Designing an English Social Mobility Index

Professor David Phoenix

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About the Author

Professor David Phoenix is Vice-Chancellor of London South Bank University (LSBU) and Chief Executive of the LSBU Group which, in addition to the University, includes South Bank Colleges, South Bank Academies and South Bank Enterprises.

He is a Board Member of the National Centre for Universities and Business and of Universities UK, where he also serves as the elected lead on funding policy. He is a Trustee of the Science Museum Group and Chair of the Science and Industry Museum.

He was elected to the Fellowship of the Royal College of Physicians (Edinburgh) for his contribution to medical research and education. He was awarded an OBE for services to science and higher education and presented with the national Friendship Award (China) for services to the country.

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Foreword

Nick Hillman, Director of HEPI

Like many other people, I am sceptical of university league tables: they tend to oversimplify the multi-faceted roles that institutions play; they can embed rather than shake up existing hierarchies; and they are rarely responsive to the information requirements of different audiences. On the other hand, like others, I cannot resist the temptation to track which institutions are up and which are down in the many annual rankings. At HEPI, we have even sought to improve the way league tables are used – for example in *A Guide to UK League Tables in Higher Education* (2018) – which risks further encouraging their status.

Others are similarly conflicted. I once heard a conversation among senior figures at a higher education institution that began with agreement on the need to broaden access through initiatives like lower offers for disadvantaged applicants. The discussion moved on to the need to raise entry standards to bolster the institution's league table position. There was broad agreement on this too, but the two back-to-back decisions directly contradicted one another.

One anecdote from an old HEPI report neatly captures this tension. *Return on investment? How universities communicate with the outside world* (2017) by the journalist Richard Garner revealed how one of his employers, the *Daily Mirror*, so distrusted the first school league tables that they opted not to publish them:

> *They were misleading, or so the argument went, and did not give a true reflection of a school's worth. We still had to write a story about them, though, so I gathered together a*

printed version of the tables and put it on the desk beside me to refer to as I wrote my story. I lost track of the number of senior executives and reporters who queued up to look at them in order to find out how their son or daughter's school had fared. A wry smile formed on my lips. 'These league tables aren't going to go away if there is such a thirst for the knowledge in them', I thought.

For this reason, HEPI has looked at what other higher education rankings might supplement those that already exist. In 2018, we published *Benchmarking widening participation?* by Iain Martin, which rated institutions by how well they reflect society. The results upended other rankings. The following year, we published *Social mobility and elite universities* by Lee Elliot Major and Pallavi Amitava Banerjee, which recommended 'social mobility rankings for universities alongside, or as part of, current league tables' to 'track the graduation, employment and other outcomes of students from a range of backgrounds.'

In the following pages, the Vice-Chancellor of London South Bank University picks up this mantle and produces an English version of the US Social Mobility Index. This recognises institutions' success in boosting the outcomes of a high proportion of students and those institutions that push a smaller proportion of students a bigger distance. The results shake up the typical league-table order.

The goal of the new exercise is not only to reward success by publicising it but also to give less well-performing institutions an incentive to do better.

Executive summary

Positive social mobility benefits individuals in terms of personal advancement and the nation in terms of productivity. There are other social benefits aside.

Education, including higher education, is widely understood to be a key contributor to social mobility. However, without a measure of universities' impact on social mobility it is difficult to assess their individual or combined contribution to this agenda and therefore to understand fully the value of university education to individuals, to the country and its taxpayers.

We set out to identify a measure of universities' contributions to social mobility, combining the social distance travelled by graduates and the number of graduates transported. We have drawn upon the US Social Mobility Index to create a methodology which reflects the different data available in England. The result is an English Social Mobility Index (English SMI) which, we hope, will help universities and others to measure their success in achieving positive social mobility for their graduates.

Due to incompatible data sets, this index includes only English providers. The base dataset for Access and Continuation rates in the Index is the Office for Students' Access and Participation Plan data. This dataset only covers English institutions, and it is therefore not possible to include institutions from the rest of the UK. The principles of the index could be applied to institutions within Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales where data is comparable.

In creating this Index, we learned the often-made assumption that particular kinds of universities have more impact on social mobility than others was incorrect. Universities of all kinds can and do make a significant impact on social mobility. Our measure could help universities independently determine and evaluate their plans for how they will contribute individually to social mobility in the context of their overall mission.

As a result, we hope that universities and their stakeholders will have a clearer understanding of how they add value to this important part of their missions and national aspirations.

Introduction

Social mobility sits at an intersection between public and private goods. It delivers benefits to both individuals and society at large, in the form of enhanced economic productivity and wider social good. Education, too, sits at this intersection and this is reflected now more than ever in England's model of higher education funding, in which an average of half the cost of a student's education is funded by the individual and the other half by taxpayers, through the writing-off of student loans.

Social mobility is widely regarded as a key outcome of education. If universities agree it is an important part of our collective mission, it compels us to identify a measure of our institutional achievements, and indeed weaknesses. This can then inform both our internal decision making and the national debate on the work of universities and their value.

This question of how educational institutions contribute to social mobility has particular resonance for LSBU Group. The Group currently comprises LSBU, South Bank Academies and South Bank Colleges. While these organisations work to a shared mission, set of values and educational framework, the individual measures of success are often different. To ensure a concerted understanding of our Group outcomes, we identified social mobility as a key unifying measure. However, we were unable to find a social impact measure we felt worked in higher education. It was in response to this challenge that we sought an approach to measuring social mobility and in so doing devised this new English Social Mobility Index.

English students – their starting points and ambitions – are diverse, as are the universities that serve them, but there is general agreement that educational institutions and the

outcomes they deliver should make a positive contribution to social mobility. In the absence of agreed measures of social mobility relevant to higher education, the impact of institutions in this area is sometimes reduced to broad projections of graduate salaries. These, however, take little or no account of individuals' personal circumstances and how far they have travelled, nor the cumulative added value of those contributions. This means they shed little light on the potential student's question of 'what is this institution likely to do for me?' and the taxpayer's question of 'what does that institution do for the country?'

We started from the basis that the background of the student, their progression through an institution and their achievement after graduation are key to an institution's impact on the social mobility of an individual. The overall impact of the institution can then be measured both in the numbers of individuals advanced and the distance they have collectively travelled.

While outreach activity is sometimes regarded as a component of an institution's social mobility impact – despite its importance – our model sets it aside. The rationale for this is the complexity of approaches, types and circumstances of institutions and their autonomy on admissions policies. Instead, in our English SMI, we focus not on how institutions attract people from different socio-economic groups but on how many they recruit and how successful they are in progressing them. What matters principally is the outcome – the nature of admissions and outreach policies should simply reflect the approach.

Some institutions will admit relatively few, often highly talented, individuals from lower socio-economic groups,

provide extraordinary resources and help them to achieve things of international renown. Others will admit many more, applying the available resources across this wider cohort and achieving outcomes that will change the lives of them and their families for the better. Both have merit, both benefit individuals and both have an impact on the UK's productivity. Here we argue that it is not an either / or. Both paths are valid and valuable aspects of the diversity of the sector.

In developing this English SMI, it has become apparent that there are a number of gaps in the available data. We suggest therefore that this English SMI could and should be developed over time as better data become available. In presenting this first version, we also freely acknowledge that there will be different opinions on the choice of data and on issues such as weighting, and will be pleased to receive suggestions on potential improvements.

1. Factors influencing social mobility

Upward social mobility is generally seen as both a public and a personal good. In addition to the social justice of enabling individuals to reach their personal and professional potential, social mobility generates improved productivity in the workplace.

In 2017, The Sutton Trust commissioned Oxera to analyse the effect of the UK's relatively poor social mobility on economic outcomes in the UK. Oxera defined social mobility as:

> *The gap between the wage of an individual whose father achieved tertiary education and the wage of an individual whose father achieved below upper secondary education.*[1]

Oxera mapped the relationship between productivity, understood in terms of Gross Domestic Product per capita, and social mobility. The results showed a correlation between a higher mobility index score and GDP per capita. Oxera determined that improving the UK's social mobility score to align with the European average would see the economy boosted by around 9 per cent – £2,620 per person or £170 billion in total.[2]

It is widely acknowledged that schooling can be a key contributor to social mobility. The Social Mobility Commission's *State of the Nation 2018-19: Social Mobility in Great Britain* report wrote succinctly: 'Schools are an essential vehicle for improving social mobility'.[3]

Sadly, however, the UK has one of the lowest levels of literacy and numeracy among young people in the developed world.[4] The majority of our population has not progressed beyond

Level 3, while 17 per cent have not progressed beyond Level 2.[5] Many of these left-behind learners are from disadvantaged backgrounds. In 2016, for pupils who are persistently disadvantaged, the educational deficit at the end of secondary school stood at 23.4 months.[6]

Research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies has shown that, three and a half years after leaving university, graduates who attended private schools earn 17 per cent more per year, on average, than those who attended state schools.[7]

Universities are often accused of not doing enough to deliver social mobility.[8] However, significant and long-standing underlying socio-economic factors lead to huge disparities in prior attainment ahead of university entrance and this inevitably and demonstrably has a statistical effect on subsequent achievement among even those with the same or similar ability.

The Social Mobility Commission's September 2020 report *The Long Shadow of Deprivation – Differences in Opportunities Across England* highlights the differing earning outcomes across the country and shows that, even if people progress, their earlier circumstances continue to have a strong bearing on their future economic success.

Although the report identifies education as a crucial factor in social mobility – it accounts for an average of around 80 per cent of the gap in adult earnings between sons from poor and wealthy families across all local authorities – it also recognises that, to a significant extent, social mobility in England remains a postcode lottery. In areas with the highest social mobility, disadvantaged individuals aged around 28 earn more than

twice as much as their counterparts in the lowest-mobility areas (over £20,000 compared with under £10,000). In areas with low social mobility, pay gaps between deprived and affluent sons are 2.5 times bigger than in areas of high social mobility.[9]

2. Measuring the impact of higher education on social mobility

Discussions about social mobility in higher education tend to focus on widening participation. Since the 1970s, there has been a huge increase in the number of people attending university with around a four-fold expansion in student numbers. In that context, there has been a significant widening of social access with a narrowing of the proportion of people attending from the most and least advantaged areas. However, today the most advantaged students are still 2.26 times more likely to enter higher education. For those universities with the highest entry tariffs, this increases to 4.7 times.[10]

Analysis of individual university contributions to social mobility has usually been limited to the numbers of pupils taken from particular socio-economic groups, such as those categorised as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic or from areas with low participation in higher education. Increasingly, universities are often also assessed in terms of the earning power of their graduates, for example through Graduate Outcomes (GO) data and Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data, and this is sometimes used as a proxy for their contribution to both social mobility and to productivity. These metrics are largely used in an attempt to produce some kind of measure of institutional contribution to individual students and to the taxpayer. But they tell us little or nothing about universities' contributions to social mobility in terms of the added value they provide to their graduates given their socio-economic position at the outset of their higher education journey.

University strategy documents are littered with references to adding value, and social mobility. However, little has been

done to measure the impact of individual institutions in this field. The longer-term approach to Access and Participation Plans adopted by the Office for Students (OfS) challenges institutions on both access and equality of outcomes. Access and Participation Plans apply institution-specific objectives to a breadth of socio-economic and demographic variables, ensuring that all higher education institutions meet minimum thresholds against continuation, completion, academic outcomes and employability. However, there are no measures around the social distance travelled and these plans are not comparative across institutions.

The OfS condition of Registration B3 states that each provider 'must deliver successful outcomes for all of its students, which are recognised and valued by employers, and/or enable further study'. However, this does not address the thorny issues of value-add and social mobility.

Domestic university newspaper rankings provide comparisons across institutions, but typically focus on measures such as UCAS entry tariff, student satisfaction levels, continuation rates, student to staff ratios, the amount spent on each student as well as research quality and intensity. In doing so, they do little to measure or recognise universities' impact on social mobility. In fact, some of the widely used measures arguably incentivise institutions to avoid students from lower socio-economic groups who, on average, present with lower UCAS points and more challenges. Only the *Guardian* attempts to measure added value, through an assessment of 'good honours' achieved against a prediction based upon students' tariff on entry. However, the measure does not reflect socio-economic background, which is the key determinant of financial outcomes.

Socio-economic factors determine that institutions taking learners principally from higher socio-economic groups will, on average, find themselves as a matter of course with students who have secured higher UCAS tariff scores, whether or not that entry tariff is required for academic success. Since UCAS tariff on entry is at the heart of all three of the major domestic rankings, this then creates a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The universities that benefit from this approach see increased applicant numbers, with the resulting selectivity driving-up entry tariffs even further, excluding those from lower socio-economic groups. Whatever the mitigation of Access and Participation Plans, this creates a cycle that encourages institutions to exclude on the basis of lower attainment in order to maintain their league table position. In turn, this aura of privilege and exclusivity further discourages the less advantaged from seeking entry to higher ranked institutions. Institutions where recruitment focuses principally on prior achievement may, it seems, be having their admissions supported by the league table impact of their selection policy rather than by what they are genuinely achieving in terms of social mobility for their students and the country. The outcome of this is that league tables that include entry tariff are inherently detrimental to social mobility.

Our English SMI is an attempt to put forward an antidote to this vicious circle. We need to switch our attention from measures that reinforce the inherent social disadvantages to those that highlight them and measure our success in combating them.

Measuring distance travelled – social mobility and value-add

As set out in the Oxera research, social mobility is a measure of distance travelled.

Within schools, the Government attempts to track this distance based on academic attainment. Each individual public exam grade that a pupil achieves is assigned a points score, which is then used to calculate the pupil's Attainment 8 score. This score is then used to calculate their Progress 8, which compares a pupils' Key Stage 4 results to other pupils nationally with similar or prior attainment.[11]

In 2012 Alan Milburn published his report, *University Challenge: How Higher Education Can Advance Social Mobility – A progress report by the Independent Reviewer on Social Mobility and Child Poverty*.[12] He called for university league tables that 'better reflect educational gain', in other words, league tables that, like Progress 8, measure the distance travelled by students and the value added by universities.

There have been several attempts to measure higher education value-add. In 2017, *The Economist* developed an analysis of all UK universities along these lines by comparing the salary of their graduates five years after graduation (using Longitudinal Education Outcomes data) against an expected salary.[13] This expected salary was based upon a statistical model which considered variables such as subject, tariff on entry, geographical location of the institution attended and family income. This model solely focused on graduate salary as a measure of success, ignoring factors such as the continuation rates of those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Although the volume of students from lower income families will have impacted upon the average salary expected, the ranking did not reward those universities with a larger intake from lower socio-economic groups.[14]

Another notable attempt was made in 2018 by the Institute for Fiscal Studies on behalf of the Department for Education. While this report looked at the differential impact that specific degrees might have on a student's medium-term earnings or employment prospects, while taking into account their characteristics, it did not measure individual institution's overall contribution to social mobility.[15]

Salary measures such as these are heavily compromised as a way of identifying how far the individual or state has truly benefited in terms of the progress achieved by the learner – be that in terms of social mobility or additional productivity. They take little or no account of students' educational or social starting point and are based on average projected earnings which have multi-year time lags. Such measures tell us little about the journey, which is the essence of value-add or social mobility. Furthermore, they often take no account of geography, which is a key determinant of salary.

Instead our English SMI looks at what individual universities are enabling their students to achieve and thus, the value they are adding. Crucially, it allows each university to measure itself against the individual approach to social mobility they have chosen to adopt.

3. The US Social Mobility Index

As we explored the idea of a measure of social mobility that worked in a higher education context, we came across the US Social Mobility Index (US SMI). The US SMI provides a comparative social mobility impact analysis of US higher education institutions which challenges the traditional analysis and, perhaps inevitably, rankings.

The traditional US, and indeed UK, higher education rankings are based on academic outcome measures which take little account of the student population admitted by institutions. Instead, the US SMI looks at the distance travelled by students, taking into account their starting point, their financial investment and their educational and employment outcomes. It is a rare example of a ranking that focuses on the impact an institution has on social mobility.

The US SMI website sets out its rationale:

> *Despite the growing economic importance of the college degree, the proportion of US high school graduates going to college – a figure that increased for decades – is now declining. The upward ratchet in tuition since the 1980's has progressively limited affordability and access to college education. In 1980, for example, college tuition took an average bite of 26 percent of the median family income in the US; by 2004, this figure had more than doubled, to 56 percent.*
>
> *One of the main culprits driving the tuition increases, and thus one of the central impediments to economic mobility, has been higher education's pursuit of the rankings, particularly those put forward by US News & World Report. Asked to explain the factors behind tuition*

> *jumps at Cornell, economists there remarked* that 'how much the university spends per student for education and maintaining a low student/faculty ratio both weigh heavily in determining rankings. Any slippage in the rankings is extremely costly to the institution.' A *study published* in Research in Higher Education by a former Provost at the University of Rochester added that if a college or university wanted to move into one of the top 20 slots in the US News rankings it would have to increase spending by tens of millions of dollars a year.[16]

This rationale summarises the potentially negative consequences of how the media (and implicitly government) currently choose to rank universities, focusing on inputs rather than outputs, and certainly not on outputs that support the goal of social mobility.

In contrast, the US SMI uses the following variables:

Variable	**Comparability to UK and relevant UK measures**
Tuition	The lack of significant variability across English institutions for first degree fees renders this a non-useful indicator
Economic Background	Index of multiple deprivation (IMD) of new entrants
Graduation Rate	Potentially continuation or completion rates by IMD
Early Career Salary	Use of Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO), or, when available, Graduate Outcomes (GO) by IMD
Endowment	Not currently as relevant across UK institutions

The US model is most sensitive to variables relating to access, with a higher weighting being given to tuition fees and the economic background of enrolled students. The top 10

institutions in the ranking are listed below. The institutions listed are not those we most associate with excellence in US universities, but are institutions that take in students from a breadth of backgrounds, while also delivering relatively high completion rates and salaries upon graduation. There will be detractors of the methodology, however, the US Index is attempting to demonstrate the value of universities which admit students from diverse and socio-economically deprived backgrounds and enable them to achieve social mobility through education.

The table on the following page (Figure 1), shows the top ten institutions in the US SMI. The table that follows (Figure 2) compares the top five of these, with the top five US universities in the 2021 *Times Higher Education* World Rankings. MIT, Stanford and Harvard all sit outside the top 1,000 in the US SMI despite having average graduation rates and post-graduation salaries almost twice as high as those in the top five of the Index. However, those more prestigious institutions have tuition fees five times higher, and a proportion of students from low-income backgrounds five times lower, than those that the Index judges to be delivering the greatest social mobility.

University fees are central to the US SMI and the high fees are detrimental to the ranking of some well-known institutions. Some will highlight that many of these expensive US universities provide substantial scholarships, bursaries and other financial support to selected students. However, these are not guaranteed. The high sticker price is therefore regarded as a significant barrier to application and therefore to entry for those from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Figure 1 – Table showing the top 10 institutions in the US SMI

Rank	SMI	Institution	City	State	Tuition	% Low Income	% Grad Rate	Median Early Career Salary	Avg Debt	Endowment (in M)	% Freshman Pell	% Pell to rich 1/2
1	376.875784	CUNY Bernard M Baruch College	New York	NY	$7,062	41.6	69.2	$57,200	$20,702	$171.95	49	15
2	288.724543	California State University-Los Angeles	Los Angeles	CA	$6,639	60.2	45	$46,100	$19,011	$31.27	70	14.3
3	277.524984	California State University-Fresno	Fresno	CA	$6,585	52.4	54	$44,700	$18,954	$144.33	63	17.2
4	257.780483	CUNY Queens College	Queens	NY	$7,138	44.4	55.5	$48,200	$16,839	$55.52	51	12.2
5	252.274347	California State University-Channel Islands	Camarillo	CA	$6,817	40.6	54.7	$49,800	$18,579	$15.02	52	21.9
6	249.698955	California State University-San Bernardino	San Bernardino	CA	$6,885	51.6	52.1	$44,500	$21,396	$37.71	68	23.6
7	245.94836	California State University-Long Beach	Long Beach	CA	$6,730	36.6	64.5	$48,100	$19,780	$66.61	49	24.8
8	243.792924	California State University-Stanislaus	Turlock	CA	$7,038	47.8	53.6	$45,400	$18,472	$12.39	62	22.2
9	243.504698	CUNY Brooklyn College	Brooklyn	NY	$7,040	54.5	48.9	$43,900	$18,679	$86.08	61	10.3
10	242.937887	California State Polytechnic University-Pomona	Pomona	CA	$7,339	34.4	58.5	$54,000	$20,448	$96.18	44	22.1

Figure 2 – Table comparing the top five institutions from the US SMI with the top five US universities in the 2021 Times Higher Education World Rankings

Rank	SMI Score	Institution	State	Tuition	% Low Income	% Grad Rate	Median Early Career Salary
1	376.9	CUNY Bernard M Baruch College	NY	7,062	41.6	69.2	57,200
2	288.7	California State University-Los Angeles	CA	6,639	60.2	45	46,100
3	277.5	California State University-Fresno	CA	6,585	52.4	54	44,700
4	257.8	CUNY Queens College	NY	7,138	44.4	55.5	48,200
5	252.3	California State University-Channel Islands	CA	6,817	40.6	54.7	49,800
334	55.4	University of California-Berkeley	CA	14,170	14.4	89	64,700
994	24.5	California Institute of Technology	CA	49,908	9.7	100	85,900
1122	20.4	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	MA	49,892	8.9	86.1	104,700
1285	15.1	Stanford University	CA	49,617	8.6	90.7	94,000
1326	13.6	Harvard University	MA	48,949	8.7	98.4	89,700

The mission statement of the top-rated institution, CUNY Bernard M Baruch College, clearly reflects its commitment to upward social mobility, and its role in facilitating it:

> *Baruch College provides an inclusive, transformational education in the arts and sciences, business, and public*

and international affairs to students from New York and around the world and creates new knowledge through scholarship and research.

A Baruch education is a financially accessible and powerful catalyst for the social, cultural, and economic mobility of students and a strong foundation for lifelong learning and community impact. Our distinguished undergraduate and graduate academic programs offer extraordinary value.[17]

A striking characteristic of the table is that the five top-rated institutions all operate within two of the large integrated tertiary education groups, which incorporate the US equivalents of further and higher education institutions – the City University of New York (CUNY) and the California State University (Cal State or CSU) systems. Both admit a highly diverse student body and are managed to facilitate transfer between the incorporated Community and Four-Year Colleges. This model clearly has similarities to what we are seeking to develop at LSBU. Furthermore, California State University system (CSU) is the largest four-year public university system in the United States and 40 per cent of students join from California Community College. The City University of New York (CUNY) is the public university system of New York City and is the fourth-largest university system in the United States by enrolment.

4. Designing an English Social Mobility Index

Based on the US SMI approach, LSBU has developed an English Social Mobility Index (English SMI) that measures social mobility based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation, student continuation and the graduate salaries of students.

We believe that the model delivers some interesting results. Avoiding some of the input measures that are generally used to analyse university performance, our Index focuses on the value-added contribution of individual institutions in raising the achievement of those from lower social economic groups. What it highlights is that universities of all kinds deliver high levels of upward social mobility. Ultimately, this approach may provide a way of adding some richness to government and other analysis of value for money in higher education. Our model responds in some regards to the Government's call to universities to demonstrate value for taxpayers and learners by showing their social mobility impact. For example, in July 2020 Michelle Donelan, Universities Minister, said: 'Since 2004, there has been too much focus on getting students through the door, and not enough focus on how many drop out, or how many go on to graduate jobs'.[18]

The methodology we have developed reflects what we believe to be the best and most relevant aspects of the US SMI methodology, taking into consideration the data available in the English sector. Like the US version, our English SMI has at its heart three factors: access, continuation (progression through the academic journey) and graduate salaries. The key data for our English SMI are drawn from the English Index of Multiple Deprivation, Access and Participations Plans and the Longitudinal Education Outcomes data.

Data sources

i) OfS Access and Participation Plans

The source of the core data is the OfS Access and Participation Plan datasets for access and continuation, which provide data for the latest five years available at the time of publication. The Access and Participation Plan is a requirement of all institutions registered with the Office for Students.

The Office for Students describes Access and Participation Plans as documents that 'set out how higher education providers will improve equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups to access, succeed in and progress from higher education'.[19] The data includes measures of performance for each stage of a student's journey through higher education:

- access – these measures show the makeup of students entering higher education;
- continuation – these measures show whether students continue their studies or not;
- attainment – these measures examine the numbers of graduates who achieve a first or upper second-class degree; and
- progression – these measures report on whether students are in highly skilled employment or study at a higher-level six months after leaving higher education.

The Access and Participation Plan datasets are based solely on English students. This is helpful in the context of our model as it avoids the possibility of an English SMI being unduly impacted by overseas students, for whom Index of Multiple Deprivation or similar analyses are not widely available. The model takes account of both full and part-time students.

There are, though, challenges with the Access and Participation data, which are derived from, and therefore reliant on, data submitted by institutions to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). There can be significant gaps in postcode data, which are a fundamental component of our English SMI model, as well as of other access and continuation metrics. There is also a legitimate question over whether continuation necessarily comprehensively records higher education progress as it includes students who repeat or exit with an award lower than originally intended.[20] This question concerns how one determines success; for example, whether this includes all students who achieve a higher level of award than they held on entry, or whether it should include only those students who graduate with their target award. Our model focuses on access and continuation and therefore includes those graduating with a higher award, rather than determining success only as full target completion.

ii) Longitudinal Education Outcomes data

Our second core source of data is the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) data for salaries, one year after graduation. The main challenges with our model relate to this data, which is an experimental dataset that maps student loan data with tax records to assess student outcomes based upon salary and student education records. There are significant gaps in the

data where links cannot be found. However, LEO is increasingly regarded as an important dataset for assessing the salary outcomes of higher education.

In *The uses and limits of Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data,* Universities UK described LEO as follows:

> *LEO data provides information on how much UK graduates of different courses at different universities are earning, either one, three, five or ten years since graduating. It does this by linking up tax, benefits, and student loans data. Data was first published in 2016, which has been followed by several experimental statistics releases by the Department for Education which reports nominal raw figures. LEO data has also recently been used by the IFS [Institute for Fiscal Studies] to show the impact of undergraduate degrees on early-career earnings, which importantly attempts to control for differences in socio-economic background, ethnicity and GCSE results.*[21]

There are a number of other challenges related to the Longitudinal Education Outcomes data which bring implications for this model:

- The student continuation rate data provided by OfS are available by quintile of the Index of Multiple Deprivation, and provide some insight into the higher education journey of students from different levels of prior deprivation. However, this is not the case with Longitudinal Education Outcomes and we are not currently able to track the Index of Multiple Deprivation quintiles in the Longitudinal Education Outcomes or Graduate Outcomes data. Our model therefore uses the overall Longitudinal Education

Outcomes scores for an institution, but as a result we cannot identify differences in outcomes between socio-economic groups. A potential resultant issue is that a high institutional SMI outcome could be the result of students from higher quintiles of the Index of Multiple Deprivation securing higher salaries while students from lower quintiles at the same institution fail to benefit from a similar uplift in salary outcomes.

- For our model we have chosen to use the Longitudinal Education Outcomes dataset comprised of average salaries after one year of graduation. It could be argued that three or five years would show greater impact for a student. However, there are greater gaps in the data the longer after graduation. Furthermore, the longer the time period after graduation, the less it can be claimed that the impact of a higher education institution is reflected in the outcomes, given the many other potential impacts.

- Published Longitudinal Education Outcomes data is not regionally adjusted. We have, therefore, made regional adjustments in the model using Office for National Statistics (ONS) data.

iii) Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)

The Index of Multiple Deprivation is derived by mapping postcodes to a percentile of deprivation, based upon measures including income, crime, health, living environment, barriers to housing / services, education and employment. The English Index of Multiple Deprivation measures relative levels of deprivation in 32,844 small areas or neighbourhoods, called Lower Layer Super Output Areas, and groups these into

quintiles. Our English SMI focuses on the bottom two quintiles of the English IMD (the 40 per cent most deprived postcodes). Use of the Index of Multiple Deprivation is central to our English SMI methodology.

We have chosen to use the Index of Multiple Deprivation rather than the participation of local areas (POLAR) data. The OfS generally use POLAR when reviewing access to higher education for disadvantaged groups. However, the focus of our model is the impact of higher education on deprivation, rather than on access to higher education. Furthermore, POLAR is not regarded as a good indicator of socio-economic backgrounds in large metropolitan areas, particularly London, because many deprived London postcodes have high higher education participation levels due to the diversity of wealth within individual postcodes. For these reasons we have opted to use the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

We have produced an English, rather than UK, SMI due to variations in the available UK national datasets. The September 2019 Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government paper, *The English Indices of Deprivation 2019 (IoD2019),* highlights this:

> *Indices of Deprivation data is published for each of the countries in the United Kingdom. These datasets are based on the same concept and general methodology, however there are differences in the domains and indicators, the geographies for which the indices are developed and the time points on which they are based. These differences mean that the English Indices of Deprivation published here should not be directly compared with those from the Indices produced in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.*[22]

Methodology

Our methodology uses the data outlined above, as follows:

1. Access: percentage of students from IMD1 and IMD2 for each institution

a) Each institution's percentage of enrolled students from Indices of Multiple Deprivation quintile 1 (IMD1). This is normalised.

b) This is added to the institution's percentage of enrolled students from IMD2 (normalised) divided by two to reflect the weighting of IMD2. This is normalised.

c) The combined score is weighted by 1.5.

The rationales for using these measures and weightings are:

- The double weighting of IMD1 over IMD2 recognises the greater impact on upward social mobility achieved by delivering successful outcomes to students from IMD1 postcodes.

- Giving access a weighting of 1.5 in this model, following the example of the US SMI, takes account of the greater social mobility impact of admitting and progressing higher numbers of disadvantaged students. Although access is the highest single variable, in total it accounts for less than half of the overall outcome of the Index. A consequence of this is that it is not possible for an institution to perform highly in our SMI while providing high levels of access but poor outcomes.

- Our Index shows the proportion, not numbers, of learners from lower socio-economic groups who are admitted and

who then progress successfully. Arguably the use of student numbers rather than proportions would better reflect institutional contribution to social mobility. However, this approach would cause institutions' size to mask their relative social mobility effectiveness.

2. Continuation: the approach employed above is also used for continuation, using a weighting of 1

a) Each institution's percentage for continuation of IMD1 students is recorded. This is normalised.

b) This is added to the percentage of each institution's continuation rate (percentage) of IMD2 students divided by 2 to reflect the half weighting for IMD2 students.

c) This total is multiplied by 1 to reflect the overall weighting of continuation in the model.

Continuation as a measure is imperfect as it does not show the entire student journey, but instead only the continuation of a student in higher education from the first year of entry to the second year. If the new Office for Students completion measure is published at sector level and includes a breakdown by Index of Multiple Deprivation this might well prove to be a better measure.

3. Salaries: Longitudinal Education Outcomes salary data

Each institution's average graduate salary, one year after graduation as published in the Longitudinal Education Outcomes dataset, adjusted for Purchasing Power Parity (PPP). This is normalised. The Longitudinal Education Outcomes data is adjusted for Purchasing Power Parity to reflect the relative spending power by the region of residence of the institution's

graduates. For example, if the regional price level compared to the price level for London is 107.2, the model applies this rate to graduates who are resident in London in order to reduce their salaries to reflect the relative spending power. Conversely, graduates residing in Yorkshire and Humber have an uplift to their average salaries to reflect the regional price level of 97.7. The PPP adjustment rates have been sourced from the Office for National Statistics.[23]

The Longitudinal Education Outcomes salary data is not ideal as it does not include a breakdown at IMD level. We have therefore used and normalised the overall institutional figure, again with a weighting of 1.

4. Combining the data

The total normalised scores for access, continuation and graduate salaries are then added together to arrive at an overall score.

All measures use an average of two years of data, with the purpose of smoothing out fluctuations and making the outputs more robust.

Summary of weightings:

Weightings	**IMD Q1**	**IMD Q2**	**All**	**Weighting**	**Index components**
Access	1	0.5		1.5	2.25
Continuation	1	0.5		1	1.5
Salaries			1	1	1
					4.75

Weighting choices

Access to higher education has been given the highest weighting, as it is the initial admission to higher education that is key to subsequent social mobility. Next ranked was continuation, as the completion of a qualification is vitally important if education is going to have the desired increase in social mobility. The salary element has the lowest weighting because there is more to social mobility than earnings (though it is a significant factor); and because this measure is based on all of those in the LEO population from a given institution, not only those from IMD quintiles 1 and 2.

There is of course room for discussion concerning the choice of weightings, or even whether these are the right variables to inform the Index. However, each weighting choice has been arrived at after careful consideration and with a view to providing a stimulating insight into the delivery of social mobility in higher education.

Data improvements

In our view, the key issues with the SMI as it stands are around the currently available data.

The Index would be improved by a clearer understanding of employment outcomes by IMD. This could either be through Graduate Outcomes or Longitudinal Educational Outcomes data. If average earnings could be identified by those in IMD quintiles 1 and 2, this would add significant value to the Index, as currently these results are potentially influenced by students from IMD quintiles 3 to 5 earning higher salaries. It is partly for this reason that this weighting has a lower weight.

Another potential avenue of improvement is the use of wellbeing data from the Graduate Outcomes survey. Graduate Outcomes asks graduates questions regarding happiness, anxiety, worthwhileness and life satisfaction. If this data could also be split by IMD and provider, it would develop a link between education and overall wellbeing. It is already known from work the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) undertook in 2017, that on average, higher levels of wellbeing could be found in those possessing higher qualifications.[24] The impact of socio-economic factors within this was not explored, but the Graduate Outcomes survey would potentially allow for this. Many studies have also identified ethnicity as playing a greater role in outcomes than socio-economic background. Consequently, in the future a measure relating to degree-awarding gaps or graduate employment gaps by ethnicity might improve the Index.

We will seek to improve the Index should better data become available and also based on responses to this publication.

5. Results

The table below shows the ratings of English universities according to our Index. Unlike the US version, there is genuine diversity in the types of institution represented in the top 10, with:

- three Russell Group Institutions – Queen Mary University of London (QML), Imperial College London and King's College London (KCL);
- two MillionPlus institutions – London South Bank and Wolverhampton; and
- four other pre-92 institutions and one further post-92.

Six are in, and four are outside, London.

This diversity in the types of institution may to some extent reflect that, while in the US universities are largely free to determine their tuition fees, the English system pushes universities to compete on areas other than price, for tuition fees are essentially the same at most universities.

Two universities clearly lead the ratings, with overall scores almost double the institution in third place. These institutions are Bradford and Aston universities, which have similar histories as former Colleges of Advanced Technology – a new form of higher education institution created in the 1950s through government investment in 10 technical colleges. They achieve this position by virtue of both having enrolments of over 50 per cent from IMD quintiles 1 and 2 (nearly 80 per cent in Bradford's case) and achieving continuation rates of over 90 per cent by these cohorts.

Figure 3: Table Showing Top 40 English higher education institutions according to our index

Social Mobility Index

IMD Q2 weighted 0.5x, Access weighted 1.5x, salaries PPP adjusted

					Index variables - Latest year data				
					Access* (%)		Continuation (%)		
Rank 2018 /19	Change in rank from 2017/18	Provider Name	Tariff	Aggregate Score 2018/19	IMD Q1 2018/19	IMD Q2 2018/19	IMD Q1 2017/18	IMD Q2 2017/18	PPP Adjusted Avg Earnings 1YAG (£) 2017/18
1	-	The University of Bradford	Medium	5.067	58.3	20.3	91.5	92.0	19,680
2	-	Aston University	Medium	4.317	39.1	17.8	95.0	95.0	23,351
3	1	Queen Mary University of London	Medium	2.726	18.8	30.5	92.0	94.5	23,176
4	4	Birkbeck College	Low	2.664	21.0	35.0	92.0	89.0	22,550
5	(2)	Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine	High	2.595	8.0	13.2	90.0	94.0	33,117
6	1	London South Bank University	Low	2.453	23.3	35.0	83.0	87.2	23,690
7	5	The City University	Medium	2.420	19.9	33.1	86.0	90.0	23,803
8	(3)	Newman University	Low	2.414	51.0	22.0	89.0	86.0	16,650
9	-	King's College London	High	2.365	13.1	24.3	81.8	93.0	26,385
10	(4)	The University of Wolverhampton	Low	2.359	50.0	20.3	81.8	87.0	18,335
11	3	The University of Bolton	Low	2.196	51.5	18.2	83.0	88.0	16,487
12	8	London School of Economics and Political Science	High	2.161	12.0	19.0	96.0	94.0	26,176
13	-	Birmingham City University	Medium	2.160	42.3	17.8	90.3	89.9	19,447
14	2	The University of Salford	Medium	2.158	39.8	18.8	89.1	90.0	19,769
15	(5)	Teeside University	Low	2.023	38.7	19.7	86.3	88.0	19,716
16	(5)	The University of Huddersfield	Medium	2.001	38.1	20.2	89.7	90.0	18,491
17	1	Brunel University London	Medium	1.990	19.0	31.7	95.0	90.0	21,330

18	(1)	University College London	High	1.658	10.1	18.2	95.0	93.0	25,955
19	-	Coventry University	Low	1.635	29.1	24.2	87.1	89.2	20,862
20	4	The University of Greenwich	Medium	1.529	22.2	32.9	90.0	88.3	20,331
21	(6)	The University of Sunderland	Low	1.528	35.1	30.9	85.5	84.1	17,055
22	15	The University of Cambridge	High	1.457	4.9	11.9	98.0	99.0	28,222
23	7	University College Birmingham	Low	1.426	45.8	20.0	85.0	84.0	16,875
24	(3)	The University of Westminster	Medium	1.419	22.4	34.4	90.0	90.1	18,649
25	9	Middlesex University	Low	1.357	24.6	36.2	87.0	87.8	18,421
26	2	The University of Keele	Low	1.249	23.8	18.4	91.0	91.0	20,988
27	-	The University of Warwick	High	1.194	10.4	15.0	94.0	94.0	25,240
28	(2)	The University of Manchester	High	1.183	17.9	14.2	94.0	95.0	22,656
29	(7)	Liverpool John Moores University	Medium	1.115	33.8	16.2	88.3	90.0	18,369
30	(7)	Edge Hill University	Medium	1.110	31.9	18.2	87.9	92.0	18,122
31	2	The Manchester Metropolitan University	Medium	1.096	31.4	18.3	91.0	91.5	18,240
32	12	The University of Hull	Low	1.025	26.8	18.8	89.0	90.0	19,887
33	(2)	The University of Central Lancashire	Medium	1.005	36.5	20.8	86.0	87.0	18,186
34	6	The University of Leicester	Medium	0.961	18.3	20.1	94.0	94.0	21,453
35	25	The University of Oxford	High	0.949	5.4	10.7	97.0	99.0	26,830
36	(7)	University of Hertfordshire	Low	0.870	17.1	26.8	88.0	90.4	21,097
37	(2)	Leeds Trinity University	Low	0.850	29.9	20.2	90.0	95.0	17,036
38	(13)	The University of East London	Low	0.803	28.4	39.6	82.5	82.4	16,092
39	(1)	Kingston University	Low	0.721	16.3	30.5	92.0	87.8	19,242
40	7	The University of Bath	High	0.560	4.1	10.0	96.0	97.0	26,471

Group Pre-92 other | Russell Group | MillionPlus | Post-92 other | University Alliance | Other

*Data shown for FT All Undergraduate students. The Index also incorporates PT students and used two-year averages of all variables rather than single year data

Contrary to potential preconceptions, the Index does not appear to bias against highly selective or research-intensive universities. For example, Russell Group institutions appear at all levels in the ratings. Reasons for this vary from institution to institution, but on the whole it is because the most highly rated deliver outstanding levels of continuation irrespective of the proportion of the cohort from IMD1 and 2.

As Figure 3 is limited to 40 institutions that do best in the English SMI, it would be wrong to think the institutions at the bottom of the table are poor performers.

Conclusions

The background of the students admitted by an institution is important to its potential impact on social mobility. So too is continuation – student progression through an institution – and their subsequent achievement on graduation. An institution's overall impact on social mobility can be reflected both in a few individuals progressing a great distance or larger numbers making less but still significant social progress.

Student continuation is a key aspect of our model. International evidence shows the UK has one of the best records in the world on student retention and progression to graduation. However, there is clearly room for improvement. There are high discrepancies in progression and awarding rates between universities and the dropout rate of students from poorer backgrounds is considerably higher than that of their more affluent peers.

With regard to graduate salaries, another input in the model, higher education institutions clearly have a role in preparing graduates with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in their future careers. However, the multiplicity of reasons for going to university, the unpredictability of career paths, gender, geography and economic circumstance, among many other factors, mean that graduate salaries are of interest but must be contextualised and should not be the Key Performance Indicator.

Salary outcomes include a self-fulfilling component much like UCAS tariff. The high earnings of a London School of Economics (LSE) graduate in Economics demonstrates principally that those who have already achieved well academically and set out to enter well-paid careers can earn a lot of money. In the same way, it shows that regardless of prior academic

achievement those who choose to go into well-regarded but under-rewarded services like Nursing earn not nearly as much. If the London School of Economics taught Nursing, the salaries of nurses would not increase, but according to most league tables, the apparent value of an LSE degree would go down.

This is not to criticise, because the LSE is a success story in these tables. It shows that other high-entry tariff institutions can maintain their international reputation for excellence while delivering in terms of social mobility. Our model table shows world-class institutions like University College London (UCL), Imperial College London and the LSE are all highly rated.

What we have identified is that some institutions, such as the LSE, UCL and KCL, are admitting moderate numbers of students from lower Index of Multiple Deprivation quintiles and enabling them to achieve significant social mobility. There are some, such as the University of Bradford, which accept many more students from lower socio-economic groups and, while not moving them so far, are clearly having a significant impact on social mobility overall. There are others that seem to be recruiting more students from lower social-economic groups than they appear able to support to achieve positive social mobility outcomes. There are others choosing to admit very few students from IMD 1 and 2, which are still failing to contribute substantially to theirs or the country's social mobility outcomes. Our SMI highlights that those best supporting social mobility deliver high levels of continuation. Improvements in continuation are, for most, key to achieving the highest ratings.

This model provides a mechanism for institutions to demonstrate their positive contribution to social mobility

alongside their Access and Participation Plans. In order to rise up the table, elite institutions might focus on identifying more of the most talented learners from lower socio-economic groups and admitting them in greater numbers. Other institutions might do more to increase progression. In future, additional funding could be made available for those with the clearest and most effective strategies for delivering their individual objectives.

What the model highlights is that some institutions are lagging behind. It shows that there are some institutions focusing on admitting high-achieving students and then reaping the benefit of high admission tariffs to enhance their reputation, while adding little value. They appear to be taking in relatively small proportions of disadvantaged learners but still not providing them with outstanding social mobility outcomes. In doing so they are making a disproportionately low impact on social mobility.

Milburn, like our model, suggests a horses-for-courses approach to social mobility rather than one-size-fits-all. In a diverse sector, we would not suggest that Birkbeck and the University of Oxford should necessarily adopt the same approach. Deciding what the individual institutional approach is, and applying appropriate resources to it, is the point highlighted by Milburn:

> *The report also recommends that all universities need to more actively consider what support they can provide to help particular groups of underrepresented students succeed in completing their studies. In some cases, this will require assessing what skills universities expect students to have in advance, and those which they can cultivate after admission.*[25]

One area that all universities might do well to address is the use of widening participation expenditure on bursaries or similar incentives to secure talented students from competitor institutions. According to the Milburn report: 'financial support to students seems to have little or no impact on widening participation and fair access, and an unknown impact on retention'.[26] The US SMI excludes entirely such incentives or similar unpredictable post-application discounts in its consideration of institutions' contribution to social mobility. Notably, though, it includes in its calculations the standard tuition fees of individual universities, on the basis this is a key factor in the application decisions of students who cannot take account of uncertain mitigating bursaries or similar.

While career and salary outcomes are important, so too is an institution's success in taking individuals from where they are to where they want to be. Using our model, learners from lower socio-economic groups will be able to see the likelihood of acceptance and of the social mobility outcomes they are likely to achieve at any institution.

There have previously been calls to reintroduce the binary divide, including a debate in the House of Lords in 2016 on the Government's assessment of the case for a new generation of polytechnics to address the technical skills gap.[27] But an approach characterised by polytechnics for the masses, with elite institutions focused on international reputation, suggests that our highly-ranked universities are doing little to enhance social mobility and that all the heavy lifting in widening participation is being done by Post-92 institutions. Our new English SMI, which calculates each institution's contribution to social mobility outcomes, shows perhaps that while the modern universities do the heavy lifting in terms of student

numbers, the most selective universities can also contribute in the form of generating very substantial distance travelled for smaller numbers.

While we need to resist calls for a binary divide, we do need to encourage a diverse higher education system. Our SMI highlights the benefit of that diversity. Rather than encouraging all universities to seek out the same learners, it can encourage them to serve the differing needs of the very wide cohort of learners that any country with an accessible higher education system needs to support.

The English SMI demonstrates that different universities have different contributions to make. It is time for them to be clear about their approach and to be measured against it. The Access and Participation Plans are a useful step, but the English SMI provides a more quantitative measure that could enable each institution in its own way and the sector as a whole to demonstrate what it is doing to deliver both social mobility and value for money for both graduate and taxpayer.

Recommendations

There are numerous potential policy implications of an index that is able to measure the value-add and social mobility contributions of individual higher education institutions.

In particular, the Government response to Dame Shirley Pearce's Independent Review of the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework instructs the OfS to consider 'if and how educational gain can be reliably measured'.[28] The English SMI could form a useful starting point in doing so.

The OfS has also recently consulted on changes to the regulation of quality and standards within higher education. The proposals include setting numerical baselines which 'will not be adjusted to take account of differences in performance between demographic groups'.[29] The creation of an index to measure the value-add of an institution should give them cause to rethink this approach.

Beyond this, we make the following general recommendations:

1. Universities should utilise the SMI, or an alternative measure, to reflect on their Access and Participation Plans and elsewhere on their strengths and weaknesses in effecting social mobility among their graduates. The OfS should consider this or an alternative measure in assessing the success of Access and Participations Plans.

   A measure of social mobility, such as this, should be promoted as an antidote to the detrimental pressure of newspaper league tables, whose undue focus on entry tariffs is inherently detrimental to social mobility.

Indeed, compilers of university league tables should be encouraged to utilise this or an alternative measure in their assessments of universities and the Government should consider including it on the DiscoverUni website.

2. The higher education sector should work together to refine and improve this model with the aim of accurate reflection on its contribution to social mobility.

3. The Government should reflect more widely on the outputs of this measure to inform policies on the higher education sector, particularly with regards to decisions on funding, value for money and quality.

4. Recognising the 'pupil premium' associated with enhancing social mobility, the Government should invest in those institutions which demonstrate high returns in their approach to social mobility.

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In this paper, Professor David Phoenix, the Vice-Chancellor of London South Bank University, proposes a new English Social Mobility Index. Incorporating the number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and the distance they travel after they enter their higher education institution, the English SMI provides a new way of understanding the contribution of universities to social mobility.

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