

Unlocking the future of fair access: balancing collaboration and competition

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Office for
Students



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“Collaboration” on Wikipedia – examples include...

- The Roman Empire (“collaboration through ruling with visible control”)
- The Oneida Community (“practiced *Mutual Criticism*, where every member of the community was subject to criticism by committee or the community as a whole, during a general meeting”)
- The Manhattan Project
- The military-industrial complex
- Modern project management theory

Why collaborate in matters of equality in higher education?

- Before I start, some caveats:
 - “Access” and “participation” are, by now, very freighted terms which I would like to use less – I prefer discussing equality of opportunity
 - But the distinction between pre-HE and on-course spheres of policy action are important (with “transition” significant between them)
 - My intention here is to focus here on pre-HE sphere

Has competition been a good thing for HE equality policy and practice in the pre-HE space?

- Yes

- No

**The “business of WP” has become
a core part of the work of HE**

Where collaboration can support HE equality practice in pre-HE

- Expanding resources and capacity
- Matching expertise to the task
- Meaningful access to potential students
- Overcoming misaligned incentives on information
 - *In whose interest is it that an aspiring student should end up on the right course at the right institution to support their ambitions?*

Potential collaborators – connectors required?

- HE providers
- Schools
- FE colleges
- Third sector
- Businesses
- Local government



OfS's work in this area

- School-uni partnerships encouraged through APPs, though challenging times are ahead
- Equality of Opportunity Innovation Fund
- Third Sector Forum – plans to develop guidance on quality partnerships
- Uni Connect – new theory of change, but future is funding-dependent

Of course, the other obvious collaborators...



Students

A new approach to student contribution to OfS's work:

Student input – opportunities for students and their representatives to share what students think the OfS needs to know and hear our responses.

Student insight – what the OfS wants to understand about students' experiences and priorities, before, during and after higher education, in order to properly deliver our regulatory work.

Student information – what the OfS thinks students need to know, and information that should be freely available to students, before, during and after their involvement in higher education.

Student involvement – opportunities for students to contribute to our regulatory activity.

What we know so far...

- Students are consumers – but they don't think of themselves that way (except when they suddenly do...)
- What students *want* and what students *need* may not be the same thing (although students themselves are alert to this)
- Students mostly want strong relationships with their provider, even when things aren't working out
- “Students” may not be a very useful group to discuss collectively anyway

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The logo for the Office for Students, featuring a dark blue square with a yellow square in the top right corner containing the letters 'OfS' in white.

OfS

Thank you for listening

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