'Extending' participation in higher education — Implications for marketing

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Abstract The concern of this paper is access to higher education (HE) in the UK. With ever increasing numbers of applications to HE and government commitment to widen participation to those neighbourhoods traditionally under-represented, cause for concern has been raised by practitioners and in the media over the different methods used for measuring the extent to which particular groups within society are under-represented and how they are then to be targeted. Also, with increased competition for applications between the universities and changes to how students finance their time at universities, all HE providers have become much more marketing-focused and as a result have begun to analyse their students in much more detail than ever before.

The paper discusses the importance of defining the government's aims carefully in order that marketing can be utilised most effectively. Via a series of analyses which drill down into application patterns it demonstrates how elusive the perceived end result can appear and, in turn, how difficult it is to devise the most appropriate marketing tactics.

INTRODUCTION

With some 22,000 university places unfilled since 1994¹ and a reported oversupply of 6,000 undergraduate student places for the academic year 2002–2003, 'clearing' universities and higher education (HE) colleges now compete heavily each year to 'hoover up' available students.² Although in the final analysis, 'more students than ever enrol at British universities',³ strong competition to recruit students means that many applicants who would formerly have gone to polytechnics and HE colleges are 'poached' each year by older established universities.

The publication of 'Supply and demand in higher education'⁴

acknowledged the recruitment problem, a situation in which government expansion targets indicate 50 per cent of the 18–30-year-old population should have experienced some form of higher education by 2010. The current participation rate is 34 per cent of the 18-year-old population.⁵ In this national context in which 'supply has outstripped demand for university places',⁶ an increasing focus on support for the retention of non-traditional students is hence necessary both to widen participation effectively and to ensure institutional survival. Consequently, since the 1990s, universities have become much more marketing-focused in the competition to fill their courses ahead of

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clearing and during clearing. The introduction of top-up fees⁷ adds a new element to the marketplace with universities now able to charge each student up to £3,000 p. a. — another restricted free market method aimed at achieving egalitarian ends.

This paper considers how this public policy issue can be framed in marketing terms. First, attention is given to what the government's aims appear to be and what they perhaps should be. Secondly, a series of analyses are presented to demonstrate how, statistically, these aims need to be carefully devised. Specifically the point is made that postcodes need to be considered in terms of their geographic position as well as their socioeconomic make-up and that the subject/institution combination applied for must be considered for an accurate discussion of a true extension in participation. Finally, consideration is given to how marketing managers at universities might incorporate this pressure from government into their marketing planning.

SHOULD MARKETING AIM TO INCREASE, WIDEN OR EXTEND PARTICIPATION?

'The big issue is surely that there are whole swathes of the population who are in social conditions which mean that they are highly unlikely to get near a university — top one or otherwise. We need to devote most of our efforts to addressing this inequity. What university they go to is a secondary question.'⁸

This is a significant statement. Applicants do not generally regard the choice of university they attend as a secondary consideration. It is suggested that in many cases, those from a privileged background (who still comprise most

applicants) do not apply to study 'maths', but to study 'maths at Cambridge' or at least 'maths at X or Y or Z'. Those from a less privileged background in terms of ethnicity, social class or age are likely to be limited in their choice to just those universities within a reasonable distance of home — perhaps so near to home as to enable them to continue to live with their parents.⁹ Traditional marketing practice would dictate that the high participation groups are identified and then targeted, however the current public policy objective requires the opposite, ie that low participation groups are targeted in order to increase their participation rates. To *encourage* universities to target these groups, a premium payment is available if applications are admitted from 'low-participation' neighbourhoods¹⁰ — this is just one example of the way in which government, having created an open marketplace for higher education, is now attempting to influence its outcomes.

Acknowledging the unusualness of this marketplace, this paper emphasises the importance of terminology in describing what the government is/should be aiming to achieve and who it is that the marketing managers at universities are attempting to attract. The first of these can be summarised as the difference between 'increasing', 'widening' and 'extending' participation, the significance of which has been raised before, for example by Thomas,¹¹ who argues that it is necessary to clarify the distinction between increasing participation and widening participation. In this context, Thomas defines the first as an increase restricted to certain social and cultural groups — particularly those that were already well represented — and 'widening' participation as increasing access to learning and providing opportunities for success to a much

wider cross section of the population than now. Put differently, an increase in participation means that although the overall numbers of people entering higher education increases, the proportions made up by the different socioeconomic groups do not change. A widening in participation implies a change in these proportions as well as an increase in overall numbers, ie a move away from the current bias towards the wealthiest groups.

In this paper a third definition of 'extending' participation is proposed as follows: a more equitable distribution of places across the different socioeconomic groups studying all courses at all institutions. (Thomas' definition of 'widening participation' implies only a concern at the macro-level of all applications to HE.)

IDENTIFYING LOW-PARTICIPATION NEIGHBOURHOODS FOR MARKETING

Conventional approaches to identifying the social background of applicants and acceptances to HE have used social class¹² or sometimes socioeconomic group¹³ and these were the only measures available. More generally, social class has been a central and institutionalised standard for any analyses of government statistics according to social background although the procedures were recently overhauled. Rose and O'Reilly¹⁴ provide extensive coverage of the revisions while one important example is found in Dearing's¹⁵ important investigation into patterns of application to HE. Dearing claimed that:

'Despite the welcome increase in overall participation, there remain groups in the population who are under-represented in

higher education, notably those from socioeconomic groups III to IV, people with disabilities and specific ethnic minority groups.'

This demonstrates that public policy is still considered in the language of social class.

Alternative methods are now available for the purpose of identifying the social background of applicants and acceptances to HE. For example, Tonks¹⁶ used geodemographic classifications and concluded that there had been only slight changes in application patterns over the period 1991–1998. If a simple cause-effect model is assumed, then social background, however measured, presents a final barrier to equal opportunity in HE and it is still firmly secured in place. Weaknesses in using conventional measures of social background for the purpose of identifying access to and participation in HE are acknowledged. The Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE)¹⁷ noted that 'Data on the socio-economic profile of the HE population have consistently been poor, difficult to collect and full of caveats'. Difficulties include inaccurate source data, coding errors and the small number of categories. As a result of these and other difficulties, geodemographics is often seen as an alternative and superior measure. As an introduction therefore, Table 1 provides the MOSAIC groups by applications and admissions to HE via UCAS for 2000–2001 and compares both of these with a base of those aged 15–18 years across Great Britain by MOSAIC.

Even at this overall level, it is possible to see divergence by socioeconomic background; 'high income families' and 'country dwellers' being more likely to make a successful application while 'council flats' and 'Victorian low status' are least likely to make one. In terms of

Table 1: MOSAIC acceptances versus applications

	All acceptances (%)	All applicants (%)	Great Britain population 15–18	Index (acceptances vs applications)	Index (applications vs GB)
High income families	23.2	21.7	13.7	107	158
Suburban semis	14.0	13.6	11.1	103	123
Blue collar owners	12.0	11.9	14.3	101	83
Low rise council	6.1	6.6	15.5	93	43
Council flats	2.8	3.3	4.9	86	67
Victorian low status	7.9	8.9	8.4	90	105
Town houses & flats	9.0	9.2	8.7	98	105
Stylish singles	5.3	5.8	3.5	93	165
Independent elders	2.9	2.9	4.9	100	59
Mortgaged families	6.2	6.3	7.5	99	84
Country dwellers	9.7	9.2	7.0	105	131
Institutional areas	0.2	0.2	0.5	95	50
Totals	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Experian/UCAS

the wider issue, ie their representation compared to the national population, 'low rise council' provides a particularly stark picture with an index of 43 — 15.5 per cent of the population are classified this way but only 6.6 per cent of applicants received through UCAS are made from this group.

Research into and marketing attempts to widen participation often ignore a more simple issue, the provision of HE geographically. Almost all of the coverage which makes reference to applicants and their postcodes talks about them in relation to their socioeconomic make-up and the participation of that socioeconomic 'type' within HE, be it measured by social class or geodemographics. Very rarely is the distance from that postcode to the nearest university or college considered and, more importantly, the variety of universities or colleges available within a reasonable commuting distance of that postcode.

Still, for a significant proportion of applicants to HE in the UK, it is the institution which is most important in their decision, the consequent journey there irrelevant. But, as the numbers of people applying increases, it is likely that

a greater and greater proportion will need to consider the trade-off between what is available at an institution and how far from home that institution is. Taking this further raises another, potentially more important issue, the movement of human capital. While it is agreed that the increase in the numbers of people entering higher education brings a benefit to the economy this benefit is unlikely to be evenly distributed. Bennett *et al.*¹⁸ and Armstrong¹⁹ concentrate on the specific relationship between the local provision of education and the consequent 'stock' of human capital. Among their findings, McCann and Sheppard²⁰ go further to suggest that accessibility to London is still the best function of job availability *per se* and thus a keen driver in many applicants' choices. The analysis in Table 2 aims to precede these analyses into the journeys that people make upon leaving HE by considering their journeys from home into HE. Its concern therefore is not this ultimate movement in human capital but the effect on choice that geography alongside demography has. By producing results which consider both, it aims to show that it is important to consider where postcodes are, not merely

Table 2: Average distance travelled by MOSAIC group

	Average distance–2001	1994–2001	1998–2001
High income families	73.9	–10.8	–2.5
Suburban semis	67.3	–12.8	–2.1
Blue collar owners	53.2	–18.9	–3.6
Low rise council	41.7	–21.8	–2.6
Council flats	28.0	–22.9	–7.5
Victorian low status	39.7	–19.9	–3.2
Town houses & flats	64.3	–14.4	–1.4
Stylish singles	58.8	–10.9	–2.5
Independent elders	71.6	–14.1	–1.8
Mortgaged families	57.4	–14.3	–0.1
Country dwellers	93.4	–5.6	–0.9
Institutional areas	85.7	–5.3	3.8
Average distance	63.3		

Source: Experian/UCAS

what type of people live within them. The results are potentially actionable, not just for those aiming for wider participation but, at the institution level, for those with a marketing brief aiming to form a clearer understanding of the dynamics of the catchment areas of their and competing institutions. Understanding the distance travelled by students is a key factor in where and how an institution might seek to recruit future students. For example, with limited resources, which careers fairs should be visited nationally? Which postcodes should receive direct mail advertising a new postgraduate course?

Table 2 plots the geodemographic classification, MOSAIC versus average distance travelled. Just as certain universities have wide catchments mainly because of where they are geographically, the MOSAIC category ‘country dwellers’ has the highest average distance (93 miles); in most cases these new undergraduates are travelling from rural to urban areas. One of the subcategories of ‘country dwellers’ is a category called ‘gentrified villages’, another is ‘upland and small farms’. These two subcategories often contain fairly wealthy households who are thus financially more confident about sending their, typically,

18-year-old, white children a long distance from home.

The two categories least likely to travel far are ‘council flats’ (28 miles) and ‘Victorian low status’ (39 miles). While financial hardship is probably the strongest deterrent to travel for those in the, typically high-rise, council flats, the category ‘Victorian low status’ contains a very high Asian and Black Caribbean population, ethnic groups which have been shown to be less likely to travel.²¹ Again, the increased number of institutions means these groups do not need to travel as far and incur as much of the subsequent expense in commuting/living away from home.

VARIATIONS IN PARTICIPATION BY SUBJECT AND UNIVERSITY CHOICE

Access to HE and the issue of widening participation are well documented and geodemographics have offered a new and more precise method of disaggregating the population of interest. This paper now reports the use of geodemographics to identify examples of variations in participation. The objectives behind the research, elements of which are included here, are to provide a richer description

Table 3: Applications to University X by MOSAIC

	All university applications %	University X applications %	GB 15–18 profile %
High income families	23.0	28.3	13.7
Suburban semis	14.0	14.6	11.1
Blue collar owners	11.9	12.4	14.3
Low rise council	6.1	4.0	15.5
Council flats	3.0	1.0	4.9
Victorian low status	8.6	5.6	8.4
Town houses & flats	9.1	7.6	8.7
Stylish singles	5.5	5.7	3.5
Independent elders	2.9	2.4	4.9
Mortgaged families	6.1	5.0	7.5
Country dwellers	9.5	9.7	7.0
Institutional areas	0.2	0.2	0.5

Source: Experian/UCAS

and a deeper understanding of application patterns for HE. In particular, the research aims to highlight significant variations, by geodemographic grouping, across subject and university choices. In this way, measures of participation are obtained. Again, comprehensive data sets were supplied by UCAS for the application year 2000–2001 and MOSAIC appended. The data were restricted to applicants aged less than 21 years of age applying for full-time degree programmes. Knowing the MOSAIC group of applicants makes it possible to create profile comparisons to identify, for example, the similarities and differences between those applying for maths and those applying for medicine. Maths was chosen as the main subject area to report in this paper because it is taught at most universities to a large number of students. In addition, analyses were performed by selected university types and individual universities. Data for one university are given in this paper but the university is identified as 'University X' to maintain confidentiality. University X might be seen as a typical 'old' university which offers a wide portfolio of undergraduate courses, it was not selected to produce extreme results. Various calculations can be performed on

the profile data, including calculations of differences and tests of significance, but in most cases the presentation is kept to simple percentage profiles because the data are easy to read. There is one exception to this where the Spearman Rank Coefficient has been used, in Table 5.

PROFILES OF APPLICATIONS AT UNIVERSITY X

Table 3 also gives the MOSAIC profile for applications to University X, and an initial measure of participation is therefore provided. The MOSAIC profile at University X is even more skewed — 28.3 per cent of its applications are from 'high income families' and only 4.0 per cent from 'low rise council'. Similarly, while applications from 'council flats' account for 3.0 per cent of all university applications, this is down to 1.0 per cent at University X. Clearly, and from this first example, certain geodemographic groups are advantaged as far as participation in HE is concerned and within the system of HE, there are marked differences in participation across the universities which comprise the system. While University X sees a disproportionately low level of

Table 4: Maths applicants by MOSAIC

	All university applications %	All maths applications %	Minimum by university %	Maximum by university %	Standard deviation
High income families	23.0	19.7	5.0	34.4	7.2
Suburban semis	14.0	13.3	4.1	20.0	3.3
Blue collar owners	11.9	12.3	2.3	25.3	6.0
Low rise council	6.1	7.4	2.3	21.7	4.0
Council flats	3.0	4.2	0.5	17.9	4.2
Victorian low status	8.6	12.5	1.1	37.0	9.8
Town houses & flats	9.1	9.4	4.1	18.8	2.7
Stylish singles	5.5	4.9	0.6	12.5	2.9
Independent elders	2.9	2.7	0.6	6.4	1.1
Mortgaged families	6.1	6.4	2.0	13.3	2.3
Country dwellers	9.5	7.1	0.7	19.8	3.8
Institutional areas	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.7	0.1

Source: Experian/UCAS

applications from ‘low rise council’ and ‘council flats’, this will be compensated elsewhere in the system by a university or universities which attract disproportionately high levels of applications from these two MOSAIC groups.

PROFILES OF MATHS APPLICATIONS

Table 4 focuses on applications for maths. Here, it can be seen that the profile for all maths applications coincides roughly with that for all applications across all subjects — but there are some differences. For example, maths attracts 12.5 per cent of applications from the MOSAIC group ‘Victorian low status’ compared with 8.6 per cent for all subjects. While maths still attracts 19.7 per cent of its applications from ‘high income families’, this is notably lower than the 23.0 per cent for all subjects. A general comment is that maths is slightly ‘better’ at obtaining a representative cross section of applications from young people identified according to geodemographics.

Table 4, however, also gives the maximum and minimum MOSAIC profile values for maths at all universities

and while maths as a subject appears to perform reasonably well overall as far as participation is concerned, this is not the case by individual university. The range of values for any one MOSAIC group is very high. While ‘high income families’ account for 23.0 per cent of all maths applications across all universities, this ranges from a minimum of 5.0 per cent to a maximum of 34.4 per cent. In the case of maths applications from the MOSAIC group ‘council flats’, the average for all universities is 3.0 per cent but the range is 0.5 per cent to 17.9 per cent. The range is even larger with ‘Victorian low status’ — from a minimum of 1.1 per cent to a maximum of 37.0 per cent.

The final column in Table 4 provides the standard deviation of profile values for maths applications by MOSAIC group and this reflects the ranges provided. Across all universities, the profile of maths applications for certain MOSAIC groups is fairly stable — such as for the groups ‘town houses and flats’ and ‘stylish singles’ and ‘mortgaged families’. This means that all universities tend to obtain roughly the same proportion of maths applications from these three MOSAIC groups. In the case of ‘Victorian low status’ and ‘high

Table 5: Maths applicants by MOSAIC group at University X

	All university applications %	University X applications %	All maths applications HE %	Maths applications University X %
High income families	23.0	28.3	19.7	26.4
Suburban semis	14.0	14.6	13.3	15.8
Blue collar owners	11.9	12.4	12.3	16.3
Low rise council	6.1	4.0	7.4	4.8
Council flats	3.0	1.0	4.2	1.1
Victorian low status	8.6	5.6	12.5	9.0
Town houses & flats	9.1	7.6	9.4	8.4
Stylish singles	5.5	5.7	4.9	3.3
Independent elders	2.9	2.4	2.7	2.3
Mortgaged families	6.1	5.0	6.4	6.4
Country dwellers	9.5	9.7	7.1	6.2
Institutional areas	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1

Source: Experian/UCAS

income families', however, these two MOSAIC groups contribute substantially different proportions of maths applications by university.

Therefore, the general comment above needs some qualification. While maths is slightly 'better' at obtaining an overall representative cross section of maths applications from young people, there are wide differences across individual universities. Participation is variable and substantially so.

PROFILES OF MATHS APPLICATIONS AT UNIVERSITY X

Assessments of participation can be taken at subject level, institution level or both. Continuing with a 'top-down' approach, maths at University X is now considered and the data appear in Table 5 which also contains profiles from previous tables for easier comparison.

Taking all maths applications in HE as the reference point, the MOSAIC profile of maths applications at University X shows that it attracts proportionately more applications from the MOSAIC groups 'high income families' and 'blue collar owners' and fewer from the groups 'council flats' and 'Victorian low status'.

Using all applications to University X as a reference point, maths at University X is particularly effective at attracting applications from the MOSAIC groups 'blue collar owners' and 'Victorian low status'. Maths is less effective at attracting applications from the groups 'stylish singles' and 'country dwellers'.

PARTICIPATION BY SUBJECT AT UNIVERSITY X

To give an illustration of the wider picture at University X, Table 6 provides examples of subject areas offered and their respective MOSAIC profiles for the source of applications. For brevity, a sample of subject areas and MOSAIC groups has been taken. The variations in participation for maths, already provided, are repeated here to aid comparisons. There are noticeable differences in participation across all these selected subject areas, apart from the MOSAIC group 'suburban semis' which contributes fairly equally to applications for all the subjects.

In the case of 'high income families', this group dominates across all subjects but there is a range from 33.9 per cent of all applications for business and

Table 6: Selected subject area applications by MOSAIC

	Business/ admin. %	Social studies %	Medicine/ dentistry %	Engineering/ technology %	Creative arts %	Maths/ informatics %	Education %
High income families	33.9	30.2	29.9	28.5	27.2	26.4	19.3
Suburban semis	14.5	15.1	16.0	14.4	16.0	15.8	14.5
Low rise council	3.3	3.6	3.5	4.3	2.7	4.8	4.9
Council flats	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	0.7	1.1	4.1
Victorian low status	5.2	5.7	4.2	5.1	3.7	9.0	7.6
Mortgaged families	5.8	4.3	4.2	5.8	3.7	6.4	11.0
Country dwellers	9.7	9.4	8.0	10.6	10.5	6.2	9.0

Source: Experian/UCAS

administration at University X down to 19.3 per cent for education.

As already observed, 'low rise council' does not participate proportionately in HE, in maths, in University X or in maths at University X. This continues across other subjects at University X but applications from this group are relatively stronger for engineering and technology, maths and education and they are weaker for creative arts. Similar comments apply to the very under-represented MOSAIC group of 'council flats'. Their contribution to applications for all selected subjects is low, although they make a bigger contribution to applications for education at University X.

'Mortgaged families' show little variation apart from education at University X where applications from the group account for 11.0 per cent of all applications.

'Country dwellers' are not inclined to apply for maths at University X, compared with their general contribution to applications across other subjects.

Finally, there is the MOSAIC group 'Victorian low status'. While this group makes a substantial contribution to applications for maths, this is not the case for other subjects. For example, only 4.2 per cent of applications to University X for medicine and dentistry are from 'Victorian low status' and an even

smaller 3.7 per cent of applications for creative arts.

Taking subject area as the starting point, a general comment from the data in Table 6 is that education and maths at University X are rather better at achieving a representative participation with respect to MOSAIC groups but these data are partial and to give a more complete summary, all subjects at University X are considered in Table 7.

In Table 7, all subjects at University X are ranked according to their Spearman Rank Coefficient which provides an indication of the similarity of the MOSAIC profile for each subject compared to the overall profile of all applications to University X. When interpreting the Spearman Rank Coefficient a score near 1 means that the two profiles are very similar and a score of -1 means that the profiles are very dissimilar. No relationship is indicated by a score of 0.

From Table 7, the profiles of applications for social studies, engineering/technology and science with social studies/arts are the most similar to the profile of all applications, all three subjects having a Spearman Rank Coefficient of 0.986. Combined sciences, education and, most notably, medicine have MOSAIC profiles of applications which are least like the overall profile. Clearly, across the subject areas offered

Table 7: Profile similarity; applications by all subjects and MOSAIC group at University X

	Spearman Rank Coefficient
Social studies	0.986
Engineering/technology	0.986
Science and social studies/arts	0.986
Biology	0.972
Creative arts	0.951
Business/administration	0.944
Combined social sciences	0.930
Languages/related	0.923
Mass comm./documentation	0.923
Social studies and arts	0.916
Humanities	0.909
Combined arts	0.902
Physical sciences	0.888
Medicine allied subjects	0.874
Agriculture	0.853
Maths/informatics	0.748
Combined sciences	0.692
Education	0.622
Medicine	-0.336

Source: Experian/UCAS 1999

by University X there are noticeable differences in participation, measured according to the MOSAIC profiles associated with applications. Evaluating these differences from the standpoint of equal opportunity, it could be that those subjects with the lowest Spearman Rank Coefficient are either the best or the worst.

The data reported here illustrate the variations in participation at the levels HE, subject, university and subject/university combinations. All the available data confirm what is usually suspected but rarely quantified, and that is the need to consider choice processes and participation within the diverse HE system by analysing the data at a much finer level of disaggregation. To close this section, it might be worth recalling that all the data provided in this paper are at the level of the 12 MOSAIC groups but that these groups break down into 52 MOSAIC types. Frequent mention was made of the MOSAIC group 'Victorian low status' but the analyses have also been undertaken at the level of the five MOSAIC types that comprise 'Victorian

low status' and participation with reference to MOSAIC types reveals substantial variation across all universities and subjects.

CONCLUSIONS

At the macro-level there are clearly biases in higher education participation rates across different socioeconomic groups, measured here using MOSAIC. Considering the journeys that students make (or plan to make) it would seem that distance, like socioeconomic background is a surrogate measure of, or proxy for, choice. Just as knowing whether a postcode is classified as 'high income families' makes it possible to estimate the likely number of applicants and acceptances by subject, so knowing the distance of this postcode from each of the institutions applied to makes it possible to refine this prediction.

Although most coverage of widening participation seems to cover the profile of the postcode there are a number of initiatives which recognise that geography on its own cannot be ignored

— the extra £20m in access funding for English HEIs in 2001–2002 was ‘to allow universities to widen access through links with schools and colleges to attract able students from a broader range of backgrounds’.²² It is through these links with local schools that popular universities will truly widen participation. A number of old and new universities have set up intensive schools programmes involving the recruitment of several new staff members to work on awareness-raising within schools and colleges across the country. Many of these universities have created a significant number of special places reserved for pupils previously thought likely to under-achieve in A-levels or from families where higher education had not been considered a realistic option. There are several ways this can operate, one example has been the swapping of lower A-level entry requirements for a programme of seminars, student-shadowing and a summer school on the campus.

The key dynamic of these types of schemes is that they have been marketed locally, acknowledging that while older universities tend to have national catchments, children at local state schools are not able to consider travelling to any part of the country. Their choice realistically is limited within their region and therefore to only one or two of the most popular older universities as well as the newer universities and local colleges. This admitting of entrants from local state schools to a nearby university (which has a national catchment) represents ‘extending’ participation, ie opening up the most prestigious universities to the groups within society which traditionally have been under-represented within them.

Analysis presented here has shown that, in marketing terms, a degree is not a commodity, it is not an undifferentiated

product. Particular courses and particular universities have their own individual brand values and target markets. For some of the most discerning consumers (applicants) it is not sufficient to be accepted to University X but it must be to study Y at University X. Cynics have argued that creating ‘new’ courses (usually at ‘new’ universities, ie former polytechnics) in order to increase the volume of people entering higher education *per se* cannot genuinely be described as extending participation. Care needs to be taken over terminology but this could be referred to as the difference between ‘extending participation’ and simply ‘widening participation’. Anecdotally, one could presume that employers still ask prospective employees where they got their degree, not what it was in.

To take one possible outcome from these results, as outlined at the beginning, top-up fees offer another market mechanism to university marketing managers. It would seem that the ‘new’ universities might lose out both ways — if they do not introduce the maximum amount per student they risk creating a perception that their courses are of an inferior quality. If they do, they risk discouraging applications from their core market, precisely those neighbourhoods which the government wants to see a greater number of applications from.

Lastly and most importantly, support for the disadvantaged is needed from birth, and probably even before. This may sound obvious, but it is often forgotten that addressing social inequalities at the point of leaving compulsory schooling and entering HE could be too late. This also raises the issue of whether positive discrimination, although initially inequitable by definition, might extend participation for the next generation.

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