

Analysing the relationship between higher education participation and educational and career development patterns and outcomes

A new classification of higher education institutions

Kate Purcell, Peter Elias and Gaby Atfield

Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick

Although competing league tables are now available that rank higher education institutions (HEIs) by a range of measures, an orthodoxy is predominant when classifying HEIs, with Russell Group, 'Old' (pre-92) universities, 'New' (post-92) universities, and 'others' being the most commonly used categories. The use of the category termed 'Russell Group' universities has become a convenient proxy indicator of access to the UK's 'most prestigious' universities (See Cabinet Office, 2009:40 for a recent example of this usage), but other analysts have suggested alternative 'top university' lists, for example 'The Sutton 13 Universities' (Sutton Trust 2008:7, 2005).

There is a public and professional need for a more precise taxonomy of universities, to provide accurate information to users about their relative HE provision and the implications of that for the opportunities to which they give or restrict access. While conducting Stage 1 of the Futuretrack survey, it was observed that the 'Russell plus' classification did not always align very closely with the experiences and qualifications of applicants. While there was typically a core of similarity within each group, some HEIs were outliers on a range of measures within their commonly-allocated category and appeared to have more in common with HEIs in other groups. This raised the question of whether it would be possible to group the HEIs in such a way that the resulting categories became more meaningful, both for students and graduate employers. In constructing a new ranking of HEIs for more effective analysis of the relationship between higher education (HE) and opportunity, we used average tariff points required for entry to a specific HEI. Applicants have various options open to them when they consider entering HE and the most significant determinant of these options was clearly tariff points. Regardless of the HEI they ultimately choose to attend, an applicant with higher tariff points normally has a wider range of options available to them than a candidate with lower tariff points – although subjects and the pattern of achievement are also very important, as a more careful analysis will reveal, and each discipline and subject does, indeed, have its more and less difficult to access HEI courses.

As an overall indication of 'university reputation' in the international marketplace and, to a lesser extent, the national one, the tariff points held by a successful applicant is a tangible measure of their educational capital, and the tariff points required by HEIs of applicants are generally indicative of the comparative status of the institution and the competition to enter it. To create the new access tariff variable, we drew on entry standards data from the UCAS application process, *The Times Good University Guide 2006* and *2007*¹ and the data on tariff points collected during Stage 1 of the Futuretrack survey, and also considered comparable league tables. In allocating HEIs to the classification, discussed above *The Times Good University Guide* uses the full UCAS tariff points score for all new students aged under 21, while the Futuretrack data drawn on for this analysis include all accepted applicants who accepted places on UK full-time HE courses in 2005-6 for whom data are access data were available, including those studying as mature students.

The HEIs were ranked according to the data provided in each of these sources, summed to give an overall ranking. The HEIs were then divided into groups based on this ranking. When HEIs were close to a border between groups, or when a particular HEI appeared to have an anomalous rank in one data source, other data from the Futuretrack survey, including the proportion of students with non-standard entry qualifications, was used to determine the most appropriate grouping. Using this system, six distinct groups were identified, as Table 1 shows.

¹ See http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/education/good_university_guide/article671847.ece for a description of the methodology used to compile the Times Good University Guide tables (accessed 21.7.09)

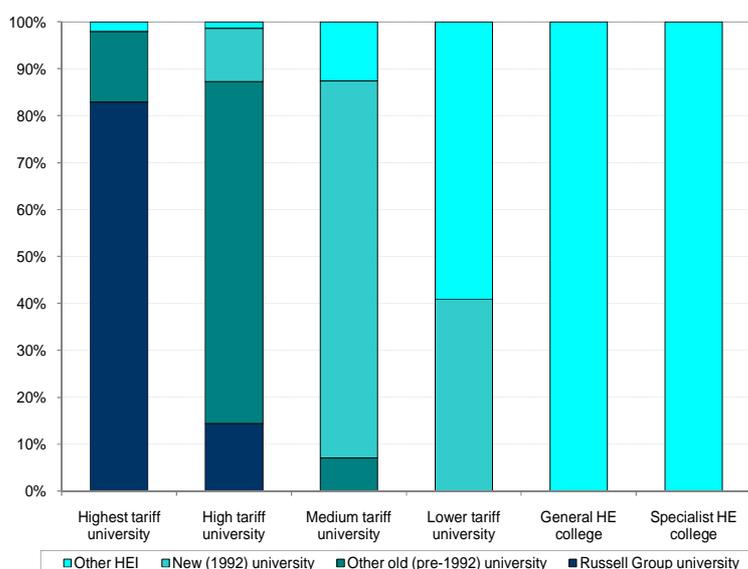
Table 1 Number of HEIs in each access category

IER access category	Number of HEIs	Stage 2 respondents in category (%)
Highest tariff	28	26.0
High tariff	36	24.4
Medium tariff	39	27.8
Lower tariff	36	11.9
General HE college	92	2.9
Specialist HE colleges	46	3.6
Overseas HEIs	-	3.4
Total UK HEIs included	Total current HE respondents (364,615*)	100.0

Source: Futuretrack 2006: Combined Stages 1&2 dataset, all Stage 2 students, weighted

Figure 1 compares the distribution of Futuretrack respondents between this new HEI tariff classification and their places in the ‘Russell plus’ grouping that we and others have used in the past.

Figure 1 HEI tariff classification categories by ‘Russell Group’ classification



Source: Futuretrack 2006: Combined Stages 1&2 dataset, all Stage 2 students, weighted

The full distribution of HEIs attended by Futuretrack respondents is provided as an Appendix to this Working Paper. Not surprisingly, the ‘Highest tariff’ group contains all but three of the Russell Group universities, but it also includes five universities previously classified as ‘other old universities’, as well as four medical schools, a veterinary school and an institute focussed on languages. Although these last six institutions are specialist colleges, it was clear that tariff points had played an equally important role in access to these institutions as for those classified in the ‘specialist HE colleges’ group, and so they, and some other similar institutions, were classified according to the tariff points required for entry rather than the range of courses they offered.

The 'High tariff' group contains the remaining three Russell Group universities, all except four of the remaining 'other old universities', four 'new universities', a new university that was not a former polytechnic, and three specialist institutions classified on the basis of the average tariff points required for entry.

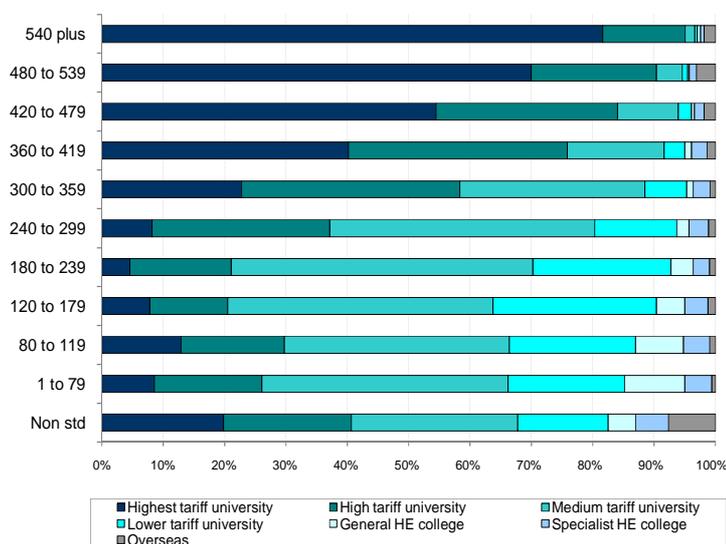
The 'Medium tariff' HEIs were diverse in terms of their status using the original schema. The group includes four 'old universities', 25 'new universities' and 10 new universities that were not polytechnics. The 'Lower tariff' group was similarly diverse, containing eight 'new universities', 13 new universities that had not been polytechnics, five former HE colleges and 10 other HEIs, the majority of which were currently University Colleges.

While the 'General HE colleges' group contains a large number of HEIs, a relatively small proportion of the Futuretrack cohort attend these institutions, primarily because many of them do not require prospective students to apply through UCAS. In addition, their numbers have been reduced as the longitudinal study has proceeded to a greater extent than for the other HEIs because relatively few of the students who attended them on courses lasting for more than two years. Some had transferred to other HEIs (as in undergraduate students who did the first part of their courses in an HE college and transferred to the university that would award their degree for the latter part) and some had completed courses such as Foundation degrees or Dip HEs.

The 'Specialist HE colleges' group includes institutions specialising in a wide range of subject areas. Arts, including fine art, music, dance and drama, were the most common specialisation, although the group also includes institutions specialising in agriculture and other land-based subjects, business, law, osteopathy and religion.

Figure 2 validates the access tariff measure in relation to the distribution of students in each tariff band by HEI type attended.

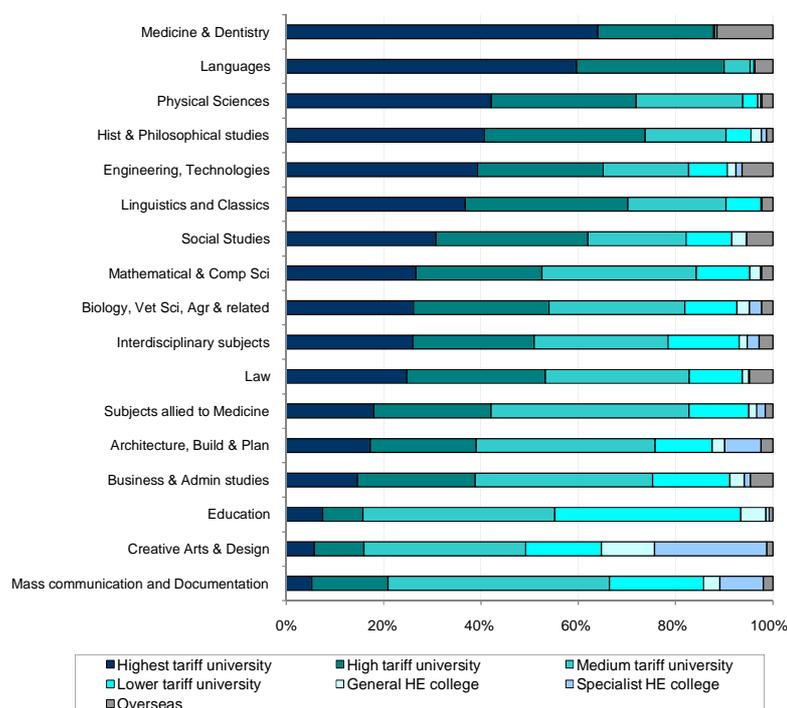
Figure 2 Tariff group HE outcomes by HEI type



Source: Futuretrack 2006: Combined Stages 1&2 dataset, all Stage 2 students, weighted

Figure 3 shows the subject groups by the new HEI tariff access profile.

Figure 3 Subject groups by HEI tariff access profile



Source: Futuretrack 2006: Combined Stages 1&2 dataset, all Stage 2 students, weighted

As can be seen, there were some subjects that were heavily concentrated in particular types of HEI. For example, almost 90 per cent of respondents studying medicine and dentistry were at highest or high tariff universities, with almost two thirds being at HEIs in the highest tariff group. Similarly, more than two thirds of respondents studying subjects such as physical sciences, historical and philosophical studies, and linguistics and classics were at HEIs in the highest or high access tariff groups. Conversely, law, which is usually associated with requiring high tariff points has a fairly even spread across the different HEI types, and is not particularly concentrated at HEIs requiring high tariff points. This is likely to reflect the diversity of law courses available, and it may be that if this group was broken down into different types of course, we would see a concentration of different types of course at different types of HEI. The data allow us to do further detailed analysis at this level.

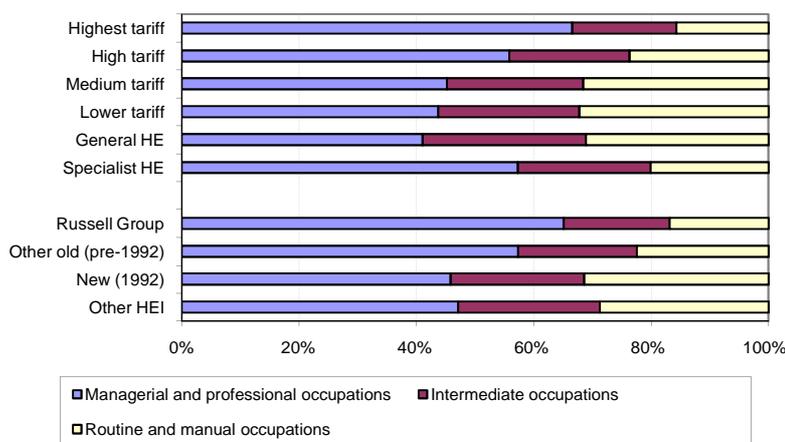
Less than a third of respondents studying mass communications and documentation, creative arts and design, and education were at HEIs in the highest and high access tariff groups, although in the case of creative arts and design and certain subjects within mass communication and documentation, the possibility of studying these subjects at specialist colleges, and the relatively large proportion of students in these areas who do so, tends to skew the overall picture. Education was the subject with the highest proportion of students studying at lower access tariff HEIs. Thirty eight per cent of students studying education were at lower access tariff HEIs, while the set of subjects with the second

largest proportion of students at lower access tariff HEIs, mass communication and documentation, has only 19 per cent.

Does the new classification allow for more useful comparison than the previously-used one?

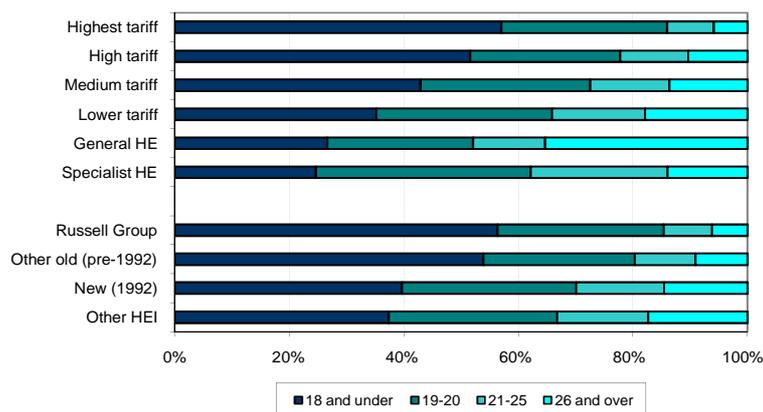
No-one pretends that all HEIs have the same student and course provision profiles and aim to attract identical student populations or offer the same range of educational services. The big underlying question is: 'Has the expansion of HE increased equality of opportunity, or does it simply segment and reinforce existing inequalities?' – and the relevant question for this new classification is 'Does it enable a more useful exploration and analysis of key issues such as this?' We present below a few examples of comparative analysis by a range of key variables, comparing the distributions of provided by using the new and previous classifications. Figure 4 shows the differences shown by the by broad socio-economic background and Figure 6 shows the relative age profiles of the categories. Both classifications indicate that 'traditional' HE recruits were most likely to have accessed those HEIs with the highest entry requirements, but the new classification provides a potentially finer graduation of the way in which the sub-groups in higher education has been expanded nationally and in terms of internal HEI policy and practice. It also indicates clearly that those attending specialist HEs have more in common socially (and in terms of prior career development) with students attending highest and high tariff universities than with those in lower tariff access universities and general HE colleges with which they are grouped in the 'Russell' classification. . Figure 4 shows the socio-economic background profiles of those attending the different types of HEI and Figure 5 shows HEI access type by the age profiles of those attending different categories.

Figure 4 HEI access by broad socio-economic background, comparing the 'old' and 'new' classifications



Source: Futuretrack 2006: Combined Stages 1&2 dataset, all Stage 2 students, weighted

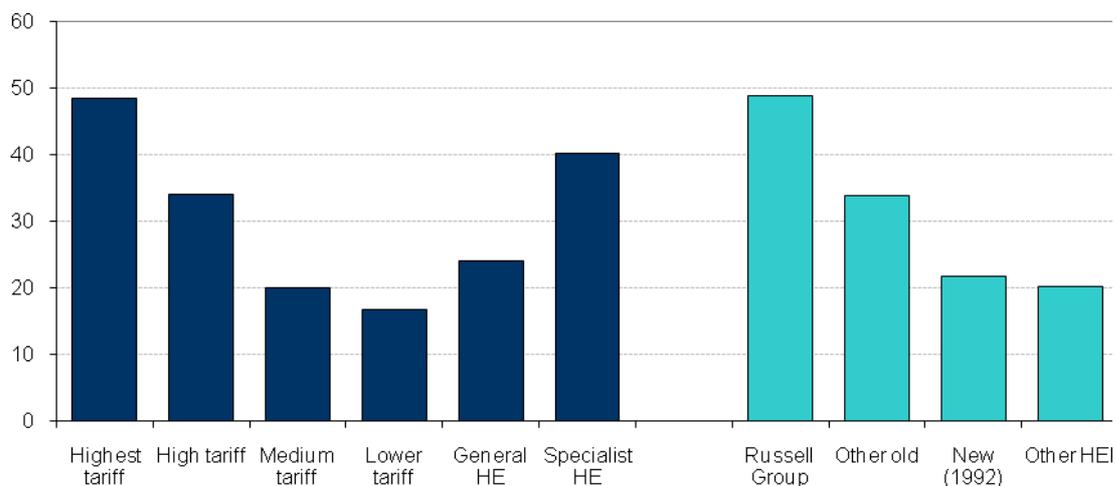
Figure 5 HEI access type by age group, comparing the 'old' and 'new' classifications



Source: Futuretrack 2006: Combined Stages 1&2 dataset, all Stage 2 students, weighted

Figure 6 shows the comparative distributions over a category we summarise as 'possessing educational advantage'; defined by having studied prior to HE entry at a selective or fee-paying school and/or be second generation HE participants. This variable reflects the finding of the Stage 1 analyses that such students had a higher propensity to have reported that HEI entry was 'normal for somebody from my background' than others, to have reported above-average access to careers guidance and advice prior to applying for HE (Purcell *et al.*2008) and to be most likely to be attending the more elite, higher ranked HEIs. Tariff points were found to be clearly correlated with type of prior education and socio-economic background, so that those attending independent and selective schools have a considerably higher probability of having accessed places at highest and high tariff HEIs than those at State schools generally and those who enter HE via non-standard routes.

Figure 6 Percentage of respondents at different types of HEI who had an educational advantage prior to entering higher education, comparing the new and old HEI categories



Source: Futuretrack 2006: Combined Stages 1&2 dataset, all Stage 2 students, weighted

The above figure illustrates the value of the new classification scheme in comparison to the old one particularly clearly, showing how the old categories of 'Russell Group', 'Other old (pre-92) university', 'New (post-92) university' and 'Other HEI' conceals the differences and extent to which the boundaries between old and new universities and highly and relatively elite HEI profiles are changing. Using the new access tariff variable, we can see that respondents at Specialist HE colleges were the second most likely group to have an educational advantage, and those at General HE colleges were more likely to than those at lower tariff HEIs.

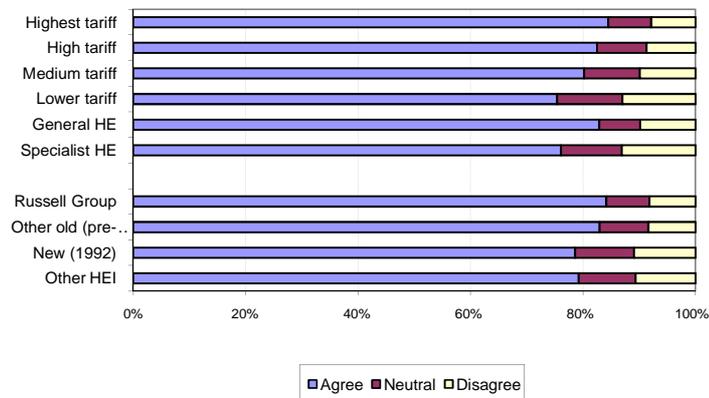
The ways in which different kinds of inequalities interact and reinforce one another in facilitating opportunity can be explored with more precision using the new classification: for example, differences among ethnic groups related to their socio-economic characteristics, differences between those reporting disabilities or long-term illnesses and differences related to other personal attributes, particularly those likely to inhibit students from choosing freely from the range of HE options to which their educational achievement prior to HE entry could provide access. A comparison of the proportions of students living in their normal family home during term rather than in student accommodation of some sort, shows that nearly two thirds of students studying undergraduate degrees at general HE colleges lived at home, with family, partner or alone, as did around half of those at lower tariff HEIs, compared with less than one in five of those at the highest tariff HEIs and less than a quarter of those at the high tariff ones.

Different experiences of the context and quality of study?

The variables discussed above related to the personal and social attributes and key characteristics of the students. It might be expected that the quality of HEI experience would vary according to the type of HEI attended and we conducted some comparisons to assess whether the new HEI classification could provide better insight into this than the older one.

The first point to note is the overall high levels of satisfaction with the tuition and support received generally at the time of the Stage 2 survey after they had successfully completed a year in HE and moved on to their second year, as Figure 7 shows. However, those at the lower tariff universities were the least satisfied, but those who had embarked on degree courses at general HE colleagues were almost as likely to be satisfied overall as those at the highest and high tariff HEIs – reflecting, perhaps, different needs and values but also possibly a higher standard of academic attention.

Figure 7 On the whole, the tuition and learning support I received on my course* were excellent

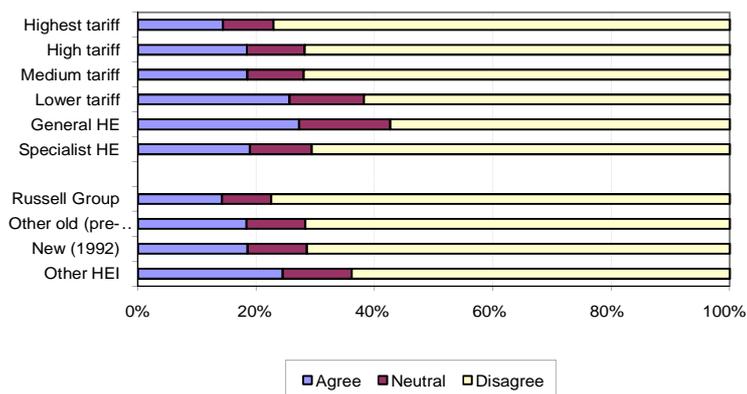


*During the first year of study.

Source: Futuretrack 2006: Combined Stages 1&2 dataset, all Stage 2 students, weighted

The area where there were clear differences in response and plausible discrepancies in the quality of provision was with reference to library resources – with those at general HEIs and lower access tariff universities most likely to agree with the statement that these were inadequate, shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Agreement with the statement 'Library resources were inadequate' by HEI category, comparing the old and new classifications

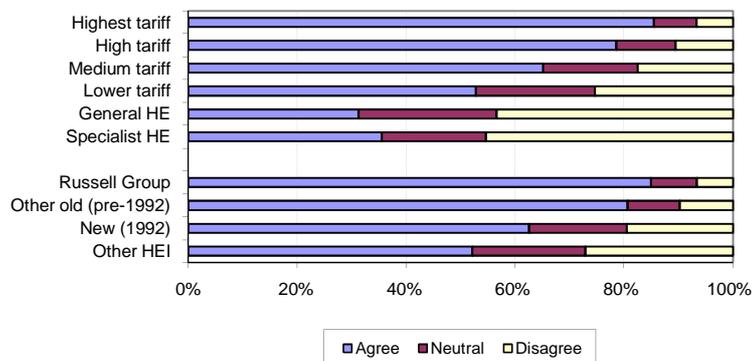


Source: Futuretrack 2006: Combined Stages 1&2 dataset, all Stage 2 students, weighted

The opportunities offered by full-time HE participation are not simply pedagogic, but include social and non-study opportunities to develop skills and experience that are well-documented to be valued by graduate recruiters as an indication of having developed social, entrepreneurial and personal transferrable skills and knowledge that will equip them to take responsible, innovative roles in the

employment context. When we examine the extent to which students agree with the statement 'There were excellent opportunities for extra-curricular activities on or around the campus' (-note, not 'Did you take advantage of these?', but simply 'Were they available?') the differences between HEI types are substantial, and more finely distinguished by the new than the old classification, a Figure 9 shows.

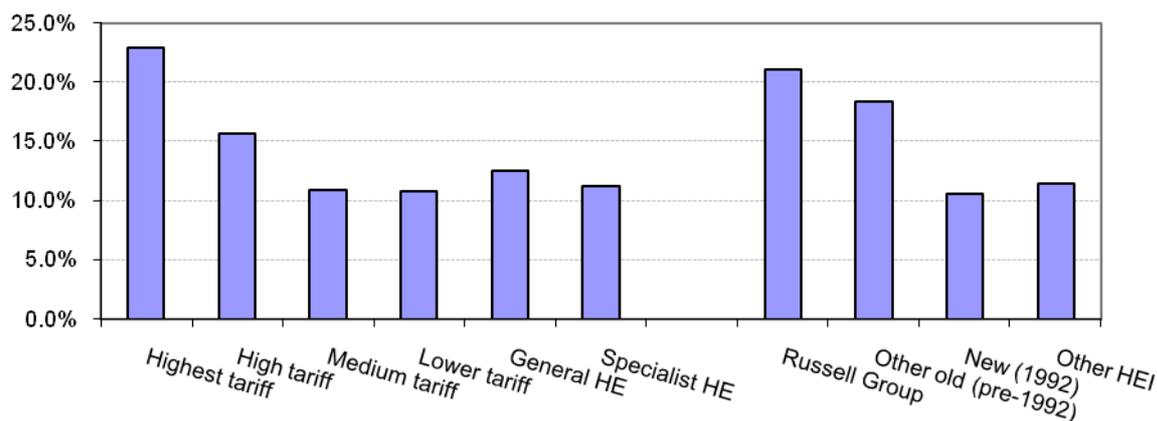
Figure 9 Extent of agreement with the statement 'There were excellent opportunities for extra-curricular activities on or around the campus', by the new and old HEI classifications.



Source: Futuretrack 2006: Combined Stages 1&2 dataset, all Stage 2 students, weighted

When we move to consider the proportions of student respondents at each type of HEI who had gained the kind of experience particularly valued by potential employers, for example, leadership experience, as shown in Figure 10, we find similar patterns. Students at the highest access HEIs had a clearly higher propensity (reflecting more opportunities?) to be gaining this type of experience.

Figure 10: Incidence of reported office holding and representational roles in student organisations, by HEI type, comparing classifications

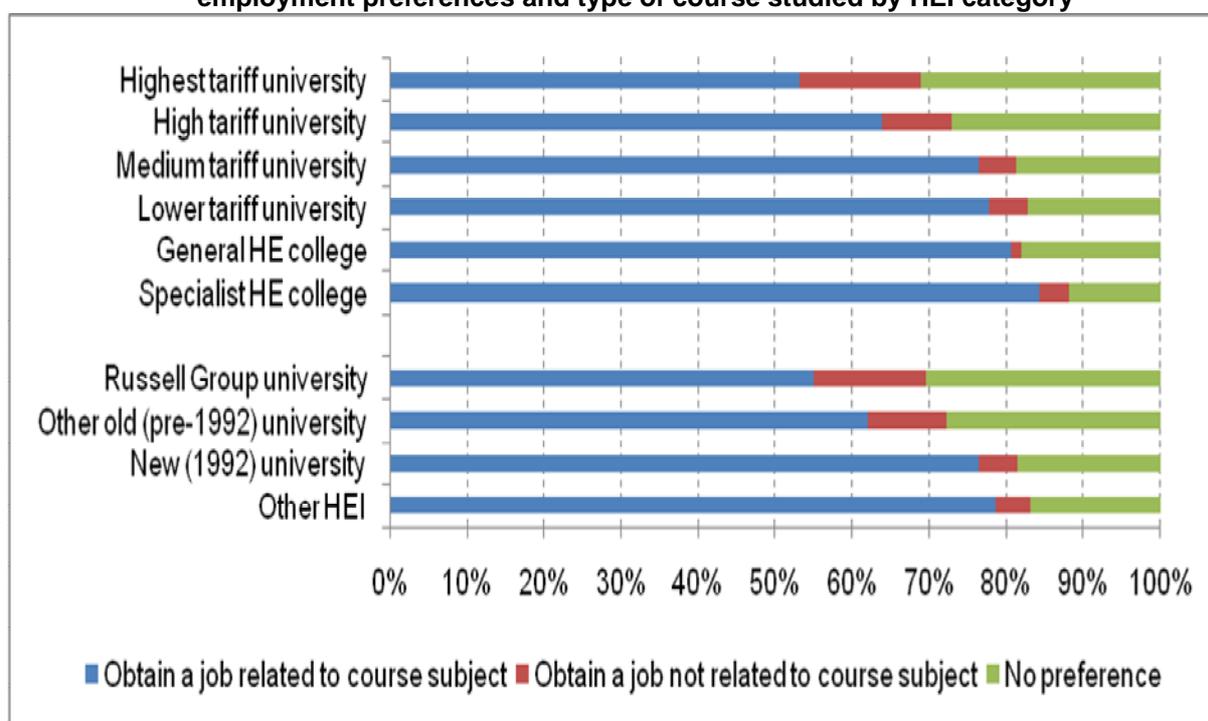


Source: Futuretrack 2006: Combined Stages 1&2 dataset, all Stage 2 students, weighted

Looking Forward

The proof of the relative utility of the IER HEI access tariff classification compared to the more established one will only be subjected to the full test at Stage 4, when we are able to explore the kinds of jobs to which different types of graduates actually gained access, beyond first destination. The full Stage 3 analysis will also provide evidence on which the methodology of the classificatory systems can be evaluated. However, a comparison of key variables that are certainly subject to analysis at Stage 3 has already been undertaken on the partial data set. This can only be indicative, since there remain 6000 responses still to be properly classified and added to the main sample, but Figures 11 and 12 are intriguing. Figure 11 compares the extent to which the preliminary sample of 2009 graduating students who had completed three-year degree programmes hoped eventually to enter employment directly related to the subject or discipline of their undergraduate course, comparing the new and old classifications.

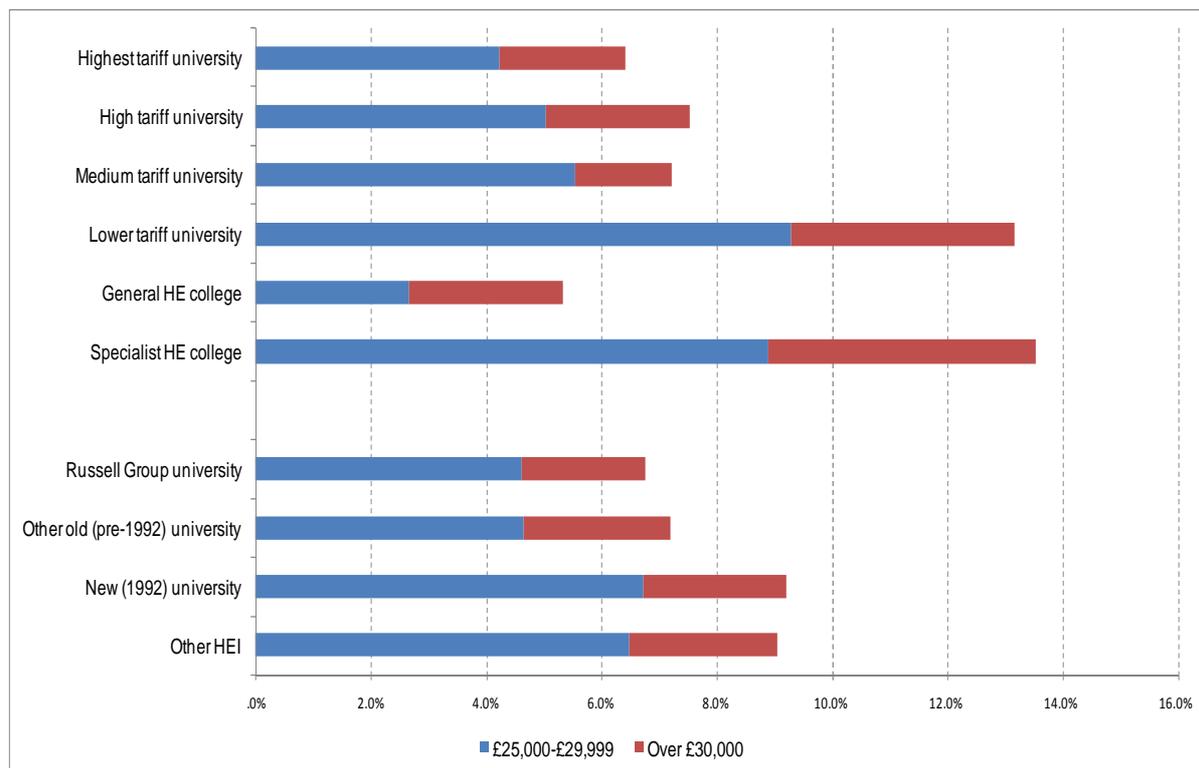
Figure 11 Distribution of 2009 Third Year graduating students by relationship between employment preferences and type of course studied by HEI category



Source: Futuretrack Stage 3 Preliminary Dataset, November 2009

Figure 12 compares the extent to which these same students reported that they had accrued debts by the end of their third year.

Figure 12: Proportion reporting debts of over £25,000 by HEI category, comparing classifications



Source: Futuretrack Stage 3 Preliminary Dataset, November 2009

What much of this preliminary analysis suggests is that on average, those who entered HE with less social and economic capital appear likely to leave with greater likelihood of high debts and more potentially-limited options. Further evidence at the Stages 3 and 4 surveys as the longitudinal study proceeds will provide the best available evidence of the relationship between prior attributes and achievements, HE experience, and outcomes. This classification system will facilitate effective analysis of these data.

It was clear from the Futuretrack Stage 1 survey findings that ranking systems and the information and preconceptions that applicants have about institutional ranking and qualities played a significant part in many applicants' decisions about which HEI to attend. These rankings were likely to play a particularly important role where an applicant lacked other types of information, for example for applicants who were first generation students or who came from areas with low HE participation rates, which is of particular relevance given the widening-access agenda. Although students with higher tariff points were most likely to be studying at HEIs that required higher average tariff points and those with lower tariff points were likely to be studying at HEIs that required lower average tariff points, this was not universally the case (quite apart from the growing significance of non-standard qualifications, as alternative entry routes have opened and the population has become more diverse, both in terms of widening access and the globalisation of HE). It may be that 'lower tariff' applicants at high tariff HEIs were exceptional cases and were made lower offers than was usual for their courses because of particular personal circumstances, but this pattern also reflects the diversity of requirements *within* HEIs for different subjects. Similarly, some predominantly lower tariff HEIs have very prestigious and highly competed-for courses in particular subjects and disciplines.

As with families and individuals, the old 'class structure' of HEIs is evolving. However at any point in the evolution, it is pertinent and perhaps necessary to investigate the impact of HEI category on the quality of experience and standards of HE provision that students receive. Consequently, it is important to have a variable measure where it is possible to assess the extent to which differences in

ratings do or do not reflect differences in the quality of educational opportunities available to students and the outcomes they have access to. The UK HE sector continues to evolve and change in structure and divisions of labour across earlier boundaries. It is increasingly inappropriate to group HEIs together based on patterns and associations 17 years ago. As in sporting leagues, nationally and internationally, performance quality and ambitions change along with successes, failures and – of course – strategic planning and investment in development. There is a need for an effective classificatory scheme on the part of all ‘users’ of HE, as it has expanded, diversified and one that is relevant to a wider range of potential students and employers than was the case in previous generations, and a more central component of the labour market as a whole.

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Appendix

Higher Education Institutions by IER HEI Access Classification ²

Highest tariff universities

University of Bath
University of Birmingham
Brighton and Sussex Medical School
University of Bristol
University of Cambridge
University College London
University of Durham
University of Edinburgh
University of Glasgow
Hull York Medical School
Imperial College London
King's College London
University of Leeds

University of London Institute in Paris (University of London)
London School of Economics
University of Manchester
University of Newcastle
University of Nottingham
Oxford University
Peninsula Medical School
Royal Veterinary College (University of London)
University of St Andrews
St George's Hospital Medical School (University of London)
University of Sheffield
University of Southampton
University of Strathclyde
University of Warwick
University of York

High tariff universities

University of Aberdeen
Aston University Birmingham
Brunel University
Cardiff University
City University
University of Dundee
University of East Anglia
University of Essex
University of Exeter
Glasgow Caledonian University
Goldsmiths College, London
Heriot-Watt University

² This classification is based upon the average tariff scores required to access undergraduate courses at them, by applicants entering with UCAS tariff scores in the year that the Futuretrack 2006 cohort applied for HE places.

Heythrop College (University of London)
University of Hull
Keele University
University of Kent
Lancaster University
University of Leicester
University of Liverpool
The School of Pharmacy (University of London)
Loughborough University
Medway School of Pharmacy
Northumbria University
Oxford Brookes University
Queen Margaret Univ College
Queen Mary, London
Queen's University Belfast
University of Reading
Robert Gordon University
Royal Holloway, London
School of Oriental and African Studies University of London
University of Stirling
University of Surrey
University of Sussex
University of Wales, Aberystwyth
University of Wales Swansea

Medium tariff universities

University of Abertay Dundee
Anglia Ruskin University
Bath Spa University
Bournemouth University
University of Bradford
University of Brighton
Canterbury Christ Church
UCE / Birmingham City
University of Central Lancashire
University of Chester
University of Chichester
Coventry University
De Montfort University
Edge Hill University
University of Glamorgan
University of Gloucestershire
University of Hertfordshire
University of Huddersfield
Leeds Metropolitan University
University of Lincoln
Liverpool John Moores University
Manchester Metropolitan Univ
Napier University
Nottingham Trent University
University of Paisley / West of Scotland
University of Portsmouth

University of Plymouth
University of Salford
Sheffield Hallam University
Staffordshire University
University of Sunderland
University of Teesside
University of Ulster
University of Wales, Bangor
University of Wales, Lampeter
University of Westminster
University of the West of England
University of Winchester
York St John University

Lower tariff universities

American InterContinental University - London
University of Bedfordshire / Luton
Bell College
Birmingham College of Food, Tourism & Creative Studies
Bishop Grosseteste University College, Lincoln
University of Bolton
University of Buckingham
Buckinghamshire Chilterns UG
University of Cumbria
University of Derby
University of East London
University of Greenwich
Kingston University
Leeds Trinity & All Saints
Liverpool Hope University
London Metropolitan University
London South Bank University
Marjon - The College of St Mark & St John, Plymouth
Middlesex University
Newman College of Higher Education
University of Northampton
The North East Wales Institute
Richmond, The American International University in London
Roehampton University
Ruskin College Oxford
St Martin's College
St Marys College, Twickenham
Southampton Solent University
Swansea Institute / Met Uni
Thames Valley University
Trinity College Carmarthen
UHI Millennium Institute
University of Wales Institute Cardiff
University of Wales, Newport
University of Wolverhampton
University of Worcester

General HE colleges

Askham Bryan College
Barking College
Basingstoke College of Technology
Blackburn College: East Lancashire Institute of Higher Education
Blackpool and The Fylde College
Bradford College
Bridgwater College
Bristol Filton College
Bristol, City of Bristol College
Carmarthenshire College
Chesterfield College
Chichester College
City College, Birmingham
City College Manchester
City and Islington College
City of Sunderland College
Colchester Institute
Coleg Llandrillo Cymru
Coleg Menai
College of West Anglia
Cornwall College
Croydon College
Dearne Valley College
Dewsbury College
Doncaster College
Duchy College
Dudley College of Technology
East Surrey College
Exeter College
Farnborough College of Technology
Gloucestershire College of Arts and Technology
Great Yarmouth College
Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education
Guildford College of Further and Higher Education
Halton College
Havering College of Further and Higher Education
Hertford Regional College
Highbury College
Hopwood Hall College
Hull College
Leeds: Park Lane College
Leicester College
Liverpool Community College
Loughborough College
Manchester College of Arts and Technology
Matthew Boulton College of Further and Higher Education
Neath Port Talbot College
NESCOT
Newcastle College
New College Durham
New College Nottingham

Northbrook College Sussex
North East Worcestershire College
North Lindsey College
North Warwickshire and Hinckley College
Norwich City College of Further and Higher Education
Pembrokeshire College
The People's College Nottingham
Peterborough Regional College
Rotherham College of Arts and Technology
St Helens College
Salisbury College
Sheffield College
Solihull College
Somerset College of Arts and Technology
South Birmingham College
South Devon College
South Downs College
South East Essex College
South Nottingham College
Southport College
Staffordshire University Regional Federation
Stamford College
Stockport College of Further & Higher Education
Stratford upon Avon College
Suffolk College
Sutton Coldfield College
Swansea College
Swindon College
Tyne Metropolitan College
Wakefield College
Warwickshire College
West Herts College, Watford
Westminster Kingsway College
West Thames College
West Suffolk College
Wigan and Leigh College
Wiltshire College
Wirral Metropolitan College
Worcester College of Technology
York College
Yorkshire Coast College of Further and Higher Education

Specialist HE colleges

The Arts Institute at Bournemouth
Bishop Burton College
British College of Osteopathic Medicine
British School of Osteopathy
Capel Manor College, Enfield, Middlesex
Central School of Speech and Drama
Cleveland College of Art and Design
Cliff College
The College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise
Courtauld Institute of Art (University of London)

Cumbria Institute of the Arts
Dartington College of Arts
Edinburgh College of Art
European Business School, London
European School of Osteopathy
Glamorgan Centre for Art and Design Technology
The Glasgow School of Art
Greenwich School of Management
Harper Adams University College
Herefordshire College of Art and Design
Holborn College
Kent Institute of Art and Design
Leeds College of Art & Design
Leeds College of Music
The Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts
London School of Commerce
Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts
Myerscough College
The Norwich School of Art and Design
Plymouth College of Art and Design
Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication
Regents Business School London
Rose Bruford College
Royal Academy of Dance
Royal Agricultural College
Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama
SAE Institute
Scottish Agricultural College
Sparsholt College Hampshire
Stranmillis University College, Belfast
The Surrey Institute of Art and Design, University College
University of the Arts London
University College Falmouth
Welsh College of Horticulture
Wimbledon School of Art
Writtle College