

Rethinking merit in pursuit of fairer admission to universities in England, 14 January 2021



00:19:58 CGHE Webinars: You can read the new report, Fair Admission to Universities in England: Improving Policy and Practice, here:

<https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/sass/research/briefings/fairadmissionreport.pdf>

00:32:28 Greg Walker: 'Living in the real world' could be seen as a plea that HE admission practices are based on a 'non-ideal' theory in the language of political theory. Whereas an 'ideal theory' would conceptualise merit as it concerns admission to HE without having regard to perduring educational inequalities prior to HE entry.

00:34:38 Nuala Burgess: A question for @Vikki Boliver (if there is time) As an approach to improving 'equity of opportunity' and better informed contextual admissions, I wondered if there might be some advantage to helping working class /disadvantaged young people to access 'elite' universities through providing a free foundation year? My own experience working with disadvantaged sixth formers and first year undergraduates suggests that many students from poorer backgrounds may not lack academic 'ability' but do lack some basic skills in e.g. essay writing, how to evaluate and argue, and basic knowledge and skills such as how to access wider reading and use libraries. These students also often have to work while studying, which means any lack in basic academic skills is exaggerated. We might level up the playing field with a free foundation year for some groups. I think a free foundation year would show 'elite' universities are serious about improving their 'fair' admissions and widening participation.

00:36:02 Johnny Rich: Interesting point, Greg. I wonder if there's an argument on the basis of return on public investment that additional (not necessarily higher) education should be most accessible by those who are least credentialed rather than those who are most?

00:36:44 Cassandra Murphy: How would you propose top Tariff universities comply with these fair admission targets when things like 'box ticking' to achieve diversity still occurs? Could they not argue they have been meeting targets but in fact are setting students of poorer socioeconomic background to fail if they have only been given a place due to 'box ticking'?

00:38:53 Jess Brown: A question for Vikki ; As you indicated, Universities have an important role to play in developing as yet unrealised potential. To what extent is that entirely concerned with admissions and how far do you think 'Elite' universities need to develop their cultural environment as a competing priority, in order for students from lower SES to realise their full potential.

00:39:19 Simon Marginson: First in Q&A in order - Peter Scott, Nuala Burgess, Greg Walker, Johnny Rich

00:39:43 Simon Marginson: then Jess Brown

00:42:27 Camille Kandiko Howson: Did you explore and/or find differences across subjects, both in processes and approaches to conceptions of 'fairness'? I know there are different disciplinary practices, with additional admissions tests very common for Maths and other STEM subjects

00:43:02 Rosemary Deem: Earlier work by people like Stephen Ball, Diane Reay noted that some applicants to university who were from disadvantaged or ethnic minority groups wanted to go to universities where there were other people like them - which might exclude a lot of traditional 'old' universities; how can this also be addressed in relation to the pool of applicants applying to different kinds of institutions? In other words why should they apply to 'old' universities, even with contextual admissions in place?

00:43:07 Helen Carasso: Contextualised admissions become necessary/equitable/relevant because of inequalities earlier in society and schooling - to what extent should HE recognise that the evidence you have presented here is really an argument for society to invest in other areas of education and welfare?

00:50:10 David James: The old access agreements allowed universities to maintain different views of widening access & participation, but perhaps crucially, had no 'teeth'. How significant are potential sanctions in the more recent OfS approach?

00:54:55 Cassandra Murphy: In regard to contextual offers, this is all well and good but realistically there have been prospective students who have refused these if their financial status changes before the time comes to relocate for university, or their institution encourages them to apply for top universities but family requires them to stay closer due to help needed

00:55:12 Christopher Jones: Great presentation Vikki!! :)

00:56:52 Fouzia SADAF: Amazing to listen. Very sequential, well drafted and well connected ideas. Great Vikki...

00:59:09 Giulia Montefiore: Extremely, extremely interesting!

01:00:06 Mohamed Shabana: very interesting concept ! I hope this is extended to international students.

01:00:22 Elisabeth Hovdhaugen: Q for Vikki from an outside UK view: you state that students from high Edu background (High SES) are more likely to get a "better predicted grade" - is this due to difference in schools offer or in grading from Teachers? if it is grading, are there anything countering that? In Norway, admission is almost solely based on grades, and competition is related to programme rather than institution. In popular programmes, such as medicine the GPA requirement to get admission is very close to the max grade possible. However, upper secondary Schools across Norway provide almost the

same edu and all students have to take exams (all in Norwegian, and then 2 more in subjects where they specialise, and this is graded anonymously, so the grader does not know the student at all). Do you have anything like that? if, so would that Counteract the "predicted grade" from teacher?

01:04:10 Rosemary Deem: Isn't Cambridge offering a free foundation course with 50 places?

01:05:21 Nuala Burgess: Cams foundation year is highly selective :(

01:05:36 Nuala Burgess: By that I mean super-highly selective

01:10:25 Nuala Burgess: Excellent point, @johnny rich about who is worth 'investment'

01:10:47 Lauren Bolz: Thank you for this excellent presentation Vikki! It doesn't look like there will be enough time for my question, but I would be really interested in hearing your thoughts on how you would approach contextualising admissions for graduate courses and more generally for programs with international applicants, where socioeconomic indicators are quite difficult to compare

01:11:01 David James: Thanks Vikki (and Simon/GCHE) for an excellent webinar. Sorry I have to go - off to present to the Welsh Government. All the best

01:11:04 David James: David

01:13:51 CGHE Webinars: Thank you all for attending today. A recording of this webinar will be on the CGHE site tomorrow morning:
<https://www.researchcghe.org/events/cghe-seminar/rethinking-merit-in-pursuit-of-fairer-admission-to-universities-in-england/>

01:14:53 CGHE Webinars: Our next webinar will be on Tuesday next week. 'Hong Kong universities: navigating in unknown waters'. You can register here:
<https://www.researchcghe.org/events/cghe-seminar/hong-kong-universities-navigating-in-unknown-waters/>

01:15:01 Eliel Cohen: Brilliant idea Johnny, but I just wonder whether if that line of argument was likely to work on the government, then we would probably already be living in a more equal, tax distributive world!

01:15:45 Johnny Rich: You're right, Eliel – that's why I was woken to couch it as merely hypothetical!

01:15:59 Johnny Rich: *so keen to *

01:16:09 CGHE Webinars: You can sign-up to our mailing list to hear about future events and new CGHE research here:
<https://researchcghe.us12.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=16ff8239ab5aa3c8d4f636725&id=1cadde4c55>

01:18:32 Helen Carasso: Is there anything positive we can take from the outcomes of last year's Covid-impacted admissions round (ignoring the chaos of the processes in real-time!)?

01:18:36 Nuala Burgess: A great session. Thank you very indeed to @Vikki Boliver and @Simon Marginson

01:18:53 Nuala Burgess: * thank you very much indeed...

01:18:56 Johnny Rich: There has been a big debate in engineering whether maths (and to a lesser extent physics) are necessary qualifications. Increasingly universities are no longer requiring them and either providing bridging studies or even finding they're not necessary.

01:19:04 Johnny Rich: Thanks, Vikki, Simon and everyone at CGHE – great webinar. Very informative and thought-provoking.

01:19:51 Rosemary Deem: Thanks Vikki - great presentation, off to read the report now