



**OXFORD
BROOKES
BUSINESS
SCHOOL**

OXFORD
BROOKES
UNIVERSITY

EDUCATIONAL CHOICES AT 16-19 AND UNIVERSITY OUTCOMES

Catherine Dilnot (Oxford Brookes Business School)

**Lindsey Macmillan (Centre for Education Policy and
Equalising Opportunities, UCL)**

**Gill Wyness (Centre for Education Policy and Equalising
Opportunities, UCL)**





Traditionally, students in the UK entered university having studied A-levels (the main 'level 3' qualification in England) at age 16-19. But this has changed in recent cohorts with nearly one in four English students entering with just BTECs or a mixture of BTECs and A-levels. This flexibility in entry routes is important for the widening participation by disadvantaged groups seen in recent years, with 40% of the least privileged quintile of recent cohorts entering with BTECs compared with less than a tenth of the most privileged.

English first degree students at UK universities have largely successful outcomes, with high proportions of first years continuing to their second year of study and high proportions of final year students graduating with a first or upper second class degree. But we find differences in university outcomes between those students entering with just BTECs rather than just A-levels, even when comparing students with similar backgrounds and prior achievement, on the same course and at the same university. Those students who have just BTEC qualifications are:

- Almost twice as likely (11.4% chance compared with 6.0% chance) to drop out as a similar 'average' student with just A-levels;
- Around 1.7 times as likely to repeat the first year in the same subject at the same university as a similar 'average' student with just A-levels (5.9% compared with 3.4%);
- Around 1.4 times more likely to graduate below a 2:1 than a similar student with A-levels (24.9% chance compared with 17.7%).



However, it is very important to note that the overwhelming majority of students entering with BTECs or combinations do not drop out or repeat, and the majority of those graduating do so with at least a 2:1. These are considerable successes for these students, who without the availability of BTECs might not have had the opportunity to attend university at all. So while it is clearly important to address these differences in outcomes, we support the existence of routes into higher education that students from non-traditional backgrounds successfully use. We therefore have concerns about recently published Department for Education proposals to reduce significantly the number of Level 3 BTEC qualifications that it will fund.

The differences in outcomes we find can be almost entirely explained by differences in academic performance in module scores throughout university, implying that the lower success rates of BTEC students is reflecting lower academic performance, as opposed to non-academic reasons, such as BTEC students deciding that university is not for them. More work is needed to establish the reasons for these patterns of lower success among BTEC students, for example examining differences in methods of assessment, and evaluating whether the increased external assessment of reformed BTECs will address these gaps in outcomes. Further support throughout their studies for BTEC students, together with further joint working between schools, colleges, universities and qualification providers seems the appropriate response.

Our work also includes an analysis of how holding A-level subjects described as ‘preferred’ and ‘non-preferred’ for entry to university, which also varies by social background, is related to these outcomes at university, and whether having a non-required entry subject in an A-level or BTEC in the same subject as the university course for ten popular degrees is related to student outcomes.



“We aim to understand the relationships between entry qualifications and subjects, socioeconomic status and university outcomes, with the hope of mitigating adverse outcomes for vulnerable students from disadvantaged backgrounds.”

Dr Catherine Dilnot

TEAM



Dr Catherine Dilnot

Oxford Brookes Business School

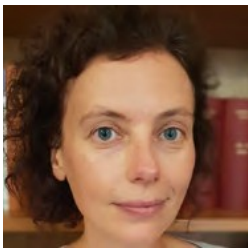
Catherine is senior lecturer in the Accounting, Finance and Economics department of Oxford Brookes Business School, and an honorary senior research associate at UCL Institute of Education. Her research interest is principally in subject choice and its relationship with social background, and the impacts such choices have on access to and progress within universities and the professions. She has published in top education journals.



Dr Lindsey Macmillan

University College London

Lindsey is Professor of Economics and Director of the Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities (CEPEO) at UCL Institute of Education. She is also a Research Fellow at Institute for Fiscal Studies and a Visiting Senior Research Fellow at Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion at London School of Economics. Lindsey's research interests focus on intergenerational transmissions of income and jobs, and the mechanisms through which these are passed across generations. She has published in top economics, sociology, social policy and education journals, and written a number of reports for government and third sector organisations, including the Social Mobility Commission.



Dr Gill Wyness

University College London

Gill is Associate Professor of Economics and Deputy Director of the Centre for Education Policy and Equalising Opportunities (CEPEO) at UCL Institute of Education. She is also Research Associate at the Centre for Economic Performance at London School of Economics. Gill's research focuses on inequality in higher education participation and performance, and her research has looked at the impact of higher education finance, access to information about HE, and predicted grades. She has published in top economics and education journals, and has written for DfE and third sector organizations such as the Sutton Trust.

CONTACT:

Catherine Dilnot cdilnot@brookes.ac.uk

Oxford Brookes Business School, Headington Campus, Oxford OX3 0BP, UK

OXFORD
BROOKES
UNIVERSITY

For more information about research opportunities
and doctoral study at Oxford Brookes Business School

tel: +44 (0)1865 48 58 58

email: business-research-office@brookes.ac.uk

www.business.brookes.ac.uk/research