

The making and shaping of higher education transitions in 'dual sector' institutions

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Overview

- The context for UG transitions to HE in dual sector institutions
- The significance of the HE application process
- The FurtherHigher (FH) Project
- The contribution of 'dual sector' institutions
- Students' experience of the application process in the FH project sites
- Implications



Context: Widening Participation in HE

- UK, European and global policy imperative to widen participation in HE in context of 'knowledge economy'
- UK: PSA target to **increase** participation (*towards* 50% by 2010 by 18-30 year olds)
- Different versions of WP in UK policy:
 - **meritocratic access** to 'elite' HE
 - **access to some form of HE** for all who can benefit from it (HEFCE, 2007)



Different forms of HE

'Our ambition is wide-ranging; from more local vocational study opportunities for those with little recent educational experience, to more help for our most talented young people to go to highly selective universities, whatever their background.'

(Peter Mandelson, Higher Education Funding letter, 22 December 2009)

Differences between elite, mass and universal HE

(Trow, 1973)

	Elite	Mass	Universal
Size	5%	15%	50%
Purpose	Shaping the mind and character of the ruling class	Transmission of skills for specific technical elite roles	Preparing large number of people for life in an advanced industrial society
How perceived	A privilege	A right	An obligation
Organisation	Communities, strong boundaries	Cities of intellect, more permeable borders	Aggregates of people, weak or maybe no boundaries



Current HE in England

- Features of all 3 in current system
- Involving differentiation and stratification
- Involving ongoing change to the field of HE
- Student transitions to UG HE take place in an increasingly complex and changing context



Significance of the application process

- the application process for undergraduate HE is an example of one aspect of the infrastructure that defines the field of HE and which has to be negotiated to gain entry to HE
- and it acts as one of the mechanisms through which the structuring and stratification of the HE field is played out



Dual sector institutions

- Found inter alia in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa
(see Garrod and Macfarlane, 2007 for an overview of these developments)
- In England:
 - 270 FE colleges with some HE
 - 40 HEIs providing FE as well as HE
- 20% in each sector considered the tipping point for achieving 'duality' (Moodie, 2009)



Role of FE/HE dual sector institutions

Access to some form of HE for all who can benefit from it (HEFCE, 2007)

Enabling WP and transition to HE through:

- Alternative routes
- Second chance opportunities
- Increased variety and geographical spread (local and regional)
- 2 year HE courses (Foundation degrees), a progression route to Honours
- 'Seamless' transition WITHIN single FE/HE institutions



The vision: a seamlessness system of lifelong learning

- Osborne and Gallacher (2007): open system of Lifelong Learning
- Parry (2003; 2005): universal access by breaking down divisions
- Garrod and Macfarlane (2007): the value of 'duals' - seamlessness



The FurtherHigher project

Research questions

- Why do we have two 'sectors' providing higher education in England?
- What impact does this have on widening participation in HE?
- How do students experience transitions between further and higher education, and between different stages of undergraduate study (level 5/6)?



FH project fieldwork

- Fieldwork in 4 'dual sector' institutions
- Transition between level 3 (FE) and year 1 of HE AND
between short cycle (2 yr) HE and final year Bachelor degree
- Interviews with students, tutors, institutional managers
documentary analysis
collection of fieldwork observation records
photographs of space and place



Four different 'dual sector' institutions

2 Higher Education institutions:

Citygate College

Southleigh University

2 Further Education colleges:

Northgreen Federal College

East Heath College

All offered FE and HE

HE was an important part of current and future provision



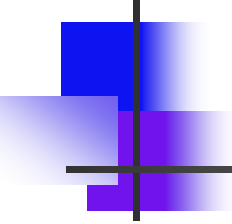
The application process

- The application process acts as a regulatory and gatekeeping practice.
- 'Selecting' and 'recruiting' institutions (Gallagher, 2006) all use application processes to give 'permission' to study HE
- Application procedures vary, UCAS currently represents a 'normative' procedure in relation to applying for HE



Normative assumptions about 'typical' UG application process

- UCAS as the system for making applications
- Certain qualifications are readily accepted (A levels vs vocational routes – see Ertl, Hayward and Hoelscher's (2009) work on 'vocational' routes and Unwin and Fuller's work on NVQ entries)
- UCAS personal statement as a significant element of applications
- *choosing* a place to study, and choosing several different possibilities
- visits to open days
- interviews



UCAS website: Different provision (and different students) go together

- Further education colleges appear on the mature students pages (not on main pages).
- Part-time degrees are outside the UCAS system.
- Full-time Foundation degrees may be in or outside the UCAS system.

<http://www.ucas.com/students/wheretostart/heexplained/>

<http://www.ucas.com/students/wheretostart/maturestudents/courses/whichuniorcollege>

<http://www.ucas.com/students/wheretostart/maturestudents/preparation>

<http://www.ucas.ac.uk/students/choosingcourses/faqs/choosingcourses/faq6> Accessed 30 December 2009

<http://www.ucas.ac.uk/students/choosingcourses/choosingcourse/foundationdegree> Accessed 30 December 2009

Students' experience in the FH project sites



- diverse practices in the FH project data
- complexity, some of it intended to make it easier for 'non-traditional' students and for 'non-traditional' courses
- The data includes:

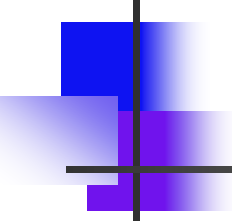
sites where applying through UCAS is the 'norm'

some individual students who struggle with UCAS applications
some individuals who find UCAS straightforward

sites where students apply direct to the HE institution or follow other application processes

confusion over the application process when moving from short cycle to bachelor degree

students seeking to start UG study applied away from their institution
students seeking to move from 2 year to Bachelor degree tended to stay within the institution or go to the partner HEI.



Following 'normal' UCAS application practices

National diploma courses with young people as the main participants

e.g.

East Heath College National Diploma
Sports

Southleigh University National Diploma
3D and ND Photography



The UCAS process as an integral part of the curriculum

instead of having a tutorial for a month, we had like a sort of UCAS workshop type session where if you were having problems with your forms, or with filling out the online thing you could go there and do. The tutor would sit down with you and say you need to be doing this or help you out with your personal statement as well you know because they're fun to write! (East Heath College National Diploma Sports)



The UCAS process as an integral part of the curriculum (2)

So what were the hardest parts of the application for you?

I reckon the personal statement because you had to make sure your English and grammar is correct, state the reasons why you think you should go to well not why you should go to University, but why you were interested in a certain hobby, like sport, what you do already in terms of sport and what you would like to do in the future. So pieces that would be relevant because I got told that if you do, you get a little checklist of what would be good for your personal statement, and like talk about voluntary work. (East Heath College National Diploma Sports)



Though individual students do not always cope with UCAS

On my first UCAS lesson I got locked out because I forgot my password so from that point I didn't really know how to use UCAS and it kind of got left and it got left and it got left and we didn't get any more help really apart from that one UCAS lesson. And then everyone was kind of doing their personal statements and stuff and I was thinking "what's all this, I haven't done any of it" so I started panicking.

And then it got to the time where it was like everyone was saying "oh yeah the deadlines are like tomorrow" and I was thinking "I haven't done anything". So then I left it and I remember I went home crying saying "oh I'm not going to go to university because I haven't done anything". And my brother said "don't worry we'll sort it out, that's fine".
(Southleigh University National Diploma 3D)



... this student then stayed on internally, bypassing UCAS

And then I was going to take a year out and work for a company where I've done work experience and I've worked there before and they were looking for a receptionist and so I was going to do that for a year and then go and do Fashion. And our final major project came about and it got marked and everything and we were sort of packing away and everyone was asking what we were doing and I said "I'm doing nothing" and [tutor] and [tutor] approached me and they said "look we think you've got talent and we would really love for you to come back". (Southleigh University National Diploma 3D)



Complexity once different application processes are involved

Nursing, at the time of the study, used 2 different application processes: UCAS for a degree in nursing, NMAS for a diploma in nursing

Basically I had to figure it out for myself and I heard from other people that you could actually apply for two. I had to confirm it with Health and Social Care staff and then.....

first I applied for the Diploma in Nursing for four universities and then I thought well, at the very, very last minute on the last day I thought "yeah I'm going to have a go and apply for the Degree as well". And it was lucky that I did because I did actually get interviews for both and offers for both. But not a lot of people did that, they just applied through NMAS instead of UCAS and I did it through Student Services and I managed to do both. (Northgreen College AVCE Health and Social Care)



'Access to HE': applying affected by diverse prior experience and application routes

Familiarity with applying through UCAS

I found it plain sailing, maybe **because I've done it before**. I know that when I started college there was a woman who had come back for her second year and she had to apply for UCAS that term and she said "oh I didn't know I had to write a personal statement, why didn't you tell me? I could have done it over the summer" And I was thinking "well you should have known that" if you were going to apply you should have known that you needed to do that. But maybe that's not so obvious as I think. Because I knew what I wanted to do, I applied in the first month I started college, got my forms in, got my statement done, I knew what I needed to do and just kind of got on with it and gave it to my tutor and it just all got sent off and done. So I heard back from them, all my universities, like in the next couple of months so I was sorted by like January, where I was going, I was quite organised in that way. (Northgreen Federal College Access course)

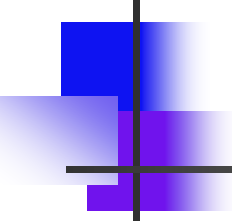


'Access to HE' (2)

The complications of bypassing UCAS

I had a bit of a panic on because I applied the year before, before I went on the Access course and I applied straight to the university and I didn't get accepted then but then they said "go and do your Access course".

UCAS then sent me this letter saying that I've been rejected and I didn't really know where I was. I rang them up and they said "oh you'll have to contact the university", And to be fair I had a different arrangement with the university rather than directly with UCAS so I don't think it was specifically their fault. The university had kept a place open for me but UCAS were saying "no it's been closed and everything's off" and it was like I had to contact a few people to get it sorted out. (Northgreen College Access course)



Applying for two year foundation degrees or HND

- In some sites, **some** students applied through UCAS, while **others** did not:
- East Heath College Early Years Fd Degree: full-time students applied through UCAS, part-time student on same course did not
- Southleigh University FdA and HND Music Technology
FdA students did not apply through UCAS but HND students said that they did



The 'new' transition point: two year degree to Bachelor degree

Confusion and inconsistency over internal transition requirements

- Southleigh University FdA and HND Music Technology FdA students did not apply through UCAS to move to Bachelor degree, but HND students said that they did
- East Heath College Early Years Fd Degree
Confused situation about whether students needed to make a UCAS application for the final Bachelor year within the institution. Because of conflicting advice, some did apply through UCAS and some didn't.



Just tick the box

And to progress from this year to next, how did you have to do that formally? Did you have to go through UCAS?

No, they sent me a little piece of paper from the college saying 'tick a box' and I did that. A few of us - because a lot of them asked about it, and they got told to go through UCAS, but I wasn't very good on the admin so I hadn't done that, and next minute I got a letter come through saying 'tick the box', so it's done through the college. So I've had the information from the college. (East Heath College Early Years Fd degree to Bachelor year)



Still waiting

And for next year have you had to make UCAS applications?

Well we were told initially we would have to so two of us did and then about three days later we were told that we didn't have to, that we would all automatically get an offer of a place through Admissions. So the people who went through UCAS we're still waiting for our enrolment pack whereas I think the other students have had theirs from the beginning of June. So I'm beginning to panic slightly, I've been down there this morning, I went down there last week and she seems to think that the Admissions packs go out in stages and that we probably haven't had ours yet. (East Heath College Early Years Fd degree to Bachelor year)



Status as 'new' or 'continuing' student has wider effects

There was some disagreement over whether we would be classed as continuing students and therefore pay the old rate or whether we'd be classed as joining a new course and have to apply via UCAS and pay the £3,000. But the college agreed that we could be classed as continuing students so it was just an internal form rather than anything else. (East Heath College Early Years Fd degree to Bachelor year)



Practical implications

- Applying to HE is not just about UCAS for students who do not fit the 'norm'
- alternative routes (vocational qualifications, Access courses) are not automatically accepted for all types of HE
- need for plenty of guidance
tutors do not always have the necessary knowledge
- The 'new' transition point from 2 year HE to Bachelor degree adds confusion and complexity
- The 'relaxing' of admissions processes for 'non-traditional' routes and students may be helpful but may also (unintentionally) add more hurdles to overcome



Deeper implications

- Application process as a regulatory mechanism shows up the diversification of field of HE
- There is increasing boundary blurring, and appears to be an increasingly open system, but it is a stratified system, which contains inequalities related to value and prestige. Different application processes show up which routes 'count' and have more 'value'
- application processes regulate participation in the HE field, and situate individuals in particular places. Do they also contribute to keeping students in a part of the field, and (intentionally or unintentionally) help create a stronger, and less open, boundary around more prestigious and valuable HE ?

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The FurtherHigher Project

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