

Widening Participation & International Students

A note by the Union President - Paul Beaumont

Definitions

'Contextual Admissions' – The use of data relating to an applicants' school (well performing, average achievements of students, rankings, etc) in considering whether to make an applicant an offer, potentially lower than the usual offer made.

'Widening Participation' – The process of encouraging students from less well off, and poor performing schools into University.

'OFFA' – The Office for Fair Access (Agreement). An agreement that the University has with the Government to engage in Widening Participation, in return for the ability to charge £9k fees.

'Outreach' – Similar to Widening Participation in the usual sense. In an Imperial sense, this is the department that co-ordinates Summer Schools and School visits of Teaching Fellows, in an attempt to engage in WP.

'UKBA' – The UK Border Agency, which is tasked with reducing net migration into the UK.

Background

Widening Participation

The use of Contextual Data in the admissions process is argued to measure the potential of a student using their expected results versus the average for the school they attend. The idea is that to improve participation from low performing schools a University lower the offers made to these students.

Also, they take into consideration courses (for instance Further Mathematics, which is not taught in many schools) that have been self-taught, as opposed to classroom taught.

This data is *sort of* used in this way around the College – on a department by departmental basis. The 'subjective' aspect (as opposed to the 'objective' use of purely examination results) is a worry to some though. This is extenuated as the College's admissions process is not centralised and varies from Department to Department.

Other Universities use Contextual Data in different ways to Imperial.

Some Russell Group Universities make their lower offers to students who have been on a 'Summer School' at their University.

Some Russell Group Universities have centralised admissions processes: Exeter for instance doesn't include academics in the admissions process and is arguably more algorithmic and fair. They have improved the quality of their student intake by ranking schools using the Department of Education's rankings of schools (and their students' likelihood of getting certain grades etc). Academics at Exeter have liked it as there is less responsibility on their part, and they have received an improved intake of students.

Other Russell Group Universities offer Foundation courses for feeding to other courses. Kings College London, for instance run a 'pre-medicine' course. Imperial trialled this system a few year ago in conjunction with Thames Valley, but it failed arguably due to the lack of support offered to the students (comparatively). Southampton University (another Russell Group University) also offers foundation years in many courses.

Our new Pro-Rector for Education has just been appointed from Southampton University.

Cambridge Union offer Outreach opportunities complimenting those run by Cambridge University. They organise:

- shadowing students at 'special lectures' on certain weekends (aspirational),
- e-mentoring via a help desk when volunteers answer applicants questions formally (informative),
- outreach by their clubs & societies, so that outreach work isn't solely academic (cultural).

Southampton too, for instance, has their Swingband doing outreach, and sports teams.

International Students

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-18888210>

Students have for some time been included in UK net migration figures.

This was arguably damaging to the UK's global reputation as it meant that students were being encouraged to leave the country and it was becoming very difficult to get a visa to come to the UK.

This was all due to a Government promise to reduce net migration as a whole. The easiest way to do this was to reduce the number of International students who come and study in the UK.

Earlier this year, a group of UK universities called on the government to remove overseas students from immigration figures, but the government rejected such suggestions, saying that targets to cut immigration could be achieved without "fiddling the figures".

Beliefs

1. In reality, the only way the UKBA can meet its migration targets is to disadvantage students, whose visa requirements are becoming seemingly ridiculous.

Resolves

1. The use of Contextual Data in principle is good.
2. The use of Summer Schools for identifying suitable candidates for making widening participation offers to should be encouraged.
 - a. This would also, create more jobs for students, as more would be required as 'mentors' than under the current Summer School setup.
3. The Union should concentrate its efforts on developing its own Outreach programmes, similar to those seen in Cambridge Union (bulleted above).
 - a. Students who partake in this should be accredited for it under a system that rewards the most devoted volunteers.
4. Imperial College Union supports the removal of international students from net migration figures.