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# English and American higher education access and completion policy regimes: similarities, differences and possible lessons

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## Abstract

England and the United States provide a very interesting pairing as countries with many similarities, but also instructive dissimilarities, with respect to their policies for higher education access and success. The purpose of this paper is to explore these similarities and dissimilarities with an eye to what each country can learn from the other with regard to reducing social class and racial/ethnic differences in higher education access and success. We focus on seven policy strands affecting higher education access and completion: student information provision; outreach from higher education institutions; student financial aid; affirmative action or contextualisation in higher education admissions; higher education efforts to improve retention and completion; performance funding; and degree of reliance on sub-baccalaureate institutions. While not exhaustive, this list of interventions is meant to focus on key policies affecting the undergraduate student experience and to give a sense of their range. We explore possible lessons that England and the United States might draw from each other's experiences, mindful of the dangers of uncritical "policy tourism". In the case of the United States, we note why and how it might benefit from following England in the use of Access Agreements to govern the outreach efforts of its universities, making more use of income-contingent loans, and expanding the range of information provided to prospective college students about the programmes and institutions they are considering. Meanwhile, in the case of England, we examine how it might benefit from greater focus on the role of further education colleges, sceptical consideration of proposals to make greater use of for-profit higher education, greater use of grant aid in its financial aid system, more policy attention to decisions students are making in primary and early secondary school that affect their preparation for higher education, greater use of contextualised admissions, and very careful consideration of the possible downsides of performance funding.

## Introduction

England and the United States provide a very interesting pairing as countries with many similarities, but also instructive dissimilarities, with respect to their policies for higher education access and success. The purpose of this paper is to explore these similarities and dissimilarities with an eye to what each country can learn from the other with regard to reducing social class and racial/ethnic differences in higher education access and success. We see the audience for this paper as policymakers and policy researchers in both countries. Policymakers may gather ideas for possible changes in the policy portfolios in their countries. Policy researchers may benefit from seeing opportunities for useful cross-national comparisons and contrasts in their analyses of the policies in their countries.

We focus on seven policy strands affecting higher education access and completion: student information provision; outreach from higher education institutions; student financial aid; affirmative action or contextualisation in higher education admissions; higher education efforts to improve retention and completion; performance funding; and degree of reliance on sub-baccalaureate institutions. While not exhaustive, this list of interventions is meant to focus on key policies affecting the undergraduate student experience and to give a sense of their range. The policies are ones that are strongly tied to government policy initiatives and therefore do not include policies that are largely institutional in origin.<sup>1</sup> Because of the federal structure of the US government, our review of US policies includes both national and state initiatives.

Our investigation of these policy strands is based on analysis of the rich material available in government publications and research studies addressing higher education access and completion. Our analysis of these materials has been enriched by the many conversations we have had with government officials, higher education researchers, and educational practitioners at both secondary schools and higher education institutions.

We should note that our analysis focuses on England since higher educational policy varies greatly across the United Kingdom. Because educational policy in the UK has been devolved to its constituent nations, higher educational policy can differ greatly across England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland (Hodgson, Spours, & Waring, 2011). We focus on England because it is the most populous constituent nation in the United Kingdom.

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<sup>1</sup> Policies that are largely institutional in origin include learning communities, undergraduate research opportunities, peer advising programmes, and so forth.

## Common goals and problems concerning higher education

The UK and US higher education systems are quite different in any number of regards. Most obviously, the US system is far larger in number of institutions and enrolments. In 2014, the US had 20.6 million students enrolled in 4,724 higher education institutions, while the UK had 2.3 million students enrolled in 159 UK universities and 144,000 enrolled in higher education programmes in 335 English colleges of further education.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, virtually all UK institutions are “public,”<sup>3</sup> whereas three-fifths of US institutions are private (Association of Colleges, 2015; Universities UK, 2016a; US National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). In addition, the US spends considerably more on tertiary education: 2.8 per cent of GDP versus 1.8 per cent for the UK (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2015a, Table B2.3).

Despite these differences, both the UK and US evidence similar goals and issues with regard to higher education. Both countries have committed to a sharp rise in the higher educational levels of their populations and a widening of participation by working class and minority youth (UK Dept. for Business, Innovation, and Skills [BIS], 2015b, pp. 13, 22, 36; UK Dept. for BIS, 2016a, para. 2.2, 2.3; UK Dept. for BIS, 2016b, pp. 7-8; US Office of the President, 2009; see also Callender, 2014; David, 2010a; Lane, 2015; Lumina Foundation, 2016; Whitty, Hayton, & Tang, 2015). In the UK, the Labour government committed to having 50 per cent of the 18 to 30-year-old age cohort participate in some form of higher education by 2010 (David, 2010a, p. 9). More recently, the Conservative government’s 2016 White Paper declared a commitment to wider participation by class and race/ethnicity:

Access remains uneven, with young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds 2.4 times less likely to go into higher education than the most advantaged.... We will make real progress on widening access and success for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to support social mobility and ensure that the Prime Minister’s goals are met – including doubling the proportion of disadvantaged students entering higher education by 2020 compared [to] 2009, and increasing the number of BME [Black and minority ethnic] students by 20% by 2020. (UK Dept. for BIS, 2016b, pp. 7-8, 41)

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<sup>2</sup> The colleges of further education in the UK play a role somewhat similar to community colleges in the US. However, one important difference is that the bulk of FEC enrolments are not considered part of higher education whereas they are in the United States (Dougherty, 2009; Hodgson, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> UK institutions are public in that they have royal charters and other forms of public authorisation and regulation.

Similarly, in the United States, President Obama in a 2009 address to Congress declared:

I ask every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training. This can be community college or a four-year school; vocational training or an apprenticeship. But whatever the training may be, every American will need to get more than a high school diploma.... That is why we will provide the support necessary for you to complete college and meet a new goal: by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. (US Office of the President, 2009)

Underlying this common commitment to expanding and widening participation in higher education is a shared belief that it is key to both fostering economic growth and reducing socio-economic inequality (UK Dept. for BIS, 2014, p. 7; UK Dept. for BIS, 2015b, pp. 10, 13; UK Dept. for Education and Skills, 2003, p. 4; US Dept. of Education, 2011a; US Office of the President, 2009; see also Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation [Gates Foundation], 2017a; Callender, 2014; David, 2010a; Lane, 2015; Lane & Parry, 2015; Lumina Foundation, 2016; Whitty et al., 2015). For example, the UK government has declared:

Our higher education system is also a significant driver of opportunity with more students from disadvantaged backgrounds attending than ever before. In addition, we are seeing the highest proportion of students from black and minority ethnic groups going to university. But as the number of students increases, our higher education system must continue to evolve.... Employers want highly skilled graduates who are ready to enter the workforce. And the country needs people with the knowledge and expertise to help us compete at a global level. (UK Dept. for BIS, 2015b, p. 10)

Similarly, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has declared:

Our vision is a US higher education system that propels social mobility and economic development. Therefore, the goal of the Postsecondary Success Strategy [of the Gates Foundation] is to ensure that more students complete education after high school that helps them support themselves, engage in their communities, and achieve their dreams.... Unless we dramatically improve student success in higher education, our nation will suffer from a shortage of the skilled workers needed to ensure we remain competitive across the globe. (Gates Foundation, 2017a)



This normative fusion of economic functionality and social equalisation is characteristic of centrist neoliberal educational policymaking in both England and the US.<sup>4</sup> Such policymaking envisions how education can graduate self-directed agents of all classes who can effectively navigate the postindustrial knowledge economy, able to both meet the skills needs of the economy and experience social mobility (Burke, 2012; Marginson & Van der Wende, 2007; Naidoo & Williams, 2015; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).<sup>5</sup>

Both England and the US are aware that their goals of higher education expansion and widening participation are hampered by the continuation of sharp inequalities between students differing in social class and race/ethnicity in access to higher education, entrance into the most selective institutions, graduation from higher education, and economic success post-graduation (UK Dept. for BIS, 2014, p. 8; UK Dept. for BIS, 2015b: 37, #14; UK Dept. for BIS, 2015c; UK Dept. for BIS, 2016a, pp. 10-11, #7.1, 7.6; UK Dept. for BIS, 2016b, pp. 7-8; UK Office for Fair Access to Higher Education [OFFA], 2014; UK Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2013; US Office of the President, 2014a; Universities UK, 2016b; also see Archer, Hutchings, & Ross, 2003; Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011; Boliver, 2013; Callender & Jackson, 2008; David, 2010a; Gates Foundation, 2017a; Karen & Dougherty, 2005; Lumina Foundation, 2016; Mangan, Hughes, Davies, & Slack, 2010; Reay, David, & Ball, 2005; Sammons, Toth, & Sylva, 2015a; Sutton Trust, 2014; Vignoles & Crawford, 2010; Whitty et al., 2015, pp. 33-41). In the UK, the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission concluded:

There is a long way to go before access to higher education can be said to be truly classless.... While there has been much progress in widening participation (participation rates in the most disadvantaged geographical areas increased by 30% between 2004/05 and 2009/10) those in the most advantaged areas are still three times as likely to participate in higher education as those in the most disadvantaged areas. There has been no improvement in participation at the most selective universities among the least advantaged young people since the mid-1990s and the most advantaged young people are seven times more likely to attend the most selective universities as the most disadvantaged. (UK Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, 2013, p. 5)

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<sup>4</sup> This fusion of social progressivism and economic functionalism harkens back to the classic formulations of sociological functionalism and economic human capital theory in the 1960s (Clark, 1962; Halsey, Floud, & Anderson, 1964; Schultz, 1961; see Dougherty & Hammack, 1990, chap. 2). However, the current neoliberal formulation puts much more emphasis on the positive role of market forces operating on and within higher education (Abbas, Ashwin, & McLean, 2012; Naidoo & Williams, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> We should also note that a full analysis of why England and the US have committed to expanding and widening higher education access must also acknowledge the low and dropping employment prospects and wages of those who leave secondary school early or do not go onto higher education. Moreover, policymakers may also be expanding higher education as a way to reduce the number immediately entering the labour market and thus bolster the wages of those already in the labour market.

Meanwhile, in the United States, Lumina Foundation, which is a leader in higher educational policymaking, has noted:

Numerous studies show that opportunities for postsecondary success in the US are not available to all. In particular, African-Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans continue to lag in postsecondary attainment.... Low-income individuals and working adults also have limited postsecondary opportunities compared to other Americans. This not only adds to a troubling increase in income inequality, it also severely reduces economic and social mobility in the US. (Lumina Foundation, 2016, p. 4)

## **Seven major strands in access and completion policy**

In pursuing greater access to and success in higher education for a larger and more diverse body of students, both England and the US have adopted ensembles of policies that are similar on many points while different on others. Both these similarities and dissimilarities are instructive. To understand their respective ensembles of policies, we examine seven major policy strands that the English and US governments are pursuing in order to improve higher education access and completion:

- Provision of information and guidance
- Outreach from higher education institutions
- Student financial aid
- Affirmative action or contextualisation in higher education admissions
- Higher education retention and completion efforts
- Performance funding: financially rewarding institutions for student completion
- Degree of reliance on sub-baccalaureate institutions

These policy strands certainly do not exhaust the various policies both countries are pursuing to expand and equalise access to higher education. However, the strands we have selected are major ones and they illuminate the variety of policies both nations have developed to affect students at various points in their paths into and through higher education.

A snapshot comparison of these seven English and US policy strands can be seen in Table 1. We have arranged them according to the timing in which they affect the student academic life-course.

	England	US
Information and guidance (IAG) provision	<p>* Poor government support for information, advice, and guidance (IAG) in primary and early secondary schooling</p> <p>* Extensive government support for IAG in late secondary school, particularly when applying for university</p>	<p>* Poor government support for IAG in primary and early secondary school, although some interesting federal and state programmes</p> <p>* Less extensive government support for IAG in late secondary schooling, particularly regarding higher education options</p>
Outreach efforts by higher education institutions	Access Agreements supervised by public non-governmental agency.	No access agreements. Institutional outreach is at institutional discretion.
Student finance	Tuition is capped by government. Heavy reliance on government funded income- contingent loans. Much smaller reliance on grant aid (from government or institutions). Grants for low-income undergraduate students were abolished in 2016.	Private tuition is not capped by government but public tuition is typically capped by state governments. Continued major role of grant aid (federal, state, and institutional). Fewer income-contingent loans, and repayment system is more onerous.
Affirmative action/ Contextualised admission	Contextualised admissions with focus on social class and on benefits to society of greater social mobility for disadvantaged students. Uneven use across institutions.	Affirmative action with focus on race/ethnicity (rather than social class) and on benefits of both social mobility for disadvantaged students and the reshaping of attitudes of advantaged students.
Higher education efforts to improve retention and completion	Rising governmental and institutional interest in last 10-20 years.	Rising governmental interest in last 10-20 years. However, longstanding interest among less-selective institutions.
Performance funding: financially rewarding	Shifting toward extensive use.	Extensive use, particularly at state level.

	England	US
institutions for student completion		
Degree of reliance on sub-baccalaureate institutions	Focus on universities. Less interest in further education colleges.	Focus on universities, but big increase in attention to community colleges.

We should mention that we can only glancingly address one important policy strand: efforts to improve preschool and elementary and secondary education with the aim of producing more students with academic credentials that prepare them for higher education. This policy strand is very important given the fact that one of the central determinants of social class and racial/ethnic differences in higher education access, institutional destination, and eventual success is the kind and level of academic preparation and credentials students achieve before they approach higher education (Adelman, 1999; Chowdry et al., 2013; David, 2010b; Gorard et al., 2007, pp. 72-74; Gorard & See, 2013; Moore, Mountford-Zimdars, & Wiggans, 2013, pp. 26-28; Perna, 2005; UK Dept. for BIS, 2015c; Vignoles & Crawford, 2010, pp. 58-59; Whitty & Clement, 2015). Because public policy to improve preschool and elementary and secondary education is so extensive, we cannot address it in this paper.<sup>6</sup> However, we do address policies that aim to inform students about what kinds of preparation and credentials they should attain in secondary school.

We should also note that the policy interventions we analyse are clearly incremental in orientation and do not threaten the fundamental social-stratification structure of society. Public policies to widen higher education access and participation are largely informed by a discourse of “raising aspirations” and “improving information”. This discourse is based on an individualistic model that constructs the main problem of widening access in terms of individuals and communities failing to recognise the value of participating in higher education or misjudging the obstacles facing them and the resources available. But the “raising aspirations” and “improving information” discourse gives insufficient weight to the operation of power, privilege, and inequality. It inadequately acknowledges the unequal social relations and multiple discourses within which aspirations and knowledge are embedded and formed (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986; Burke, 2012; Dougherty, 1996; Lareau, 2011; Reay et al., 2005).

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<sup>6</sup> One of the reasons for this extensiveness is that the policy interventions to improve preschool and elementary and secondary schooling must not only address what schools do but also what families and communities do (Dougherty, 1996).

## Information and guidance provision

Both England and the US have made major efforts to provide students, parents, and teachers with information relevant to higher education access and success, particularly with regard to financial aid<sup>7</sup>. This emphasis on information provision is a concomitant of the shift in both societies towards a more marketised higher education system emphasising student freedom of choice and student self-funding of a major part of their education (UK Dept. for BIS, 2011a, p. 32; UK Dept. for BIS, 2015b, pp. 11, #10-13, 81, #6; UK Dept. for BIS, 2016a; US Office of the President, 2014b). The Obama administration stated:

We need better information, tools, and resources to help students and families select schools that provide good outcomes at an affordable price. Without this, there is insufficient incentive within the higher education marketplace to offer a quality education at a lower price, or for low-performing institutions to improve. (US Office of the President, 2014b)

Similarly, the UK Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills stated:

We know that information about what they can expect from university is crucial to young people making life changing decisions. We recognise that higher education is not the only option for young people, so it is essential that they have the best information and support available to be able to make these huge decisions. To be able to make the best choices about where and what to study, individuals need access to robust, timely and objective information regarding the quality of teaching they are likely to experience and what this is likely to mean for their future employment. (UK Dept. for BIS, 2015b, p. 11)

Where England and the US differ is in their point of focus in providing information. Arguably, the US provides somewhat stronger policy support for efforts in primary and early secondary school to inform students about why higher education is important and how to prepare for it. On the other hand, England has the more extensive policy support for providing student in late secondary school with information about higher education opportunities. England has also studied much more intensively how students in secondary school use information about higher education to make their choices.

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<sup>7</sup> For research and theoretical perspectives on the role of information in higher education access and choice, see Breen & Goldthorpe (1997); Castleman, Schwartz, & Baum (2015); Davies, Qiu, & Davies (2014); Deutschlander (2017); Goldrick-Rab (2016); Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper (1999); Lareau (2015); Manski & Wise (1983); McDonough (1997); Morgan (2005); Plank & Jordan (2001); Reay, David, & Ball (2005); and Whitty, Hayton, & Tang (2015).

However, the US has pioneered the use of the new social media to reach students with up-to-date information (see below).

### **Policies to support information and guidance provision in early secondary school**

Policies to inform students during early secondary school reflect awareness that students are making (and having made for them) fateful choices regarding their academic preparation for higher education relatively early in their schooling. Whether they undertake intensive English, mathematics, and science preparation in secondary school has a major impact on whether they enter higher education in general and selective institutions and programmes in particular (Adelman, 1999; Chowdry et al., 2013; Moore et al., 2013, pp. 26-28; Perna, 2005; UK Dept. for BIS, 2015c).<sup>8</sup> It is clear that those choices are strongly affected by the quality of information, advice, and guidance provided to students and their parents (Deil-Amen & Tevis, 2010; Moore et al., 2013; Perna et al., 2008; Purcell et al., 2008; Sutton Trust, 2008).

Neither England nor the US does a very good job of providing policy support for effective information, advice, and guidance (IAG) in primary school and early secondary school. In both educational systems, there are major gaps in how well students are advised on the benefits of higher education and how best to prepare for it. The US federal government does fund an extensive array of programmes such as Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) to improve student awareness while they are still in secondary or even middle school. These programmes fund state and local programmes run by higher education institutions and community organisations to provide low-income students with advice on the importance of pursuing higher education, what secondary school courses to select, how to fill out higher education applications, and how to secure financial aid (Cahalan, 2013, pp. 37, 41-53; Perna, 2002; US Department of Education, 2014; Venezia & Jaeger, 2013). In the fiscal year 2015, GEAR UP funded 127 programmes and served 570 thousand low-income students (US Department of Education, 2016c). Meanwhile, in the academic year 2013-14, Upward Bound and Talent Search supported 1,430 programmes serving 369 thousand low-income students in secondary schools (US Department of Education, 2014, p. 11; Venezia & Jaeger, 2013).

Despite their impressive enrolments, the Council for Opportunity in Education has estimated that the federal TRIO programmes reach less than seven per cent of the 11

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<sup>8</sup> The fatefulness of these choices is particularly marked in the UK. At age 12 or 13 students are deciding on which General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) fields they will study. These choices heavily determine what A-level fields they choose at age 15 or 16. In turn, the number and type of A-level fields and the grades achieved on them largely determine the prestige of the higher education institutions and programmes within them that students can enter (Chowdry et al., 2013; Reay et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2010).

million students eligible for the programmes (Venezia & Jaeger, 2013, p. 124). However, it should also be noted that many states such as California, Illinois, New York, Texas and Washington also operate extensive efforts to disseminate information about higher education to students in secondary school (Barnett et al., 2012; Kirst & Venezia, 2004).<sup>9</sup> Still, that leaves many states with very little effective policy support. The result is that advising for college is very weakly supported in most high schools in the United States (Perna et al., 2008).

It is unclear how effective the US funded programmes are. Several evaluations have been conducted and they have found, at best, modest impacts. Moreover, they have largely not used randomised control trials but rather matched-programme designs, so they are not able to rigorously rule out competing causes of apparent programme effects (Cahalan, 2013, pp. 41-51; Haskins & Rouse, 2013).

England also provides little policy support for information, advice, and guidance in primary and early secondary school, particularly in recent years. It did make a notable effort with the creation of the Aimhigher programme, run by higher education institutions but funded indirectly by the government (Doyle & Griffin, 2012; Emmerson, Frayne, McNally, & Silva, 2006; Harrison, 2012; Wiggans, 2012). Established in 2004 to bring together two predecessor programmes, Aimhigher was designed to encourage primary and secondary school pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds to attend university. Initially, it had four strands: (1) improving links between secondary schools and universities and further education colleges through visits by students to higher education institutions and visits by higher education representatives to secondary schools; (2) fostering outreach by higher education institutions to disadvantaged students, primarily through summer schools; (3) improving information dissemination; and (4) providing small student grants to cover university expenses (Emmerson et al., 2006, p. 5; Parry, 2010, p. 37). It enlisted the support of some 2,500 schools, 100 universities, and 300 FE colleges (BBC News, 2010; McCaig, Stevens, & Bowers-Brown, 2007; Passy & Morris, 2010). However, Aimhigher was closed in 2011 when it lost the support of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government (Attwood, 2010; BBC News, 2010).

What succeeded Aimhigher was a smaller-scaled and less well-funded effort. Responsibility for information, advice, and guidance (IAG) for 16-18 year olds was devolved to secondary schools beginning September 2012 (UK OfSTED, 2013, p. 8). To support their efforts, the government also allocated funds for a National Network for

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<sup>9</sup> In addition to the federal and state programmes, there are several well-known private programmes such as AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination), Project Grad, and Aspire (Cahalan, 2013, pp. 39, 48-51).

Collaborative Outreach (NNCO).<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the government encouraged higher education institutions, in their Access Agreements (see below), to make more extensive efforts to reach students in secondary and primary school (UK OFFA, 2016a, p. 8).

However, the NNCO was funded at only £11 million a year for 2015 and 2016 (Higher Education Funding Council for England [HEFCE], 2016; Whitty et al., 2015, pp. 38-40). The NNCO catchment areas encompassed 97 per cent of all schools, but their networks for collaborative action (NCOs) largely did not reach deep into those schools. The networks often admitted that they had difficulty establishing effective relationships with schools, and much of the networks' efforts were devoted to developing web-based efforts to coordinate the school outreach efforts of higher education institutions. The resources were not there to develop school counselling capacity in depth (see HEFCE, 2016a). Moreover, the networks were faced with great uncertainty as to whether they would be funded after 2016. Meanwhile, in the case of university outreach under the aegis of university Access Agreements, the government has encountered institutional resistance to focusing their efforts on outreach rather than on providing more extensive financial aid (UK Dept. for BIS, 2014, pp. 39-40) (see below for more).

The NNCO is to be replaced in 2017-2020 by the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP). The funding is projected to be £60 million a year for the first two years. The aim is to increase participation in higher education in localities where participation rates are low overall and lower than expected (Universities UK, 2016b, p. 29).

Despite the development of the NNCO and university Access Agreements, the devolution of responsibility for IAG for 16-18 year olds to schools seemingly has resulted in a weakening of higher education advising in the state (public) schools (UK Dept. for BIS, 2014, p. 35; UK OfSTED, 2013, pp. 5-6; Universities UK, 2016b, pp. 32-33; Whitty et al., 2015, pp. 38-40). For example, on the basis of visiting 60 schools across England, the UK Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OfSTED) concluded in 2013:

Only one in five schools were effective in ensuring all its students in Years 9, 10, and 11 [ages 15 to 17] were receiving the level of information, advice, and guidance they needed to support decision-making.... Too few of the schools visited had adequate arrangements to provide an individual careers guidance interview by a qualified external adviser to all the students in Years 9, 10, 11 that needed one.... Only just over a third of the 43 individual careers guidance interview observed by inspectors were conducted well enough. (UK OfSTED, 2013, pp. 5-6)

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<sup>10</sup> The coalition government (2010-2015) also funded the National Scholarship Programme as a continuation of the Aimhigher efforts (Doyle & Griffin, 2012, p. 85).



A factor in the weakening of information and guidance during early secondary school is the proliferation of small sixth forms (programmes preparing students for higher education), particularly in academies. Those small sixth forms may not be able to provide a wide range of courses, with the result that students may be preparing in only two or three fields, fewer than would be optimal. Yet, the schools are loath to admit this to their students for fear they will elect not to enter the schools' sixth form (authors' interviews).

### **Policies to support information and guidance provision in late secondary school**

Both England and the US have mounted more extensive policy efforts to support information provision in late secondary school than in primary and early secondary school. This effort can be broken down into two parts. The first is support for the provision of information about higher education costs and how students and their parents can finance them. England and the US differ only a bit in the kinds and extent of information provided by governmental sources (see Table 2 below). The second is information about what particular forms of higher education students might pursue, and here there are more extensive differences between the two countries in the degree of government support (see Table 3).

With regard to financing higher education, both the US and England maintain government-sponsored, quasi-public websites where students, their parents, and their advisors can get information about the tuition and fee costs of higher education and the types of financial aid available for undergraduate students (see Table 2). One notable difference between the two countries is that the US data do not provide costs and aid at the programme level but only at the level of the institution as a whole.

<b>Table 2: English and US Information Provision to Undergraduate Students on Higher Education Costs and Financial Aid</b>		
	<b>England</b>	<b>US</b>
Higher education costs		
* Gross cost	1, 3	1
* Net cost		1
Types of govt. aid available	2, 3, 4	
* Tuition fee aid	2, 3, 4	2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10
* Maintenance aid for living expenses	2, 4	

<b>Table 2: English and US Information Provision to Undergraduate Students on Higher Education Costs and Financial Aid</b>		
	<b>England</b>	<b>US</b>
Types of nongovernment aid available or how to find it	3, 4	2, 4, 5, 10
Aid for students who are low income	2	2
Aid for students with special situations, e.g., children, disabled	2, 4	
How to apply for financial aid	2, 3, 4	2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10
How to compare financial aid packages		10
Loan repayment requirements and advice	2, 3, 4	2, 10
How to cut costs of higher education		7, 8, 10

## **Sources**

### *England:*

1. Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Unistats: <https://unistats.direct.gov.uk>
2. UK government: <https://www.gov.uk/student-finance/extra-help>
3. Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), <https://www.ucas.com>
4. Student Finance England, *Student finance – New full-time students*: [http://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/6720/sfe\\_new\\_full\\_time\\_students\\_guide\\_1617\\_d.pdf](http://www.practitioners.slc.co.uk/media/6720/sfe_new_full_time_students_guide_1617_d.pdf)

### *United States:*

1. National Center for Education Statistics, *College Navigator*: <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator>
2. US Department of Education, *Federal Student Aid*: <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/types#aid-from-the-federal-government>

3. US Department of Education, *My Future, My Way: First Steps toward College* (2014): <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/sites/default/files/my-future-my-way.pdf>
4. US Department of Labor, *CareerOneStop, Scholarship Search*: <http://careerinfonet.org/scholarshipsearch/ScholarshipCategory.asp?searchtype=category&nodeid=22>
5. US Department of Education, *College Preparation Checklist* (2013): <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/sites/default/files/college-prep-checklist.pdf>
6. Generation Texas, *Make It Happen*: <http://gentx.org/resources/make-it-happen>
7. Generation Texas, *College Planning and Financial Aid Guide*: [http://gentx.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/GenTX\\_RYF\\_CollegePlanningGuide\\_English.pdf](http://gentx.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/GenTX_RYF_CollegePlanningGuide_English.pdf)
8. College for All Texans, *Paying for College*: <http://www.collegeforalltexans.com/index.cfm?objectid=63191384-AA4B-80EB-1DE27FED58BF444D>
9. College for All Texans, *Financial Aid*: <http://www.collegeforalltexans.com/index.cfm?objectid=F0EFCF71-D6FB-4079-BC54E83CEB3A9C2C>
10. Illinois Student Assistance Commission, *Students and Parents before College*: <http://www.isac.org/students/before-college>

Besides its use of a national website and national publications to publicise financial aid information, the US government has also secured the agreement of over 3,400 US higher education institutions, enrolling three-quarters of all undergraduates, to provide specific financial aid information in their acceptance letters to students. They will include a “Financial Aid Shopping Sheet” in a standardised format “to simplify the information that prospective students receive about costs and financial aid so that they can easily compare institutions and make informed decisions about where to attend school” (US Department of Education, 2016d). No similar information from higher education institutions is provided to undergraduates in England.

The bigger difference between English and US policy support for information, advice, and guidance in late secondary school concerns information about higher education choices for undergraduates. The UK has a government-sponsored website, Unistats (<https://unistats.direct.gov.uk>), that provides much more extensive information than do the equivalent US government-sponsored sites, such as the College Navigator and the College Scorecard (<http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator>; <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov>). Unistats data are made public both through a central Unistats website and through a requirement that each higher education institution provide access to a selection of the Unistats data (the Key Information Set) through a widget or link embedded in the institution’s website that directs prospective students to the Unistats website. As students look at a particular undergraduate programme at an institution, the Unistats widget allows the students to find out what the Key Information Set data are for that programme and similar programmes at other institutions.

Table 3 below anatomises these differences. Certainly, there is a lot of overlap in the kinds of information provided, but there are also substantial differences. The key difference is that the UK source provides information at the level of the individual undergraduate course (programme or major) within an institution, rather than the institution as a whole. Moreover, the UK source provides much more extensive information on instructional practices, post-graduation outcomes, and student satisfaction.<sup>11</sup>

<b>Table 3: English and US Provision of Information on Higher Education Options for Undergraduate Students</b>		
	<b>England</b>	<b>US</b>
Level of data provided	Programme (major)	Institution as a whole
Student educational attainment before entry	1 (qualifications entered with)	1 (higher education institution test score average of entrants)
Academic requirements	1 (UCAS tariff scores of course completers), 2 (qualifications asked for by institutions)	
% of applicants accepted		1
Tuition and fees	1, 2	1, 2, 3
Housing costs	1	
Financial support availability	1 (simple yes/no)	
Net cost		4
Courses/Programmes offered	1	1, 2
Accreditation of programme	1	
Instructional features	1	

<sup>11</sup> Prospective students in the US can access some of this information from private college-advisory web sites but this information is not of the best quality. Typically, that information comes not from a systematic survey (such as the UK's National Student Survey) but rather from self-initiated and quite likely nonrandom student comments aggregated by the website.

<b>Table 3: English and US Provision of Information on Higher Education Options for Undergraduate Students</b>		
	<b>England</b>	<b>US</b>
* delivery (e.g., proportion of time in lectures, independent study)	1	
* grading (e.g., proportion based on tests, coursework)	1	
* nontraditional learning opportunities (e.g., part-time, internship)	2	1
Retention after one year	1	1
Graduation rate		
Grade distribution of graduates	1	
Post-graduation outcomes (further education, employment)	1	
Average salary after graduation	1 (6 mos. and 40 mos.)	
Default rate on student loans		1
Student satisfaction	1 (national survey)	
* academics and teaching	1 (12 items)	
* advising	1 (3 item)	
* higher education institution learning services	1 (3 items)	
* ultimate learning	1 (3 items)	

**Sources:**

*England*

1. Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), Unistats:

<https://unistats.direct.gov.uk>

2. Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), <https://www.ucas.com>

### *United States*

1. National Center for Education Statistics, *College Navigator*:

<http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator>

2. US Department of Education, *College Scorecard*: <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>

3. US Department of Education, *College Affordability and Transparency Center*:

<http://collegecost.ed.gov/catc/Default.aspx>

4. Net cost calculators mandated by the federal Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (Hopkins, 2011).

### **Assessing student information needs and usage**

Beyond the differences between England and the US in policies supporting the provision of information about higher educational options, there is also an important difference in how the two nations assess what information is needed and how it should be provided. England has made a concerted effort to analyse students' information needs and how well Unistats and other sources meet those needs (Careers Research and Advisory Centre, 2012; HEFCE, 2014a, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c; UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2017; see also Davies, 2012; Renfrew et al., 2010; Slack, Mangan, Hughes, & Davies, 2014). These analyses have looked in detail at what information students value, what sources they use to get this information, how they analyse that information, and what cognitive biases affect their judgment. The result has been an extensive examination of students' information ecology that is more sophisticated than what exists in the US. There are US studies of what information (particularly financial) prospective students consider in deciding on which higher education institution to attend (College Board, 2012; Eagan et al., 2015, p. 51; Vargas, 2004). For the most part, these studies have not examined what are the many kinds of information that students want, how they get that information (with the exception of financial information), and how they analyse (or misanalyse) that information. However, there is an emerging, although still small, US literature on how students analyse information about higher education (Castleman, 2015; Castleman, Schwartz, & Baum, 2015; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, & Person, 2006; Scott-Clayton, 2015).

### **Use of the new social media to reach students**

While the United States has lagged behind England in carefully analysing how students use information to make their higher education choices, the US has pioneered the use of new social media to reach students with up-to-date information (Castleman, 2015; Castleman, Schwartz, & Baum, 2015; Universities UK, 2016b, p. 75). A variety of interesting interventions involving new social media have been fielded to provide students, their parents, and secondary school counsellors with information about

college opportunities and to prompt students to take timely action (Castleman, 2015; Castleman et al., 2015). For example, Benjamin Castleman and Lindsay Page (2015) developed a text message intervention to reach students recently graduated from high school to make sure they take the necessary steps to ready themselves for college that autumn. In a randomised control trial, some students were sent periodic, automated text messages to remind them of such key steps as registering for orientation and placement tests, completing housing forms, and filling out financial aid forms, and to offer help in filling out those financial aid forms and interpreting financial aid award letters and tuition bills from their intended colleges. In their evaluation of the text messaging intervention, Castleman and Page found evidence that it had a significant impact on three of 12 outcomes examined (Castleman & Page, 2015, p. 154).

## **Outreach from higher education institutions**

Beyond the general provision of information in secondary school about higher education finance and opportunities, there is an important role of outreach efforts by higher education institutions specifically. A central element of the English effort to enlarge higher education access and success was the establishment of a public, non-governmental Office for Fair Access to Higher Education (OFFA) that encourages institutions to widen their intake and support of less advantaged students. In 2017, under the new Higher Education and Research Act of 2017, a new Office for Students took over the duties of OFFA (UK National Archives, 2017; see also UK Dept. for BIS, 2016b).

A key instrument through which OFFA worked was its regulation of Access Agreements that most English institutions are required to file in which they specify how they will widen participation in higher education.<sup>12</sup> The first Access Agreements were submitted for the 2006-07 academic year (Bowes, Thomas, Peck, Moreton, & Birkin, 2013b, p. 11).<sup>13</sup> The Access Agreements have not been as forceful as they could be, but they have no counterpart in the United States. Hence, they merit consideration by US scholars and policymakers.

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<sup>12</sup> Access Agreements have been defined as “working documents which are updated annually, in which universities and colleges set out the range of support, both financial and non-financial, that they intend to put in place to support the access and retention of students from under-represented groups. More specifically, access agreements require institutions charging tuition fees above the basic rate [set by government] to invest a proportion of additional fee income in bursaries [financial aid from institutions], other forms of financial support and/or outreach, retention and student success work” (Bowes et al., 2013b, p. 5).

<sup>13</sup> However, the use of something like Access Agreements preceded the establishment of OFFA in 2004. The UK government in 1999 required all English higher education institutions to state what they were doing to widen participation, and in 2001 it asked them to set out plans, targets, and activities for the years 2001-04 (McCaig, 2010).

The English institutional Access Agreements came into being as a result of the shift to allowing public institutions to charge student tuition fees for full-time undergraduates of up to £3,000 a year in 2006. Concerns were raised about the impact of increased tuition on widening participation. Today, institutions charging tuition above £6,750 a year are required to produce Access Agreements showing how they will widen access to their institutions (Sutton Trust, 2015; Whitty et al., 2015, pp. 31-32, 38). All but one English university and many further education colleges now charge above this sum and thus are subject to the requirement of producing Access Agreements (UK OFFA, 2015, p. 12).<sup>14</sup>

In their Access Agreements, English institutions have to state their tuition fee levels, specify the amount and kind of institutional financial aid (“bursaries”) to be offered, describe the outreach and retention activities that will be undertaken and how much will be spent on them, and set performance targets (UK Department for BIS, 2016a, sec. 4.2). The Access Agreements are made publicly available and have been reviewed by OFFA. OFFA has shaped Access Agreements through its yearly instructions on what it expects to see in them, workshops it holds, informal conversations with institutions as they react to OFFA’s instructions, and review of the preliminary draft that institutions submit (UK OFFA, 2016a). For example, beginning in 2012-13, OFFA pushed to have student retention, success, and post-graduation attainment addressed in Access Agreements (UK Dept. for BIS, 2014, p. 45). By the time of its strategic guidance for the 2017-18 access agreements, OFFA declared: “We expect your assessment of your performance to consider the whole of the student lifecycle from access to higher education, through to progression to employment or postgraduate study. You should demonstrate the evidence you have used to determine the balance of spend between access, student success, and progression activity” (UK OFFA, 2016a, para. 18).

It is hard to determine how effective the Access Agreements have been. University enrolments have risen sharply during the years 2006-07 to 2015-16 among 18 year olds in the most disadvantaged quintile of neighbourhoods, from 11.2 per cent in 2006-07 to 18.15 per cent in 2015-16 (UK OFFA, 2016b, p. 6; see also Universities UK, 2016b, p. 55). Moreover, a survey of all higher education institutions in England found that over half of the respondents agreed that since the introduction of Access Agreements the proportion of under-represented groups entering their institution had improved (Bowes et al., 2013b, p. 61).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> English further education colleges only had to develop an Access Agreement if they received funding directly from the government (through the Higher Education Funding Council for England or the UK Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills). If they get funding from another higher education institution to offer a higher education programme, the Access Agreement would be issued by that institution (UK Dept. for BIS, 2016a, sec. 7.7).

<sup>15</sup> These data are based on a survey of all higher education institutions in England, with a response rate of 57 per cent (Bowes et al., 2013b, p. 13).



On the other hand, this increase in higher education access on the part of under-represented students cannot be simply attributed to the impact of the greater university outreach efforts and the use of Access Agreements. The recent rise in the number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds entering higher education has likely more to do with the following: improvements in secondary school educational attainments; institutions reaching the saturation point for entry by middle-class students; the desire of higher education institutions to expand because a greater proportion of their income is now reliant on tuition rather than government funding; and institutions being more willing to accept students with vocational qualifications coming out of secondary school due to the competitive struggle for students in an increasingly marketised higher education system.

Still, it is still likely that OFFA and its Access Agreements played some role in the greater access of disadvantaged students to English higher education because there is evidence that institutions have modified their outreach efforts in response to the demands of producing their Access Agreements. Total investment in widening participation activity (not including financial aid) rose from £743 million in 2012-13 to £842 million in 2014-15 (UK OFFA, 2016b, p. 21). Moreover, institutions report that the use of Access Agreements has helped raise the profile and status of widening participation efforts within their institutions, has led them to put a greater priority on improving achievement and success among under-represented groups, and has driven the development of better systems for measuring the impact of their widening participation efforts (Bowes et al., 2013b, pp. 17, 19-20, 23, 27-28, 32, 53, 55, 63). As one of our interviewees noted, her institution's Access Agreement is a weapon that she can use internally to force changes in the institution's practices.

Whatever the limitations of the English Access Agreements, there is no US counterpart. To be sure, US institutions do make major efforts to reach out to students and their parents. They maintain websites, publish and mail brochures, visit high schools and college fairs, and provide institutional financial aid (Steinberg, 2003; Stevens, 2009). Moreover, colleges receiving federal aid are required to maintain a net price calculator on their websites (US Department of Education, 2016e). However, US institutions are not required to create and publish anything like Access Agreements, where they publicly commit to certain goals and concomitant outreach and retention practices. State governments do develop master plans for their public institutions, but these master plans very rarely set out specific steps and targets to which individual institutions are committed (McGuinness, 2016). In addition, the US does not have an office like OFFA or the Office for Students that is committed to pushing institutions to widen participation. This goal has certainly been a concern of US presidents, the Congress, and the Department of Education, but there has been no dedicated office for which widening participation is its day-to-day concern.

## Student financial aid

Both England and the US put a major emphasis on student aid, given that both of their higher education systems rely heavily on student tuition to finance higher education operations. In 2013-14, US public higher education institutions received 20 per cent of their total revenues from tuition and fees (US National Center for Education Statistics, 2016, Table 333.10).<sup>16</sup> And the figure is even higher for England: 51 per cent of institutional revenues in 2015-16 came from tuition fees (UK Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2017, Table 16).<sup>17</sup> By 2014/15, less than a fifth of the sector's teaching income came directly from government sources (Universities UK, 2016c). As a result, both countries operate extensive systems of financial aid for students (Callender, 2017; Goldrick-Rab, 2016; Heller & Callender, 2013; Stampen & Zulick, 2009). However, there are major differences within this overarching commonality.

In its financial aid, England today emphasises student loans and puts much less reliance on grants or scholarships (Callender, 2013; Universities UK, 2016b, p. 49). To be sure, the English system has used grants extensively in the past. A National Scholarship Programme was in existence between 2011 and 2015. Moreover, until 2016, the government administered a national programme of means-tested educational maintenance grants towards the living expenses of low-income students (Whitty, Anders, Hayton, Tang, & Wisby, 2016, pp. 79, 82).<sup>18</sup> In addition, higher education institutions provide institutional grants or “bursaries” in connection with their wider participation efforts governed by Access Agreements (Callender & Wilkinson, 2013; Murphy et al., 2017).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> We should note, however, the burgeoning US movement for tuition-free provision of community college education. Three states (Minnesota, Oregon, and Tennessee) have established such a programme and several states are contemplating it. More strikingly, New York State passed legislation to establish free tuition at both community colleges and public universities for low and middle-income families (Fain, 2015; Goldrick-Rab, 2016; National Conference of State Legislatures, 2017; New York State, 2017).

<sup>17</sup> Tuition at English universities also tends to be higher than at US universities. Most English universities charge £9,250, which converts to about \$11,380, which is considerably higher than the average in-state tuition at US public four-year colleges and universities of \$9,650 in 2016-17 (College Board, 2016b, p. 9; Murphy, Scott-Clayton, & Wyness, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Both programmes were eliminated by the Conservative Government elected in 2015 (Whitty et al., 2016, pp. 79-82). For more on these UK grants and scholarships, see Callender and Wilkinson (2013) and Sutton Trust (2015).

<sup>19</sup> In 2014, only 42 per cent of all students received such financial support. Most received the aid in cash, and the sums offered were small. For instance, students entering university in 2014 received on average an estimated cash support of £535 (\$695) per year and tuition discounts of £100 (\$129) per year (Dearden, Hodge, Jin, Levine, & Williams, 2014, p. 13). This very low level of institutional support means that there is little difference between published tuition and the prices students pay. Along with the fact that students find out about their bursaries only after acceptance to an institution, this helps explain why there is no evidence that bursaries have resulted in increased enrolment, even by disadvantaged students (Callender & Wilkinson, 2013; Gorard et al., 2007, pp. 55-59; UK Dept. for BIS, 2014, p. 39). However, there is evidence that bursaries may play a role in retention (Davies & Harris, 2016).

Despite the presence of this grant aid, the English student aid system is now largely based on loans (Universities UK, 2016b, p. 49). A key feature distinguishing the English loan system from that in the US is the almost exclusive reliance on income-contingent loans provided by the government for undergraduate study, the terms and conditions of which are set by the government<sup>20</sup>. All English domiciled (and currently EU) undergraduate students are eligible for government-subsidised loans to cover all their tuition. In addition, all English domiciled undergraduate students are entitled to maintenance loans towards their living costs. By 2013-14, 92 per cent of full-time undergraduates had taken out a loan for tuition and 89 per cent for maintenance (UK Student Loans Company, 2015). They begin to repay these loans in the April after they leave university, but only if their income is above £21,000 a year. They then pay nine per cent of their income above £21,000 until they have either paid off their loan or have made 30 years of payments. Any outstanding debt is written off after 30 years. The loans carry an interest rate of three per cent above inflation while students study. Once they graduate, the rate is limited to inflation until their income reaches £21,000. Graduates earning between £21,000 and £41,000 are charged interest on a sliding scale, up to a maximum of inflation plus three per cent, once their annual earnings exceed £41,000. Loan repayments are collected via the tax system. From 2016, most English domiciled postgraduate students will be eligible for government funded income-contingent loans worth up to £10,000 with similar repayment conditions described above, except these postgraduates will pay six per cent of their income above £21,000 while simultaneously paying off their undergraduate loan. For those students who have taken out government tuition loans, their tuition fees are paid directly by the government to their university. Consequently, any non-repayment of loans arising from low graduate earnings and debt forgiveness is shouldered by the government rather than the student or their university. These “hidden” subsidies are considerable. While estimates vary considerably, as they depend on numerous factors, the latest estimate for undergraduate loans suggest that for every £100 the government lends to students, it will only get back £70 (McGettigan, 2015).

Meanwhile, the US student aid system, while utilising loans heavily, still funnels much of its aid to students through grants. In the academic year 2015-16, 55 per cent of undergraduate student aid and 32 per cent of graduate student aid came in the form of grants (College Board, 2016a, p. 13). Income-contingent loans, while present in the US, play a smaller role than in the UK. In 2016, they accounted for 25 per cent of borrowers in repayment of federal direct student loans, up from 11 per cent in 2013 (College Board, 2016a, p. 19; see also Barr, Chapman, Dearden, & Dynarski, 2017; Supiano, 2016; US Department of Education, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c). Moreover, the terms of repayment are considerably more onerous in the US than in England. Students must apply every year for income-contingent repayment. Payments do not adjust

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<sup>20</sup> Private loans are a very marginal, though slowly growing, part of English student aid. They are aimed primarily at postgraduate and international students.

automatically to changes in students' income; payments are dependent on the previous year's income students state in their application for income-based repayment. If students' incomes change and they want to make an adjustment, they have to file a new application (Dynarski, 2016).

A major question faced by the loan systems in England and the US is the extent to which working class and minority students are deterred from taking them because of debt aversion and whether this limits their higher education opportunities and choices (Callender & Jackson, 2005, 2008; Callender & Mason, in press; Long, 2008; Perna, 2008; Universities UK, 2016b, p. 49). Also, there is concern that loan indebtedness may be distorting the occupational choices of students, leading them to specialise in subjects and take jobs that may not interest them but make it more likely they can pay off their loans (Bowes, Thomas, Peck, & Nathwani, 2013a, p. 4; Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2013, p. 83; Long, 2008, pp. 25-26).

## **Affirmative action or contextualisation in higher education admissions**

A prominent feature of higher education access in the United States since the 1970s has been a commitment on the part of most selective higher education institutions to affirmative action in admissions (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005; Espenshade, Chung, & Walling, 2004; Hinrichs, 2013; Howell, 2010; Karabel, 2005). UK institutions have something rather similar in the form of contextualised admission for institutions (Bridger, Shaw, & Moore, 2012; Lane & Parry, 2015; Mountford-Zimdars, 2016; Supporting Professionalism in Admissions, 2014, 2016).

Affirmative action in the United States has involved institutions taking into account students' racial/ethnic, gender, and class background in making admissions decisions, with the aim of making their student bodies more inclusive. Similar to the UK distinction between "positive action" versus "positive discrimination" (Supporting Professionalism in Admissions, 2016), US higher education institutions are not allowed to use quotas in admissions decisions. Institutions can only bring in race and other such social background characteristics as a "plus" factor in a holistic analysis of student applications (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Bowen et al., 2005; Espenshade et al., 2004; Karabel, 2005; US Department of Education, 2011b). The evidence is that US affirmative action has had a decided effect on enrolment at selective colleges and universities (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Hinrichs, 2013; Howell, 2010; Karabel, 1999). For example, based on a careful econometric analysis, Howell estimates that eliminating affirmative action would reduce minority enrolment at the most selective US four-year colleges and universities by 10.2 per cent (Howell, 2010).

The UK has elements of affirmative action in its higher education system in the form of “contextualised admissions”. This takes several different forms, not including the use of quotas. At minimum, institutions may read with particular care the applications of lower-income students who are flagged as having higher academic potential than their secondary grades might suggest, perhaps because they scored much better than the average for their schools. Such students may be invited for interviews. More forcefully, contextualised admission can take the form of accepting students with lower secondary school performance than is typical and offering them institutional financial aid or “bursaries” and targeted student service supports (Bridger et al., 2012, pp. 17-19, 31, 47-57; Moore et al., 2013, pp. 3, 17, 47-50, 53; Universities UK, 2016b, p. 65; see also Boliver, Gorard, & Siddiqui, 2015; Mountford-Zimdars, 2016; Supporting Professionalism in Admissions, 2014, 2016). A 2011 survey of institutions that are members of the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) found that – among the 93 responding UK institutions (three-quarters from England) – 41 per cent reported using contextualised admissions in some form and 63 per cent reported that they planned to use it in the future (Bridger et al., 2012, p. 17; Supporting Professionalism in Admissions, 2011).<sup>21</sup>

Several different factors have pushed English institutions to use contextualised admission. A major one has been government commitment to widening participation and its support of the use of contextualised admissions (Bridger et al., 2012, pp. 22-25, 35; Lane & Parry, 2015; UK Dept. for BIS, 2011b, para. 5.3; UK Dept. for BIS, 2014, p. 25).<sup>22</sup> For instance, in its 2011 guidance to the Director of Fair Access, the coalition government stated:

We recognise that, if selective institutions are to make progress in admitting more students with high potential from disadvantaged backgrounds, they may want to admit some such students on the basis of lower entry qualifications than they would normally apply. To help them identify individuals with the greatest potential, institutions may sometimes want to use contextual data, for example about levels of average attainment in an applicant’s school. The Government believes that this is a valid and appropriate way for institutions to broaden access while maintaining excellence, so long as individuals are considered on their merits, and institutions’ procedures are fair, transparent and evidence-based. (UK Dept. for BIS, 2011b, para. 5.3)

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<sup>21</sup> Supporting Professionalism in Admissions conducted surveys as well in 2013 and 2015 but the response rates were much lower.

<sup>22</sup> This government support dates back to 2004, when the Higher Educational Steering Group (the Schwartz Review) recommended five “principles of fairness” for admissions practice and introduced the concept of contextualised admissions (UK Department for Education and Skills, 2004; see also Lane & Parry, 2015, p. 23). This policy recommendation was then re-endorsed by the government in 2009 (UK Dept. for BIS, 2009a, p. 42; idem, 2009b, p. 10).

Despite these egalitarian concerns, it also needs to be acknowledged that institutions have been drawn to contextualised admissions for other reasons. Contextualised admissions also allow institutions to maximise their success in selecting students who will finish by distinguishing among students who already bring excellent academic records (Bridger et al., 2012, p. 24).

Despite government support, it is clear that many UK institutions do not use contextualised admissions or are reluctant to admit it (Bridger et al., 2012, pp. 17, 24). One reason for this reluctance is that it has been strongly criticised by representatives of selective and expensive private schools whose stock in trade is securing admission of their graduates to the selective universities (Mangan et al., 2010, p. 347; see also Bridger et al., 2012, p. 25). However, one could argue that another factor – although it is not independent of the first – is that selective universities remain wedded to the idea of pursuing only the best and the brightest and largely diversify only to the degree that the working class or nonwhite students they take in have high potential to join the best and brightest. As it is, studies of the impact of the use of contextualised admissions find that it has some impact on who is admitted, but the impact is small. Contextualised admissions are used at selective institutions mostly to distinguish between equally prepared applicants. The number of applicants who are accepted with lower grades due to contextualised admissions is rather low (Moore et al., 2013, pp. 40-41, 45).

A notable difference between US affirmative action and English contextualised admissions is that the first is focused on race/ethnicity and gender while the second is focused on social class (Bowes et al., 2013a, p. 61; David, 2010a, p. 8)<sup>23</sup>. No doubt this reflects deep political, cultural, and historical differences between the two countries in which dimensions of social stratification are regarded as primary. An additional difference is that English discussions of contextualised admissions seem to have focused on the possible benefits of a more diverse student population for societal goals of social mobility and social justice and paid less attention to the benefits of exposing more privileged students to alternative social perspectives. There is little discourse in England on “crafting a class” and the pedagogical benefits of diversity (Moore et al., 2013, p. 45; Parry, 2016; see also Chang, Denson, Saenz, & Misa, 2006; Duffy & Goldberg, 1997; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Stevens, 2009).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> However, the UK Conservative government under David Cameron called for efforts to bring in more white working class males, because they are the most under-represented in higher education (UK Dept. for BIS, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b). Moreover, a recent policy change is that in the future the name of applicants will be removed from their UCAS form when their form is sent to universities. This is meant to tackle selection bias based on racial/ethnic origin.

<sup>24</sup> However, see the interesting discussion in Hockings et al. (2010) and Reay, Crozier, and Clayton (2009) on how UK universities might benefit from greater attention to the pedagogical benefits of classroom diversity.

## **Higher education efforts to improve retention and completion**

In recent years, policy attention in both England and the United States has moved beyond considering only higher education access to also considering higher education completion and success. This has stemmed from awareness that there are significant gaps in completion among students differing in social background, particularly social class and race/ethnicity (Lumina Foundation, 2016; US Office of the President, 2009, 2013, 2014a, 2014c; Universities UK, 2016b; Vignoles & Powdthavee, 2010).

The rising interest in higher education completion has brought attention to new policy instruments. One form is specific institutional efforts to retain students and move them toward completion (Arminio, Torres, & Pope, 2012; Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015; David, 2010c; Gorard et al., 2007; McClellan & Stringer, 2016; Thomas, 2012; Universities UK, 2016b). Another form is funding higher education institutions based on student completion and not just enrolment (Dougherty et al., 2014, 2016; Dougherty & Natow, 2015; Hillman, Tandberg, & Fryar, 2015; Universities UK, 2016b, pp. 51-52).

### **Institutional efforts to retain students**

US higher education institutions have long had policies and programmes devoted to enhancing the student experience and promoting student retention and graduation. These policies and programmes have included such things as developmental education and tutoring to improve academic skills, advising and guidance, mental health counselling, and social programming (Arminio et al., 2012; Bailey et al., 2015; McClellan & Stringer, 2016). Moreover, over the years, the US federal government has funded various programmes – including Student Support Services and the Ronald McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program – to support higher education institutions in improving college students' academic skills and knowledge of graduate school opportunities. Evaluations of these programmes have found positive effects, but these evaluations have not been based on randomised control trials (Cahalan, 2013, pp. 52-56).

These institutional efforts have intensified in recent years as the federal and state governments – in good part due to recommendations by major educational foundations such as the Gates and Lumina Foundations – have committed to what has been called the “completion agenda” (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2017a; Lumina Foundation, 2016; US Department of Education, 2011a). For example, the Obama administration called for sharply increasing the number of students not just going to higher education but also completing it (US Office of the President, 2009). Meanwhile, the states and major foundations such as the Gates and Lumina Foundations have been pouring funds into improving developmental education for students arriving in college without college-

level academic skills, improving academic advising, and facilitating student movement through and between institutions (Bailey et al., 2015; Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2017a; Cahalan, 2013, pp. 54-56; Lumina Foundation, 2016). In recent years, the concept of “guided student pathways” has provided a principle for conceptually and practically organising many of these interventions (Bailey et al., 2015).

In England, there has been a similar, although later developing, desire to improve student support and completion (Gorard et al., 2007; Mountford-Zimdars et al., 2015; Thomas, 2012; Thomas, Hill, O’Mahony, & Yorke, 2017; Universities UK, 2016b, pp. 69-77). A major reason for this later development is that non-completion has been far lower in England than in the US. For example, the percentage of UK-domiciled full-time, first degree entrants not persisting into the second year was only six per cent in 2013-14. However, the rates of non-persistence are considerably higher for men, mature entrants, part-time students, students from families of lower socio-economic status, and members of certain minority racial/ethnic backgrounds (HEFCE, 2013, pp. 15-19; UK Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2016, Tables T3a, T3b; Universities UK, 2016b, pp. 68-69, 102-105). Hence, in recent years, institutions have developed various programmes to address non-persistence – anchored in the concept of a “culture of belonging” – such as residential summer schools prior to entry; induction orientation programmes; instruction in learning skills; provision of mentoring, tutoring, and emotional support by peers and staff; and provision of clubs and other activities (Gorard et al., 2007, pp. 85-86; Thomas, 2012; Thomas et al., 2017; Universities UK, 2016b, p. 106). As with the United States, government pressure has played a major role in the development of this emphasis on improving the student experience. In 2000, the Labour Secretary of State for Education and Employment decried the fact that “evidence shows there are unacceptable variations in the rate of ‘drop-out’ which appear to be linked more to the culture and workings of the institution than to the background or nature of the students recruited” (quoted in Longden, 2012, p. 126). In 2007, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) stated that government funding for teaching at universities would take into account student completion, among other factors (UK National Audit Office, 2007, p. 24).<sup>25</sup> In 2016, OFFA – again reflecting pressure from the government – pushed to have institutional Access Agreements pay considerable attention to issues of completion (UK Dept. for BIS, 2014, pp. 45, 63; UK OFFA, 2016a, para. 53-54). As a result, institutional expenditures on student retention and success, through the Access Agreements, are projected to double from £72.5 million in 2012-13 to £148.4 million in 2019-20 (UK OFFA, 2016b, p. 19). Finally, one of the main indicators used for the Teaching Excellence Framework pertains to retention and continuation (HEFCE, 2016b; UK Dept. for BIS, 2016b).

At the same time, we should note that a major part of institutional interest in England in improving the student experience is driven as well by institutional desires – particularly

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<sup>25</sup> This funding programme was ended, following the 2012-13 reforms in higher education policy.



on the part of the less selective and less research-intensive institutions – to remain competitive in the market for student enrolment (Callender, 2013; Temple, Callender, Grove, & Kersh, 2016). Drop-out rates affect institutional standing in league tables, such as the *Times Higher Education* rankings, that play a major role in student choice of institution (particularly on the part of students from wealthier backgrounds) and are vital to an institution’s reputation (HEFCE, 2015d; Renfrew et al., 2010).

A noteworthy omission in both the English and US policy efforts to enhance student support is attention to improving the institutional climate for working-class and minority students, particularly at selective institutions. Scholars and public agencies have called attention to the negative impact on retention of disadvantaged students of perceptions that the institution does not recognise, or is even inimical to, their cultures (Archer, Hutchings, Leathwood, & Ross, 2003: 199-200; Burke, 2012, chaps. 2, 8; Bowes et al., 2013a, pp. 93-94; Crozier, Reay, & Clayton, 2010; Gorard et al., 2007, pp. 103-104, 125-126; Hockings, Cooke, & Bowl, 2010; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; UK Dept. for BIS, 2014, pp. 57-58). Despite this, there has been little governmental attention to how to address these “socio-cultural incongruities”. Neither in England nor the US are there substantial government policies directed to changing institutional cultures or the curriculum to make them more receptive to and inclusive of the cultures of working and racial/ethnic minority students.

## **Performance funding for improving higher education student outcomes**

Performance funding has been advocated as a major means of improving student access to and success in higher education. By tying public funding of institutions to their student outcomes, the hope is to improve student retention, graduation, and job placement (Bowes et al., 2013a, pp. 3-4, 62, 101; de Boer et al., 2015; Dougherty et al., 2014, 2016; Dougherty & Natow, 2015).

The UK has used a variety of funding programmes to spur better student outcomes in higher education<sup>26</sup>. In the case of the further education colleges, the government operated a funding system in the mid- and late 1990s that rewarded colleges for student retention and attainment (Fletcher, Gravatt, & Sherlock, 2015; Gorringer, 2016). In the case of universities, their teaching activities have also been subject to performance funding. Under the block grants for teaching that universities have received from the Higher Education Funding Councils, universities were penalised financially for those students who did not complete their studies (Longden, 2012, p. 128; UK National Audit

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<sup>26</sup> The UK has also used performance data to evaluate its secondary schools. For example, a new performance indicator for those schools is rates of entry to the Russell Group universities (Whitty et al., 2016, p. 81).

Office, 2007, p. 24). Recently, the Conservative government has introduced performance metrics under the rubric of a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). The TEF attaches performance on these metrics to permission to increase the tuition charged by universities and the number of international students they can recruit. Initially, the metrics include employer/destination, retention/continuation, and student satisfaction with teaching, assessment and feedback, and academic support. Later metrics may include student commitment to learning, training and employment of staff, and teaching intensity. To arrive at the final institutional ratings, the metrics are benchmarked against the composition of entering students in terms of social class, race-ethnicity, and academic-preparation (HEFCE, 2016b; UK Dept. for BIS, 2015b, pp. 24-25, 32-34; UK Dept. for BIS, 2016b; UK House of Commons, 2016; see also Ashwin, 2016; Bagshaw, 2017; Boyd 2017; Universities UK, 2016b, pp. 51-52).<sup>27</sup>

The United States has a very extensive system of performance funding for higher education that is rooted mostly at the state level. To be sure, the federal government has applied performance funding principles to its financing of student enrolment at private for-profit colleges (Field, 2014; Natow, 2017; US Senate, 2012) and of vocational training under the Joint Training Partnership Act (Heckman, Heinrich, Courty, Marschke, & Smith, 2011).<sup>28</sup> However, the more extensive performance funding programmes are at the state level. Today, over 30 states in the US have performance funding programmes in which a certain portion of state funding for public higher education is allocated on the basis of institutional performance on outcomes metrics such as retention rates, numbers of students reaching certain thresholds of credits earned, and numbers of degrees awarded. In some states, such as Ohio and Tennessee, performance metrics drive as much as 80 per cent of state appropriations to public higher education institutions, which amounts to a quarter of total institutional revenues (Dougherty et al., 2014; Dougherty et al., 2016; Dougherty & Natow, 2015; Hillman, Tandberg, & Fryar, 2015; Snyder, 2015).

## **Degree of reliance on sub-baccalaureate institutions**

A striking difference between England and the US is that the discourse on institutional access and success in England has focused on a narrower set of institutions. The English discourse has centered on universities, while that in the US has encompassed both universities and community colleges (Bailey et al., 2015; Dougherty 1994; U.S. Office of the President, 2014c). The English equivalent to community colleges – the

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<sup>27</sup> The initial TEF ratings have been for institutions as a whole but there are plans to issue subject-specific (major) ratings as well (Bagshaw, 2017; Boyd, 2017).

<sup>28</sup> In the case of for-profit colleges, the federal government has issued regulations that they must meet a certain level of job placements for their students in order for their students to continue to be eligible for federal student aid (Field, 2014; Natow, 2017).

further education colleges (Dougherty, 2009; Hodgson, 2015; Hudson & Storan, 2012; Parry, Callender, Scott, & Temple, 2012) – have received much less attention<sup>29</sup>.

In England, both under the Labour and Conservative parties, attention has been focused on achieving greater access by disadvantaged students to selective universities, particularly the Russell Group of the most selective “research-intensive” institutions (UK Dept. for BIS, 2015b: 37, #14; UK Dept. for BIS, 2016a, pp. 10-11, #7.1, 7.6; UK OFFA, 2014; also see Sutton Trust, 2014; Whitty et al., 2015, p. 32). On the other hand, there is much less interest in England in the sub-baccalaureate sector, even though further education colleges account for roughly 8.5 per cent of higher education students in all institutions in England (Hodgson, 2015; Parry, 2010, 2016; Parry et al., 2012; see also Bathmaker, 2010; Gallacher, 2014; Hudson & Storan, 2012).<sup>30</sup> Despite these numbers, the further education colleges have great difficulty attracting policy attention. For instance, they received only three mentions, and then only in passing, in the 2015 and 2016 government green and white papers where the Conservative government outlined its proposals for higher education reform (UK Dept. for BIS, 2015b, 2016b). This is not to say that further education colleges have been entirely bereft of attention. For example, the UK Department for Education in 2015 and 2016 sponsored Area Reviews of post-16 education that examined the missions, funding, and market situation of further education colleges and sixth form colleges in England (UK Department for Education, 2016). The focus was on determining whether the colleges should be reconfigured, including merging with each other or with universities (Gravatt, 2016). Moreover, the 2017 campaign manifesto of the Conservative Party does briefly mention the further education colleges and proposes the establishment of “institutes of technology” specialising in sub-baccalaureate technical education (Conservative and Unionist Party, 2017, p. 51). Still, it is unclear to what degree these initiatives represent a sharp policy break with the longstanding English focus on universities rather than sub-baccalaureate institutions (David, 2010b; Parry, 2010).

In the United States, universities also tend to receive more attention than do community colleges. All too often, when an analysis refers to higher education, it is usually focusing on the university sector. Nevertheless, in the last ten years, community colleges have received much greater attention than in the past. Numerous state governments, the Gates, Lumina, and other foundations, and the Obama administration made community colleges the focus of their initiatives to increase college access and success (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2017b; Lumina Foundation, 2016; US Office of the President, 2010). For example, the Obama administration declared in 2010:

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<sup>29</sup> In Scotland and Northern Ireland, however, the further education colleges have received considerably more governmental attention (Gallacher, 2014; Hodgson, Spours, & Waring, 2011).

<sup>30</sup> In Scotland and Northern Ireland, further education colleges account for 18 per cent of all higher education students (Parry, Callender, Scott, & Temple, 2012).

In an increasingly competitive world economy, America's economic strength depends upon the education and skills of its workers. In the coming years, jobs requiring at least an associate degree are projected to grow twice as fast as those requiring no college experience. To meet this need, President Obama set two national goals: by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world, and community colleges will produce an additional 5 million graduates. As the largest part of the nation's higher education system, community colleges enroll more than 6 million students and are growing rapidly.... President Obama proposed the American Graduation Initiative to invest in community colleges and help American workers get the skills and credentials they need to succeed. (US Office of the President, 2010)

A few years later, the Obama administration called for community colleges to be made tuition free for the first two years (Fain, 2015). This effort built on initiatives by the states of Tennessee, Minnesota, and Oregon to encourage higher education access by allowing students to attend public community colleges for free (Fain, 2015; Goldrick-Rab, 2016; National Conference of State Legislatures, 2017).

The US and England differ also in their attitude toward for-profit higher education. Interest in for-profit colleges has been declining in the US even as it is rising in the UK (Fain, 2016; Hunt, 2016; Smith, 2016; UK Dept. for BIS, 2015a, 2015b, 2016b). Until recently, for-profit enrolments were surging in the United States, rising from about 0.9 per cent of postsecondary enrolments in 1980 to a peak of 9.6 per cent in 2010 (US National Center for Education Statistics, 2016, Table 303.10; see also Cahalan, 2013, p. 61). Since then, support for for-profit higher education ebbed sharply in the US as it became clear that large numbers of students are failing to graduate or are doing so with large debt and few prospects to be able to pay off that debt (Cahalan, 2013, pp. 61-62; Cohen, 2016; Deming, Goldin, & Katz, 2013; US Senate, 2012). The Obama administration moved to tighten federal regulation of the for-profit sector and pushed state governments to do the same (Fain, 2016; Smith, 2016). In good part due to this, enrolments and revenues of the for-profits fell sharply, dropping from 9.6 per cent of postsecondary enrolments in 2010 to 7.7 per cent in 2015 (US National Center for Education Statistics, 2016, Table 303.10; see also Cohen, 2016). However, the fortunes of the for-profit sector appear to be rising under the more business-friendly policies of the Trump administration. The administration has announced that it will revoke two key regulations the Obama administration installed to restrict the tendency of for-profit colleges to enrol students who have low likelihood of completing their degrees and being able to repay the federal loans they were extended (Blumenstyk, 2017; Kreighbaum, 2017).

Meanwhile, the UK government has called for an expansion of alternative or “challenger” providers of higher education, including for-profits, primarily to stimulate greater competition among English higher education providers in line with government’s strategy of creating an even more marketised system of higher education (UK Dept. for BIS, 2015a, 2015b, 2016b; Universities UK, 2016b, pp. 36-37). Announcing the results of a consultation on alternative providers, the UK Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills declared:

Our system of higher education is world class and built on a reputation for quality. This Government is determined to maintain and strengthen that reputation. Many alternative providers of higher education contribute strongly to this through exceptionally high levels of student satisfaction and the employability of their graduates. It is a clear priority for the Government to widen the range of high quality higher education providers. This will stimulate competition, increase choice for students, and deliver better value for money for both taxpayers and students across the higher education sector. (UK Dept. for BIS, 2015a, p. 3)

This initiative in favour of expanding for-profit education has been embodied in the Higher Education and Research Act passed by Parliament in 2017. The act makes it substantially easier to register new institutions.

## **Drawing lessons from the other country’s experience**

In examining the policy ensembles used by England and the United States to foster greater access to and success in higher education, it is clear that there are substantial areas of convergence. However, the divergences are also substantial and suggest areas in which each country could fruitfully learn from the other. This is in keeping with the long history of policy borrowing between the UK and US (Phillips & Ochs, 2003; Whitty & Edwards, 1998; Whitty et al., 2016, chap. 3). But as we consider what policy lessons might be drawn from the converging and contrasting experiences of the UK and US, we have to be very mindful of the pitfalls of policy borrowing. Below we review some of these pitfalls before we make the case that there are policy lessons that England and the United States can usefully draw from each other’s experience.

## The vicissitudes of policy borrowing

Policy borrowing can easily fall into an uncritical “policy tourism” in which policies from another society are copied without deeply considering the prerequisites of successful borrowing (Steiner-Khamsi, 2010; Whitty et al., 2016). There are several obstacles to successful policy borrowing.

One obstacle is that the borrower may simply be adopting policies that do not work well. The policy borrower may be ignoring the lack of strong supportive evidence because of ideological and personal ties to the policy exponents in the other country (Whitty & Edwards, 1998, p. 223; Whitty et al., 2016, pp. 43-44, 51). These shared ideological and personal ties may prevent the policy adopter from noting the gaps in the logic and evidence of the theory of action underlying the policy because the theory accords so well with the borrower’s own opinions and preconceptions. This danger may well be present in the case of widening participation policies, which often have not been backed up by careful studies showing that they are indeed effective (Gorard, 2013; Gorard et al., 2007). Policy borrowers may also ignore the workability of the policy they are copying because they are more concerned with its symbolic or political usefulness rather than its practical utility. In fact, a similar or superior policy may be available in the borrower’s home country but is ignored in favour of the glittery promise of a policy from another country. The reason is that the policy borrowed from abroad may – because of the prestige of its home country and its practices – command interest and support in ways not available to a homegrown policy (Phillips & Ochs, 2003, p. 455; Steiner-Khamsi, 2010; Whitty et al., 2016, pp. 46, 50). To prevent inattention to the workability of a policy, it is important that the would-be policy borrower show evidence that the policy to be borrowed has a theory of action that is well worked out and solidly based in evidence of effectiveness.

Another pitfall in policy borrowing is that, while the policy may have proven itself in another country, it is implemented without due awareness to the cultural, political, and organisational presuppositions necessary for it to work in a new country (Phillips & Ochs, 2003, p 458; Whitty & Edwards, 1998, p. 223). The policy borrower may see the policy in narrowly technical terms, as an easily transportable tool rather than a practice embedded in a specific cultural, political, and organisational context that must also be replicated in order for the policy to work (Whitty et al., 2016). To obviate this concern, it is necessary to explore the cultural, political, and organisational requirements of the external policy and whether they can be replicated in the adopting country.

## **A warrant for the usefulness of English-US policy borrowing**

A general warrant for the workability – desirability is another issue – of policy borrowing between England and the United States is that the two countries evidence considerable similarities in their higher educational goals and problems and in their social and political structures and cultures (Bowes et al., 2013a). Both countries are advanced capitalist societies with highly diverse populations and considerable economic inequality. For example, while the US is notable for the sheer racial and ethnic diversity of its population, it is also noteworthy that 13 per cent of the UK population is nonwhite (UK Office for National Statistics, 2013) and people from many different countries in Africa, Asia, and Europe now work and live in the UK. Similarly, both countries have highly unequal class structures. Across the OECD countries, the ratio between the average income of the top 10 per cent of income earners to the bottom 10 per cent is 9.6 to 1. However, the figures for the UK and US are 10.5 to 1 and 18.8 to 1, respectively (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2015b).

Both England and the United States also share considerable socio-political similarities. Both have liberal market economies that differ considerably from the social market economies of northern Europe. Both countries tend to favour market forces and the privatisation of services as the main means of social coordination and their political cultures are canted towards scepticism of governmental regulation and coordination (Hall & Gingerich, 2009). Both countries have many supporters of smaller government and lower taxation. This neoliberal tendency can be seen in the tendency of both Conservative and New Labour, Republican and Democratic governments in the last four decades to emphasise the individual, choice, and the market in discussions of public policy generally and higher education policy specifically (Feigenbaum, Henig, & Hamnett, 1998; Lane, 2015; O'Neil, Fields, & Share, 2012; Wilkins & Burke, 2013). At the same time, both countries have witnessed the rise of strong resistance to these neoliberal tendencies: on the left, we see the ascension of Jeremy Corbyn to leadership of the Labour Party and of Bernie Sanders as a leading candidate in the 2016 Democratic Party presidential primaries; and on the right, we see the rise of nativist economic populism in the form of Donald Trump's election as president and the successful push by the UK Independence Party and likeminded Conservative Party members for the UK leaving the European Union.

Finally, the two countries share similar goals for and problems with education. As we have seen above, both are committed to increasing student participation and success in higher education, for reasons of economic growth, social control, and social justice. At the same time, they face major class and racial/ethnic differences in student access and success in higher education.

Despite the above, it is also clear that England and the United States also differ substantially in other areas. In England, the national government plays a much more extensive role in educational policymaking than is the case in the US, where the state and local governments play a very large role (McGuinness, 2016; O’Neil et al., 2012). For example, in England, the national government finances higher education and student financial support and sets tuition levels for public higher education institutions, whereas in the United States state governments set tuition levels and provide a very substantial share of the funding for public higher education (McGuinness, 2016). Moreover, because of this difference and the union of executive and legislative power in the UK’s parliamentary system, policy change can occur more rapidly and thoroughly than in the United States.<sup>31</sup> In the United States, the extensive separation of powers and the resultant difficulties it poses for securing and implementing governmental decisions makes rapid and consistent decision making more difficult (O’Neil et al., 2012). This contrast in government structure and process can be seen in the ways that English higher education is periodically and rapidly swept by major waves of reforms as in 1992, 1998, 2004, 2011 and 2017. This rapidity of change is aided by the fact the English higher education system is much smaller in enrolments and number of institutions and almost entirely public in institutional control, which reduces the number of stakeholders, particularly ones that are relatively more independent of government control (US National Center for Education Statistics, 2016; Universities UK, 2016a).

With the above considerations in mind, let us consider some lessons that the United States and England might usefully draw from each other’s policy experiences.

## **Lessons for the US**

Drawing on the English experience, the United States might wish to seriously consider adopting something like the Access Agreements in England, making more use of income-contingent loans, and expanding the range of information provided to college prospects about the programmes and institutions they are considering.

### **Introducing access agreements**

The US push for greater access to higher education institutions across the spectrum of selectivity could be aided by adoption of something like England’s policy of Access Agreements. This is not because Access Agreements have markedly democratised

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<sup>31</sup> This tendency in the UK has been amplified by the fact that some of the most significant policy changes in the UK are now enacted via regulations that do not require Parliamentary scrutiny, which vastly speeds up the policymaking process.



access to higher education in England so far<sup>32</sup>. However, as we have seen above, the advent of Access Agreements has encouraged English institutions to become more thoughtful and persistent in their adoption of practices that might result in widening access to higher education (UK Dept. for BIS, 2014; UK OFFA, 2016b).

It would therefore seem useful for the United States to consider using Access Agreements at a time when there is rising concern about the large degree of racial/ethnic and class inequality in access to higher education generally and to selective institutions particularly (Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011; Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2017a; Karen & Dougherty, 2005; Lumina Foundation, 2016; US Office of the President, 2014a). The requirement to have Access Agreements has the promise of pushing institutions to become more transparent, thoughtful, and determined in their pursuit of wider access. Moreover, in committing to certain practices and outcomes, institutions could be more easily evaluated on their success and their use of practices that are rooted in sound evidence.

In principle, the US government has the power to require Access Agreements due to the heavy dependence of virtually all US higher education institutions on federal, state, and local government funding of institutional operations, research and development, and (through student aid) student tuition. In the academic year 2013-14, federal, state, and local government appropriations and grants and contracts accounted for 40.2 per cent of the total revenues of public higher education institutions. Even private nonprofit institutions received 11.2 per cent of their revenues from similar government sources. It should be noted that neither of these figures reflects the fact that the tuition revenue of these institutions is heavily subsidised through federal and state aid to students and that auxiliary enterprises such as university hospitals are also heavily dependent on public financing (US National Center for Education Statistics, 2016, Tables 333.10, 333.40).

One key English feature that the US would have to adopt, in order to get Access Agreements to work effectively, is something like England's OFFA and its successor, the Office for Students, to review those agreements and push institutions to be more ambitious. Absent such review and prodding, the Access Agreements could easily fall into mere exercises in institutional public relations and rote responses to regulatory demands. It is important to have some public or semi-public agency provide direction for the Access Agreements and evaluate their results.

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<sup>32</sup> The selective universities have not changed in their intake of less-advantaged students, and there is evidence that the higher education system is becoming more socially segregated. And while the less-selective institutions have taken in many more less-advantaged students, this was already a part of their organisational missions. Moreover, with the advent of tuition-based funding, it was in their interest to take in more students in order to increase institutional revenues upon which they rely heavily.

## **Making greater use of income-contingent loans**

As mentioned earlier, the US student loan system is currently in crisis. US graduates owe \$1.3 trillion in student loans, and seven million borrowers are in default, and even more are in arrears. England provides an example of how the government can address these problems, by providing more extensive income-contingent loans. By basing repayment on loan holders' income, a well-designed income-contingent loan programme would provide a solution to the great concern in the United States about the many students who are saddled with loan debt that is too high for them to repay or is repayable only at the cost of taking jobs they do not want or deferring marriage and house buying (Barr et al., 2017; Dynarski, 2016; Konczal, 2013; Long, 2008, pp. 25-26). However, in making greater use of income-contingent loans, US policymakers need to keep in mind that they can be expensive to the national treasury if not designed well. Programme features with equity concerns in mind – such as not requiring payment until graduates' incomes rise above a certain threshold; keeping interest rates lower for low-earning graduates; and forgiving debt remaining after, say, 30 years of repayment – have resulted in income-contingent loan plans not being cost-neutral to the government. These are costs that are worth bearing but they must be kept in mind. However, it is possible to design an income-contingent loan system that is cost-neutral. According to Barr, Chapman, Dearden, and Dynarski (2017), “key variables include a combination of low loans, real interest rates above the government cost of borrowing, loan surcharges, lower thresholds, higher repayment rates, longer loan terms, and a healthy labour market with good earnings growth. Some of these variables can be controlled, others cannot” (p. 10).

## **Better provision of information about higher education choices**

With regard to information provision, the US could usefully emulate England in developing policies to provide prospective students with nationally comparable information about the student experience, student satisfaction, and economic returns at the level of individual degree programmes (majors). For students, it is important to know not just the features of an institution as a whole but also those of specific programmes such as biology or sociology within an institution. Programme-specific information about income returns is particularly important because there is more variation in income returns by programme than by institution (Davies, 2012, p. 264; Scott-Clayton, 2016, pp.

18-21).<sup>33</sup> Besides income returns,<sup>34</sup> the US could also follow the lead of the UK in providing programme-specific data on instructional conditions and student satisfaction<sup>35</sup>. In providing student information at the programme level, US policymakers must be mindful of a difficulty England has run into. Programme-specific data can be unreliable if sample sizes are too small or corrections are not made for differences in the entry characteristics of students (Davies, 2012, pp. 270-271). Moreover, policymakers need to be mindful that better information on programme-specific returns may lead institutions to sharply raise tuitions for programmes that carry a higher return.

To English scholars and policymakers, this call for more information provision in the US may seem problematic. They are very aware that greater information provision in England has been a concomitant of the neoliberal shift toward a more marketised system of higher education in England relying on greater student choice and institutional competition. Many fear that this shift toward greater marketisation will result in widening inequality in higher education participation and a more highly stratified higher education sector (Abbas, Ashwin, & McLean, 2012; Brown & Carasso, 2013; Callender & Scott, 2013), particularly when greater information provision includes university rankings (Hazelkorn, 2015). However, in the US, where the higher education system is already highly marketised (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), the greater provision of information is actually a means of combating the negative consequences of that high degree of marketisation. US students already face many different choices of programmes and institutions that carry very different costs and outcomes. More information and more equal information is a key means of reducing inequalities produced by class and racial/ethnic differences in choices produced under conditions of unequal information provision and utilisation (McDonough, 2005; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, & Person, 2006; Scott-Clayton, 2015).

In addition to following the English lead on providing programme-specific data, US policymakers could also emulate England in utilising the insights of research into how students use and misuse information in order to make sure that the information students are provided is maximally useful. The US could draw on the extensive analyses by the

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<sup>33</sup> In providing programme-specific income returns, it is important to provide students not just with the average returns for each programme but also with the variation or dispersion of those returns. Two programmes with the same average returns may have quite different variation around that average (Davies, 2012, p. 263).

<sup>34</sup> There is reason for not focusing too much on income returns as a measure of programme or institutional effectiveness. In good part, income returns are out of the control of institutions because returns are dependent on the labour market conditions (temporal and geographical) that students encounter. Moreover, one would not want to penalise institutions for preparing students for occupations that are socially necessary but not necessarily well paid.

<sup>35</sup> This kind of information is collected in the US by the National Survey of Student Experience (NSSE). However, unlike the UK, that information is not reported at the programme-level and, in any case, is not in the public domain and thus available to students. Another data source, which is public, is the Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) data warehouse maintained by a consortium of major public universities.

Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) of student information usage and supplement them with additional studies. One of the HEFCE findings that US policymakers should certainly ponder is that students make relatively little use of official data systems, such as Unistats, and instead rely more on information gleaned from university sources, visits to institutions, and family and friends (see Reay et al., 2005; Slack et al., 2014). The question then is to how to make “cold” knowledge such as that derived from government statistical repositories nearly as “hot” as the knowledge students derive from more personal sources (Davies, Qiu, & Davies, 2014). This is particularly important because the knowledge that prospective students derive from family and friends is largely anecdotal and less well-rounded than data drawn from carefully constructed surveys and other data sources. This need to increase student use of more formal data is particularly pressing for low-income and minority students whose family and friends may have knowledge of higher education that is particularly limited and idiosyncratic (see McDonough, 1997; Reay et al., 2005; Slack et al., 2014). In encouraging greater use of official data, the US should also be mindful of the findings from England that students and parents need considerable help in interpreting those data. They often misread what the data really mean (HEFCE, 2015a, 2015d). For example, students often do not understand the meaning of a confidence interval in judging point estimates of such things as student satisfaction with a programme (authors’ interviews).

## **Lessons for England**

Our cross-national comparison also indicates that there may be places where policy in England could benefit from emulating aspects of US policy. These possible points of emulation are the following: greater focus on the role of further education colleges and very cautious consideration of proposals to make greater use of for-profit higher education; greater use of grants in financial aid to students; more policy attention to informing student decisions in primary and early secondary school that affect their preparation for higher education; greater use of contextualised admissions; and very careful consideration of the possible downsides of performance funding.

### **More attention to further education colleges and scepticism about for-profit colleges**

Further education (FE) colleges do not play as big a role in England’s higher education as community colleges do in US higher education. However, further education colleges still do play an important role and arguably should play an even bigger one (Hodgson, 2015; Parry et al., 2012). It has been estimated that about half of those completing sub-baccalaureate Higher National Degrees go on to achieve bachelor’s qualifications

(Parry, 2010, p. 46; see also Universities UK, 2016b, p. 31). However, students with vocational education qualifications still have a higher risk of not entering universities or dropping out of them (Ertl, Hayward, & Holscher, 2010, pp. 80-82; Smith, Joslyn, & Jameson, 2015). Hence, a strong argument can be made for more government policy attention to and financial support of the role of further education colleges in English higher education (Bathmaker, 2010; David, 2010a, pp. 154-155; Parry, 2010). One way that the higher education role of further education colleges could be enhanced is by helping them develop transfer agreements for movement into university first-degree programmes that do not apply just to a small set of universities but to a wide swath of universities and that closely attend to the transfer of vocational courses. This would approximate the system-wide articulation arrangements that US states have developed between their community college systems and their university systems and the attention those arrangements increasingly pay to transfer of vocational courses (Bailey et al., 2015; Townsend, 2009; Wyner, Deane, Jenkins, & Fink, 2016).<sup>36</sup> Another change would be to further promote linkages between further education colleges and highly selective universities. Such efforts would require attention to the ways selective universities discourage further education graduates by, in some cases, only crediting one year of a foundation degree towards a university degree (authors' interviews). This is not to gainsay the difficulty that further education programmes are often in vocational subjects that have no university equivalent. Such transfer arrangements may become easier if English higher education develops a credit-hour system similar to that in the US that eases transfer of portions of a degree.

The US experience would also suggest very careful attention to possible negative repercussions from the large-scale expansion of for-profit higher education. There may be lessons to be learned from the regulatory structure that the United States has had to develop to reconcile government provision of financial aid to students attending for-profit colleges and the dangers of poor quality provision by those institutions (Field, 2014; Natow, 2017; US Senate, 2012).<sup>37</sup>

### **Greater emphasis on grants in financial aid**

England may wish to give renewed consideration to the importance of need-based grant aid. Despite the benefits of income-contingent loans, grant aid in the form of bursaries and scholarships should remain an important part of the nation's student aid portfolio. The evidence that working class and minority students may be leery of taking loans, even if repayment is on an income-contingent basis, suggests that loans should be

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<sup>36</sup> This would demand a more robust and flexible system of credits and credit transfers.

<sup>37</sup> These new regulations developed under the Obama administration (Natow, 2017). There is considerable question of how much regulation of the for-profit sector will occur under the Trump administration (Blumenstyk, 2017).

complemented by other forms of student aid (Bowes et al., 2013a, p. 71; Callender & Mason, in press; see also Long, 2008, pp. 25-26). Moreover, there is evidence that grant aid has a significant impact on enrolments, one that appears to be more pronounced than that for loan aid (Dearden, Fitzsimons, & Wyness, 2014; Dynarski, 2003; Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2013; Kim, 2004; Scott-Clayton, 2013). However, for grants to be effective, it seems that they have to be given in advance of student enrolment. Research on student bursaries in England has found that they do not have any significant impact on student enrolment decisions (Sutton Trust, 2015)<sup>38</sup>. This has been attributed to the fact that they are awarded only after acceptance at an institution and that they do not amount to much money (Callender & Wilkinson, 2013; UK Dept. for BIS, 2014, p. 39; see also Gorard et al., 2007, pp. 55-59).

### **Greater attention to information and guidance in primary and early secondary school**

With the demise of Aimhigher and its incomplete replacement by the National Network for Collaborative Outreach and the National Collaborative Outreach Programme, England should consider a more extensive programme of government support for information, advice and guidance in primary and early secondary school (Universities UK, 2016b, pp. 61, 87-88; see also UK Dept. for BIS, 2016a, para. 5.5). Fateful student choices about higher education begin early as students, their parents, and their teachers make decisions about what fields they should prepare for at the GCSE and A-levels. Without having A-level preparation in at least four courses in the right or “preferred” subjects, most students in England are essentially barred from attending a top university (Chowdry et al., 2013; Mangan et al., 2010; Russell Group, 2014; Smith et al., 2015; UCAS, 2015).<sup>39</sup> Yet, there is extensive evidence that students lower in family income, parental occupation, and parental education are considerably less likely to know this and consequently less often take three or more A-level exams and obtain grades of B, A, or A\* (Sammons et al., 2015a, pp. 5, 23, 39-40; idem, 2015b, pp. 20, 37).<sup>40</sup> To be sure, if students do not succeed in attaining these credentials in secondary school, they still may be able to acquire them by enrolling in an Access programme at a further education college (Parry et al., 2012; Stanton, Morris, & Norrington, 2015)<sup>41</sup> or a

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<sup>38</sup> However, there is some evidence that bursaries do play a role in retention in higher education and in enhancing the student experience in higher education (Davies & Harris, 2016).

<sup>39</sup> This A-level preparation is dependent in turn on preparation for the GCSE exams. Inadequate GCSE preparation in early secondary school makes it hard to do well on the A-level courses in later secondary school (Reay et al., 2005; Williams et al., 2010).

<sup>40</sup> Once one controls for other background characteristics, Black and South Asian students are more likely than White UK students to take four or more A-level exams (Sammons, Toth, & Sylva, 2015b, pp. 19, 35) and to enter higher education (Vignoles & Crawford, 2010).

<sup>41</sup> However, provision of Access courses is shrinking due to the fact that students now have to pay for these courses. Consequently, if students wish to continue on to university, they need to take out a loan for the Access course as well as for their subsequent undergraduate education.

compensatory year 0 at the beginning of university.<sup>42</sup> However, it would be more efficient if students were to secure the necessary academic preparation earlier. Hence, a stronger programme of support for advising students and parents during the early secondary school years would be advisable (Universities UK, 2016b; Whitty & Clement, 2015).

Not all forms of outreach are equally useful. There are useful lessons from UK evaluations of the relative effectiveness of such outreach activities as application information and assistance, mentoring, tutoring, open days, residential schemes, and parent and teacher engagement (Sutton Trust, 2015; see also Gorard et al., 2007). There may also be useful lessons to be drawn from the US experience with GEAR UP, Upward Bound, and Talent Search, in addition to England's experience with its own Aimhigher programme and its successors (Cahalan, 2013; Constantine, Seftor, Martin, Silva, & Myers, 2006; D. Doyle & Griffin, 2012; Emmerson et al., 2006; Gorard et al., 2007; Harrison, 2012). One of the key lessons is the importance – in outreach to communities under-represented in higher education – of considering under-representation as a product not so much of lesser desire or ability but of societal and institutional obstacles and exclusions that negatively shape disadvantaged students' aspirations, knowledge, and academic preparation (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986; Burke, 2012; Ogbu, 1979; McDonough, 1997; Reay et al., 2005).

### **Greater consideration of contextualised admissions**

English universities do engage in contextualised admissions but they could do more (Universities UK, 2016b, p. 89; Whitty & Clement, 2015). The limited success of the most selective UK universities in diversifying themselves by class and race/ethnicity is rooted in part in their emphasis on only accepting highly prepared students defined in terms of the dominant cultural categories. English universities therefore may benefit from a reconsideration of what constitutes merit in university admission. Should that promise be indexed almost exclusively by high scores on conventional tests of academic performance and possession of elite cultural knowledge (see Burke, 2012; Karabel, 2005)?<sup>43</sup> Are there other ways of measuring ability to benefit from higher education that would open up new opportunities for students coming from under-represented backgrounds? These questions have been subject to extensive debate in

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<sup>42</sup> There is concern in England that students undertaking this year 0 will run into the same difficulties of inadequate preparation and blocked mobility that have been documented for much developmental education in US higher education institutions (see Bailey, 2009 and Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015).

<sup>43</sup> As Gorard et al. (2007) note, there is evidence that students with some qualifications other than A-levels sometimes perform as well as those with A-level qualifications (Gorard et al., 2007, pp. 86, 130-131). Burke (2012, chap. 7) insightfully analyses the class, race/ethnic, and other cultural presuppositions that are implicitly built into various admissions materials and processes such as personal statements, artistic portfolios, and admissions interviews.

the United States in the context of affirmative action, and selective universities have developed a variety of means to consider and weigh alternative measures of academic merit (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Bowen et al., 2005; Espenshade & Chung, 2011; Karabel, 2005; Sacks, 2007; University of California, 2013). At the same time, we do not want to overemphasise the importance of affirmative action/contextualised admissions or soft-pedal its difficulties. Most of the variation by class and race/ethnicity in access to higher education and the most selective institutions is due to differences in academic preparation prior to higher education (Adelman, 1999; Chowdry et al., 2013; Gorard, 2013; Gorard et al., 2007; Perna, 2005; UK Dept. for BIS, 2015c; Vignoles & Crawford, 2010). Moreover, we have more to learn about what characteristics of less-advantaged students best predict ability to do well in highly selective institutions (Boliver et al., 2015).

### **Care in pursuing performance funding**

Finally, as England continues its use of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), it will be important to carefully track the intended and unintended impacts of the TEF.<sup>44</sup> For example, will the use of performance metrics encourage game playing by institutions rather than genuine improvement, dissuade institutions from accepting disadvantaged students, and compound the difficulties of institutions in poor market positions (Abbas, Ashwin, & McLean, 2012, pp. 183, 187; Ashwin, 2016; Universities UK, 2016b, p. 51; see also Locke, 2014; Longden, 2012)? This monitoring of institutional performance might usefully draw on research on the obstacles encountered and negative side effects produced by performance funding in the United States (Dougherty et al., 2016; Heckman et al., 2011; Moynihan, 2008; Rothstein, 2008).<sup>45</sup> For example, research on the implementation and impacts of performance funding for higher education in three leading US states (Indiana, Ohio, and Tennessee) has found that institutional officials often report impacts unintended by policymakers such as restrictions in admissions to higher education and weakening of academic standards (Dougherty et al., 2016; see also Umbricht, Fernandez, & Ortagus, 2015). These institutional officials frequently note that – in order to improve their graduation performance – their institutions could and often actually do move to reduce degree requirements or to restrict admission of less-prepared students who will be less likely to graduate or perform well.<sup>46</sup> Contributing to these unintended impacts are impediments

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<sup>44</sup> It will also be important to consider how well the TEF metrics accurately capture student outcomes and the institutional contribution to them (Ashwin, 2016; Marginson, 2017).

<sup>45</sup> At the same time, the United States may have much to learn from England about possibilities and pitfalls if it ever decides to apply performance funding to the research activities of public universities in a fashion similar to the Research Excellence Framework in England (see Deem, 2016; HEFCE, 2014b).

<sup>46</sup> Similar unintended impacts are reported in other studies of performance funding in higher education (Kelchen & Stedrak, 2016; Stensaker, 2003; Umbricht, Fernandez, & Ortagus, 2015) and performance funding in government operations more generally (Heckman et al., 2011; Moynihan, 2008; Rothstein, 2008).



that US higher education institutions encounter in attempting to legitimately meet performance metrics. These obstacles include metrics that are poorly matched to institutional missions, failure of performance funding programmes to take into account differences between institutions in student body composition, and lack of government support for institutions to learn how to more effectively (and legitimately) meet performance demands (Dougherty et al., 2016; see also Locke, 2014).<sup>47</sup>

## Summary and conclusions

The many similarities between the higher education systems of England and the United States in their higher education goals, policies, problems, and socio-political environments provide a basis for possible policy lessons. In this paper, we have explored the similarities and dissimilarities of higher education policies in the two countries with an eye to what each country can learn from the other with regard to reducing social class and racial/ethnic differences in higher education access and success. We have focused on seven policy strands: provision of information and guidance; outreach from higher education institutions; student financial aid; affirmative action or contextualisation in higher education admissions; institutional efforts to improve student completion; performance funding; and degree of reliance on sub-baccalaureate institutions. We explore possible lessons that England and the United States might draw from each other's experiences, mindful of the dangers of uncritical "policy tourism". In the case of the United States, we note why and how it might benefit from following England in the use of Access Agreements to govern the outreach efforts of its universities, making more use of income-contingent loans, and expanding the range of information provided to prospective college students about the programmes and institutions they are considering. Meanwhile, in the case of England, we examine how it might benefit from greater focus on the role of further education colleges, sceptical consideration of proposals to make greater use of for-profit higher education, greater use of grant aid in its financial aid system, more policy attention to decisions students are making in primary and early secondary school that affect their preparation for higher education, greater use of contextualised admissions, and very careful consideration of the possible downsides of performance funding.

Perhaps the most important policy strand is the one that focuses on improving information and advice during primary and secondary school<sup>48</sup>. The decisions about academic preparation that students make (and are made for them) during those years

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<sup>47</sup> The Teaching Excellence Framework does take into consideration the entering characteristics of students before determining the final ratings for higher education institutions (Bagshaw, 2017; Boyd, 2017). However, questions remain about how well this benchmarking captures the value added by different types of institutions (Njoroge, 2016; Strike, 2016).

<sup>48</sup> We should not forget policies to improve the educational efforts of schools, early childhood education providers, and families, a very important subject that we did not have the space to address in this paper.

are singularly fateful for their academic futures, leaving restricted room for later interventions such as financial aid, outreach efforts by higher education institutions, and contextualised admissions.

Exploring possible policy lessons from comparing the policy ensembles used in England and the United States can indeed be useful for suggesting new policy initiatives. But this cross-national comparison also reminds one of the limits of progressive policymaking. Even as new avenues for policy action open up, they also encounter new limitations. Progressive policies run up against the enduring class, racial/ethnic, gender, and other inequalities that fundamentally structure English and American society. Most overtly, promising policies often arouse open opposition from those whose privileges may be eroded by such policies (Karabel, 2005; Oakes, Rogers, Lipton, & Morrell, 2002). Less overtly, progressive policies that equalise higher education in one realm produce compensatory educational investments in other realms by privileged groups in order to maintain their relative advantage in cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986; Brown, 2001; Collins, 1979; Lucas, 2017; Oakes et al., 2002).

Despite these socio-political obstacles, the fact remains that the continued pursuit of policies to expand and widen participation for higher education is still important. Even if growing access to higher education by less-advantaged groups does not produce equality, it does give those groups access to forums and powers that bring immediate individual benefits and better position those groups for the next stage in their struggle for equality.

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