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Marketisation and widening participation in English higher education: a critical discourse analysis of institutional access policy documents

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This paper uses critical discourse analysis of English higher education institutions' policy statements about access to explore the changing ways that institutions have used language to shift their market positionality away from widening participation for all and the process of higher education to 'fair access' (i.e. social mobility for the 'brightest') and the outcome of producing 'professionals'. Analysis is drawn from the Access Agreements two sets of sampled institutions (ten large prestigious pre-1992 universities and ten former polytechnics, known as post-1992 universities¹) at two points in time: 2006-07 (the first wave of Access Agreements) and 2012-13 (the first set of Access Agreements in the new funding regime).

Keywords: market differentiation; critical discourse analysis; widening participation; fair access; shifting discourses.

Introduction

This paper uses critical discourse analysis of institutional Access Agreements to illustrate the ways in which English HE institutions (HEIs) address widening participation and fair access in policy and practice and in the context of the rapid marketisation of the sector. It is based on analyses of two datasets – a sample of twenty original 2006-07 Access Agreements and twenty 2012-13 Access Agreements (changed to reflect the new tuition fee/financial support regime introduced by the White Paper Students at the Heart of the System: Department for Business, Innovation and Skills [BIS], 2011a). The two samples consist

of the agreements lodged by the same institutions (ten research intensive and mainly selective 'pre-1992' universities – all members of the Russell Groupⁱⁱ – and ten mainly recruiting 'post-1992' universities) at both points in time. It is sometimes argued that these categorisations – the selective/recruiting demarcation for instance – are somewhat outmoded and that university 'mission groups' are fluid and may prove to be ephemeral as markers of institutional differentiation. Nevertheless this is outweighed by the ability to make comparisons between still recognisably distinct institution types and, critically for the purpose of this paper, over time they have not significantly moved in relation to each other (e.g. league table positions) during the timescale 2006-07 to 2012-13.

This article sets out to establish that certain discourses are discernable in the way that HEI types are positioned in relation to widening participation and fair access, and that these discourses have shifted over time, particularly among post-1992 universities which are under more pressure from the policy reforms and the effects of marketisation (Taylor and McCaig, 2014). The paper concludes by linking discourse analysis to key policy drivers that are detrimental to widening participation and opportunities for students from under-represented groups.

Access Agreements are documents that have to be agreed with Office for Fair Access (OFFA) in order for institutions to be able to charge tuition fees above the basic level. They lay out how institutions will spend a proportion of the fee income above the basic fee on financial support and outreach activities to maintain access for the poorest applicants and those from social groups under-represented in higher education (care leavers, disabled students, some black and minority ethnic groups etc.). Institutions can also take the opportunity to express the institutional mission and values that helped to inform policies designed to support fair access and widening participation. As such, Access Agreements can be seen as 'discursive events' (Fairclough 1993: 136), statements of social practice from the institutions' perspective.

Access Agreement (hereafter AA) spending can take the form of financial aid (bursaries and scholarships, fee waivers, discounted services) and outreach activities. It should be noted that OFFA has no powers to influence institutions' admissions policies and practices, nor can it oblige them to expand to widen the social pool of students or offer courses in disciplines that are more often attractive to those with lower entry requirements. OFFA's powers are restricted to ensuring that institutions spend a certain amount of money on outreach among under-represented groups, and that those that do apply with the requisite

qualifications receive fair treatment. Previous analyses of AAs have included comparative analysis of levels of financial support and of outreach priorities, of under-represented groups targeted, and comparative analysis of AAs by institution type and over time, since the first wave of AAs were agreed in 2006-07 (McCaig, 2008; McCaig and Adnett, 2009; McCaig, 2010; 2011; Callendar and Jackson, 2008; Callendar, 2009a; 2009b; Harrison, 2011; McCaig, 2014). This article aims to extend this analysis specifically to the language employed and the extent to which it is establishing, maintaining or changing sets of discourses used by institutions when rationalising access policies.

Market differentiation and critical discourse analysis

Drawing in part on Foucault's notion of the increasing commodification of the social world, Fairclough (1993) analysed the marketisation of the English higher education sector by focusing on the language used in job advertisements and prospectuses of two distinct types of higher education institutions, noting that language, as a social practice interacts with the social context (Fairclough 1993: 134). Such texts – discursive events – are seen as an attempt to create a hegemonic discourse that places an institution within a relational context to other institutions (Fairclough 1993: 136). Discourse is thus used to establish a 'type' in contradictory relation to an alternative 'type' of institution between which there can be a dynamic tension that mirrors the external political and economic context (Mulderigg 2012). These typologies can then be encoded in language, in behaviours and practices to create an institutional narrative that bestows a set of values in the sense of prestige (for pre-1992s) or inclusivity (for post-1992s). Some recent researchers in the field (e.g. Bowl and Hughes, 2013; Graham, 2013) recognise that sectoral diversity and institutional differentiation is a key element of marketisation. Thus the basis for institutional discourses and behaviours is set by market positionality (Gibbs and Knapp, 2002; Maringe, 2005; McCaig, 2010).

Marketing theory suggests that where full information is not clearly available (for example, in relation to how good a degree course will be for career development) consumers will look for alternative discursive indicators of positionality (Graham, 2013: 80) or classification based on 'a set of specialised recognition rules' translating into 'a generation of legitimate meaning' (Bernstein, 1990: 29). This legitimacy can be cemented though the 'social appropriation' of discourses by some institutions to the exclusion of others (Ball, 1990: 3). One clear positioning is based on the notion of institutional prestige, which acts as a substitute for information about quality in the minds of consumers and

media commentators (Gibbs and Knapp, 2002; Brown and Scott, 2009). Prestige is, by its very nature, restricted to a few institutions, but many others can make use of an order of discourse that celebrates other qualities such as a reputation for meeting the needs of a diverse student body, serving the needs of local employers, or by focussing on opportunities for locally based under-represented groups. These institutions aim to position themselves in widening participation (WP) or social justice terms in the way that businesses attempt to market themselves as more socially responsible or 'greener' than the competition.

Political context: English HE and the meanings of widening participation and fair access

Pre- and post-1992 institution types have developed markedly different approaches to participation. WP in its generic system-wide sense is focused on raising the aspirations of all young people that might benefit from higher education if they could be encouraged to achieve the requisite grades at school. The notion of 'fair access' – a subset of WP of concern to individual institutions (Bekhradnia, 2003) – is conceptually based in research by the Sutton Trust that identified several thousand school leavers in each year cohort with the ability to attend the most selective institutions that do not in fact attend them (Sutton Trust, 2004). This notion of 'lost talent' has been highly influential among policymakers concerned with social mobility; its underlying assumptions were present in the 2011 White Paper *Students at the Heart of the System* (BIS, 2011a) and in OFFA guidance for the submission of revised post-2012-13 AAs (OFFA, 2011) both of which actively encouraged the identification, through targeted outreach, of these 'most able' young people by selective institutions.

Alongside the White Paper, new guidance from OFFA (2011) removed the mandatory requirement for institutions to provide bursaries for all those that qualified on the basis of residual household income. This was briefly replaced by the National Scholarship Programme (NSP) (BIS 2011a: paras 5.28-5.29; BIS, 2011b) which was withdrawn after two years and supported only around a sixth of the number supported by the previous OFFA regime (Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2012: 6; McCaig, 2014). Hereafter, government has been mainly concerned not with increasing the number of students in HE from under-represented backgrounds, but only with the proportion of poorer students from lower socio-economic backgrounds attending the more selective institutions:

Analysis by OFFA shows that the relative chance of people from low-income backgrounds studying at the most selective third of universities has worsened. The most advantaged 20 per cent of the young population were around six times more likely to attend a selective university in the mid-1990s but seven times more likely by the mid-2000s (BIS 2011a: para 5.7).

Introducing new guidance for OFFA, the Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg reiterated the emphasis on fair access, defined as access for bright students from disadvantaged backgrounds:

Universities can and should do more to ensure fair access. Today we are setting out our expectations for the action needed to close the gap between aspiration and achievement. Social mobility in this country has stalled. It will only improve if we throw open the doors of universities, especially the most selective, to more bright students from disadvantaged backgrounds (BIS 2011c).

Relational discourses: pre- and post-1992 institutions

Pre-1992 institutions have long practised this ‘fair access’ version of WP. Earlier analyses of the content of the original set of 2006-07 AAs showed that pre-1992s were far more likely to carry out their outreach with ‘bright’ younger children (often from primary age) than post-1992s and also more likely to use their student support packages to reward merit (McCaig and Adnett, 2009; McCaig, 2010; 2011) on the principle of the early identification and ‘hot-housing’ of talented youth, if it could be found and kept on track through interventions. This is often done through the use of ‘merit-aid’ scholarships, financial support only for the brightest, which has long been a feature of the marketised US system (Heller, 2006; 2008). These support pre-1992 institutions’ interests in selecting only the best candidates from national and international pools of talent, the cherishing of academic autonomy and a reputation for research excellence.

Post-1992 institutions can rarely rely on tradition, prestige or their standings in international university rankings in their marketing, however they can and do draw on a series of alternative values to inform a different set of discourses that are more favourable to the wider notion of WP. Key elements of post-1992 discourse around WP are accessibility and diversity, being welcoming and student-friendly and catering for the needs of mature and part-time students. Post-1992s often have a long history of providing vocational education post-1992s are able to

emphasise their proximity to the needs of the labour market and this encompasses flexibility in delivery and the provision of sub-degree and bespoke professional qualifications, often (though not exclusively) with a particular relevance to local employment needs.

Method

As noted above, this analysis is based on two data sets; a sample of twenty original 2006-07 AAs and twenty 2012-13 AAs. The composition of the samples were kept the same in order to track changes over time. The two samples consist of the agreements lodged by the same institutions (ten research intensive and mainly selective pre-1992 universities – all, coincidentally, members of the Russell Group – and ten mainly recruiting post-1992 universities) at both points in time. The sampling frame was purposefully to have large institutions with the full range of subject areas from each of the two main types that had been shown through previous research (e.g. HEFCE, 2006) to have different understandings of WP reflecting their different student bodies and perceptions of their applicants markets. Sampling was also designed to ensure national coverage, to ensure that there was a balance of urban and rural/coastal institutions. To pick up localised competition effects the sample contained two ‘paired’ institutions (where a pre-1992 and a post-1992 were from the same city). Replicating the sample enabled a two-way analysis – between institution types (demonstrating institutional market differentiation) and over time (demonstrating and explaining positional change in the context of a developing market in higher education, reflected in Government policy).

Statements from all AAs were thematically analysed using NVivo to produce a dataset of comparative statements by institution type and across the time series. Themes were identified from the content and layout of AAs (which usually adhered to a basic template format). Key themes drawn from in this paper include: strategic aims and objectives; historical record on access; access enhancement statements; and outreach targeting. In each paired set of statements, set out below, the actual text is taken from the same thematic section of the agreements wherever possible; the later agreements were more likely to follow a set format, making statement-comparison easier. In the following analysis and tables, types are shortened to pre92 and post92 while institutions are attributed anonymously as Pre1 to Pre10 (if pre-1992 institutions) and Post1 to Post10 (if post-1992 institutions). The paper proceeds by looking first at discourse shifts in post-1992 institutions’ AAs; then

discourse shifts among pre-1992 institutions' AAs; followed by a summary and discussion section.

Analysis

The critical discourse analysis herein lays out the different approaches that pre- and post-1992 institutions adopt in relation to widening access and participation. As with Fairclough (1993) the emphasis is on different meanings attached to discourses stemming from quite different understandings of the nature and purpose of the endeavour of higher education. Where this paper extends the critical analysis is by introducing the variables of time and the driver of a dynamic policy trajectory encouraging further market differentiation (BIS, 2011a); discourse is thus analysed in relation to the original positionality of a 'typical' pre or post-1992 institution and the progressive language of 'change' in a shifting context.

Post-1992s: from the institution to the individual

The most striking shift in the discourse of post-1992 AAs was from statements about the institution and what it can do to statements about the individual student-as-consumer. In Table 1, Post2's 2012-13 statement focuses on 'potential' to be 'unlocked' through access to 'valid and relevant' education whereas in 2006-07 statements the emphasis was on 'institutional visions' to meet the needs of the region and beyond. Post6 takes a more subtle approach by reinforcing its WP commitments and by reference to students from diverse backgrounds, but where the 2006-07 agreement aims to develop 'responsible and critical' students, by 2012-13 it would produce 'ambitious, enterprising graduates'. The discursive journey from being a student to becoming a graduate is the substitution of process for outcome (emphases have been added and distinguishing names removed by the author).

Post-1992s discourse shifts: from inclusivity to employability

A second key discourse shift is that there is noticeably less emphasis being placed on inclusivity as a value and correspondingly more emphasis on employability, which seems to have become steadily more important for sample post-1992 institutions over the 2006-07 to 2012-13 period. Table 2 presents two different approaches to the need to enhance employability outcomes. Post7, which had a longer tradition of producing professional qualifications within its locale, retained its traditional mission of producing professionals but employed notably more personalised discourse, using such terms as the 'student journey'

and ‘learning experience’ to describe how the institution would shepherd them through their progress into the world of work, with a focus ‘on the professions’. There is a clear emphasis here on benefits to the individual, and also evidence of discourse inflation in the shift from ‘employability’ to ‘the professions’.

TABLE 1
Post-1992 discourse shift: from the institution to the individual

HEI	2006-07	2012-13
Post2	<p>We are a groundbreaking and distinctive higher education institution, whose vision is</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to combine academic rigour with vocational relevance; • to work in partnership with other providers and the public and private sectors; • to make a substantial contribution to meeting the higher level knowledge and skills needs of the [region] and beyond. 	<p>The University’s mission is to ‘unlock the potential within individuals and organisations through the excellence and responsiveness of our teaching, research and student support’. The University is committed to part-time, vocational and professional education; widening participation and extending educational opportunities to mature students and other under-represented groups.</p>
Post6	<p>The University ... seeks to deliver research and teaching to world class standards, to foster scholarship and culture, to serve its region in an open and accessible way and to develop responsible and critical students from a diverse social and cultural background.</p>	<p>The key for the University over the coming years is to retain and improve its position and build upon its already excellent platform to sustain its outstanding record for widening participation as well as further enriching and enhancing our interventions and activities in light of evidence relating to impact ... The University ... is recognised for its focus on social inclusion and outreach, providing pathways and routes into the University and working in the community to enable those who have the ability to benefit from a higher education experience to access it ... Once we have secured talent from the widest pool, the University team works hard to ensure that our students are enabled to reach their potential and are supported to develop as ambitious, enterprising graduates.</p>

The AA of Post9 contained no references to employment or the professions at all in 2006-07, concentrating mainly on the difficulties of

recruitment in an area with historically low progression into higher education. Hence its agreement focuses on progression arrangements and partnership working based entirely on intake. The 2012-13 agreement retains much of this discourse, but now also highlights the importance of measures to enhance the employability of their graduates – again an outcome, rather than process, focus.

TABLE 2
Post92 discourse shift: from inclusivity to employability

HEI	2006-07	2012-13
Post7	Access, progression, student achievement and employment are all central to the University's raison d'être and have been for well over a century ... A teaching-led University with a strong commitment to applied research, the University today is seeking to build on its proud record of service ... and on its traditional strengths in vocational and professional education.	[The] University has a history of supporting access to advanced education, which stretches back to its foundation ... Today, our mission statement reflects that: We are about creating opportunity for our students and equipping them to become highly successful in their chosen field. Our focus is on the professions. Widening participation is achieved by delivering success for our students. We can help create the best possible opportunities for our students to succeed.
Post9	The University recognises that raising levels of participation requires long-term strategic action based on changing underlying attitudes and aspirations. The partnership approach of the University includes developing long-term working relationships with regional Universities and strategic partner colleges [the region] in order to offer a range of progression pathways and educational opportunities for under represented groups.	In the lead up to 2012/13 the University will be investing even more resource in preparing students for the world of work through wider access to relevant placement and internship schemes, professional mentoring programmes, academic credit for extra-curricular work including volunteering, and a XXX scheme to encourage students from under represented groups to aspire to working in the professional sector.

Some institutions that expressed the links between their vocational provision and employment in both 2006-07 and 2012-13 also used the discourse of 'the professions' in 2012-13 agreements. One such was Post3 which moved from a discourse of widening participation and 'progression' to 'employment' in 2006-07 to one that highlights the 'professions' and 'fair access' in 2012-13. Post5, a traditional teaching-

and-learning institution that valued inclusivity and its ‘responsiveness to students’ needs’ including student success in graduate employment in 2006-07, had by 2012-13 a ‘strap line’ focused on ‘tomorrow’s professionals’ (see Table 3).

TABLE 3
Post-1992 discourse shift: from employability to ‘the professions’

HEI	2006-07	2012-13
Post3	<p>The University uses the term ‘widening participation’ in its broadest sense and encompasses dimensions such as race, social class, age, gender, sexuality and disability. It also relates to the whole student experience of HE, ranging from pre-entry through to progression, achievement and employment ... The University has a diverse student population. One of its shared values ... is ‘respect for diversity amongst members and prospective members of its community’.</p>	<p>We will ensure the accessibility of all our courses through a comprehensive programme of support that starts in local primary schools and extends to assisting our graduates into their chosen professional careers ... The University ... has a long-standing and well evidenced commitment to widening participation and fair access.</p>
Post5	<p>The University ... is a teaching and learning led university that places students’ needs first. We are proud of our record in widening participation to higher education with a highly socially inclusive student population. This is combined with high levels of student achievement and success in graduate employment.</p>	<p>At the University ... a key part of our mission is “to deliver an accessible and inspirational learning experience ... and to engage fully with employers and the community”. Our “strap line” is “inspiring tomorrow’s professionals”. To achieve this mission, and to live up to our brand promise, we seek to support every student through every stage of their personal “student journey”, from supporting their first decision to consider higher education as an option, through application, enrolment, their learning experience, engagement with professions, and trajectory into work and further study.</p>

Discourse change among Pre-1992 institutions

While 2012-13 documents were in general more detailed in the way that they engaged with widening participation and fair access, the marginality of these issues to pre-1992s core business model is perhaps reflected by

the fact that there are few new discursive themes introduced. Instead, previous discourses were inflated, enhanced and sometimes expanded in keeping with the longer documents produced in 2012-13 compared to 2006-07. Pre-1992 institutions took a more oblique approach to WP on the whole in their AA statements; only rarely was it presented outwith the context of the need to maintain excellence. In the earlier agreements several institutions did not even take the opportunity afforded by their submission to express their values and mission through their track record on access; where performance on access is cited in the 2012-13 agreements it usually in comparison to Russell Group competitors rather than the whole sector (competition within the Russell Group for those with the highest entry grades has become fierce, see McGettigan, 2013; Taylor and McCaig, 2014). Three key themes formed the contextual 'wrapper' for pre-1992 statements about WP: excellence, expressed as the importance of maintaining the highest possible entry requirements and institutions' international reputations that have to be maintained; institutional values relating to higher education in general – such as the Robbins principle (that higher education should be made available for all those that can benefit from it); and the difficulties that pre-1992s in particular face when trying to widen participation given that qualified applicants from under-represented backgrounds were often reluctant to apply to such institutions.

Pre-1992 discourse shift: from 'international' to 'global' excellence
Institution Pre1 was one of those that did not specifically reference WP in its 2006-07 agreement's mission statement, though it did speak of using its 'international reputation' to support the region and in continuing 'the tradition of making a university education available to the members of any community able to benefit from it', its version of the Robbins principle. By 2012-13, Pre1 had become a 'selective leading global University' but also strongly foregrounded its record on outreach and retention and on its access record for admitting state-school educated students. Rhetorically and figuratively reinforcing its position among the elite, Pre1 emphasises its track record not in relation to the whole sector, but to other members of the Russell Group, and in its rhetorical shift from 'international' to 'global' we can see a degree of discourse inflation. Pre5 also used Russell Group peer benchmarking to demonstrate a 'reputation for excellence in widening access to higher education' that was not considered for inclusion in the 2006-07 agreement (see Table 4).

TABLE 4
Pre-1992 discourse shift: from international to global

HEI	2006-07	2012-13
Pre 1	The University's commitment to widening participation is enshrined within its mission statement. 'We will continue to serve [the city and region] using our skills and knowledge and drawing on our international reputation to promote social and cultural well-being and to aid economic growth and regeneration ... We will continue the tradition of making a university education available to the members of any community able to benefit from it. '	The University ... offers an inspirational student experience at a selective leading global University . We are proud of our strong outreach and retention record that has been built up over a long period of time, and which places us in the vanguard of the Russell Group . Over the last 5 years, the HESA performance indicators show that we have ... outperformed many of our peer institutions in terms of the volume and proportion of students from lower socio-economic groups. We ... are seeking to expand our ... progressive programmes which work with Gifted and Talented widening participation students over the course of their secondary education.
Pre5	(No statement relating to WP)	The University ... is proud of its reputation for excellence in widening access to higher education . [The University] is ahead of its benchmark for recruitment from state schools; is second highest within the Russell Group for recruitment from NS SEC classes 4,5,6 & 7; is ranked equal first in the Russell Group for the percentage of students recruited from low participation neighbourhoods.

Pre-1992 discourse shift: from widening participation to 'fair access'
Several pre-1992 institutions spoke of the difficulties in WP given the very high demand for places on their selective provision. As noted above, OFFA has no powers to influence institutions' admissions policies and practices; OFFA can only monitor performance to ensure that institutions spend an agreed amount of money on outreach and that those that do apply with the requisite qualifications receive fair access. The following statements from Pre3 illustrate how the principle of inviolability of entry requirements is even more curtly expressed in 2012-13 than it was in the earlier document; but also that by 2012-13 Pre3 felt the need to insert a defensive statement (citing Russell Group research) that state school

students are less likely to achieve high A Level grades and less likely to apply to them. This suggests that some pre-1992 institutions were having to make their discourses ‘work harder’ to maintain the status quo that privileges higher admissions from independent school pupils (see Table 5).

TABLE 5
Pre-1992 discourse shift: contextualising the inviolability of high entry requirements

HEI	2006-07	2012-13
Pre3	It remains the University’s policy to admit UK students of the highest academic calibre and potential irrespective of financial or other non-academic considerations. However, as a leading international university, [this University] attracts high quality applicants from the rest of the EU and further afield ... Entry to [this University] typically requires a minimum of three grade As in appropriate GCE A Level subjects (or their equivalent). There is a large pool of qualified applicants and competition is rigorous.	The standard A-level offer for entry to [the University] is currently advertised as A*AA. There is a large pool of qualified applicants and competition is rigorous.
Pre3	We are also mindful of the implications of the difficulties being experienced by the state sector in student take up and teaching provision in a number of subjects which are critical for entry into many of our courses, including modern languages, mathematics and physical science subjects.	We are also mindful of the implications of the difficulties being experienced by the state sector in student take-up and teaching provision in a number of subjects that are critical for entry into many of our courses, including modern languages, mathematics and physical science subjects. Additionally and as noted by the Russell Group, a lower proportion of state-sector students overall achieve top grades compared with those in the independent sector, and state sector students are less likely to apply to selective universities.

TABLE 6

Pre-1992 discourse shift: from generic aspiration raising to targeting (only) the 'gifted and talented'

HEI	2006-07	2012-13
Pre8	The University is particularly concerned to contribute to educational excellence in the region . The university ... is a research-led university with demanding entry requirements, committed to excellence in teaching and research and to increasing the diversity of its student body .	The University ... has a long tradition of raising aspiration and supporting achievement by working with young people, teachers, schools and colleges across [the city and region] and beyond.
Pre7	(no statement on regional focus)	Our University Mission is to ... play a leading role in the economic, social and cultural development of the [region]. As a world-class civic university , our aim is to marry excellence with relevance and to respond to the needs and demands of civil society . We see our activities in WP and fair access as a natural consequence of our aims and values ... As a civic university which engages fully with our community, the city and the region , we have been working for the past 18 years with schools and colleges in the [region] to promote progression, participation and flexible access.
Pre10	The Russell Group believes that the outcomes of the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth's 'Higher Education Gateway' project could be of real interest to member institutions. The Group is committed to attracting and admitting those most able to benefit from the type of courses we offer adopting a more strategic and structured approach to outreach and widening participation across the University ... A more output focussed approach through working in a targeted way with less ' general ' aspiration raising and a clear focus on driving up academic attainment , leading to a realistic aspiration to progress to Higher Education.
Pre4	Last year, our centrally co-ordinated outreach programme alone worked with 14,500 young people. Working with young people from year 9 means that much of this activity takes time to feed into University targets and we are confident that we will continue to encourage more under-represented groups into the University	We will continue to work with young people aged 13 or under (including within primary schools) ... through outreach [and] ... annual festivals such as the Science Festival and Festival of the Arts .

Pre9		<p>Targeted outreach for access to selective courses / careers / professions. The major expansion in our outreach activities builds on our experience of running successful, programmes such as XXX and XXX – intensive, profession-specific programmes for cohorts of students from under-represented groups.</p>
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Pre-1992 discourse shifts: leadership through the ‘civic university’

Not all pre-1992s in the sample have the same ability to select from a national pool of identified bright young people. Pre8, for example, couches its improved record against the difficulties it faces; however it was keen in 2012-13 to reiterate its links to the region. Pre7, on the other hand, introduced the discourse of ‘civil society’ and the leadership roles that civic universities can play for the first time only in 2012-13 (Table 6). Pre-1992 institutions actuate this civic leadership through the identification and support of the ‘most able, least likely’ group of ‘gifted and talented’ young people. For Pre10 this long-standing strand of WP outreach had overtly become part of ‘strategic and structured approach’ that meant a withdrawal from the kind of ‘general aspiration raising’ work that was the basis of the Aimhigher partnership model. For Pre4, this means a continuing focus on younger age groups (mentioned in 2006-07 in the context of Y9); by 2012-13 the ‘most able, least likely’ group are not only highlighted as a strategic target in the document, but the age-focus had extended downwards to include primary-age pupils (9 to 11 years old). Targeting is also evident in the highlighting of subject disciplines and specific professions for Pre4 and Pre9 (see Table 6).

Discussion

Analysis of the two sets of post-1992 AAs shows marked shift in emphasis from the institution and its characteristics, dispositions and values to a discourse focused on outcomes for the individual student-as-consumer. This shifting discourse enables post-1992s to move towards a more business-like register and away from a welcoming, inclusive embrace of all those that wish to pursue higher education in its myriad forms. Behind much of this is the long run impact of the marketisation of the system and some of the more immediate changes to policy. For example: the need for institutions to maximise the number of higher grade applicants as part of the ‘core and margin’ student number control

policy (BIS, 2011a; Taylor and McCaig, 2014); the focus on the coupling of 'retention and success' appear to be direct responses to the requirements of new OFFA guidelines issued in 2011 (OFFA, 2011). The discourses of quality and employability reflect the marketisation-effect on institutions to at least maintain league table positionality, given that entry requirements (entry tariff points) and employability outcomes (destinations of leavers) are key metrics in those calculations.

Post-1992 institutions' AAs statements show a marked shift in emphasis in at least four linked areas of discourse. Where post-1992s once spoke of the institution and what it could do for the student, the labour market and wider society, in the later agreements there is more emphasis on positive outcomes accruing to the individual. Where post-1992s were portrayed as an agent for societal good (because of being welcoming and inclusive places that valued diversity for its own sake) in 2012-13 agreements most post92s were more concerned to highlight their role in enhancing individuals' employability, and in some cases employability discourse (always an implicit part of post-1992s offer) was presented more prestigiously via links to 'the professions'. A further discursive development was the adoption of the language of 'challenge' for some post-1992s in maintaining their WP track records in the face of competitive pressure (the need to recruit from a wider geographic base) and/or the financial climate (which threatened course withdrawal). These are linked to the discourse shift towards 'retention and success', as noted above.

Taken together these post-1992 discourse shifts can be seen to threaten the notion of WP and diversity of provision and of students. They are seen to reflect government policy and its emphasis on providing only social mobility for those with 'good' pre-entry grades the name of enhanced differentiation. The corollary is that institutions that resist this discourse (and the behaviour that underpins it) are denuded of students and are forced into an alternate market segment, one which recruits those studying sub-degree and part-time qualifications and has to adjust its price in the face of cheaper competition from 'new' alternative providers and further education institutions (a process expected to be accelerated by the provisions of the 2015 Green Paper Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice (BIS 2015).

Among pre-1992s there was less evidence of new discourses emerging between 2006-07 and 2012-13, however there was a degree of 'discourse inflation' and, in some cases, an embrace, for the first time, of a track record of success in WP. As in 2006-07, the main concern of pre-1992s in later agreements was maintaining excellence through the

inviolability of high entry grades and this set the discursive context for the way that WP or fair access was discussed. Access track records were presented in relation to other Russell Group members rather than benchmarked against the whole sector, and usually evoked in reference to targeted outreach designed to identify the brightest young potential applicants. One new area of discourse was the rise (or re-emergence) of the civic role of some pre-1992s as the locus for regional or local engagement. This emphasis on the university as a leading institution in the region replaced former references to engagement with collaborative partnerships (Aimhigher and Lifelong Learning Networks) which were both abolished in the period between the two sets of statements. This enabled pre-1992s to portray such engagement in a more prestigious light, befitting and reinforcing their status as intellectual leaders of the region, rather than mere collaborators in a collective enterprise.

Conclusion

Critical discourse analysis as employed here demonstrates the extent to which post-1992s are withdrawing from their reliance on being 'WP' institutions in the face of the needs for differentiation driven by marketisation. This is manifested in an increase of what Gerwitz and Ball (2000) describe as 'new managerialism' in the way that educational institutions are organised and operationalised. The increasingly marketised English higher education sector abounds with examples of such organisational change, noted by, for example McGettigan (2013) and particularly Taylor and McCaig (2014), which uses direct evidence from senior HEI managers to demonstrate an increasing emphasis on the 'bottom line' of recruitment, retention and successful employment outcomes. These are driven by manifestations of marketisation such as the National Student Survey and the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey and show the extent to which discourse is reflected in action. Because of this both pre- and post-1992s identify prestige markers that will continue to be important, both in differentiating within-type institutions from each other and by emphasising the unique set of values each type can offer. Pre-1992 institutions invoke prestige by rhetorically shifting from having international reputations to being globally competitive (as measured by league tables) and by the discourse of civic leadership, which is more prestigious than participating in state mandated partnerships such as Aimhigher. Post-1992s employed a similar prestige-shift when moving from employability to 'the professions', which are much more in discursive vogue since the publication of *Students at the Heart of the System* (BIS, 2011a). Such

discourse change illustrates the extent to which WP is threatened by marketisation. These tendencies are relevant far beyond the peculiarly differentiated English system; what is generalisable is the potential threat that institutional differentiation under any regime of competitive pressure will damage social justice and equity of access to higher education.

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ⁱ The terms pre- and post-1992 universities are used in the UK context to differentiate the 40 universities in existence prior to 1992 and those created after the Further and Higher Education Act (1992) which had mainly been Polytechnics or Colleges of Higher Education. These were HE institutions that did not have their own degree awarding powers (and thus could not be defined as universities) prior to the 1992 Act, hence 'post-1992s'.

ⁱⁱ The Russell Group is a mission group currently consisting of 24 UK research intensive universities (22 in England). It was established in 1994 originally to represent those universities with large medical schools and to lobby government in areas of shared interests.