The Myths and the Reality about Higher Education

Jonathan Tinnacher
Head of Student Recruitment
Myths or reality?
A “two-tier system”? 

Universities woo foreign students but close door on Britons in 'two-tier' clearing system

By LAURA CLARK and PAUL BENTLEY
Last updated at 7:45 AM on 17th August 2010

Sixth-formers face a ‘two-tier’ clearing system as elite universities shut their doors to competent British applicants while continuing to recruit overseas students paying up to £20,000 a year.
Are international students preferred?

• Universities have ‘contract’ with HEFCE do deliver teaching to a fixed number of UK/EU students
  - Funded by Government (HEFCE grant, student loans, and student support)

• Universities have no cap on numbers for international students
  - No funds from Government
What do we do?

- Universities set own targets for entry:
  - To meet HEFCE targets for UK/EU students
  - To meet own targets for internationals – these depend on our own resource constraints and needs
Impact on students?

• University of Leicester always sets the same academic requirements for both groups.

• But at confirmation:
  - Courses may be full for UK/EU, but have places for international students.
  - Courses may be full for international students, but have places for home students.
After 2012?

- Government will still need to restrict numbers of UK/EU students across sector - as there will still be a cost to the treasury for tuition fee loans.
- New mechanism not decided yet - White Paper in Autumn?
- Universities will still need to set separate targets for each.
Discrimination against private schools?
The Government view

“We recognise that, if selective institutions are to make progress in admitting more students with high potential from disadvantaged backgrounds, they may want to admit some such students on the basis of lower entry qualifications than they would normally apply.

To help them identify individuals with the greatest potential, institutions may sometimes want to use contextual data, for example about levels of average attainment in an applicant’s school.

The Government believes that this is a valid and appropriate way for institutions to broaden access while maintaining excellence, so long as individuals are considered on their merits, and institutions’ procedures are fair, transparent and evidence-based.”

Vince Cable and David Willetts, Letter of Guidance to the Director of Fair Access
Evidence?

• Consistent evidence that students from independent schools perform less well at university than those from state schools.

• BUT, the effect of school performance is inconsistent.

(Schooling effects on higher education achievement, HEFCE 2003)
Positive discrimination: Compact schemes

- More than 50 institutions have compact schemes.
  - One-third involved reduced offers.

(HE outreach: targeting disadvantaged learners, HEFCE 2007)

- Realising Opportunities: Pilot compact scheme with 12 research intensive universities.
  - Gives equivalent of 40 UCAS points for completion (10 of 12 universities).
Use of contextual data

- Some universities (eg. Durham / Bristol / Nottingham), explicitly say that they provide contextual data (eg. school performance, postcode data) to admissions tutors.
- None of these do blanket discrimination.
- Some do vary offers.
- At Leicester, currently, we do not use contextual data, but we do use contextual information.
Future use of contextual data

To be provided by UCAS for 2012 entry:

• Average school GCSE performance of students achieving 5 A*-C GCSE including English or Welsh and mathematics or equivalent
• Average point score for best 8 GCSEs
• Average QCA points per A level entry (or equivalent)
• Average QCA points per A level student (or equivalent)
• Percentage of students entitled to free school meals
• Percentage entitled to educational maintenance allowance
• Lives in a low progression to higher education neighbourhood (Polar 2)
Are some A-levels better than others?

A-level results: Top universities secretly list 'banned' subjects – teachers

Blacklist said to contain non-traditional A-level subjects mainly offered by comprehensives rather than private schools

Jessica Shepherd, education correspondent

guardian.co.uk, Friday 20 August 2010 21.30 BST

Article history
At Leicester

• Certain courses require certain A-levels (see prospectus).

• General Studies accepted for some subjects (see prospectus).

• All other subjects accepted (inc. Critical Thinking).

• But... admissions tutors have discretion to make offers suitable to individual circumstances.
Russell Group

• Recently published “Informed Choices”
  - www.russellgroup.ac.uk/informed-choices

• Mentions “facilitating subjects” - which are frequently required (and so keep options open)

• Also “hard” and “soft” subjects. No strict definition, but suggests that students taking one “soft” subject, should not experience problems getting in to Russell Group University

• So... think carefully before taking two “soft” subjects”
Are universities ‘dumbing down’?
Are universities ‘dumbing down’?

• But James Ladyman, a professor of philosophy at Bristol University, accused universities of short-sightedness and said learning to think was the skill graduates most needed in order to succeed in the workplace.

• 'Incorporating corporate skills into the curriculum is short-term thinking,' he told the Guardian.

• 'The point about education is that it equips you for the long-term. Now we have this emphasis on the cash-value of a degree.'
What we do at Leicester

• We provide education to enable students to become experts in their field.
• We want our students to be prepared for the future.
• Build in transferrable skills into courses.
• And...
The Leicester Award

- Recognises a range of employability courses and programmes that help students develop, assess, recognise and record employability skills learnt outside the curriculum.

- Volunteering, Work Experience, Communication, Ambassador, Leadership, Social Enterprise etc.

- Appears on the student transcript (but does not replace academic credits).
Languages at Leicester

Certified language courses available from beginners through to advanced level.

- Arabic
- Chinese
- Dutch
- French
- German
- Greek
- Italian
- Japanese
- Polish
- Portuguese
- Russian
- Spanish
Internships

- Sandwich programmes.
- Summer internships.
- Graduate Internships.
- TULIP (The University of Leicester Internship programme).
Effect of tuition fees?

Half of university students 'put off by £9,000 fees'
Half of students will be turned off top universities by the imposition of £9,000 tuition fees, research suggests.

Poll: 'Half Of Students Scrap Uni Plans'
Nearly half of A-Level students do not plan to go to university, with many claiming they have been put off by higher tuition fees, according to a new survey.
University of Leicester research

- There may be a fall in numbers of students wishing to go to university
  - but our research suggests this will be less than 10%
- There will be a “flight to quality” - that is, if paying more, students want to go to a “better” university
  - Based on perceptions of quality, or reputation
- “Brand image” is critical
- Disappointing lack of correlation between student experience (as measured by NSS) and reputation
In summary?

- Don’t believe everything you read in the press!