The Comprehensive University:

An Alternative to
Social Stratification
by Academic Selection

Tim Blackman

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About the Author

Tim Blackman is Vice-Chancellor of Middlesex University and Professor of Sociology and Social Policy. His previous roles include Pro-Vice Chancellor and Acting Vice-Chancellor at The Open University and Head of the School of Applied Social Sciences and Director of the Wolfson Research Institute at Durham University. After leaving school he worked at sea for a year before undertaking a degree in Geography, a spell as a community worker in Belfast and a PhD on housing policy. He started his academic career at the University of Ulster before moving into local government for five years and later returning to higher education as a Deputy Dean at Oxford Brookes University and subsequently Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law at Teesside University. He has written on urban policy, housing, social care and health inequalities, worked as a government adviser on the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, and is a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences.

Foreword

Matthew Taylor, Chief Executive of the Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA)

I am delighted to welcome the latest HEPI Occasional Paper. It joins several other engaging and important papers in the series.

Tim Blackman's case for comprehensive universities is radical and will no doubt ruffle feathers but it is also based on strong argument and powerful research. I was particularly struck by the evidence he presents on the efficacy of mixed ability teaching in American higher education, evidence which reinforces similar findings in schools.

I am attracted to the argument in this pamphlet on grounds of values, impact and effectiveness.

Values: Tim is surely right that we should aim for all universities and not just the newer, more community-focussed ones, to contribute to a genuinely inclusive university system with a more diverse student body.

Impact: Requiring all university courses to include a proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and with less impressive academic records (while enabling other universities to change their mix by recruiting students from the other end of the spectrum) would, of course, open up new paths to social mobility. But it could also change the character of universities, potentially creating a positive feedback loop as elite institutions felt like less intimidating places for students from poorer communities and other institutions became more serious options for students from wealthier backgrounds.

This may be part of the thinking which has led the Scottish Government to go down a route aligned with that proposed by Tim Blackman. The Government has accepted the recommendations by the Commission for Widening Access, including the proposal that by 2019 all Scottish universities should set specific access thresholds for all degree programmes against which applicants from the most deprived backgrounds should be assessed. These should, the Commission argues, be set at a level which accurately reflects the minimum academic standard and subject knowledge necessary to successfully complete a degree, but open up access for applicants with these backgrounds.

Effectiveness: Public money must be used wisely. We know that it is academic entry requirements that are keeping young people from deprived backgrounds out of universities – requirements that Tim argues are often unnecessarily high. Given the considerable amounts spent on widening access by elite universities and the fact that the gap between the proportion of independent school students and state school students entering those institutions has hardly moved (and may in fact be growing), it is reasonable to assume that much of this money is being ineffectively deployed. Forced to choose between ploughing more funds into schemes that do not deliver value for money or a relatively simple regulatory change that is guaranteed to shift the dial, my policy wonk brain plumps for the latter.

Knowing the deep resistance to change in parts of our higher education system in England and the current difficulty with politicians making bold decisions, I fear Tim may not have much joy influencing policy in the short term. But before

politicians can be persuaded to be brave we need pioneers to lay the ground upon which policymakers might one day walk. In writing this pamphlet Tim Blackman is opening up an important and overdue debate about what would really make our universities motors of social change. I can't wait for the reaction!

Contents

Executive Summary

This paper aims to promote a debate about whether academic selection in higher education has gone too far. By too far is meant beyond what students need to succeed on a course, with little demand on teaching expertise in the most selective institutions, and into a realm of prestige and discrimination that compounds Britain's social class inequities.

While the role of academic selection in secondary education has come under intense scrutiny and criticism for distracting from the need to improve both social mobility and skills, there is no such examination of academic selection in higher education. Instead, the less selective institutions are labelled 'low status' and social mobility measures are focused on small numbers of young people from low-income families gaining places in very selective 'high status' universities.

While this situation raises many issues about equality and whether the focus of current policies is right, it is also likely to be impoverishing the learning environment in our higher education institutions and possibly leading to worse educational outcomes overall. This is because academic selection produces social stratification and by doing so reduces the diversity of abilities and identities that successive recent studies show are resources for successful complex learning. There is not just an equality dividend to be gained from desegregating Britain's universities but also a possibility of educational and productivity dividends.

The paper proposes mechanisms for achieving this change, based on introducing open access or basic matriculation quotas in all higher education institutions and, in England, replacing with a levy the access expenditure which is currently required

if an institution chooses to charge its students more than the basic fee. The levy would be based on how imbalanced the social class intake of an institution is, and the funding raised would be allocated by formula to institutions according to their need either to increase recruitment from socially advantaged students or decrease recruitment from socially disadvantaged students. A small number of specially designated research universities would be excluded but still required to increase recruitment from non-selective schools.

A variety of sources of evidence and precedents from secondary education and the United States are used to support the arguments. However, the main argument is a values-based one: that it is better for education to bring people together than to separate them.

1. Why is higher education selective?

Most secondary schools in the UK do not select their pupils on the basis of prior academic achievement. They are deliberately comprehensive, with this principle based on a positive education argument that it is best to educate young people of different abilities together. Almost all universities are based on the opposite principle: academic selection and stratification by ability into different types of institution. This contrast attracts little public or political debate.

The aim of this paper is to promote that debate. My reasons for doing so are twofold:

1. Rather than upholding standards, I argue that the use of academic selection beyond what applicants need to succeed on their course is impoverishing higher education, especially in limiting how it can benefit from diversity.

2. At a time when separation of all kinds is in fashion, we should surely look to education to bring people together.

Universities encounter little of the controversy that surrounds selection in secondary education, beyond whether their use of academic selection is done fairly. The principle of academic selection itself is sacrosanct. With universities often claiming that they are engines of social mobility, the role of selection needs to come under the same scrutiny as in schools, especially the notion that highly-selective institutions are by definition the 'good' institutions in the sector.

Theresa May put grammar schools back on the policy agenda, a special interest of her ex-Chief of Staff and close adviser Nick Timothy, a former Director of the New Schools Network. The Conservative Party manifesto for the June 2017 general election committed to, 'More good school places, ending the ban on selective schools', conflating 'good schools' and 'selective schools', and arguing that access to 'good schools' drives social mobility.

The objective of creating more grammar schools, ostensibly as the driver of social mobility, appears to have fallen victim of the general election outcome. Even before the election, the House of Commons Education Select Committee disagreed with the policy. The Committee concluded that grammar schools are not a solution to the attainment gap between young people from different social class backgrounds.[1] At the time, the Government continued to argue that grammar schools were needed so that all children can go as far 'as their talents will take them'. [2]

The belief behind this position appears to be that some children are more talented than others and that the most talented should be separated from the less talented and educated in 'good schools'. Selective schools are the 'good' schools needed for this purpose, although the vast majority of 'good' schools - as measured by value-added progress measures – are actually comprehensives.[3] Only in education among the public services is selection used in this way to define 'good'. A good hospital, for example, is surely one where its clinicians cure illnesses better than another hospital, not one where the patients are the most healthy when they are admitted.

The arguments have continued to rage in secondary education but not in higher education. A 'good' university is routinely taken to mean a highly selective one, even with the recently-announced Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) Bronze, Silver and Gold awards. Indeed, media comment on these awards has led with headlines about a few 'leading', 'top' or 'elite' universities failing to achieve gold or silver awards. This has meant that the progressive social mobility agenda in higher education has been to widen access to the most selective universities; exactly what has been pursued so controversially in Conservative Party policy thinking on secondary education. The principle that 'good' universities are hard to get into is not questioned and, moreover, obfuscates their poor progress in widening access despite their many claims to the contrary.[4]

Rather than question whether the current extent of selection in higher education is really necessary, either schools are regarded as the problem for not reducing social class differences in attainment, or many young people are regarded as not smart or hard-working enough to make top grades at school, so never will at university. That a young person has not achieved top grades during the part of their life when they were in secondary education is accepted as reason enough for why they will not succeed in a 'good' university, bar some tweaking of admission requirements by universities that contextualise some of their offers.[5]

Furthermore, it is regarded as normal and preferable that a young person who does achieve top grades at school should avoid the universities that are less selective. Yet there is no reason for doing this based on any systematic differences in

teaching quality or the likelihood of completing or obtaining a good degree classification once student background is taken into account.[6] We instead appear to be in a world based on snobbery and discrimination rather than evidence, which is socially damaging and could be producing worse educational outcomes overall.

While it might be argued that selection in higher education is different to secondary education because a young person should have demonstrated whether they are ready to progress to higher education by the end of their secondary education, this is far from proven and it is possible to complete a degree successfully despite doing less well at school. Many factors, however, make this less likely, including a lack of the necessary teaching expertise in higher education, inadequate support, ongoing social disadvantage, and how the system separates higher and lower achievers. I believe that this last factor is particularly important and argue below that all students would benefit from being educated among diverse abilities and backgrounds rather than stratified into institutions with different degrees of selectivity. This will not happen, however, while the most selective institutions are regarded as the sector's 'best', 'leading' or 'good' universities.

The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) might upset the conflation of 'good' and 'selective' in the higher education sector but this seems unlikely. Universities are firmly embedded in the British class system, which is far more resilient, insidious and nuanced than the TEF's Bronze, Silver and Gold awards, which represent mixed bags of measures and panel assessments that are far less intuitive than academic admission requirements.

It would be surprising if aspiring students in any significant numbers switched their choice from a higher-tariff Russell Group institution to a lower-tariff post-92 institution because one has a Silver award and the other Gold. This has not happened with previous quality award regimes or with the experience of schools trying in vain to point parents to their value-added performance rather than their crude exam results, which are largely determined by their intake.

In this paper I am going to argue that not only does 'good' not mean 'selective' but that this advocacy of selection in education is driven by an impulse to separate people into deserving and undeserving, 'us' and 'other'. Such distinctions have a long history in British social policy.[7] They were partly a reactionary response to demands for inclusive social policies further to the growth of mass democracy and the consequent pressure to increase public spending and a universal 'social wage'. But it is an impulse that is probably in most of us, rooted in our ancient past when group identity was about survival.

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2. A sector divided by ability

Today, those origins of our behaviour are reflected in some of the most ordinary decisions we make, such as where to send our children to school. For many people it is 'natural' to want their children to be educated with others like them. Even when we are more open-minded and want our children to experience diversity by sending them to multicultural schools, we may still worry if that school's exam performance is poor because of the lifelong handicap we think that might mean for them. Better the school that has good results, and the best guarantee of that is a selective school.

We would likely be right, not because our child mixing with others of different abilities and backgrounds is likely to do worse educationally, but because schools as well as universities are part of a structure of inequality that channels opportunities for some but not for others. In particular, the professions with the best remuneration prospects disproportionately recruit people educated in selective schools and the most selective universities.

At the pinnacle of this structure of inequality are Oxford and Cambridge, packed with similar young people from predominantly affluent families whose A-Level grades mean they receive a privileged education in small groups and with immense prestige. This prestige is based on hyper-selective admission requirements and research reputations that give these universities and their degrees a world standing. It is a package that more or less guarantees their students access to the country's best paid jobs. Paradoxically, though, this important research standing is not reflected in the country's

economic performance. The UK combines one of the OECD's most productive higher education sectors, given performance on research metrics and, in England and Wales, its short degrees, with one of the least productive economies and one of the most unequal income and wealth distributions. As discussed below, I believe that some aspects of academic culture are impeding the potential of higher education to contribute much more to both economic productivity and social mobility. At the heart of this issue is how academic selectivity creates hierarchies.

Much lower down the higher education hierarchy from hyper-selective Oxford and Cambridge are the post-92 universities. These are much less selective and, as polytechnics and their predecessors, were mostly established to drive economic productivity and social mobility. Those still true to their polytechnic origins as comprehensive tertiary institutions use selection as a guide to whether a student will succeed on the course with good teaching and support, rather than as a means of moving up the league tables. They make lower offers to create the opportunity to succeed – although sadly they still often feel it necessary to have higher published tariffs to avoid reputational damage because of the dominant selective model.

The vision for polytechnics was that they would be the non-selective higher education equivalent of comprehensive schools.[8] That did not happen because they more and more modelled themselves on selective universities. Only The Open University established itself as a comprehensive university, but with a distinctive part-time, adult education model that presents particular challenges for student retention.

The comprehensive principle in full-time higher education would need students to be guided to the right course for them to succeed and prepared for each subsequent level of study. Recognition of what good teaching can and should achieve would be crucial. John Hattie's review of the research on schools points overwhelmingly to teacher expertise being the main single factor that determines student outcomes, and there is no reason to believe this does not apply to higher education.[9] We should focus on Hattie's advice that good leadership in education is about making all teachers like the best, and knowing who our best are.

In UK higher education, it is academic selection that largely determines student outcomes rather than teaching expertise. This is because of the prestige associated with the most selective institutions. These are at the upper end of an extraordinarily wide range of entry requirements for undergraduate degree courses, with this hyper-selectivity often associated with research-intensive institutional missions.

Figure 1 plots the 2014/15 average UCAS tariff score against the 2014 Research Excellence Framework score for each UK university. Looking first at the range in UCAS tariff scores along the horizontal axis, we see how large this is, from 234 to 600. The published admission requirement for a Computer Science degree, for example, ranges from two Cs at A-Level to three A-Levels at A*A*A. The actual grades that some students are admitted with are likely to be even lower at the former institution and even higher at the latter institution. Whether or not some students are admitted to low-tariff institutions without the potential to succeed – and for every such student

many more with similar grades are likely to succeed – a far bigger issue is the sheer range of admission requirements. It is unlikely that these are all assessments of what is needed to succeed on a particular course. If instead they are about rationing places on high-demand courses, then there are serious problems about how the highest of these requirements discriminate systematically and at scale against students not from more affluent middle-class families.

Figure 1: UK universities UCAS tariff and REF score
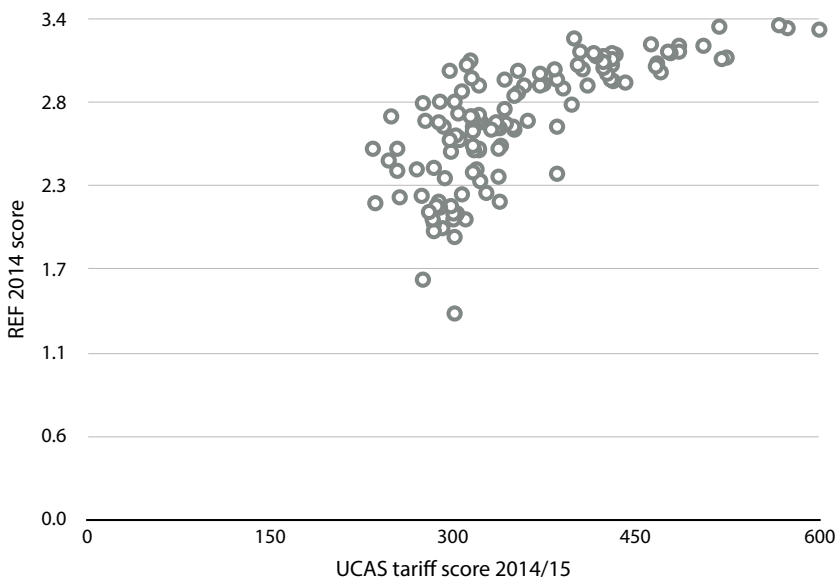
It is also apparent from Figure 1 that the high-tariff institutions are high performers in research. It is often suggested that these research-focused institutions need all their students to be very bright, whether because this adds to intellectual stimulation in these environments or because these students need less

resource-intensive teaching and support (such as traditional lectures with seminars delivered by research students – leaving more time for research). Yet the graph also shows that many other universities did well in the REF across a wide range of UCAS tariff scores. Their students did not seem to pull down their performance.

In reality, Figure 1 shows how the UK's universities group into two clusters: one a group of high-tariff, high-research performers and the other a group of low to medium-tariff universities with a wide range of research performances. While all hyper-selective institutions are strong research universities, not all strong research universities are hyper-selective institutions. The best that could be said in favour of the argument that strong research universities need to be hyper-selective is that this may be the case for a small group of very high-performing research universities, but it is not the case for most of the sector, including many very selective institutions.

There may be an argument, therefore, for removing from the likes of Oxford, Cambridge and Imperial the pressure to widen their social class intakes because these institutions are strategically important world-class research universities that need to agglomerate exceptionally high-performing human capital. Widening their social class intake while staying hyper-selective is an almost impossible task until schools start to break the link between social class and attainment on a far bigger scale than currently, which is very unlikely with the current level of funding.

There may be a similar case for institutions such as Edinburgh, Cardiff, Manchester, Durham and Bristol for regional or national

policy reasons, although it amounts to perhaps 10 per cent of the sector at most. As I argue below, the more exceptions that are made to the move towards a comprehensive system, the more damage that is likely to be done to the average achievement of all students.

If we use an indicator such as research income exceeding teaching income, there would be around eight universities designated as research universities. Their budgets could be secured subject to performance but with no REF, especially since this expensive exercise now really only repeatedly confirms the top position of the same few institutions.[10] The rest of the sector should be comprehensive teaching universities, still often with significant research activity depending on their own strategies and priorities, and possibly still with a REF, although the rationale for such an exercise would be considerably reduced. It could be replaced with much less onerous formula funding, similar to Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) allocations.

There should, however, be one exception to taking the pressure to widen access off these few high-performance research universities, and that is private and selective schools. Higher attaining pupils from these schools do less well at university than equivalently qualified state comprehensive pupils, an effect not seen with regard to social class background, but hyper-selective universities recruit disproportionately from them.[11] These universities need to increase their intake from comprehensive schools, which would also help improve their very low proportions of Black and Minority Ethnic students, and would not compromise their high admission requirements. If UCL can recruit 71 per cent of its students from state schools, then Oxford can surely do a lot better than its 56 per cent.

In proposing that there should be a small group of high-performing research universities where we accept that their students will generally be from affluent social class backgrounds, even if more are state educated, this is not saying that these are the 'good' universities. They are different universities to the majority of the sector, which would be comprehensive universities. This would end pecking orders based on selection.

3. A sector divided by class

Currently, the playing field for the university admissions game is far from level. At the most disadvantaged end is a child brought up on a social housing estate where gangs trade drugs, knives and guns, attending their local comprehensive school largely deserted by the middle class, and with parents sometimes too worn out by the night shift to help with homework, even if there were somewhere quiet to do it. At the other end is a child who attends an independent school, has personal tutors, is taught in small classes and has somewhere peaceful to do homework helped by mum and dad, both graduates. These are two ends of a continuum mirrored in the grades young people achieve in their school exams. It is by no means a perfect correlation; some children do find it harder to learn than others. What we do know, from decades of educational research, is that they can nearly all succeed with good teaching and support. If the first child scrapes grades good enough to make it into higher education that is a huge achievement, but the likelihood of being selected by a 'high status' university is small.

By any measure, the proportion of working-class students at our universities varies considerably. Some are far more working class than (most) others. I first became struck by this not by looking at the statistics but by looking at the students.

When I think back to two universities where I worked, one a hyper-selective Russell Group institution and the other a much less selective post-92, the students at the former were generally taller, more expensively dressed and talked with noticeably 'posher' accents than the students at the latter, who were generally shorter, more cheaply dressed and often

had noticeable local accents. This is a generalisation but it was a real difference. If a typical student from either of these two universities swapped institution, it is likely they would feel uncomfortable.[12] The reason is social class segregation in our university sector, creating a quite different 'habitus' between different types of institution: the term sociologist Pierre Bourdieu used to describe the postures, accents, feelings and actions that together make social class differences visible.

The data, then, are really no surprise. The Office for Fair Access (OFFA) uses National Statistics data classifying UK domiciled young full-time undergraduate entrants as in either socio-economic classes 1 to 3 – the children of managers, professionals and intermediate occupations – or 4 to 7 – the children of small employers and own-account workers, lower grade supervisors and technicians, and semi-routine and routine workers. Classes 4 to 7 are a focus for assessing how successfully universities are in widening access, although the main measure is recruitment from low participation areas (so-called POLAR data).

Figure 2 shows a ranking of all UK universities on this social class variable.[13] The large range is immediately apparent, with just 10 per cent of the intake at Oxford and Cambridge from classes 4 to 7 compared to 58 per cent at Bradford. Although much of OFFA's and recent governments' attention has been on the universities at the bottom end of this distribution, if we reframe the widening access issue as not one that is just about access to highly-selective universities but is instead about social class polarisation at the sector level, then we should be just as concerned about the universities at the top end of the distribution. These are concentrating working-class students and are effectively shunned by many students from wealthier backgrounds.

Figure 2: UK universities ranked by percentage of students in social classes 4-7
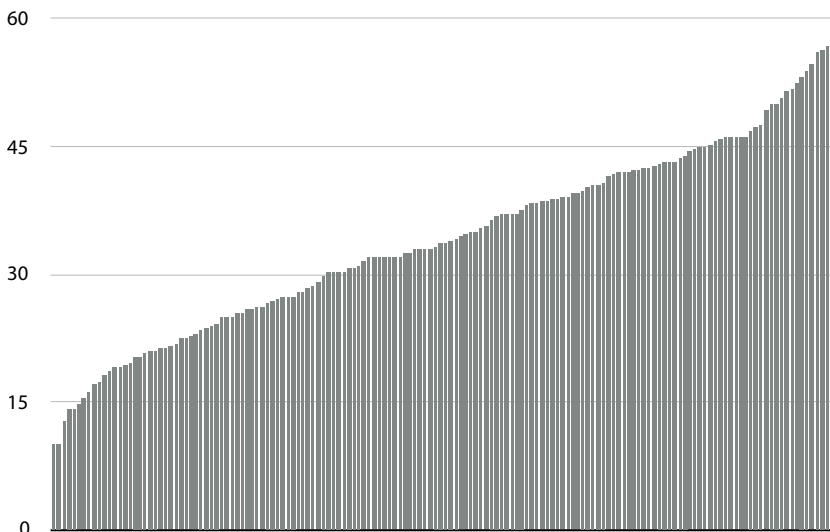
My own institution, Middlesex, admitted 56 per cent of its students from social classes 4 to 7. While atypical of universities, most of which are well under 50 per cent on this measure, it is actually more typical than many universities of the society of which it is part, where 41 per cent of the population are in social classes 4 to 7 and 51 per cent in London, from where Middlesex recruits 70 per cent of its students. Rather than being categorised as 'post-92', 'modern' or 'lower-tariff', universities with this kind of profile are already essentially 'comprehensive'.

Unlike schools, comprehensive universities are not the norm but very much the exception. Not only is the intake to universities from young people with parents in semi-routine or routine occupations disproportionately low, but those who do make

it into higher education concentrate in certain universities. Sector-wide, however, this concentration is not as marked as the country's geographical segregation of social classes.

We can use the Index of Dissimilarity (IoD) to make this comparison, a simple measure of the percentage of one of two groups that would have to move to have the same distribution as the other group. It is a common measure of segregation, with 0 as no segregation and 100 as complete segregation.

Comparing social classes 1 to 3 and 4 to 7, the higher education sector's IoD is 0.21, meaning that 21 per cent of entrants in 2014/15 with one class background would have to move to another institution to be distributed proportionately the same across the sector as entrants from the other class background.[14] This can be compared with how segregated local authority areas are on the same index, although this takes no account of the level of participation in higher education. The local authority IoD is 0.35, or 35 per cent. On this measure, universities are less segregated than the country as whole. They appear to be desegregating young people to some extent, probably because they use academic rather than social class selection, despite school attainment being closely correlated with social class. This apparent ability of universities to desegregate as well as segregate is something that should be built upon and I return to this below.

If we look at students' school backgrounds, the picture is different and here we see universities increasing segregation. The proportion of pupils at independent schools is 7 per cent nationally, although this rises to 18 per cent among 16 to 18-year olds. The proportion of entrants in 2014/15 from independent

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schools is highly skewed across universities, ranging from 44 per cent at Oxford and 38 per cent at Cambridge (some specialist institutions are even higher) to 1 per cent at Bolton, Edge Hill, Staffordshire, Teesside and Wolverhampton. The IoD comparing independently and comprehensively schooled entrants is a whopping 49 per cent. Across local government areas the equivalent IoD is 32 per cent, so it appears that universities are further segregating into highly selective universities the already very concentrated geographical distribution of independently-schooled children.

As already touched upon, a decision to send a child to an independent school is essentially a decision to separate that child from children in general, often to increase their chances of doing well later in life. It is in general a good decision if looked at from the perspective of an individual child. It is not so good if we want a fair and inclusive society, because independent schools are part of a structure of unequal opportunities that is deeply associated with social class and the hyper-selective universities as channels to well-paying professions.

Mike Savage's analysis of data from the Great British Class Survey indicates how this might be working.[15] He found that three variables are closely related to future income and wealth prospects. These prospects appear to be significantly enhanced by:

1. attending an independent rather than a comprehensive school;

2. having parents who are senior managers or professionals rather than in semi-routine or routine occupations; and

3. attending Oxford or another 'Golden Triangle' university (best), another Russell Group university (second best) or any other university (third best, and better than none).

These three variables have separate and cumulative effects on the likelihood of becoming a member of what Savage identifies as Britain's 'elite' social class, the top 6 per cent.

Independent schooling appears particularly to advantage the children of senior managers and professionals. Sixty-four per cent of independently-schooled and Oxford-educated children with these parents were found to have made it into the elite class in adulthood, compared to 49 per cent of comprehensively-schooled and Oxford-educated children with the same parental background. The only difference was attending an independent school. Forty-nine per cent is still a pretty good likelihood compared to just 23 per cent of comprehensively-educated but non-Russell group university graduates with senior manager and professional parents who made it into this elite, and it is double compared to 11.5 per cent for non-Russell group comprehensively-educated graduates with parents in semi-routine or routine occupations.

Claire Crawford and her colleagues present similar evidence using different data showing how private education and what they call 'high status' universities confer separate effects in boosting graduate earnings that have nothing to do with attainment.[16]

It is clear why aspirational parents with the money would send their child to an independent school, but it is not so clear why highly selective universities recruit quite so many

students from these schools. As already noted, when account is taken of the effects of subjects and grades attained in school at Key Stage 4, pupils from independent and selective state schools do significantly less well academically at university than students from comprehensive schools.[17] Independent schools, though, have a disproportionately large share of the high attainment entrants that very selective universities like because they concentrate young people from advantaged family backgrounds, and have established themselves as feeders to these universities, despite appearing to inflate their pupils' actual potential. Part of the reason for their feeder status is undoubtedly many of these schools coaching for Oxbridge exams and interviews, biasing selection in favour of their students.[18]

The higher education sector currently both extends opportunity and entrenches class privilege, with the latter effect far outweighing the former. Access agreements and targets are largely irrelevant because these accept and take into account entry tariffs when benchmarking and assessing universities' performances recruiting disadvantaged students. In fact, they cloud the issue.

4. The hidden injuries of class

Sennett and Cobb's classic text *The Hidden Injuries of Class* explores how doctrines of equality – of the type OFFA operates, with its benchmarked widening participation data – seemingly erase overt class distinctions but actually reproduce them in more socially acceptable forms such as 'ambition' and 'talent'.[19] Thus, the hyper-selective universities are the 'good' universities where ambitious and talented students study. This may sound fine until you put yourself in the shoes of a lecturer or student who works in a less selective institution. By implication they are not 'good', 'ambitious' or 'talented'. These are hidden injuries of class.

It is actually worse than this. A job of the hyper-selective universities is now apparently to rescue 'bright' working class students from these low status institutions. A recent article in UCL's alumni magazine about the university's widening access work quotes Professor Ann Phoenix as saying:

> *It's not just about getting more working-class and minoritised ethnic groups into university per se – it's also about getting them to think beyond their local universities, which is where we know they're likely to go, and to be accepted by high-status universities.*[20]

If this does not read to you as outrageous, try substituting 'school' for 'university', although perhaps some readers will think that too is simply how it is. Certainly, when I challenged Alan Milburn, Chair of the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, speaking at a HEPI-Bridge Group event on widening participation, as to why his focus was exclusively on

the Russell Group rather than the post-92s that actually do the heavy lifting, the answer he gave was just that: this is how it is, the Russell Group is the path to professional success.

The Government's Behavioural Insights Team has even been set to work on saving working-class young people from low status universities. They have been developing methods for discouraging high-achieving low-income school pupils from applying to universities that are not in the Russell Group, including effectively condoning some employers' discriminatory practices favouring recruitment from these institutions. The information they sent to these pupils even claimed that it can be cheaper to attend them, including the cost of living away from home, which is rather difficult to believe and deserves investigation by the Competition and Markets Authority.[21] We seem to be moving to a situation where the Department for Education is a marketing department for the most selective universities. This is already the case with regard to the media's greater interest in Russell Group stories, and both biases seem to have much to do with these institutions being the *alma mater* of senior politicians, civil servants and journalists.[22]

Prejudice and discrimination aside, aspects of the learning environment in Russell Group universities can be better than some other institutions due to decades and sometimes centuries of investment – often enabling their academics, for example, to have individual offices, an attraction for good staff and making personal tutoring a lot easier. Predominantly white and middle-class lecturers may be more comfortable teaching predominantly white and middle-class students, so

some good academics may choose not to work in less selective universities, where the chances of establishing a prestigious research reputation are also less. Yet there are excellent staff in less selective institutions, but although many are passionate about the power of education to transform their students' lives, this is made harder by them being denied students who are encouraged instead to go to 'good' universities.

One of Theresa May's most outspoken critics of her predilection for grammar schools is the recently-departed Chief Inspector of Schools, Michael Wilshaw. In an interview on the BBC's *The Andrew Marr Show* a few months ago, he talked of his own experience as a comprehensive school head teacher. His argument against grammar schools emphasised how important his top 20 per cent of achievers were, just the students that grammar schools and independent schools cream off from comprehensives. This 20 per cent were important, Wilshaw argued, because they raised everyone's game.

Because pupils with higher prior attainment are discouraged from attending less selective universities, or choose not to because they think that the reputation of highly-selective universities will give them an advantage in the job market, or feel more comfortable in a more middle-class environment, they are the missing tens of thousands in less selective universities.

Based on the IoD analysis discussed above, over 30,000 entrants from social classes 1 to 3 would need to enter another institution to replicate the distribution of entrants in social classes 4 to 7. Around 15,000 entrants from social classes 4 to 7 would need to move to replicate the distribution of entrants

from social classes 1 to 3. The latter figure is much less because of the considerably lower higher education participation rate among these young people. If their participation rate was to approach anywhere near that of young people from social classes 1 to 3 there would need to be a major expansion of higher education places.[23]

Instead, the policy focus is on the missing few thousand in highly-selective universities who are the state school pupils with high grades not in these institutions.[24] But for less selective universities to lose these students, in addition to those who already do not come, further undermines them for the very reason that Wilshaw identifies for schools. The influence of these students is important both informally in social life and extra-curricular activities, and formally in teaching. Mixed-ability classes, for example, enable particularly effective teaching practices, such as peer-to-peer learning. This can be used in a variety of ways so that those students who find learning a particular topic easier can support those students who find learning the topic harder, with significant benefits to both.

At Middlesex, we hire our highest-achieving third-year students to work part-time as learning assistants alongside lecturers in first-year classes to support students who need some extra help. Our data show this raises engagement and achievement. It builds on variation. Evidence from schools suggests that streaming makes no difference to pupil attainment but denies the variation in different types of ability that expert teachers can use with powerful methods like peer learning.[25] These methods probably have significant potential in mixed-ability settings to help narrow social class differences in educational outcomes, which persist into higher education, and are largely

the same in both more and less selective institutions.[26]

The evidence from schools suggests that selection reduces the average attainment of students from disadvantaged backgrounds: that is, the achievement of disadvantaged school students in selective local authority areas is lower than in non-selective areas.[27] Furthermore, high-attaining pupils do no better attending a grammar school than a good comprehensive school, comparing all schools in the top 25 per cent based on value-added progress measures. What grammar schools do to nearby comprehensives is decrease their chances of being a good school by reducing their pupils' attainment due to removing their high-attaining pupils.

A reasonable inference from this evidence for higher education is that highly-selective universities are damaging not only less selective universities but also the average achievement of all students.

5. Diversity

The better education that these high attaining students would receive in less selective institutions is likely to be co-created by their own contribution to the learning process. I have touched on this above regarding peer learning but there is further evidence about the importance of diversity to creativity and problem-solving, both of which are intrinsic to the complex learning that characterises higher education.

This evidence relates to group work and the general learning environment. Taking group work first, Scott Page's book *The Difference* discusses the effects of two types of group attribute when groups are solving difficult problems or making decisions that require complex scenarios and options to be explored.[28] These are: diversity of perspectives; and average ability. He shows that diversity of perspectives can be more successful than average ability, and although combining diversity and ability works best, high average ability is likely to reduce diversity and be less successful than a combination of diverse perspectives and abilities that are relevant to the task.

The diversity effect that Page identifies involves bringing to bear on a problem or choice different ways of seeing solutions (perspectives) and different ways of constructing solutions (heuristics). These tend to be associated with identity diversity because attributes such as age, gender, class and ethnic identity have important influences on our ways of seeing and thinking. He argues that these are resources as significant as cognitive ability and concludes that whether solving a problem, making a choice or predicting a future scenario, just bringing together 'the best and brightest minds' is likely to be a flawed approach

because they are more likely than a diverse group to think about the world the same way. Diversity brings innovation.

Page also argues that cognitive ability is diverse; that we all have 'toolboxes' of cognitive skills, partly reflecting latent abilities and partly education, training and experience. While cognitive ability matters, its significance is not in terms of some abstract average measure like an IQ test but in terms of the toolbox of relevant competencies we bring to a situation. If a problem-solving group comprises people all with the same tools, it is likely to be less effective at solving complex problems than if some members bring tools that others do not have. 'The more tools in our kits', Page writes, 'the fewer places we get stuck', an insight that applies just as much to learning as problem-solving.[29]

Some students will find one way of having something explained easier than another, yet we still often teach as if there is only one way to explain something. Furthermore, and especially relevant to the focus of this paper, there is some evidence that students from different social class backgrounds use different strategies to learn, but that university lecturers recognise and reward middle-class strategies most.[30] Lecturers need to deploy diverse pedagogic toolboxes if the persistent social class differences in outcomes noted above are to be tackled. Evidence suggests that this is possible.

Page's arguments are not only relevant to problem-solving and pedagogy but research and innovation generally. Identity and cognitive diversity 'work' by increasing the likelihood of improvements and breakthroughs. There are similar effects driving urban creativity and innovation networks, including

the importance of serendipitous connections made in high-density liquid networks, perhaps the ideal state for a university campus![31] Yet we sorely neglect the main potential source of diversity on our campuses: our students. Their identity and cognitive diversity are not just 'contextual' – to be controlled for statistically so that benchmarked comparisons can be made of access and attainment – but compositional. They are resources for co-creating higher education.

Much of this diversity is currently selected out by many universities, especially cognitive diversity and identity diversities associated with lower school attainment. Higher-tariff institutions reject students who would otherwise bring the different ways of seeing and thinking associated with, for example, working-class experience or black ethnic identity, or the skills acquired with applied general qualifications or coping with adversity, while lower-tariff institutions lose students who would otherwise bring their advantages of having had better opportunities to learn, experience highbrow culture or international travel, and perhaps stronger theoretical thinking.

The mixed-tariff, comprehensive university benefits from both. It is more likely to drive social mobility and its graduates are more likely to be able to work in diverse teams to solve problems, make decisions and improve productivity. They could help make our society not only more tolerant of difference but welcome difference as enriching economically, socially and culturally.

Universities in the UK are way behind progressive employers in realising the benefits of diversity.

As Page writes:

> *hiring students who had high grade point averages from the top-ranked school may be a less effective strategy than hiring good students from a diverse set of schools with a diverse set of backgrounds, majors, and electives.*[32]

Blind recruitment processes have been found to reduce graduate hires from Oxbridge and other Russell Group universities, increasing recruitment from other institutions.[33] This almost certainly increases cognitive and identity diversity, not only contributing to companies' equalities targets but also to the bottom line. McKinsey, for example, claims that better business outcomes follow from 'inherent diversity' (gender, race and socio-economic background) and 'acquired diversity' (experience and skills), and has found that companies which combine both as 'two dimensional diversity' have 45 per cent more market share.[34]

This type of evidence is based on associations rather than established causal relationships, but many studies are now pointing in the same direction, and the significance of Page's book is the way he uses mathematical models to show how diversity works to produce these outcomes.

The diversity effect has striking potential in education. Peer-to-peer learning has already been mentioned. Mixing boys and girls benefits the school attainment of both genders but especially boys, and randomly assigning roommates at college to avoid white and black students self-segregating improves both academic effort and social behaviour.[35] Iris Bohnet's discussion of crafting diverse groups has interesting

implications for crafting diverse classes, showing that this is not just about mixing people up but is about designing groups.[36] She suggests that 'skewed heterogeneity' is likely to be less effective in team performance than 'balanced heterogeneity' or even homogeneity. In crafting seminar groups for example, if the class as a whole is very male, instead of having one or two women in groups dominated by males, the diversity effect is likely to work better by forming a few gender-balanced groups with the rest all-male. She warns, however, that the type of task matters. If it requires a high level of coordination then homogeneous groups may be the best option, but most complex problems benefit from diversity.

Evidence about the benefits of diversity for students in higher education is mainly from the US, much originating from the research used by hyper-selective universities to justify admitting black students with lower grades than white students under legal challenge from the families of the latter, who argued they were being discriminated against. To exercise this kind of affirmative action as a social objective unconnected with educational benefit would be illegal in the US by infringing 'equal protection' under the Constitution, so universities have had to make their arguments on the basis of pedagogy.

Legal rulings found that equal protection was not violated by public universities deliberately creating 'pedagogically meaningful numbers of students from a broad array of racial, ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, and ideological backgrounds'.[37] Evidence demonstrated that using race as a factor in the admissions process enabled all students to experience racial and ethnic diversity in the classroom as well as in informal interactions, and that this was

associated with measurable improvements in engagement and academic skills. Perspective enhancement and role reversal were identified as particular pedagogic benefits.

Many US studies now demonstrate this positive relationship between student learning in higher education and exposure to peers from different backgrounds, including evidence of positive effects on problem-solving ability, satisfaction, motivation, general knowledge and self-confidence.[38] Other benefits are reducing prejudice and implicit bias towards particular groups, and enhancing critical thinking and perspective-taking by students, including more complex thinking. Studies have also shown that college diversity increases civic engagement.

These very important findings are highly relevant to the demands on higher education to extend students' capabilities to think creatively and work with others. It is important to note, however, that these arguments for diversity are about diverse toolboxes and not diverse preferences. Page makes a key point about this, warning that if there are diverse fundamental preferences among groups there is likely to be conflict.[39] This is not necessarily to be avoided but to recognise that, while it is possible to reach agreement about a solution, problem or decision, for matters where fundamental preferences are at issue agreeing to disagree or to compromise may be the solution.

Creating diversity on university campuses – and in virtual spaces as well – is not just about the intellectual stimulation of different ways of seeing and thinking but is also about building dialogue across fundamental preference differences and often very divisive fault lines such as animal testing, the Middle East

or the use of particular images or ways of dressing. In part, this is about intercultural competencies – how respect and disrespect are expressed and perceived in different cultural contexts for example, which is a precondition for working well in a multicultural team.[40] In part, it is also about democratic and deliberative goals, and not shying away from recognising past injustices as well as continuing inequalities.

This question is explored in Natasha Warikoo's book *The Diversity Bargain*.[41] She discusses how diversity has been approached by highly-selective institutions in the US and how far behind the UK is with this agenda. These approaches vary: Harvard for example emphasises dialogues and intercultural and race relations, while Brown's approach emphasises facing up to historical wrongs and current power inequalities. The former approach seeks to reduce divisions, integrate students and help them find common ground while the latter develops self-confidence, solidarity and resilience. A particularly interesting finding from Warikoo's interviews is that students wanted more opportunities to talk about race, often finding this difficult. The key conclusions, however, are that these are very important experiences, need purposeful designs to achieve them, and are much harder to achieve if universities remain so selective.

6. Learning together

Diversity is good for learning. Two-and-a-half thousand years ago the Greek historian Herodotus journeyed far and wide to meet and know people who were different.[42] He wanted to know them because through knowing others the Greeks would learn more about themselves. Beneficial as international travel is, we can also bring diversity to our campuses. At Middlesex, our campus mixes students from London's cultural and social mosaic with students from over 130 different countries. One reason why we are diverse is that we do not demand inflated grades for admission; we ask for the grades needed to succeed on the course, including extensive foundation year provision, but do not set the bar so high that we select out social and cultural diversity, or deny the opportunity for 80 per cent to succeed because 20 per cent might not fully achieve their study goals.

Universities are cognitively demanding environments, but developing just cognitive abilities is one-sided learning. The other side is diversity and, in particular, using diversity. Highly-selective universities, by selecting for prior achievement, select out the variation that is potentially a resource for learning. While less selective universities can compensate to a large extent for the lower initial abilities of much of their intake by focusing on excellent teaching that builds students' abilities, the more selective universities cannot compensate for their lack of diversity. Both would be enriched by swapping some students.

How could this be achieved? Warikoo, in considering the US 'elite' institutions, argues for introducing entry quotas for

social class, type of school attended, race or exam grades, and using lotteries to award places.[43] She refers to the precedent of some American high schools that commit to fixed proportions of their student body being in top, middle and low ranges on standardised tests. In England, only grammar schools can select by ability (Scotland and Wales are fully comprehensive) although some generally non-selective state-funded secondary schools are permitted to select a proportion of their intake by ability or aptitude. School admission policies also use catchment areas and feeder schools. The use of POLAR data by OFFA to benchmark universities' widening access performance and the many school partnerships that universities have as part of their access strategies could be built on to create admissions schemes designed to create more mix by social class, ethnic identity and ability. In general, school precedents such as quotas, lotteries, catchment areas and feeder schools present interesting possibilities for higher education.

In other words, there is a variety of admission mechanisms that could be used to desegregate universities and move to all but a few being comprehensive. The simplest would be to require a fixed proportion of entry to be open access along the lines of the school academies that are allowed to use selection but only for a fixed proportion of their intake. Alternatively, there could be a minimum matriculation requirement, based on minimum threshold standards across the sector, but low enough to make a significant impact on the barrier to access created by high-entry requirements. Excess demand could be managed using a lottery. The immediate effect of course might be for the currently most 'prestigious' universities to be flooded with applicants, most of whom would be disappointed, and for

some high-attaining, socially-privileged applicants who would otherwise have secured a place to be rejected unless these institutions expanded significantly. Such expansion would be at the cost of less selective universities, which would defeat the purpose of de-segregation.

The best way to avoid this would be a financial mechanism, building on OFFA's current requirement that institutions charging above a £6,165 annual 'basic fee' use a proportion of their additional fee income to fund measures to widen access among under-represented groups. This is currently focused primarily on improving the institution's own access performance, but this would become far less important with open or basic matriculation entry, since high-entry tariffs would no longer be the obstacle they currently are to recruiting more students from under-represented groups, given that the main reason for low participation is lower achievement at school.[44]

Universities with disproportionately high numbers of entrants from social classes 1 to 3 could have targets for re-balancing both these entrants and those from social classes 4 to 7 within tolerance bands that bring them closer to the sector averages. This would reframe the access problem at institutional level as one of over-representation of socially privileged students as well as under-representation of socially disadvantaged students. Institutions could scale the size of their open access quota to manage meeting their target, for many in the process widening access to students in social classes 4 to 7, but needing little dedicated access spending to do it. Instead, much of this spending could be channelled as a levy into a central pot used for redistribution to institutions needing to increase towards the sector average their representation of students

from social classes 1 to 3, using a funding formula based on their representation of these students. These funds could then be used to cushion the financial impact of scaling back their lower-tariff recruitment to increase their proportion of higher tariff, social class 1 to 3 students as lower-tariff students they might have otherwise recruited opt for other institutions that were previously too selective to accept them.

While highly-selective universities could seek to maintain or even increase their intake from social classes 1 to 3, this would impose a significant additional cost on them by increasing their levy payment and redistributing funds to less selective institutions. These lower tariff institutions might also choose not to scale back their recruitment from social classes 4 to 7 and even increase it, but this would also impose a financial cost of lost levy by reducing an otherwise higher proportion of students in social classes 1 to 3. So as not to compromise the national effort to increase the participation of young people in social classes 4 to 7 generally, all institutions could be required to agree the size of their open access quota in their annual Access Agreements with OFFA, with these scaled to drive a continuing increase in the participation rate.

Taking the current access spend by Russell Group universities as a guide, the central pot could be around £250 million a year, but would reduce as the sector de-segregated.[45] It would be distributed by formula to institutions working to increase their intake of students from social classes 1 to 3. While this amount of funding would enable almost all the social class 1 to 3 students who would need to move to achieve a sector IoD of zero to be given free places, this would of course be highly regressive. The requirement should be that the funds are

not used for scholarships but for other measures to enable a rebalancing within the institution's current or reduced size and attract more social class 1 to 3 students, such as sports facilities, halls of residence or marketing. In addition, not all the Russell Group access funding should be redistributed, given some would need to be retained to resource the additional support needed for open access students.

Many Russell Group universities already operate a kind of access quota by providing access routes, although often predominantly for mature students. Alex Astin has argued in the US context that wider change would most likely occur if a highly-selective institution decided to allocate a significant proportion of its places to applicants with much lower grades, rising to the challenge of teaching these students and demonstrating learning gain, rather than basing their reputation on selective intake.[46] Russell Group institutions, however, even if sympathetic to more ability and identity diversity in their institutions, would probably not want to face allegations of dumbing down compared to their competitors that a unilateral decision to adopt open access for a proportion of young entrants would no doubt attract. Many less selective institutions would also probably welcome increasing their proportion of higher attainment, more socially-privileged students but cannot do so because in the current prestige-driven system there is not the demand from these students. Overall, there is a need for determined national policy action of the kind I outline above, with quotas and levies, to achieve change.

The reputational barriers must be tackled. These would start to be eroded by the research/comprehensive distinction I

proposed above, designating some 90 per cent of the sector comprehensive. It is primarily academic culture which drives these reputational distinctions. Most employers do not rank the university attended high among their selection criteria; the problem of discrimination in favour of Russell Group applicants is largely one confined to 'elite professions' and appears to be a class bias.[47] Employers rank much more highly specific skills, professional experience and area of degree specialisation.[48]

Astin is highly critical of how academic culture values 'being smart' more than 'developing smartness'.[49] He argues that students who would otherwise struggle can often succeed with extra time, support services, tutoring and academic counselling. The extent to which they may struggle can also be mitigated with good prior diagnostic assessment, guidance and course placement, including foundation programmes. While some may fail to complete, most full-time students do complete even with open admissions. So this is a much fairer approach than denying opportunity to most because some fail to make it to graduation, often for non-academic reasons. He concludes that all universities need to attach much more priority to their 'excellence' in the academic growth of average or underprepared students than to their 'excellence' in selecting smart and better-prepared students.

7. Learning skills

Astin also argues that the under-representation of many groups in US universities is not just a case of being less prepared but also of too great a focus on cognitive ability when universities make selection decisions. This is especially anomalous given that universities have increasingly defined the graduate attributes their education confers in much broader terms than just cognitive ability, including affective outcomes such as values, influencing and leadership. Skills to find, assess and apply knowledge have also become more important, playing to a wider range of abilities as long as students can learn and practise developing these skills at different paces. A move to competency-based learning and assessment across the sector would help immensely, but instead this is often seen as crowding out the academic subject knowledge that students 'need to know' to pass exams and course work. Even worse for some, it is making academic education resemble vocational education.

The comprehensive university, however, needs to embrace 'academic' and 'vocational' education, not just to offer opportunities to a range of student abilities and identities but to enable students to move from one to the other. Indeed, a logical development of a more comprehensive university system is universal credit transfer. In contrast to current Government policy in England to bifurcate 'academic' and 'vocational' pathways from age 16, there needs to be one tertiary framework that is far less defined by academic and vocational distinctions and far more enabling of credit transfer. While the German model is sometimes held up as a successful example of binary pathways, German technical education has

significant academic content. This is why it is so successful in training employees able to think for themselves and contribute ideas for improvements and innovations that help drive Germany's impressive productivity record.[50]

Current Government policy is to strengthen a separate technical education sector and apprenticeships, both as alternatives to more costly higher education and to meet labour market needs.[51] Influential work by Alison Wolf and others has argued that the higher education sector is over-providing full-time degree graduates, pinning much of the blame on favourable loan finance.[52] However, this is unlikely. The latest UCAS data show that fewer than two-in-five 18-year olds apply to university, and this declines to only just over one in five in areas of the country least represented in higher education. For an advanced knowledge economy, this is hardly excessive, as evidenced by a graduate unemployment rate of little over 3 per cent, less than half of the non-graduate rate and, given frictional unemployment, as good as full employment. In addition, the earnings benefit for graduates compared to non-graduates for those from poorer families is about double that for graduates from richer families, so any reduction in university places is likely to make the sector's social mobility performance even worse.[53]

The level of earnings achieved compared to debt accumulated is a different matter. Wolf suggests that degree courses are now in many cases too expensive given the graduate and government debt incurred compared to what many graduates will earn. More students should instead choose cheaper and shorter vocational courses.

The problem with this analysis is that it ignores how almost all the full cost of degree education in England is now borne by the individual student, while the benefit accrues more widely. One estimate is that about half the benefit of higher education accrues to the student as private earnings and non-market benefits and about half to wider society.[54] A fairer funding system would be for student fees to start being reduced to half their current level, with the balance met by a phased increase in funding from general taxation to reflect this wider societal benefit, and giving a much better return on their loan for the student. As has been shown by others, the net cost to the taxpayer would likely be little different with lower fees because of not needing to cover so much unpaid graduate debt. The popular Labour Party policy of abolishing fees altogether is more radical but arguably still a co-funding model, with the individual student still incurring living costs and facing future taxation of any graduate earnings premium.

The challenge for debt-burdened students is the high employment, low productivity economy into which they will graduate in the UK. The millennial generation may well be the first to have lower real earnings than the generation before them if there is not a step change in the UK's flagging productivity growth.[55] Skilled graduates able to improve performance and innovate are crucial to turning this around, but skilled graduates are different to experts in academic subject knowledge, taught within a research rather than practice paradigm.[56]

Even Scott Kelly's useful HEPI paper on the importance of the general vocational alternative to A-Levels, BTECs, to widening access to higher education fails to problematise the nature of much teaching in higher education.[57] He concludes that BTEC

students need help to adjust to 'theoretical study', rather than university teachers needing to adjust to the needs of students for professional, entrepreneurial and vocational skills. He reports that lecturers in the most selective universities are most likely to see BTEC students as deficient. This is not surprising in a system where there is little expectation on lecturers to achieve learning gains in applied skills and every expectation that only those students who find it easiest to learn academic knowledge should be selected onto degree courses.

Unfortunately the prestige of learning in a research rather than a practice environment is part of the problem and has seen many post-92 institutions seek to emulate the Russell Group rather than establish advanced practice-based learning as an alternative model. This model is surely the alternative that an economy with lagging productivity needs. Arguably, a research environment is less relevant to this model than an environment that encourages 'design thinking': practical, creative problem solving that explores alternative solutions for better future designs, whether products, services, policies or artworks.[58] This iterative, experimental and user-led approach is behind much industrial and professional innovation and although it draws on academic research – which is still very important - it is in many respects a different practice and is embedded in practice contexts.

The post-92 universities are well-suited to developing this model as an alternative for all social classes, but this needs policy support. It should probably include shorter technical education courses and degree apprenticeships, which could substitute for some of the lower-tariff degree entrants that

under my proposals would be accepted by what were the more selective universities. Why, for example, should the Behavioural Insights Team not write to high-achieving socially privileged young people to 'nudge' them to these institutions? After all, apprenticeships are now being promoted 'for smart kids too'.[59] The practice focus that is still evident in many post-92s owes much to their stronger representation of creative arts subjects, with their approach to interpreting and improving the world through making. To relegate making to sub-degree technical education risks not addressing the main challenge to economic and social wellbeing in the UK, which is poor productivity and especially a productivity tail.[60]

Making, however, is about much more than making an artwork or a robot, it is about making good arguments, good presentations and good relationships. Above all, solutions are 'made' and they are best made by combining abilities and diversity in the same environment.

The Comprehensive University: An Alternative to Social Stratification by Academic Selection

Conclusion

While less selective universities are not often explicitly called 'low status', very selective institutions are frequently called 'high status' in the media, by politicians and in the academic literature. Students at the 'not high status' institutions know that they are, in effect, in a low-status university and, by association, are 'low status' people who possibly should not be at university. These low-status students are more likely to be working class and black. They are advised to head for 'high status' universities if they are 'talented'. The TEF does add a new dimension but is a gloss that does not tackle the fundamental issue of lack of diversity in so many of our universities.

In my view this is a pretty shocking state of affairs that needs to be addressed on equality grounds alone, but I have sought to argue in this paper that there are likely to be significant educational and productivity dividends from ending it. I have also outlined some mechanisms for achieving this – not a complete shift to comprehensive higher education but one that introduces a large comprehensive element while preserving some selection and retaining a special status for a small number of research institutions.

The paper's arguments mostly relate to England. Although broadly applicable across the UK, they would need different policy tools in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Scottish Government has already announced moving to a requirement that all universities adopt separate access entry requirements for every degree programme, reserving these for applicants from the most deprived backgrounds.[61] I have also focused on full-time undergraduates. Where it is

research-based, postgraduate provision should probably be concentrated more in the research institutions, allowing them to reduce undergraduate numbers, while part-time provision faces particular challenges at the moment, a solution to which would only help my argument.

All students would benefit from replacing a stratified higher education system with mixed-tariff institutions where the diversity of cognitive abilities and identities would be a resource for everyone's learning. Diversity would be both an input and an outcome, helping make society more tolerant, populating public services jobs with professionals who are more representative of their users, and improving business productivity. The attractiveness of the predominantly Russell Group, highly-selective universities to more privileged students would be reduced in tandem will increasing the attractiveness of post-92, less-selective universities. This would use the most powerful tools that are available to achieve this, which is open access or basic matriculation quotas combined with a levy, creating more diverse and more successful learning communities in all our universities.

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In this hard-hitting paper, Tim Blackman, a serving Vice-Chancellor, calls for a much less hierarchical higher education sector.

He shows how this will benefit students, the quality of learning and social mobility and, most importantly, he shows how to get there.

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