



Room for improvement?

How are English institutions performing in relation to fair access to higher education? A comparative analysis with the U.S.

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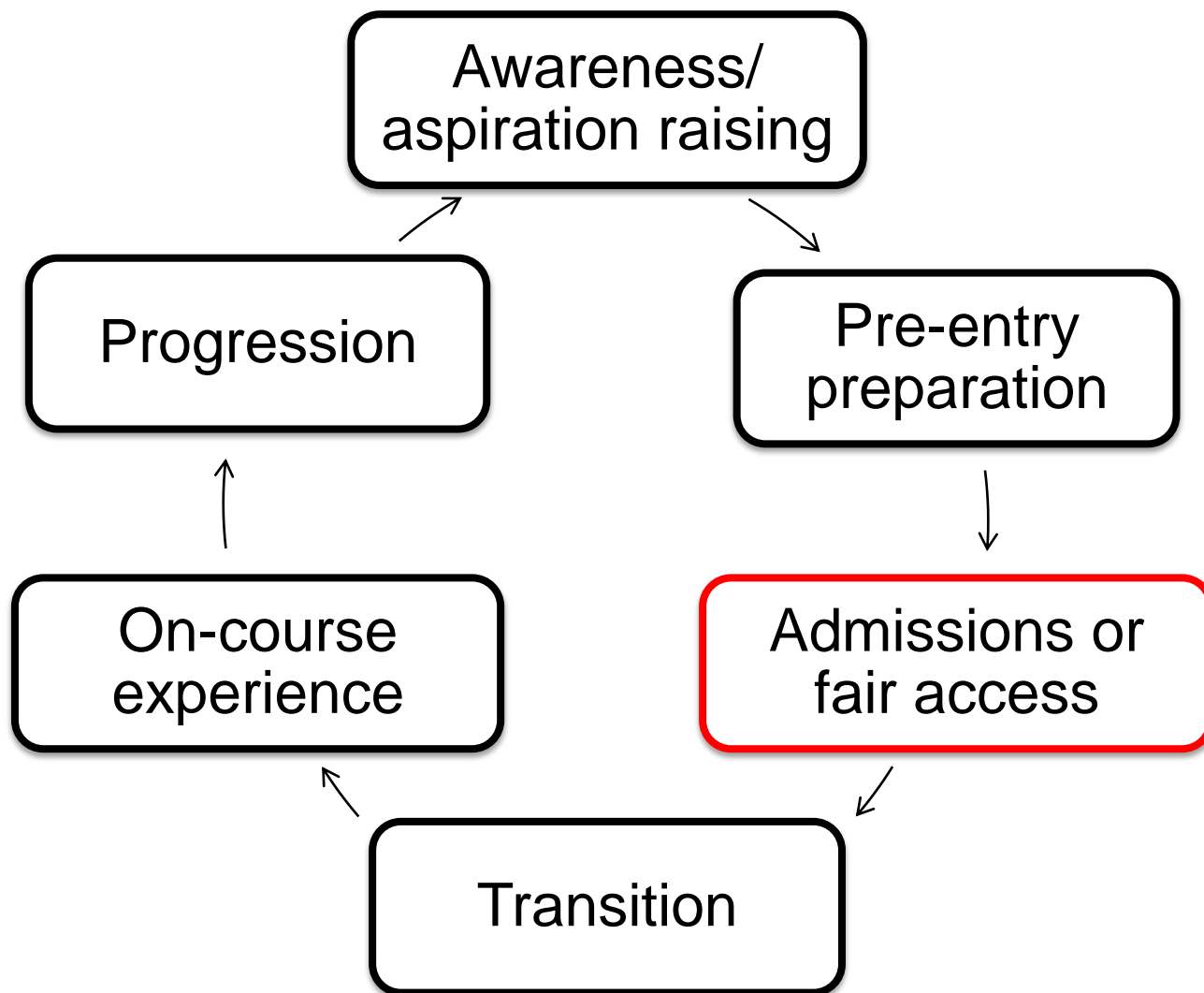
Overview

- What is 'fair access'?
- What are English HEIs doing to promote fair access?
 - (i) Ensuring everyone is treated the same.
 - (ii) Building equality into the admissions process
 - (iii) Recognition of previous disadvantage
- What are US institutions doing?
 - (i) Strategic enrolment strategies;
 - (ii) Cognitive and non-cognitive tests;
 - (iii) affirmative action;
 - (iv) Contextual data / holistic review.
- What else could English HEIs do?



What is fair access?

Student lifecycle



“A fair admissions system is one that provides equal opportunity for all individuals, regardless of background, to gain admission to a course suited to their ability and aspirations. Everyone agrees that applicants should be chosen on merit: the problem arises when we try to define it. Merit could mean admitting applicants with the highest examination marks, or it could mean taking a wider view about each applicant’s achievements and potential”.

Schwartz report.

The limits of fairness

Michael Young: “In the course of a mere hundred years we have come close to realizing at one stroke the ideals of Plato, Erasmus and Shaw.”

-The Rise of the Meritocracy (1958)

Burton Clark: “Situations of opportunity are also situations of denial or failure.”

- The ‘Cooling-out’ Function in Higher Education (1960)

Social class and achievement

- Equal examination grades do not represent equal potential.
- The affect of social background on attainment begins to appear by the age of two years.
- Research shows that, all other things being equal, students from state schools and colleges tend to perform better at undergraduate level than students from independent schools and colleges.



What are English HEIs doing?

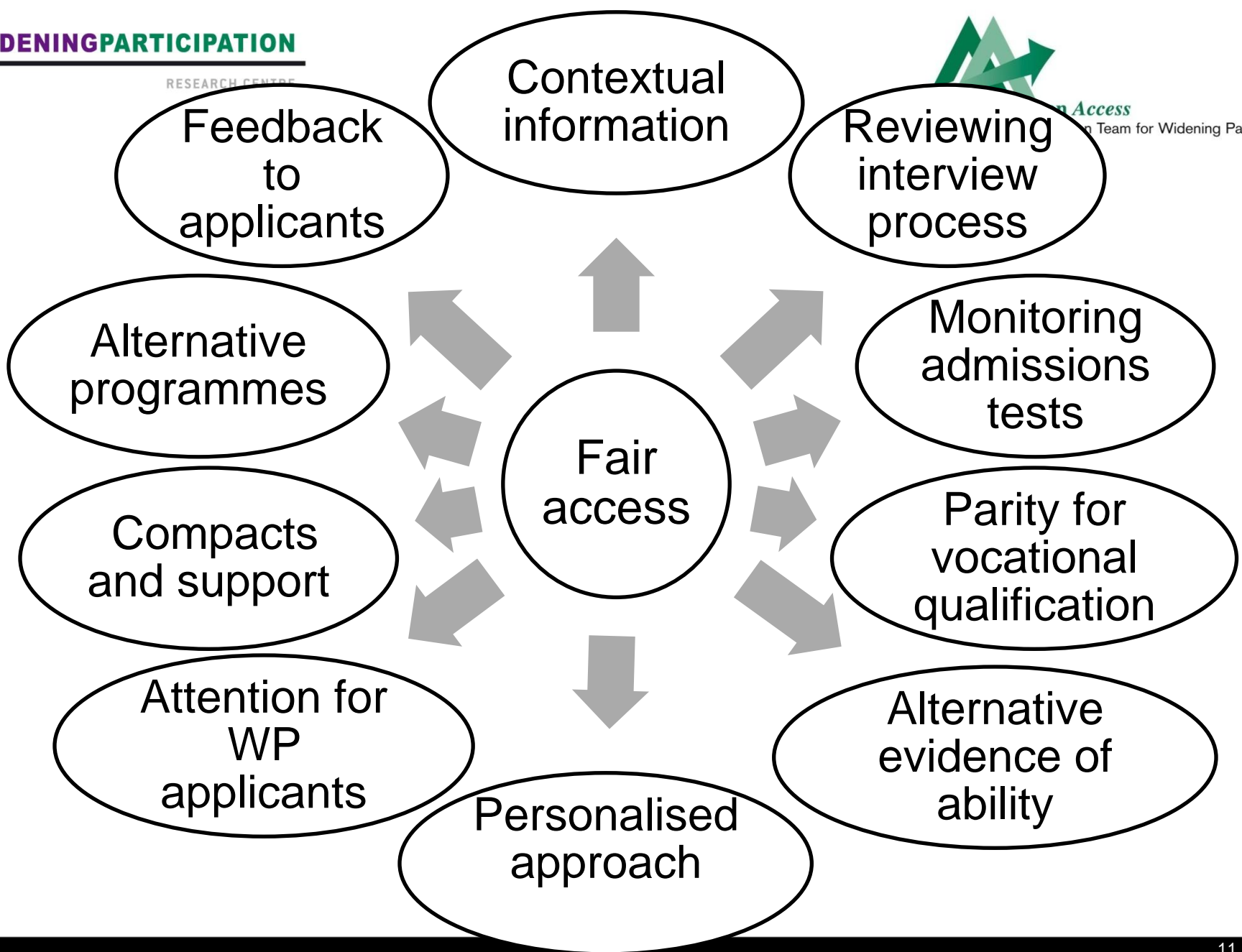


Widening Participation Strategic Assessments

- WP includes a commitment to fair access. Fair access in this sense is taken to mean that appropriately qualified students are able to access any institution and are confident to do so regardless of their background and social status. (HEFCE Annex A, paragraph 7).
- Admissions have a role to play in WP, and transparency and standards are important for public confidence. We would expect institutions to publish their admissions policies and illustrate whether and how they contribute to their WP strategies. (HEFCE 2009, paragraph 16, section d)

Analysis of WPSAs

- 129 WPSAs submitted by all English HEIs in June 2009.
- Action on Access undertook a thematic analysis.
- All WPSAs coded-up by single researcher using NVivo.
- Queries run using coded and text searches.
- Query reports analysed for emerging themes and alternative approaches.
- Limitations: snap shot; document v reality.



Commitment to and understanding of ‘fair access’

- 115 HEIs (89%) make an explicit link between WP and admissions (but this was required).
- Link is generally vague, rather than explicit.
- But there are different ways of interpreting fair access:
 - Treating everyone in the same way “regardless of background”.
 - Improving equality in the admissions process.
 - Taking account of the circumstances in which the student achieved their academic qualifications.

Simple equality: Treating everyone the same

- Some institutions have a simple approach to equality. The emphasis is on transparency and fairness to ensure that everyone is treated in the same way:
- The institution “aims to ensure a high quality customer-service that is empathetic, supportive and accessible, and ensures that no prospective or existing student is discriminated against on the grounds of age, colour, creed, disability, ethnic origin, gender, HIV/AIDS status, marital or parental status, nationality, political belief, race, sexual orientation or socio-economic status”.
- This may include feedback to applicants.

Equality in the admissions process

- Some institutions recognise equity concerns in relation to the admissions process. Institutions are:
- Reviewing interviews, auditions and testing to overcome practical barriers and concerns about bias.
- Seeking to achieve parity for students with vocational qualifications through IAG, staff training and support for students.
- Offering compacts and supplementary support to targeted groups/schools to assist with admissions process. 79 HEIs (61%) run programmes identified at compact schemes, usually in specific discipline areas.

Recognition of previous disadvantage

Some institutions are recognising that there is not a level playing field prior to entry.

They are addressing this through:

- Use of contextual data
- Additional testing
- Allowing alternative evidence of ability

Contextual data

- Institutions can use contextual data to take account of:
 - school or college in which the student studied;
 - personal circumstances which may have impacted on performance.
- This Russell Group university is committed to the use of contextual data to create “genuinely fair admissions policies and practices and providing access for all those capable of benefiting from higher education irrespective of their personal or familial circumstances or capacity to pay”

Contextual data

- Institutions can take a proactive or a reactive approach with regard to use of contextual data.
- Contextual information can be used at different decision making points of the admissions process.
 - To review
 - To interview
 - To offer a place to
 - To offer a lower grade

Additional testing

- Institutions can use additional testing:
“A possible institution-wide entrance exam is also under consideration and is being piloted... A key consideration of the pilot is to ensure that performance cannot be improved through coaching and that the exam is unbiased towards any nationality, race, culture, gender, background or disability”.
- Concern to ensure that this does not introduce additional bias.

Alternative evidence of ability

- A number of institutions consider alternative sources of evidence of ability (e.g. credit accumulated elsewhere, essay, interview or other experience).
- For example: “Admissions procedures for part-time courses allow sympathetic consideration of non-traditional qualifications, work and life experience and credit may also be given for prior learning and Open Studies work”.
- But only 6 HEIs (5%) mention AP(E)L.

Further steps to support fair admissions

- Good information for students
- Staff development.
- Monitoring fair admissions.
- Aligning WP outreach work with admissions policy.
- Identifying specific target groups and mapping against interventions.
- Setting targets and measuring effectiveness.



What are US institutions doing?



Comparing the UK and US

Points of convergence and divergence...

- Movement from ‘elite’ to ‘mass’
- System flexibility
- Institutional diversity and stratification
- Role of government and funding trends
- Aspiration, college and the ‘American Dream’
- The higher education marketplace

Putting US higher education in context

- 60% students enrolled in 'public' colleges or universities
- 20%+ enrolled in community colleges
- 60% enrolled in institutions with tuition < \$10,000 per year
- 5% in institutions >\$40,000

Access in the US: How are we doing?

- Disconnect between federal policy goals and market context of higher education
- Legal environment and the critique of affirmative action
- Leveraging aid strategies
- Class profile, market position and the Admissions 'arms race'

And yet...

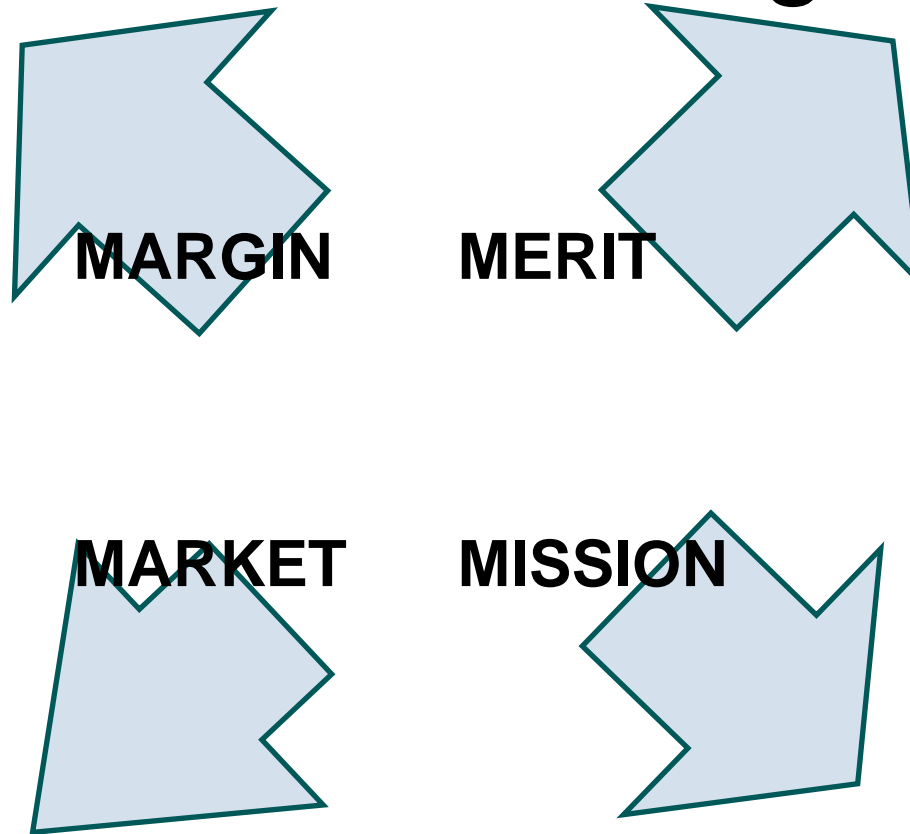
- National goal: 65% by 2020
- Top tier initiatives to promote access
- The emergence of college 'match'
- Non-cognitive indicators of college potential

Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM)

Coordinated set of concepts, tools and practices that harness institutional intelligence and resources to achieve the optimum mix and flow of enrollments to support an institution's goals.

- ✓ *Strategic orientation*
- ✓ *Research based*
- ✓ *Systems approach*
- ✓ *Market focused*

SEM – balancing market, mission, merit and margin



The debate over Admission measures

Indicators of ability, SES and market position...

- High school transcripts, grade point averages and class ranks
- Standardized test scores
- Application essays, recommendations, leadership and community engagement

‘Non-cognitive’ indicators of student success

William Sedlacek – University of Maryland

- Self- Concept
- Realistic Self- Appraisal
- Handling System/Racism
- Long- Range Goals
- Leadership
- Strong Support Person
- Community
- Nontraditional Learning

DePaul University - Chicago

- With 25,000+ students, the largest Catholic university in the US
- Eighth largest private 'not for profit' university
- Teaching focus
- Nationally known schools of Music and Theatre
- Mission-based commitment to access
- Enrolls more CPS than any other selective private university



Balancing access with attainment at DePaul

- The importance of mission
- Recognizing market position
- A research-based approach
 - Clifford Adelman, *Answers in a Toolbox*
 - *Consortium on Chicago School Research*
 - ‘Unpacking’ CPS students at DePaul
- Case study – International Baccalaureate students in Chicago
- 4 Ps of student retention

A Widening Participation Strategic Assessment at DePaul?

- **Goals and strategies:** A model for access and attainment
- **Admissions statement:** Test-optional, 2012
- **Activities – *institution-wide commitment***
 - Partnerships & pathways – IB, dual enrollment etc.
 - Financial aid commitments
 - First year program
 - Balancing equity of access with equity of experience
- **Indicators**
 - Graduation rate targets
 - Narrowing the gaps
 - Analytics and stories



What else could English HEIs do?

Areas for development in English HEIs

- Alignment between institutional mission, widening access, fair admissions and retention and success.
- Setting WP targets and aligning with action.
- Greater institutional research.
- Monitoring applications and acceptances.
- Greater use of contextual information in admission.
- Assessing impact.
- Recognising the tensions and finding an institutional way forward.



Thank you

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