

Wonkhe Access All Areas Conference

Key Insights

- Working with early-years provision and schools on **attainment** is a **key priority** in the sector and commitment to this is valued by OfS
- Supporting young people to make the right educational choice for them was a core theme – a focus on **improving careers guidance**
- **Listening to student needs** and adapting provision to provide a more fulfilling experience for all student groups is key to access, social mobility and inclusivity
- **Sense of belonging** and **equality of opportunity** are integral to supporting students to 'get on'

John Blake in conversation

1. Conversation between John Blake (Director for Fair Access and Participation, OfS) and Mark Leach (Wonkhe). Key points summarised:
2. **Initial priorities** for JB: **responding to lost learning** and adaptations due to the pandemic; championing **equality of opportunity** for all students **post-access**;
3. Focus on tackling **attainment gap** for students (higher SEO/lower SEO backgrounds) – links to early years attainment;
4. Ambition to “**construct a united education system**” between schools, colleges and universities;
5. Desire for **widening participation work** to be **embedded across organisations**, not only in specific teams;
6. Concerns around student **knowledge gaps due to covid**;
7. Emphasis on the importance of **high-quality careers IAG** in universities;
8. Expectations for APP variations:
 - a. Support schools with **careers IAG**;
 - b. Register existing **school partnerships**;
 - c. **Collaborate with third sector experts** working with schools;
 - d. Adjust **financial support** in light of rising inflation;
 - e. **Sense of belonging** – if measured meaningfully and a genuine priority.

What are the debates and trends shaping tertiary education participation?

9. Panel discussion between Sam Freedman (Ark), Yana Williams (Coleg Cambria) and Graeme Atherton (NEON). Key points summarised:
10. SF had interesting insights about '**status inequality**' rather than wage inequality between graduates and non-graduates, impacting on **perceptions of HE**;

11. YW spoke about how FE prepares adult learners to return to education, and suggests **HE can learn from the provision in FE**;
12. GA highlighted the lack of engagement between HE and the **levelling up agenda**, despite the ambition of education providers to reduce inequalities;
13. **Lifelong Loan Entitlement** - recent research suggests adults are reluctant to take a debt burden to reskill/upskill. **Difficult to predict uptake** and consequences for HE/FE.

Who are the future students and what's informing their choices about HE options?

14. Conversation between Mark Kernohan (Wonkhe) and Clare Marchant (CEO, UCAS). Key points summarised:
15. UCAS current data about prospective students include:
 - a. **450% increase** in declarations of a mental health condition;
 - b. **2 in 5** say better IAG would help them make better decisions;
 - c. Advantaged students are **1.4 x more likely** to consider HE in primary school than disadvantaged peers;
 - d. **1 in 2** UCAS applicants are also interested in apprenticeships;
16. CM spoke about the **value of 'near to peer' IAG** e.g. hearing from a recent graduate from the same course – discussions and vlogs could be used to share experiences;
17. UCAS survey found that students are concerned more with **current cost of living** than student loan payments in the future;
18. UCAS data show that there is **unmet demand** in students' interest in **apprenticeships**.

Getting in: Inspiring approaches to access

19. Research presentations from Leonie Ansems de Vries and Bronwyn Parry (both King's College London) and Cathy Mitchell (Heriot-Watt University). Key points summarised:
20. Interesting updates on projects with refugees and displaced learners from King's, potential for NU to learn from their projects e.g.:
 - a. King's is **1st UK HEI to resettle a refugee family** under their sponsorship scheme, and want to work with other HEIs to expand;
 - b. **Homes for Ukraine project** - working with partner universities to host displaced university students and staff from Ukraine;
21. CM's talk follows from her recent [Wonkhe article](#) on the topic, about **importance of children's early literacy and maths** understanding predicting later academic achievement. Her insights included:
 - a. Initiatives to support underrepresented young people should **begin as early as age 5**;
 - b. Early years education programmes and access initiatives exist (government and charity) but these rely on parental motivation and capacity to engage – not possible for all situations, so **how can HE support these young people and families?**

Advantaged students are 1.4x more likely to consider HE in primary school than disadvantaged peers.

Clare Marchant, UCAS

Ambition is to “construct a united education system” between schools, colleges and universities.

John Blake, OfS

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Getting on: Student diversity, experience, quality and outcomes

22. Research presentation from Geoff Layer (Disabled Students' Commission), Evan Botwood & Rania Regaieg (both sabbatical officers, UWE SU). Key points summarised:

23. GL emphasised that having **disability support in place as early as possible** is key for disabled students' sense of belonging – feelings of exclusion likely if they don't receive support on arrival/induction;

24. The DSC **agenda for change**, aiming to improve support and reduce the burden on disabled students – important to review;

25. EB and RR shared experiences from visiting **universities in Scandinavia** and their **key belonging practices** to build communities, social capital, and academic confidence;

26. Notable insights – focus on students eating together, creating multi-functional spaces, **student-led welcome activities**, mixing initiatives for diverse student groups.

What does social mobility mean in 2022?

27. Panel discussion between Natalie Perera (CEO of Education Policy Institute), Peter Scott (Commissioner for Fair Access in Scotland) & Sinead Gallagher (Welsh government). Key points summarised:

28. NP key insight - **bring diverse people into positions of influence**, so decision-making is informed by different realities; can be difficult with attainment gaps limiting people's graduate opportunities;

29. PS shared **Scotland's progressive framework for fair access** e.g. Scottish HEIs agreed on contextual offer eligibility and adjustments;

30. SG focused on the **importance of place and retaining talent in Wales** - foster people's links to their community; empower them to feel they can make change – can be applied to **North East local context**;

31. All raised the challenges of 'good' graduate jobs being concentrated in cities, particularly London, leaving less affluent areas at **risk of 'brain drain'** and **reproducing existing inequality** in opportunities and local regeneration.

For more information please contact:

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