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**COMPARING AND LEARNING FROM ENGLISH AND AMERICAN
HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS AND COMPLETION POLICIES**

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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. We focus on five key policy strands: student information provision; outreach from higher education institutions; student financial aid; affirmative action or contextualisation in higher education admissions; and programmes to improve higher education retention and completion. At the end, we draw conclusions on what England and the US can learn from each other. The US would benefit from following England in using Access and Participation Plans to govern university outreach efforts, making more use of income-contingent loans, and expanding the range of information provided to prospective higher education students. Meanwhile, England would benefit from following the US in making greater use of grant aid to students, devoting more policy attention to educational decisions students are making in early secondary school, and expanding its use of contextualised admissions. While we focus on England and the US, we think that the policy recommendations we make carry wider applicability. Many other countries with somewhat similar educational structures, experiences, and challenges could learn useful lessons from the policy experiences of these two countries.

England and the United States (US) provide a very interesting pairing as countries with many similarities, but also instructive dissimilarities, with respect to their policies for higher education (HE) access and success. We focus on five policy strands affecting HE access and completion: student information provision; outreach from HE institutions; student financial aid; affirmative action or contextualisation in HE admissions; and programmes to improve HE retention and completion.

The paper explores these five key policy strands with an eye to what each country can learn from the other with regard to reducing social class and racial/ethnic differences in HE access and success. While we focus on England and the US, the policy lessons drawn carry wider applicability. Many other countries with somewhat similar educational structures, experiences, and challenges could learn useful lessons from the policy experiences of these two countries.

The UK and US HE systems are quite different in some regards. Most obviously, the US system is far larger in number of institutions and enrolments. In 2017-18, the US had 20.6 million students enrolled in 4,724 HE institutions, while the UK had 2.34 million students enrolled in 164 UK universities and 186,415 enrolled in HE programmes in colleges of further education and another 71,050 attending private providers. Moreover, virtually all UK institutions are ‘public,’¹ whereas three-fifths of US institutions are private (Association of Colleges 2015; Universities UK 2018; US National Center for Education Statistics 2019). In addition, the US spends considerably more on tertiary education: 2.5% of GDP versus 1.7% for the UK in 2016 (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 2019, Table C2.1).

Despite these differences, both England and the US evidence similar goals and issues with regard to HE. Both countries have committed to a sharp rise in HE participation levels and widening participation among working class and minority youth (UK Dept. for Business, Innovation, and Skills [UK BIS] 2015, pp. 13, 22, 36; UK BIS 2016a, para. 2.2, 2.3; UK BIS 2016b, pp. 7-8, 41; US Office of the President 2009; see also Callender & Dougherty 2018).

Five Major Strands in Access and Completion Policy

In pursuing greater access to and success in HE for a larger and more diverse body of students, both England² 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 these policy ensembles, we examine five major policy strands that England and the US are pursuing in order to improve HE access and completion:

- Provision of information and guidance to facilitate higher education access
- Outreach from HE institutions
- Student financial aid
- Affirmative action or contextualisation in HE admissions
- HE retention and completion efforts

These policy strands do not exhaust the various policies both countries are pursuing to expand and equalize access to HE.³ However, the strands selected are major ones and they illuminate the variety of policies both nations have developed to propel students into and through HE.

Provision of Information and Guidance to Facilitate Higher Education Access

Both England and the US have made major efforts to provide students, parents, and teachers with information relevant to HE access and success, especially about financial aid (UK BIS 2016a; US Office of the President 2014b).⁴ Where England and the US differ is in their focal point in providing what is called college counselling and precollege outreach in the US and information, advice, and guidance (IAG) in England. To bridge this difference, we will use the term “information and guidance” to refer to both the US and English programmes.

Arguably, the US provides somewhat stronger policy support for efforts in early secondary school to inform students about why HE is important and how to prepare for it. By contrast, England has the more extensive policy support for providing students in late secondary school with information about HE options.

Efforts to Support Higher Education Aspirations and Academic Preparation

Policies to inform and guide students during early secondary school reflect awareness that students are making fateful choices regarding their academic preparation for HE 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 HE in general and selective institutions and programmes in particular (Adelman 1999; Chowdry, Crawford, Dearden, Goodman, & Vignoles 2013; Moore, Mountford-Zimdars, & Wiggans 2013; Perna 2005; UK BIS 2015). Such choices are strongly affected by the quality of information, advice, and guidance provided by schools and other sources to students and their parents (McDonough 2005; Moore et al. 2013; Perna, Rowan-Kenyon, Thomas, Bell, Anderson, & Liet 2008; Sutton Trust 2008).

Neither England nor the US does a very good job of providing policy support for effective information, advice, and guidance 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 HE and how best to prepare for it.

Most US high schools provide counsellors who, among other tasks, offer HE advice. However, particularly in public schools, there are too few counselling staff members, especially in schools in low-income and minority areas. A survey of US high schools by the College Board (2011) found that in schools where 75% or more of students were poor (that is, receiving free or reduced-price school lunch), the student to counsellor ratio was 427 to 1, while in schools where 24% or fewer of the students were poor, the comparable figure was 352 to 1. Furthermore, in schools where 75% or more of the students were of minority background, the student to counsellor ratio was 429 to 1, while in schools with a minority percentage of 24% or less the comparable figure was 359 to 1 (College Board 2011, pp. 49-50). Compounding these high student to counsellor ratios is the problem that counsellors often have to devote considerable time to students with behavioral and emotional problems, leaving relatively little time for college counseling (McDonough, 2005).

To remedy the social class and racial gap in counselling resources, the US federal government funds an extensive array of 'TRIO' programmes such as Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) to improve student awareness in middle school and secondary school. These federal programmes fund state and local programmes run by HE institutions and community organizations to provide low-income students with advice on the importance of pursuing HE, what secondary school courses to select, how to fill out HE applications, and how to secure financial aid (Cahalan 2013; Haskins & Rouse 2013; US Department of Education 2014;

Venezia & Jaeger 2013). In addition, states such as California, Illinois, New York, Texas, and Washington also operate extensive efforts to disseminate information about HE to students in secondary school (Barnett, Corrin, Nakanishi, Bork, Mitchell, & Sepanik 2012; Howell, Kurlaender, & Grodsky 2010; Kirst & Venezia 2004). In addition to the federal and state programmes, there are several well-known private programmes such as AVID, Aspire, College Advising Corps, College Possible, I Have a Dream, Kalamazoo Promise, and Project Grad (Cahalan 2013). Many of these state and private outreach programs have benefited greatly from injections of funding from private foundations, particularly the Gates and Lumina foundations but also the Jack Kent Cooke and other smaller foundations.

Many of these programmes have produced positive results, as indicated by several well-known evaluations varying in methods used (for reviews, see Cahalan 2013; Haskins & Rouse 2013). To be sure, a randomized control trial of the federally funded Upward Bound programme for high school students found on average “no detectable effect” on whether students enrolled in college, what type of college they entered, or whether they applied for or received financial aid (Seftor, Mamun, & Schirm 2009). Upward Bound provides academic tutoring and counselling on secondary school course selection, college applications, and financial aid (US Department of Education, 2014). However, the Seftor et al. study has been criticized for various methodological errors that led to underestimating impacts (Cahalan 2013). Moreover, other studies have found substantial impacts of federally funded outreach programs. A quasi-experimental, propensity-score matched sample study of the Upward Bound Math-Science (UBMS) Programme (which involved intensive exposure to mathematics and the sciences) found that those selected for the program were more likely to enroll in four-year colleges and more selective ones at that, take more math and science courses, and complete a bachelor’s degree than those who applied to UBMS but were not selected (Seftor & Calcagno 2010). A further quasi-experimental, propensity-score matching study of another well-known federal programme for middle school students, Talent Search, found substantial and statistically significant positive impacts on graduation from high school, application and award of financial aid, and college entrance. As with Upward Bound, Talent Search provides academic tutoring and counselling on secondary school course selection, college applications, and financial aid (Constantine, Seftor, Martin, Silva, & Myers 2006; US Department of Education, 2014). Furthermore, a number of experimental and quasi-experimental studies of state and private programs have also found

positive and statistically significant results. For example, using a randomized control trial, Avery (2013) found that the private College Possible programme in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota had a positive impact on enrollment in more selective four-year colleges. Meanwhile, a quasi-experimental study of the Texas GO Center advising programme, using propensity-score matching, found that the programme improved higher education applications and acceptances, especially for students exposed to the programme for two years (Cunha, Miller, & Weisburt 2018).

Despite this profusion of efforts, coverage of students is still quite incomplete, even taking into account federal, state, and private programmes. For example, the Council for Opportunity in Education has estimated that the federal TRIO programmes (including Upward Bound, Talent Search, and other programmes) together reach less than 7% of the 11 million students eligible (Venezia & Jaeger 2013). Moreover, though several states have well developed programmes that supplement these federal programmes, many other states have no state or private programmes of any significant size.

England also provides relatively poor policy support for information and guidance in early secondary school, particularly in recent years. It did make a notable effort with the creation of the Aimhigher programme in 2004, run by HE institutions but funded indirectly by the government (Emmerson, Frayne, McNally, & Silva 2006; Harrison 2012). However, Aimhigher was closed in 2011 after losing government funding (Attwood 2010) and was replaced by a smaller-scaled and less well-funded effort, the National Networks for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO). Under the NNCO, responsibility for information and guidance for 16-18 year olds was devolved to secondary schools (UK OfSTED 2013, 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, Hayton, & Tang 2015). The NNCO catchment areas encompassed 97% of all schools, but their networks for collaborative action did not reach deep into those schools and the networks had difficulty establishing effective relationships with schools. Much of the networks' work was devoted to developing web-based coordination of the school outreach efforts of HE institutions. Significantly, the resources were inadequate to develop school counselling capacity in depth (see HEFCE 2016).

Meanwhile, in the case of university outreach under the aegis of university Access Agreements (currently Access and Participation Plans), the government has encountered

institutional resistance to focusing their efforts on outreach rather than on providing more extensive financial aid (UK BIS 2014) (see below for more). The NNCO was replaced in 2017 by the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP). The aim is to increase HE participation in localities where participation rates are low overall and lower than expected. The main focus is to promote awareness by schools and colleges of available outreach activities and build more where needed. However, the number of students now being served through NCOP is small: only 120,000 in 2017-2018 (UK OfS, n.d. A). Moreover, the future of the programme and its funding is uncertain.

Despite the NNCO, NCOP, and university Access and Participation Plans (see below), the devolution of responsibility for information and guidance for 16-18 year olds to schools seemingly has resulted in a weakening of HE advising in the state (public) schools (UK BIS 2014; UK OfSTED 2013; Universities UK 2016; Whitty et al. 2015). 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)

Partly as a result of these limitations, some minor changes to provision have been implemented (UK Department of Education [UK DfE] 2017) but these are unlikely to have a substantive impact.

Efforts to Provide Information on Higher Education Costs and Programme Features

Both England and the US have mounted extensive policy efforts to provide information about higher education options, including finance and programme features. The UK government-sponsored website, Unistats (<https://unistats.direct.gov.uk>), has provided extensive information on higher education costs and other programme features. Unistats data have been made public both through a central Unistats website and through a requirement that each HE institution provide access to a selection of the Unistats data (the Key Information Set) on its

website. In September 2019, the Office for Students launched a successor system, Discover Uni, which has many of the same features (UK Office for Students [OfS] 2019a). Meanwhile, the US government sponsors similar sites such as the College Navigator and the College Scorecard. Moreover, the US government has required higher education institutions eligible to enrol students receiving federal financial aid to provide a net-price calculator on their webpages (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

While there is substantial overlap between the English and US websites in the kinds of information provided, there are also substantial differences. The key one is that the English website 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 English website provides much more extensive information. It includes data not only on retention rates but also on instructional practices, learning outcomes, student support, student satisfaction, and postgraduate employment outcomes including earnings (Dougherty & Callender 2017, Tables 2 and 3; UK OfS 2019a).

Where the US has pioneered is in the use of the new social media to reach students (Castleman, Schwartz, & Baum 2015; Universities UK 2016, 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 et al. 2015). For example, Castleman and 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 higher education that fall. In a randomized 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 forms and interpreting financial aid award letters and tuition bills from their intended colleges. Castleman and Page examined the impact of this text-messaging intervention in a randomized control trial in three sites (Dallas, Texas; Lawrence and Springfield, Massachusetts; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) involving random assignment either to a treatment group receiving text messaging or a control group that did not. Three different outcomes were measured (overall enrolment, enrolment in four-year college, and enrolment in two-year college) in each of the three sites. Castleman & Page found statistically significant positive impacts for two of nine outcomes: two-

year enrolments in Dallas (5 percentage points higher) and overall enrolments in Lawrence and Springfield (7 percentage points higher). The probit regressions included controls for gender, race/ethnicity, family income, and high school grades. The authors attributed the lack of a stronger impact to small sample sizes in some sites and the presence at some sites of other outreach programs, which undercut the impact of their intervention (Castleman & Page 2015).

Outreach from HE Institutions

HE institutions' outreach efforts play an important role in information and guidance about HE finance and opportunities. A central element of the English effort to enlarge HE access and success was the establishment of a public, non-governmental Office for Fair Access (OFFA) that encouraged institutions to widen their intake and support less advantaged students. In 2018, under the Higher Education and Research Act of 2017, the Office for Students (OfS) took over OFFA's duties (UK National Archives 2017; see also UK BIS 2016b).

A key instrument through which OFFA and OfS have worked is regulation of the Access Agreements and, later, Access and Participation Plans that most English institutions are required to file. Access Agreements were introduced in 2006 as a result of the shift to allowing public institutions to charge tuition fees for full-time undergraduates of up to £3,000 a year. Concerns were raised about the impact of increased tuition on widening participation, so institutions charging increased tuition were required to file Access Agreements in which they specified how they would widen HE participation. Following a further increase in tuition fees to a maximum of £9,000 in 2012 and £9,250 in 2017, institutions charging tuition above £6,750 a year have been required to produce Access Agreements and, from the academic year 2019-20 onwards, Access and Participation Plans (Sutton Trust 2015; Whitty et al. 2015). All but one English university and many further education colleges now charge above this sum and thus are required to produce these plans.

In their Access Agreements, English institutions had 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 would be undertaken and how much would be spent on them, and set performance targets (UK BIS 2016a, sec. 4.2). The new Access and Participation Plans are similar in intent to their predecessors. However, the plans will cover three to five years

rather than one year in order to allow HEIs to set more ambitious targets. Moreover, there is stronger emphasis on how universities will tackle gaps between disadvantaged students and their peers across the student lifecycle – including admissions, attainment and successful progression beyond higher education: ‘The gaps of concern include discrepancies in the entry and drop-out rates between the most and least advantaged students, as well as gaps in degree attainment between white and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students. Each university’s plan must include ambitious targets to reduce the gaps they identify, and evidence-based and robust measures to deliver improvements’ (UK OfS 2019b). The OfS’s target is to halve the gap in entry rates between the most and least represented students by 2024-25 and eliminate it altogether by 2038-39. This will require a substantial reduction in the number of students from the most privileged backgrounds enrolling in HE, unless the sector expands significantly (UK OfS 2018). Consequently, the OfS has adopted a more vocal approach to the Access and Participation Plans unlike OFFA’s more voluntaristic approach to the Access Agreements. This includes 'enhanced monitoring' by the OfS entailing additional reporting requirements on commitments made in the plans, specific actions to address areas of weakness, requirements to change plans, or interventions from the Director for Fair Access and Participation.

It is hard to determine how effective the Access Agreements were. University enrolments rose sharply among 18 year olds in the most disadvantaged quintile of neighbourhoods, from 11.2% in 2006-07 to 19.5% in 2016-17 (UK OFFA 2017, p. 13). A survey of all English HE institutions found that over half of the respondents agreed that since the introduction of Access Agreements the proportion of underrepresented groups entering their institution had improved (Bowes, Thomas, Peck, Moreton, & Birkin 2013b). Yet, this increase in HE access of underrepresented students cannot be simply attributed to the impact of the greater university outreach efforts and the use of Access Agreements. The rise in the number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds entering HE has likely more to do with the following developments: improvements in secondary school educational attainment; HE institutions reaching the saturation point for entry by upper class and middle-class students; the desire of HE institutions to expand, including accepting students with vocational as against academic secondary school qualifications, because a greater proportion of their income is now based on tuition rather than government funding; and recently, the lifting of the cap on the number of students universities can recruit.

Still, it is likely that Access Agreements played some role in the greater access of disadvantaged students to English HE because there is evidence that institutions modified their outreach efforts in response to the demands of producing their Access Agreements. Total expenditure on widening participation activity (not including financial aid) rose from £146.9 million in 2012-13 to £296.4 million in 2015-16 (UK OFFA 2017, p. 25). Moreover, institutions reported that Access Agreements helped raise the profile and status of widening participation efforts within their institutions, led them to prioritise improving achievement and success among under-represented groups, and drove the development of better systems for measuring the impact of their widening participation efforts (Bowes et al. 2013b).

Whatever the limitations of the English Access Agreements and Access and Participation Plans, there is no US counterpart. US institutions do make major efforts to reach out to students and their parents. They maintain websites, publish and mail brochures and course catalogues, 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 2016). However, US institutions are not obliged to create and publish anything like Access and Participation Plans, where they publicly commit to certain goals and concomitant outreach and retention practices and are evaluated on their success in these efforts. 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 organisation like England's 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 HE systems rely heavily on student tuition to finance HE. In 2015-16, US public HE institutions received 21% of their total revenues from tuition and fees (US National Center for Education Statistics 2019, Table 333.10).⁵ And the figure is even higher for the UK: 47% of HE

institutions' total income in 2017-18 came from tuition fees (Universities UK 2019).⁶ As a result, both countries operate extensive systems of student financial aid to help counter financial barriers to HE access (Callender 2017; Goldrick-Rab 2016; Scott-Clayton 2017). However, there are major differences within this overarching commonality.

England today emphasizes student loans and puts much less reliance on grants or scholarships (Callender 2013; Universities UK 2016). Until 2016, the government administered a national programme of means-tested educational maintenance grants towards low-income students' living expenses (Belfield, Britton, Dearden, & van der Erve 2017; Callender and Wilkinson 2013, Sutton Trust 2015; Whitty, Anders, Hayton, Tang, & Wisby 2016). In addition, HE institutions provide institutional grants or 'bursaries' in connection with their wider participation efforts governed by Access and Participation Plans. However, only a minority of student receive such aid, and the amount received tends to be small compared with government provided aid, and varies by the institution attended (Callender & Wilkinson 2013; Murphy, Scott-Clayton, & Wyness 2017).

Today the only government-funded student aid in England are loans, the terms and conditions of which are set by the government. These loans cover all of a student's tuition fees – currently a maximum of £9,250. In addition, maintenance loans towards students' living costs are available. All English domiciled undergraduates attending a UK HE institution are eligible for these loans, although the amount of maintenance loan received depends on family income, unlike tuition loans which depend only on the tuition charged. By 2016-17, 95% of full-time undergraduates attending public HE institutions had taken out a tuition fee loan and 89% a maintenance loan (UK Student Loans Company 2018).

A distinguishing feature of loans in England is that the repayments are income-contingent, depending on graduates' earning. By contrast, the majority of US loans are 'mortgage' style with repayments made irrespective of a graduate's income. Most US loans are repaid over a fixed time period – usually under a standard 10-year repayment plan - with monthly repayments determined by the total amount borrowed plus interest. There is extensive evidence that the US's mortgage style loans contribute to financial hardship and high levels of default (Barr at al. 2019; Scott-Clayton 2018).

In England, students start to repay their loans on graduation once their income reaches a repayment threshold – currently £25,000 a year. They then pay 9% of their income above the

repayment threshold until they have paid off their loan but after 30 years after graduation, any outstanding debt is written off. Their loans carry an interest rate of inflation plus 3% while studying. Once students graduate, the interest rate is linked to their earnings, rising from just inflation to inflation plus 3% once their earnings reach a certain level – currently £45,000. Loan repayments are taken directly and automatically from the graduate's salary through the tax system.

Since 2016, most English domiciled postgraduate students also have qualified for government funded income-contingent loans. Students taking Masters courses can get loans of up to £10,609 for the duration of their course while students following Doctoral courses are eligible for up to £25,700. The loans have similar repayment conditions as described above, except postgraduates pay 6% of their income above £21,000 while simultaneously paying off their undergraduate loan.

These income-contingent loans by design protect students from excessive repayments and financial hardship if, on leaving university, they experience low earnings, are unemployed or take time out of the labour market to care for children or elderly relatives. Students cannot default on their loan repayments. Indeed, it is the government, not students or their HE institutions, which bears any financial penalties associated with low graduate earnings. These 'hidden' subsidies associated with such protections are considerable. The latest government estimate suggests that for every £100 the government lends to undergraduate students, it will only get back £53 – a subsidy of 47% (UK DfE 2019), representing the government's financial contribution to undergraduate HE.

Meanwhile, the US student aid system, while utilizing loans heavily, still funnels much of its aid to students through grants and other non-loan forms. In academic year 2017-18, 70% of total undergraduate student aid and 34% of graduate student aid came in the form of grants, tax refunds, and other non-loan forms. Meanwhile, loans made up 30% of total undergraduate student aid and 66% of total graduate student aid. The overwhelming amount of total student aid comes from the federal government: 61% of undergraduate aid and 72% of graduate student aid. The remainder was provided by institutions and various private sources (College Board 2018a, pp. 13-14).

Need-based grant aid such as the Pell Grant for undergraduates is particularly favoured in the United States because it has a significant impact on raising college-going rates. The best

estimate, aggregating across several studies, is that every additional \$1000 in grant aid raises college-going rates by 4% on average, with higher impacts for low-income students. Meanwhile, the enrollment impact of loans and tuition tax credits is significantly lower (Dynarski & Scott-Clayton 2013, pp. 79-80; Long 2008, p. 22; Scott-Clayton 2017, pp. 19-20).

In the US there are numerous types of loans available with differing repayment plans, unlike in England. Income-based loans, while present in the US, play a smaller role than in England. In March 2018, only 29% of the borrowers in repayment on federal Direct Loans were in 'income-driven repayment' plans (College Board 2018a, p. 20). Moreover, the terms of repayment on these loans are considerably more onerous in the US than in England. Students must apply every year for income-contingent repayment. Payments do not adjust automatically to changes in students' income; payments are dependent on the previous year's income students report 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 (Barr et al. 2019).

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 HE opportunities and choices (Callender & Jackson 2008; Callender & Mason 2017; Long 2008; Scott-Clayton 2017). For instance, a 2015 study in England of a nationally representative sample of 17 to 21 year old prospective HE students taking an HE entry qualification found that working class students were far more likely than those from other social classes to be deterred from applying to university because of fear of debt, even after controlling for their prior academic attainment, gender, ethnicity and other characteristics. In addition, that study found that debt aversion among working class students had become more entrenched over time (Callender & Mason 2017). Debt aversion also influences students' choice of institution. A recent English study on the take-up of student loans among current students confirms the relationship between debt aversion and loan take-up. The more debt averse the student, the less likely they were to take out a student loan. To avoid taking out a loan, especially a maintenance loan, students lived at home while studying, limiting their options to only, or mainly, their local higher education institutions (de Gayardon, Callender & Green 2019). Also, there is increasing evidence that loan indebtedness may be distorting post-graduation life-course outcomes and behaviour. For example, fear of debt appears to affect the occupational choices of students, leading them to take subjects and jobs that may not interest them but make it more likely they

can pay off their loans (Bowes, Thomas, Peck, & Nathwani 2013a; Dynarski & Scott-Clayton 2013; Long 2008).

Affirmative Action or Contextualisation in HE Admissions

A prominent feature of HE access in the US since the 1970s has been a commitment on the part of most selective HE institutions to affirmative action in admissions (Bowen & Bok 1998; Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin 2005; Espenshade, Chung, & Walling 2004; Hinrichs 2013; Howell 2010; Karabel 2005; Warikoo 2016). UK institutions have something rather similar in the form of contextualised admission for institutions (Boliver, Crawford, Powell, & Craige 2017; Bridger, Shaw, & Moore 2012; Lane & Parry 2015; Mountford-Zimdars 2016; Supporting Professionalism in Admissions 2016; Warikoo 2016).

Affirmative action in the US involves 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 HE institutions are not allowed to use quotas in admissions decisions. However, institutions can consider 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 significant impact 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 (2010) estimates that eliminating affirmative action would reduce minority enrolment at the most selective US four-year colleges and universities by 10.2%.

The UK has elements of affirmative action in the form of 'contextualised admissions,' which is strongly supported by England's Office for Students.⁷ The emphasis is on some of the underlying factors associated with the link between social class and academic attainment: for example, attendance of a low performing secondary school; living in an area with a high level of financial, social, or economic deprivation; and living in a neighbourhood that has a low progression rate to higher education. This contextualisation takes several different forms. At a 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 potentially offering them institutional financial aid or ‘bursaries’ and targeted student service supports (Boliver, Gorard, & Siddiqui 2019; Bridger et al. 2012; Moore et al. 2013; Universities UK 2016; see also Mountford-Zimdars 2016; Supporting Professionalism in Admissions 2016). A study of the admissions process of the Sutton Trust group of 30 highly selective universities found that 18 of them stated that they prioritised ‘contextually indicated applicants’ for a reduced offer one or more grades below the standard offer (Boliver et al. 2017, pp. 18-19).

Despite the above, it remains true that many UK institutions are reluctant to use contextualised admissions or wish to offer only relatively minimal adjustments of offers (Boliver et al. 2017; Bridger et al. 2012). One reason is that institutions fear that reduced offers may result in admitting students who will not succeed at university, even though the evidence does not bear this out (Boliver et al. 2019). Another reason for foot dragging on contextualised admissions is that it has been strongly criticized by representatives of selective and expensive private schools whose stock in trade is securing admission of their pupils to selective universities (Mangan, Hughes, Davies, & Slack 2010; see also Bridger et al. 2012). Thirdly,, many selective universities still 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 non-white students they enrol have high potential to join the best and brightest. Studies of the impact of the use of contextualised admissions find that it has only a small impact on who is admitted and the number of applicants who are accepted with lower grades is low (Moore et al. 2013). Contextualised admissions are used at selective institutions mostly to distinguish between equally prepared applicants. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, entry tariffs are used in many league tables as an indicator of the HE institution’s quality and prestige.

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).⁸ No doubt this reflects 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; Parry 2016; see also Chang, Denson, Saenz, & Misa 2006; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin 2002).⁹

HE Efforts to Improve Retention and Completion

In recent years, policy attention in both England and the US has moved beyond considering only HE access to also considering HE completion and success. This has stemmed from awareness of the 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, 2014a; Universities UK 2016; Vignoles & Powdthavee 2010). The rising interest in HE completion has brought attention to what institutions can do to better retain students and move them toward completion (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins 2015; David 2010; Gorard, Adnett, May, Slack, Smith, & Thomas 2007; Seidman 2012; Thomas 2012; Universities UK 2016).

US HE institutions have long had policies and programmes devoted to promoting student retention and graduation (Seidman 2012). This effort responds to the rather poor completion rates for US higher education institutions, particularly those focused on sub-baccalaureate preparation. Among students entering US higher education institutions in the fall of 2003, 36% had left college without a degree when followed up six years later, with the figure for sub-baccalaureate entrants even higher at 46% (Skomsvold, Radner, & Berkner 2011, Table 2.0A-C). The student retention and graduation programmes mounted by U.S. higher education institutions have included such things as tutoring and developmental education to improve academic skills, advising and guidance, mental health counselling, and social programming (Arminio et al. 2012; Bailey et al. 2015; McClellan & Stringer 2016; Seidman 2012). 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 HE 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 randomized control trials (Cahalan 2013).

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 2017; Lahr 2018; Lumina Foundation 2016; US Department of Education 2011a). For example, the Obama administration called for sharply increasing the number of students not just entering HE 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, enhancing academic advising, and facilitating student movement through and between institutions (Bailey et al. 2015; Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation 2017; Cahalan 2013; Lahr 2018; Lumina Foundation 2016).

Recently, the concept of ‘guided student pathways’ has provided a principle for conceptually and practically organizing many of these interventions to improve college retention and graduation (Bailey et al. 2015; Dougherty, Lahr, & Morest 2019; Jenkins, Lahr, & Fink 2017; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, & Person 2006; Rosenbaum, Ahearn, & Rosenbaum 2017). This new approach has four central elements: systematically designing courses and programs to facilitate transition to employment and further education; creating a comprehensive educational plan for every student and emphasizing guided student choice of programs and careers; revamping advising structures and processes to ensure that students are making timely progress along their educational plan; and improving instruction, particularly in developmental education. The guided pathways concept has been enthusiastically supported by the federal government, the Gates Foundation and other philanthropies, the American Association of Community Colleges, many state coordinating boards, and a multitude of community colleges (Bailey et al. 2015; Jenkins et al. 2017). For example, the American Association of Community Colleges is leading an initiative supporting guided pathways reforms at 30 colleges across the country. And the California Legislature has appropriated \$150 million to support the implementation of guided pathways reforms by the 114 California community colleges, which serve over 2 million students annually (Bailey et al. 2015; Jenkins et al. 2017).

In England, there has been a similar, although later developing, desire to improve student support and completion (Gorard et al. 2007; Thomas 2012; Thomas, Hill, O’Mahony, & Yorke 2017; Universities UK 2016). 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 8% in 2017-18. However, the rates of non-persistence are considerably higher for men, part-time students, mature entrants, students from families of lower socio-economic status, and members of certain minority racial/ethnic backgrounds (UK HESA 2019, Tables T3a, T3b; Universities UK 2016). Recently, 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 programs; 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; Thomas 2012; Thomas et al. 2017; Universities UK 2016).

As with the US, 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). In 2016, the OFFA – again reflecting government pressure – pushed for institutional Access Agreements to address non-completion. Consequently, institutional expenditures on student retention and success, through the Access Agreements, rose from £72.5 million in 2012-13 to £117.1 million in 2015-16 (UK OFFA 2017, p. 25). The OfS is continuing this policy in its regulation of Access and Participation Plans and has set a goal of eliminating the unexplained gap in non-continuation between the most and least represented groups by 2024-25, and to eliminate the gap entirely by 2030-31 (UK BIS 2014; UK OfS 2018).

In England, HE institutions’ interest in improving the student experience is driven not just by government pressure but also institutional desires – particularly among less selective and less research-intensive institutions – to remain competitive in the market for student enrolment

(Callender 2013; Temple, Callender, Grove, & Kersh 2016). Dropout is costly. Dropout rates also affect institutional standing in league tables, such as the *Times Higher Education* rankings, that play a major role in student choice of institution (particularly among students from wealthier backgrounds) and are vital to an institution's reputation (HEFCE 2015; Reay et al. 2005).

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 recognize, or is even hostile to, their cultures (Archer, Leathwood, & Hutchings 2002; Burke 2012; Bowes et al. 2013a; Crozier, Reay, & Clayton 2010; Gorard et al. 2007; Harper & Hurtado 2007; Reay, David, & Ball 2005; Stephens, Fryberg, & Marcus 2012; UK BIS 2014). Despite this, there has been little governmental attention to how to address these 'socio-cultural incongruities.' Neither England nor the US has developed substantial government policies directed to changing institutional cultures or the curriculum to make them more receptive to and inclusive of the cultures of working class and racial/ethnic minority students.

Summary and Conclusions

In this paper, we have explored the similarities and dissimilarities of HE policies in England and the US with an eye to what each country, as well as others, can learn from the other with regard to reducing social class and racial/ethnic differences in HE access and success. We have focused on five policy strands: provision of information and guidance; outreach from HE institutions; student financial aid; affirmative action or contextualisation in HE admissions; and institutional efforts to improve student completion.

In reviewing these five policy strands, we would argue that each country has much to learn from the other.¹⁰ This is in keeping with the long history of policy borrowing between the UK and US (Forsey, Davies, & Walford 2008; Whitty et al. 2016). But we would argue that other countries also could benefit from the experiences of these two countries as they attempt to expand and widen access and success in HE. Other countries – particularly those that resemble the US and England in social structure, educational system, and governmental arrangements --

may well find the recommendations made here of interest. Much policy borrowing in educational policy has occurred between the US, England, Continental Europe, Canada, Australia, India, and Chile: for example, the use of school choice policies in elementary and secondary education and the use of accreditation and performance funding as a means of quality assurance in higher education (Forsey et al. 2008; Kivisto & Kohtamaki, 2016; Rhoades & Sporn 2002; Whitty et al. 2016). Much of that policy borrowing has had a neoliberal flavour, with an emphasis on fostering greater efficiency and market responsiveness, so instead we are emphasizing here policy borrowing that focuses on fostering greater equality.

The US would benefit from following England in using Access and Participation Plans to govern the outreach efforts of its universities, making more use of income-contingent loans, and expanding the range of information and guidance provided to prospective higher education students about the programmes and institutions they are considering. Even if Access Agreements (and their successor Access and Participation Plans) have not markedly democratized access to HE in England so far, they have encouraged English institutions to become more thoughtful and persistent in their adoption of practices that might result in widening HE access. It would therefore seem useful for the US to consider using Access and Participation Plans at a time when there is rising concern about the large degree of social class and racial/ethnic inequality in access to HE generally, and to selective institutions particularly (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation 2017; Lumina Foundation 2016; US Office of the President 2014a). Requiring Access and Participation Plans 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. At the same time, we would caution that any such focus on institutional outcomes should not be tied to resource flows, in the form of performance funding, without very careful consideration of how to avoid the many obstacles and unintended consequences often accompanying such funding (Dougherty & Natow 2019).

In principle, the US government has the power to require Access and Participation Agreements due to the heavy dependence of virtually all US higher education institutions on government funding of institutional operations, research and development, and (through student aid) student tuition fees. In academic year 2015-16, federal, state, and local government appropriations, grants, and contracts accounted for 32.2% of the total revenues of all higher

education institutions. Even private institutions received 13.2% of their revenues from similar government sources (US National Center for Education Statistics 2019, Tables 333.10, 333.40, 333.55). It should be noted that neither of these figures reflects the fact that the tuition revenue of these institutions is heavily subsidized 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 2019). This dependence of even private higher education institutions on government funding has meant that they too are subject to a host of regulatory demands such as providing the federal government with enrollment and completion data, putting a net-cost calculator on their webpages, adhering to the Civil Rights Act prohibition on racial and other discrimination, observing Title IX prohibitions on sex discrimination, and so forth. This financial dependence would allow the US federal and state governments to extend their efforts to increase equality of access by requiring Access and Participation Plans.

Second, the US can learn from England about ways to address the current crisis in the US student loan system. US graduates owe \$1.3 trillion in student loans, and seven million borrowers are in default, and even more are in arrears, with the problem being most extreme for students of colour and students in for-profit colleges (Scott-Clayton 2018). England provides an example of how the government can address these problems, by providing a universal system of income-contingent loans that does not require yearly reapplication (Barr et al. 2019). The US already has federal income-contingent loans programmes, so such loans would not be entirely novel, but the US programmes do not reach the majority of students receiving federal loans and their administration is far more cumbersome than in England. Hence, there is much room for improvement. Among the biggest benefits of this extension of income-contingent loans are the promise to reduce the high US loan default rate and, in turn, reduce the debt aversion of working class students fearful of such default (Barr et al. 2019). However, policymakers in the US and elsewhere need to keep in mind that income-contingent loans 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 (UK DfE 2019).

Finally, 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). These data elements have been repeatedly evaluated so there is reason for confidence in their validity and reliability (see Diamond, Roberts, Vorley, Birkin, Evans, Sheen, Nathwani, 2014). Programme-specific information about income returns is particularly important both in the UK and US because there can be more variation in income returns by programme than by institution (Davies 2012; Scott-Clayton 2016). Such information may be particularly useful to first-generation college goers who are less apprised of the income payoffs of different programmes and more dependent on occupational earnings, given their lesser inherited wealth. However, the use of such programme-specific data needs to be treated with caution and not used to penalise subjects that traditionally have low financial returns or to ignore the important nonmonetary benefits of HE. Besides publicizing income returns, the US could also follow the UK in providing programme-specific data on instructional conditions and student satisfaction. Such information is particularly important for working class, minority-ethnic, and female students who need to weigh how welcoming different institutions and programs will be to people with their background (Crozier, Reay, & Clayton 2010; Harper & Hurtado 2007). More information and more equal information is a key means of reducing inequalities produced by class, racial/ethnic, and gender differences in choices produced under conditions of unequal information provision and utilization (Dougherty 2018; McDonough 2005; Rosenbaum et al. 2006).

Trans-Atlantic trade should also flow to the east. England would benefit from following the US in making greater use of grant aid to students, devoting more policy attention to decisions students are making in early secondary school that affect their preparation for HE, and expanding its use of contextualised admissions. In the case of grant aid, it should remain an important part of the nation's student aid portfolio with the re-introduction of a national system of grants aimed at disadvantaged students. The evidence that working class and minority students may be leery of taking loans, even if repayment is income-contingent, suggests that loans should be complemented by other forms of student aid (Bowes et al. 2013a; Callender & Mason 2017). Moreover, there is evidence that grant aid has a greater impact than loans on enrolments, especially among disadvantaged students (Dearden, Hodge, Jin, Levine, & Williams 2014;

Dynarski & Scott-Clayton 2013; Scott-Clayton 2017). However, for grants to be effective, students need to know, in advance of application, that they will receive them (Callender & Wilkinson 2013; UK BIS 2014, see also Gorard et al. 2007).

Second, England should also consider a more extensive programme of government support for information and guidance in early secondary school (Universities UK 2016; Whitty & Clement 2015; see also UK BIS 2016a). There is extensive evidence that students lower in family income, parental occupation, and parental education are considerably less likely to know that 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; Reay et al. 2005; Sammons, Toth, & Sylva 2015). There are useful lessons to be drawn from the US experience with GEAR UP, Talent Search, and various state and private programs, in addition to England’s experience with its own Aimhigher programme and its successors (Cahalan 2013; Emmerson et al. 2006; Gorard et al. 2007; Harrison 2012; Haskins & Rouse 2013; Sutton Trust 2015).

Finally, while English universities do engage in contextualised admissions, they could do more, with important lessons to be learned from the US experience (Universities UK 2016; Whitty & Clement 2015). English universities 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)? Are there other ways of measuring ability to benefit from HE that would open up new opportunities for students coming from under-represented backgrounds? These questions have been subject to extensive debate in the US 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; Karabel 2005; 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 HE access and the most selective institutions is due to differences in academic preparation prior to HE (Adelman 1999; Chowdry et al. 2013; Gorard et al. 2007; Perna 2005; UK BIS 2015) and the understandable reluctance of less advantaged students to enter culturally unwelcoming institutions (Archer et al. 2002; Crozier et al. 2010; Mullen 2010; Reay et al. 2005). Moreover, we must not ignore that affirmative action policies

have been a political lightning rod in many countries, including the US, England, India, and Brazil (Karabel 2005; Mountford-Zimdars 2016; Pazich & Teranishi 2012; Warikoo 2016). This means that vigorous contextualised admissions policies need to be robustly explained, with their manifold benefits but also difficulties carefully detailed.

While we have focused on England and the US, we think that our policy recommendations carry wider applicability. Many other countries with somewhat similar educational structures, experiences, and challenges could learn useful lessons from the policy experiences of these two countries. Countries with mass higher education systems or the desire to create ones, may find it useful to ponder the lessons of the English and US efforts to grapple with the challenges not only of massively expanding higher education but also of equalizing social class, race-ethnicity, and gender access to and success in higher education. One of the most important lessons we would draw for any country is that the Anglo-American experience points to the great difficulty in combatting social inequality in higher education, that the educational amelioration of inequality cannot be divorced from its social amelioration, and that educational amelioration requires wide-ranging, persistent, self-reflective, and innovative effort over many years.

Our proposals may seem quixotic in a time of political reaction in both the US and England where there might seem to be little appetite for egalitarian reforms. However, we would argue that there are long-term currents in higher educational policymaking that underlie the ups and downs of the election cycle. The quest for greater equality of higher education access has continued in Republican as well as Democratic administrations, Conservative as well as Labour Governments. In large part, this continuity rests on the fact that policy leadership is lodged not just in the political leadership but also in the civil service, foundations and policy groups, and university researchers. Hence, we are aiming our recommendations in good part to this more permanent policy leadership, which then feeds ideas to the political leadership. And even when the national political leadership may lose interest for a while in egalitarian reform, the torch is picked up by the political leaders of subnational governments, whether Scotland and Wales or New York, Tennessee, and California.

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ENDNOTES

¹ UK institutions are public in that they have royal charters and other forms of public authorization and regulation.

² HE policy within the UK is devolved leading to policy divergence among the UK nations. Here we focus on England, unless stated otherwise.

³ In another report, we examine another two policies as well: performance funding for higher education and reliance on sub-baccalaureate institutions (including for-profit colleges) (Dougherty & Callender 2017).

⁴ For theoretical perspectives and research findings on the role of information in higher education access and choice,

see Dougherty (2018).

⁵ We should note, however, the burgeoning US movement for tuition-free provision of public higher education, particularly at community colleges (Li & Mishory 2018; National Conference of State Legislatures 2017).

⁶ 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, as compared to the average in-state tuition at US public four-year colleges and universities of \$10,230 in 2018-19 (College Board 2018b, p. 9; Murphy, Scott-Clayton, & Wyness 2017).

⁷ However, the OfS cannot regulate university admissions because this would be deemed as interfering with a university's autonomy.

⁸ 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 BIS 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.

⁹ However, see the interesting discussion in Reay, Crozier, and Clayton (2009) on how UK universities might benefit from greater attention to the pedagogical benefits of classroom diversity.

¹⁰ We make these arguments at greater length in Dougherty & Callender (2017).