

The prestige claims of UK universities: rhetoric and reality

Vikki Boliver
Department of Sociology
Durham University

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The rhetoric

Research

Our universities are global leaders in research, but it is vital they receive sufficient funding and support

Education

A high-quality, research-led education requires proper funding at both undergraduate and postgraduate level

University access

The under-representation of talented students from certain backgrounds has deep-rooted causes which we cannot solve alone

Business & Innovation

Collaboration with business is a key part of the work of our universities but Government could foster more innovation

EU & International

Our universities are global businesses competing for staff, students and funding with the best in the world

Regulation & Management

Autonomy is crucial to the success of our universities – they will not flourish if they are over-regulated

The reality

- Except for Oxbridge, Russell Group universities are no different to most other 'Old' universities
- Relative to 'New' universities, 'Old' universities are generally:
 - More research-intensive
 - More academically selective
 - Richer
 - Posher
- 'Old' universities are NOT generally better at...



...educating students

'Excellence' as a barrier to equity

Narrowly equating 'excellence' with academic selectivity and research-intensiveness obstructs equity

- Widening access largely restricted to the 'heroic disadvantaged' who have succeeded academically at school against the odds
- Only really willing to 'teach' those who can be expected to succeed at university under their own steam

"those who have come through adversity of some core kind and still perform to the level that we want"

"what university admissions have to be very careful about is that we do not take students in who might perform slightly less well in our institution because of our methods who could have performed exceptionally well in another university"

Widening the definition of 'excellence'

- *Untenable* to define excellence as admitting only those with the highest grades for whom success under their own steam is virtually guaranteed from the outset.
- Given that universities are supposed to be educational institutions, definition of excellence surely must include success in *supporting learners to achieve their potential*