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# *Higher Ambitions for Fair Access and Work Based Learning*

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- Constructive description
- From 'fair admissions' to 'recognition' through work-based learning
- Constructive description of the *Schwartz Report*
- Constructive description of 'Wider and Fairer Access to Higher Education' in *Higher Ambitions*
- A 'recognition' case study example
- Questions for discussion



# Constructive description



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- Dowling (2009) distinguishes between a 'forensic' approach to the analysis of texts, which might seek a 'discovery' or 'critique' of the world 'as it really is' and constructive approaches such as 'constructive description' or 'deconstruction'
- Constructive description emerges from my transaction with object texts and is reconstructed in the readers transaction with my text as an artefact
- Methodological approach
  - *Localisation and bounding of the text in the higher education field as an object of analysis*
  - *Identification of oppositions and alliances within the object text*
  - *Construction of modes of action by recontextualising identified oppositions and alliances*
  - *Analysis of the dynamics of the strategic distribution and exclusion of textual objects in relation to the discursive space constructed as modes of action*





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# From 'fair admissions' to 'recognition' through work-based learning

- Descriptions of fair admissions in the *Schwartz Report* (AHESG: 2004) operate to reinforce institutional autonomy in establishing how merit and potential are assessed even where this is non-valid and/or non-reliable and as such unfair
- Professional practice in admissions operates as as an abibi for unfair admissions practices
- Descriptions of wider and fairer access in *Higher Ambitions* (DBIS: 2009) operate reinforce institutional autonomy even where this leads to less valid access decisions
- The key changes described, to address issues of wider and fairer access, are primarily positioned as a matter of 'admissions' where autonomous universities act as gate-keepers
- Descriptions of work-based and employer-responsive provision, facilitated by the flexible use of credit, position access as a matter of the 'recognition' of learning
- A case study example of employer-responsive work-based learning demonstrates the inappropriateness of an 'admissions' approach



# Policy context for fair admissions



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- **A fundamental principle of social justice**

*“All those who have the potential to benefit from higher education should have the opportunity to do so”*

(DfES: 2003 p68)

- **Review by the Admissions to Higher Education Steering Group (Schwartz Review)**

- *the need to reinforce public confidence in the fairness and transparency of admissions arrangements;*
- *the diversity in the missions of providers of Higher Education, and of their students;*
- *maintaining the autonomy of institutions in academic matters including the systems and processes by which applicants are admitted.*

(AHESG: September 2003, Appendix 4)





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## Some issues for fair admissions identified in the Schwartz Report

- **The predicted A-level grades system**
  - *“An admissions system relying on predicted grades, only half of which are accurate, cannot be fair”*  
(AHESG: September 2004, p44)
- **Recognition of non-A-level qualifications**
  - *“uneven awareness of and response to the increasing diversity of applicants, qualifications and pathways into higher education”* (AHESG: September 2004, p5)
  - lack of awareness of non-A-level qualifications is *“not...a legitimate reason for not considering an applicant”* (AHESG: September 2004, p28)
- **The validity and reliability of applicant background information**
  - *“Applicants should be assessed as individuals...not...more or less favourably by virtue of his or her background”* (AHESG: September 2004, p35)
  - *“The type of school attended affects the predictive validity of examination grades...equal examination grades do not necessarily represent equal potential”*  
(AHESG: September 2004, p22)





# Schwartz principles for fair admissions

- **Transparency**
  - *Institutional Admissions Policies that inform applicants about the criteria and processes by which merit and potential to benefit from higher education will be assessed*
- **Selection for merit, potential and diversity**
  - *A fair admissions process should seek to assess merit and potential*
  - *Diversity of cohort is a positive educational attribute for all higher education contexts*
- **Reliability, validity and relevance**
  - *Methods used to assess merit and potential should be reliable and valid*
  - *Admissions processes that do not provide evidence of merit and potential are not relevant*
- **The minimising of barriers**
  - *Admissions processes should seek to minimise any barriers that are irrelevant to admissions requirements.*
- **Professionalism**
  - *To develop and share best practice in admissions*





# Modes of assessing merit and potential in the *Schwartz Report*

Reliability	Validity	
	Valid	Non-valid
Non-reliable	<i>Endorsed</i>	<i>Nepotistic</i>
Reliable	<i>Impartial</i>	<i>Reproductive</i>



# A discursive map of 'modes of assessing merit and potential'



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## Endorsed mode (*Valid/Non-reliable*)

- Non-standardised references, personal statements and individual information
- Predictive A-level grades

***A matter of National admissions systems and institutional autonomy/professionalism***

## Impartial mode (*Valid/Reliable*)

- Published institutional admissions policies
  - National credit systems
  - Post qualification admissions
  - Revised UCAS application forms
- To include standardised prompts for the production of personal statements and references etc*
- Inclusion of wider contextual factors to further validate examination results

***A matter of institutional autonomy/professionalism***

- Exclusion of non-relevant admissions factors
- A matter of institutional autonomy/professionalism***

## Nepotistic mode (*Non-valid/Non-reliable*)

- Non-relevant admissions factors
- Eg Preference to relatives of previous graduates or benefactors*
- A matter of institutional autonomy/professionalism?***

## Reproductive mode (*Non-valid/Reliable*)

- Non-relevant admissions factors
- Eg Treating applicants' automatically more or less favourably by virtue of background or school/college*
- A matter of institutional autonomy/professionalism***
- Examination results excluding wider contextual factors
- A matter of institutional autonomy/professionalism***
- Exclusion of non-A-level qualifications
- A matter of institutional autonomy/professionalism***





# The dynamic relations and textual strategies in the Schwartz Report

- **Recommendations for fair admissions practice and matters of institutional autonomy**
  - *Wider contextual factors to further validate examinations results*
  - *Exclusion of non-relevant factors*
  - *Inclusion of non-A-level qualifications*
- **Professionalism in admissions as an alibi for ‘unfair’ admissions practice**
  - *The terms of reference of the Review required the maintenance of institutional autonomy in academic matters– this constitutes the internal rules of the discourse ie what can/cannot be said*
  - *Admissions practices that are non-valid and/or non-reliable (‘unfair’) cannot be described as such as this would contravene institutional autonomy in academic matters*
  - *Promoting ‘professionalism in admissions’ avoids any direct challenge to ‘unfair’ institutional practices seeking an ‘exchange of narratives’ or an ‘equilibration’ (Dowling: 2009) in describing best practice in fair admissions*





# The policy context for *Higher Ambitions*

- **The Leitch Review of Skills**

*“Further improvements in the UK’s high skills base must come from workforce development and increased employer engagement...Stimulating high skills acquisition within the workforce will require closer collaboration between HE institutions and employers and employees, especially for part-time students and bespoke programmes” (Leitch: 2006, p60-62)*

- **Leitch Review higher-level skills ambitions**

- *40% of the adult population having higher-level skills (level 4 or above) by the year 2020*
- *70% of the people who this target would affect have already left school*

- **How can the 40% target be achieved?**

- *Part-time study in addition to work*
- *Work-based learning that recognises higher-level skills in the workplace*





# Wider and Fairer Access to Higher Education in *Higher Ambitions*

- **Wider and fairer access through major changes in the higher education system**
  - *“access to higher education is a question of basic social justice”* (DBIS: 2009, p8)
  - *“This requires a major change in the culture of our higher education system...a greater diversity of models of learning: part time, work-based, foundation degrees and studying whilst at home”*  
(DBIS: 2009, p9)
- **‘Traditional’ and ‘non-traditional’ students**
  - *‘Traditional students’ described as those “coming straight from school with A levels and studying full-time”* (DBIS: 2009, p30)
- **University autonomy**
  - *“the principle of university autonomy means that Government does not interfere with any university’s admissions procedures”* (DBIS: 2009, p35)





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# Key changes to promote wider and fairer access to higher education

- **Helping students set their sights on university**
  - *improving information, advice and guidance, raising the ambitions and aspirations of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds – arguably a deficit model of widening participation (Archer: 2003)*
  - *developing links and partnerships between universities, colleges, schools and the professions*
- **Recognising capability**
  - *“the use of appropriate contextual criteria can help to ensure that high-potential candidates are not missed by the system” (DBIS: 2009, p35)*
- **Widening access to our most selective universities**
  - *Progress made in widening access for those from under-privileged backgrounds is not reflected in the most selective universities*
  - *OFFA advice on better targeted use of access agreement variable tuition fees income*
- **More flexible routes into higher education**
  - *Part-time and workplace-based courses aimed particularly at mature students or those from non-conventional backgrounds – **the only change targeted at non-traditional students***

# Modes of access to higher education in *Higher Ambitions*



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Participation	Fairness	
	Impartial	Partial
Closed	<i>Admissional</i>	<i>Privileged</i>
Open	<i>Recognisational</i>	<i>Exempted</i>





# A discursive map of 'modes of access to higher education'

## **Admissional mode** (*Impartial/Participation closed*)

- Raising ambitions and aspirations for under privileged young people

*Aimhigher, school/university partnerships and better IAG*

- Inclusion of wider contextual factors to further validate examination results

### **A matter of institutional autonomy/professionalism**

- OFFA Report on the most selective universities

*Better targeted use of Access Agreement monies to promote fair access for talented young people*

- Flexible routes into higher education

*Foundation Degrees, advanced and higher apprenticeships, two year degree programmes, part-time courses*

## **Privileged mode** (*Partial/Participation closed*)

- Exclusion of wider contextual factors in consideration of examination results

### **A matter of institutional autonomy/professionalism**

- Lack of progress by the most selective universities in promoting fair access

## **Recognitional mode** (*Impartial/Participation open*)

- Flexible routes into higher education

*Workplace-based courses, employer-responsive provision*

- National credit framework

*Promoting progression into and through higher education, short credit-based courses*

## **Exempted mode** (*Partial/Participation closed*)

- Adults who do not pursue higher-level qualifications  
*60% of the adult population even if Leitch targets are met by 2020*







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# A 'recognition' case study example

- **Halifax Community Bank 'Journey in Practice' programme**
  - *Workforce development to raise the standards of retail banking practice across this national company*
  - *Higher level training for 600 Branch Managers, 300 Local Team Managers and 30 in-company training (Journey in Practice) Managers*
  - *The University worked with PTP partner to submit a tender for the contract, which was won*
- **Accreditation of the Journey in Practice programme**
  - *Branch Managers - 30 credits and level 6*
  - *Local Team/Journey in Practice Managers 40 credits at level 7*
- **Progression to University awards**
  - *The University is working with the employer to construct UG and PG provision that recognise the accredited programmes and lead to Advanced Diploma and Postgraduate Certificate awards*



# Questions for discussion



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- *Can the engagement between Halifax Community Bank and the University be coherently described as involving 'admissions'?*
- *How helpful is an 'admissions' approach to promoting fair access to higher education in meeting the Leitch higher-level skills target?*
- *Does employer engagement require a partial departure from university autonomy and does this imply a risk to academic standards?*
- *Should work-based learning providers promote 'recognition' as the prime mode of access to higher education?*

