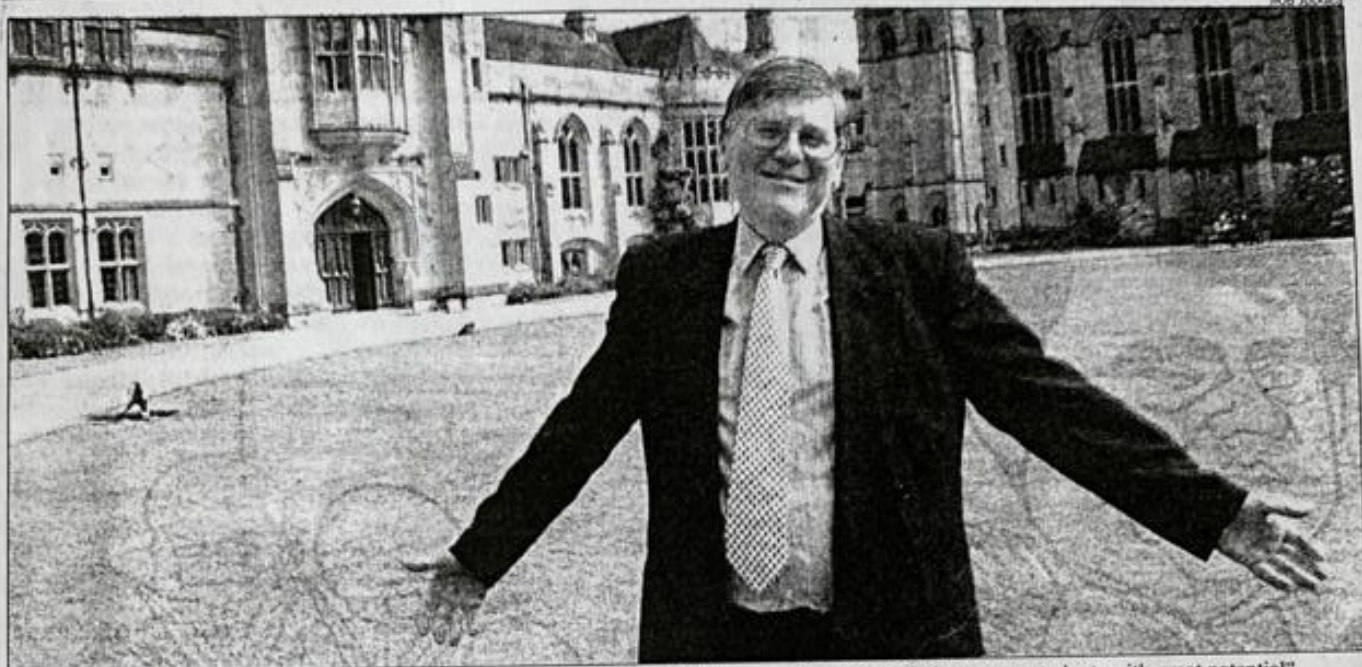


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Professor David Marquand, the principal of Mansfield College: "We know we have been missing out on students with great potential"

Oxford colleges set sights on state sector

By John O'Leary
Education Editor

SEVEN Oxford colleges are joining forces in a campaign that could tip the balance of entrants to the university in favour of state education for the first time in a quarter of a century.

A consortium being announced today consists of Mansfield College — Oxford's newest and smallest — and Worcester, New, Harris Manchester, Hertford, Keble, and St Hugh's. They hope to achieve a big increase in the number of working-class and mature students.

Mansfield is aiming to take three quarters of its students

from the state sector within five years, giving it by far the largest proportion in Oxford. All seven colleges will focus on students from further education colleges, who constitute the smallest proportion of Oxford and Cambridge entrants.

Applications to Oxford from the state sector rose to 47 per cent last year, but relatively few came from further education colleges, where up to 50,000 students sit A level and many more take vocational qualifications. A recruitment officer, funded by the Sutton Trust, will encourage the brightest to raise their sights.

David Marquand, Mansfield's principal, said: "Plenty of people at these colleges are

getting three As at A level but they assume, wrongly, that they won't be good enough or won't fit in at Oxford. We will not be engaged in positive discrimination or setting quotas, but we know we have been missing out on students with great potential."

Mansfield felt that its intake of 60 undergraduates a year was too small for a solo approach to further education colleges to have an impact. Professor Marquand, a former MP and a confidant of Tony Blair, said: "We are not just in this for ourselves; what we are really trying to do is become a lever of change for Oxford as a whole."

David Blunkett, the Educa-

tion Secretary, praised the scheme. "It is vital that we widen access to higher education, and particularly to our leading universities," he said. "I am also pleased that special attention is being paid to potential students in further education."

The initiative will be announced this evening in London as the keystone of Mansfield's £10 million development appeal. As well as providing extra accommodation, the money will go to its Environmental Institute and to fund research into provision for dyslexics in higher education.

Dyslexia is a particular concern of Guy Hands, the City financier and Mansfield alumnus who has wiped out the col-



Hands: old boy helping college's £10m appeal

lege's debts to ensure that all the money raised can go towards the projects identified in the appeal. Mr Hands also funded a study by the public relations firm Bell Pottinger to prepare the appeal.

In recent years Oxford has undertaken a series of initiatives to widen access, including summer schools for state school and college applicants. Mansfield's initiative is the largest by the 32 colleges that select undergraduates.

Dyslexic financier acknowledges his debt

GUY HANDS, the City financier who is said to have earned £40 million in a year's dealing for the Nomura Bank, credits the unorthodox ways of Mansfield College with providing the launchpad for his spectacular career.

His high-flying ambitions might have come to nothing, however, without the flexible approach he found at Oxford in the early 1980s. At a time when dyslexia was regarded with scepticism in much of the education system, he was given abbreviated reading lists and allowed to dictate his finals papers. Mr Hands, 40, said yesterday: "No one

would have been able to read my writing, but the college was fantastically understanding. I would never have got through the reading we were expected to do if my tutor had not identified the key texts, and I would certainly have failed my finals without special arrangement.

"Dyslexics have a different way of thinking about problems, which can be extraordinarily productive. . . They develop coping mechanisms. . . which aren't trusted at school although they often are at university, for example using reasoning rather than knowledge-based solutions to problems."