Admission of responsibility: Selective and non-selective institutions and the ‘balancing’ of social justice and excellence

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Can we achieve excellence and social justice in admissions?
Objectives

- Question relationship(s) between social justice and excellence
- Taking admissions out of the equation
- Outline how Social Justice relates to university, widening participation, fair admissions and excellence
- Case study of a non-selective institution – social justice and excellence?
- Discussion: social reproduction, meritocracy, what role for admissions?
Meritocracy and Social Justice

‘a social system where individual talent and effort, rather than ascriptive traits, determine individuals’ placements in a social hierarchy’ (Alon and Tienda, 2007)
Social justice and the university

• What is a University for?
• Public vs private good? Both constituted in economic terms.
• New role for Universities: bright kids to elite institutions (Social Mobility)
• Injection of For-Profit to force market behaviours.

“Widening participation is at death’s door. Social mobility is the new Holy Grail.”
Social Justice and Widening Participation

• Troubled relationship with social justice?
  – Increasing and/or widening participation – which wins out?
• Confusion of tongues
  – ‘A battery of reports, exhortations and policy proposals’ (Hoare and Johnston, 2010)
  – Messy – between policy makers, HEIs and inside institutions.
• New threats to continuing progress – cuts, fees and the White Paper
• Marketing and Finance rules OK?
  – Greenbank (2006) institution’s strategic frameworks ‘based on economic grounds rather than widening participation’
  – Coates and Adnett (2003) ‘a freer market will encourage HEIs to concentrate upon high ability, low-problem entrants’
Social Justice and Fair Admissions

• ...and shifting relationship with widening participation

• Decreasing commitment to *admissions* for diversity (hinted at in Schwartz Report, 2004; confirmed by Adnett et al, 2010)

• Missed opportunities
  – what does fair mean and how can it be measured? (Watson, 2006; Adnett at al, 2010)
  – Office for Fair Access

• Suitability of the meritocratic impulse?
### Definition of terms

**Social justice**
- Postcode data
- Low participation neighbourhoods
- Indices of multiple deprivation
- Low previous educational qualifications?

**Excellence**
- Research excellence?
- Student measures?
  - Satisfaction
  - Institutional surveys
  - Careers and Employment
Social justice @ OU

2. Social representation

All New OU undergraduates embarking on full ‘Year 1’ study,
Proportion of students within each IMD quintile, by year

![Bar chart showing the proportion of students within each IMD quintile by year from 2006/07 to 2009/10.](chart.png)
1. Part-time ‘WP’ participation rates

Social justice @ OU

Year

% no previous HE and from low participation neighbourhood (POLAR2)

OU Young
PT sector Young
OU Mature
PT sector mature

2006/07 2007/08 2008/09 2009/10
Social justice @ OU

3. Socially just outcomes?

All New level one undergraduates, credit achievement rate from module start by IMD 5 percentile, 2009-10
Excellence and the student experience

- Functional distance between student experience and admissions
- Renewed and increasing interest in student experience, so Excellence = Teaching Excellence?
  - Shifting Widening Participation emphasis across UK.
  - National Student Survey
  - Key Information Sets
  - Employability
  - White Paper ‘Students at the Heart of the System’ extends these
- National Student Survey (NSS)
  - Open University has 15 of 50 highest scoring courses on NSS
  - OU is Consistently top three overall – 93% satisfied
- Employability – increasing work-related reasons for study, even for OU (52% to 63% in 5 years).
Discussion – What of access?

• Large numbers of students with low previous educational qualifications are capable of success in higher level study given appropriate preparation and support (Levy and Murray, 2005)

• ‘Access’ curriculum provision at Open University confirms
  – Significantly more likely to achieve if you start with an Access module, rather than jumping straight in if lower previous educational qualifications.
Discussion – Entry and exit requirements

Admission
Discussion – Entry and exit requirements

Entry Requirements
- Aspiration raising
- Pre-entry activities
- Admission
- First term/semester
- Moving through the course

Exit Requirements
- Employment
What if No Higher Education Institutions were selective?
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References


