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**HELOA North West & Northern Ireland, Autumn 2021 Group Meeting – Edge Hill University**

Session Notes – Thursday 9th September 2021

**Institutions in attendance:**

Aberystwyth University (1)

Edge Hill University (14)

Lancaster University (1)

Liverpool John Moores University (4)

Manchester Metropolitan University (3)

Myerscough College (1)

University Centre at Blackburn College (1)

University of Central Lancashire (3)

University of Liverpool (2)

University of Manchester (1)

University of Salford (2)

Student Finance England (1)

**Total attendees: 34**

The session notes below were written and compiled by a variety of reporters, therefore some formatting differences may be present.

1. **Keynote: ‘Unlocking Opportunity – The Impact of a Criminal Record on Access to higher education’,** Charlotte Brooks (PhD Researcher, School of Sociology & Social Policy, University of Nottingham) **– pp.2-5**
2. **‘T-Levels: What are they and how will they impact students?’,** Catherine Sezen (Senior Policy Manager at the Association of Colleges) **– pp.5-6**
3. **‘Progression Panel’,** Nicola Marsden (Head of UK Student Recruitment, Lancaster University); Karen Varty (Director of Recruitment & Admissions, Manchester Metropolitan University); Simon Jenkins (Head of Student Recruitment, Edge Hill University) **– pp.6-10**
4. **Keynote: ‘Unlocking Opportunity – The Impact of a Criminal Record on Access to Higher Education’**

*Charlotte Brooks (PhD Researcher, School of Sociology & Social Policy, University of Nottingham)*

It is important in our roles for us to understand that a criminal record doesn’t necessarily mean an individual has been in prison or that they have a custodial sentence.

There are many instances where individuals will have a criminal record, without either of these two scenarios being the case.

**What is a criminal record?**

* Any interaction with the criminal justice system. This includes fines, cautions, community sentences and prison sentences
* 1 in 6 people have a criminal record in England and Wales
* 70% of individuals with criminal records have fines for minor offences, many are not violent crimes

Think back to a time you have done something you don’t feel proud of and imagine having to disclose this to your team at work or having to constantly relive the occasion. This is often what individuals with a criminal record will have to experience. For example, when applying for insurance, they will have to provide information and details.

**Why is understanding this important to our roles?**

We need to ask whether this impact on an individual’s life is proportionate. These individuals have taken this action, which may have been a while ago – should it still be impacting them now when their sentence is done?

Although there is not a WP group specifically for individuals who have a criminal record, individuals who meet WP criteria are often more likely to have a criminal record. The Lammy review (2017) highlighted that some groups are marginalised by the criminal justice system in the UK, for example individuals of a BAME background

**Applying to university**

Prior to 2018, all individuals applying through UCAS were required to disclose any unspent convictions

There are some types of conviction which will never be spent

Since September 2018, only applications to regulated degrees, such as teaching, social work, nursing etc, need to disclose this information

Little is known about this in terms of applications to postgraduate taught and postgraduate research courses

**Are criminal records still a barrier?**

Many universities still ask applicants to disclose information after they submit their application.

Processes vary between institutions and are complex.

So how can we make the process fairer and more inclusive?

**Charlotte’s research plan**

Several stages:

1. **Policy analysis of different universities’ criminal records policies**
* How easy is it to find?
* How long did it take to find it?
* Do we know what it involves?
1. **Survey to Heads of Admissions at 148 universities**

This has been sent to both public and private institutions, but not colleges which offer HE provision

Sent at the start of September **(please give Head of Admissions at your institution a gentle nudge to complete this if they haven’t already)**

1. **Semi-structured interviews with university staff**
2. **Discussion with those who have a criminal record to look into the emotional impact**

For example, many individuals may feel nervous and unwanted by the institution

**What has been learnt so far from Charlotte’s work?**

**University processes**

107 universities still ask for criminal records disclosure, even though the box for disclosure has been removed from the UCAS form. We should ensure we are familiar with the process in relation to this for our individual institutions, so that we can answer queries in relation to this at open days or fairs.

**Language**

Language relating to WP groups is often encouraging, however this is not the case when it comes to criminal records. Terminology such as ‘ex-offenders’ is often used, which can cause distress, whereas phrasing such as ‘individuals with criminal records,’ would be better use of language.

Some policies describe individuals as risky or dangerous, however when we think about reasons why an individual may have a criminal record, this is often not the case. There is a need from some institutions to review, and be more mindful about, the language they are using in this area

 **Lack of a dedicated contact**

There appears to rarely be a dedicated contact at institutions for individuals with a criminal record, as there often is for groups such as care leavers. This can make it hard for individuals to get in contact with institutions about any queries or concerns in relation to application, as there is often concern about disclosing sensitive information to a general inbox.

**Lack of clarity**

21 HEIs don’t have information available online about whether individuals need to disclose criminal records.

**Other points to consider:**

American research highlighted that there is little evidence to show a link between disclosure of criminal records and safety on campus. Are there other ways in which we can keep our campuses safe?

Universities aren’t required to oversee risk assessments for those with criminal records, this is the role of the Criminal Justice System

There is no dichotomy between victims and individuals with a criminal record – many individuals are both a victim and an individual with a criminal record. For example, individuals with a criminal record and protection against violent partners. It is important to bear in mind that there is often a context behind a criminal record and it is important for us not to judge.

**What information might applicants want to know?**

* **Will I need to disclose during the admissions process?**
* **What information will I need to provide?**

Many don’t have a probation officer and for some institutions there can be a time limit, such as 2 weeks, for providing the information or their offer of a place may be cancelled

* **Will a criminal record limit applicants in terms of placements or part-time work?**

Criminal records may have an impact of individuals not just during the application process, but also once they are a student at an institution

* **Will I need to disclose in order to get a place in halls?**

Some students may not be able to afford private housing

* **Will I need to disclose on enrolment or registration?**

Some students get the whole way through the application process and get to the point of actually arriving to move into halls or enrol, only to find they then have to disclose, which can be traumatic

* **What information will be shared with academic departments or other students?**

We can all play a part in this in our roles by ensuring that when information is disclosed by a student at an event, we consider the sensitive nature of the information and respond accordingly e.g. not going back to the office and sharing this information with the team

**What actions can we take in our roles to best support individuals with a criminal record?**

* Avoid asking an individual why or how they received a criminal record
* Learn the process for disclosure of criminal records at our institution
* Take the time to research and understand the difference between spent and unspent convictions, so that we can help explain this to students with queries
* Be encouraging and supportive
* Signpost individuals to relevant support:

**Unlock** – organisation which supports individuals with a criminal record into university or employment. They will call universities on behalf of students to ask about their processes for disclosure (@unlockcharity)

**NACRO**

**Prisoner’s Education Trust**

**The Fair Chance Pledge** is similar to the Stand Alone Pledge and is a way for universities to make their processes fairer for individuals with a criminal record.

**Charlotte’s contact details:**

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1. **‘T-Levels: What are they and how will they impact students?’**

*Catherine Sezen (Senior Policy Manager, Association of Colleges)*

**T-Levels**

* 2 years for 16-19 year olds (not currently offered to adults) 2 years=1800 hrs
* 1 T-level equivalent to 3 A-levels
* 80% classroom learning and 20% work placement
* Rolled out in 2020, starting with 3 courses. By 2023 there will be 23 in a variety of areas
* Some routes apprenticeship only
* Not all T-levels same size in terms of hours
* Split into core and occupational specialism
* Industry placement 315-420 hours over 4 years
* Each route split into specialisms. Colleges may not offer all
* Mitigating components to support students not confident in assessments is the two different grades factoring into final grade. Occupational and core units 50/50
* T-levels awarded UCAS points
* Created following consultation with employers. HE providers not originally consulted. Not originally route to HE but following pushback from stakeholders (parents) T-levels made route to HE

**Year in review**

* Employers very engaged. Overall very well received
* Challenges include:
	+ Requirement for English/Maths
	+ Industry placements
	+ FE lack of funding
	+ Not enough students for some specialisms
* 1-year T-level transition programme to support students not yet ready to take T-levels get to required level. Core components include guidance period, English and Maths, work experience and preparation, introductory technical skills and pastoral support

**Level 3 review**

* Streamlining by defunding of technical level 3s that overlap with T-levels. Some courses such as performance will continue to be funded as no T-level equivalent
* By August 2023 technical qualifications that overlap with wave 1 and 2 of T-levels will be defunded

**Further reading recommended**

* NCFE HE guide <https://www.ncfe.org.uk/t-levels/creating-the-next-generation-of-skilled-workers>

**Contact details of speakers:**

**Catherine Sezen:** catherine.sezen@aoc.co.uk

1. **‘Progression Panel’**

*Nicola Marsden (Head of UK Student Recruitment, Lancaster University); Karen Varty (Director of Recruitment & Admissions, Manchester Metropolitan University); Simon Jenkins (Head of Student Recruitment, Edge Hill University)*

**Introductions:**

***Karen Varty* –**

* Director of recruitment and admissions at Manchester Met for 4 years.
* 22 years in Higher Education.
* Has worked in school administration, faculty recruitment, central recruitment – UCAS Fairs etc.
* Previously Head of school administration in Computer Science, covering general student admin including recruitment.
* Previous to that; head of academic services within faculty – most operational activity, responsible for all UK recruitment and all admissions (UK, international, UG, PG etc).

***Simon Jenkins –***

* Head of student recruitment at Edge Hill for 4 years. Home student recruitment, events, coms, CRM, UG and PG.
* Previously UK student recruitment manager at Keele University
* Previous to that, Student Recruitment Manager at Nottingham University after being a Student Recruitment Officer.
* Sat on midlands HELOA Committee.
* Started at Durham, Student Ambassador to graduate assistant in WP and recruitment.

***Nicola Marsden –***

* Graduate of Durham, Student Ambassador to general graduate assistant
* Schools liaison officer for 4 years
* Moved to faculty of social sciences to do university administration
* Moved to Teesside as deputy head of admissions for health and social care
* 6 months in maternity cover for head of admissions
* Recruitment manager at Teesside then head of student recruitment
* Chair of HELOA NE/Yorkshire and Humberside
* Moved to head of student recruitment at UCLAN
* Temporarily worked outside of HE for charity centre with partially sighted people, then IVF clinic
* Wanted to go back to HE so started at Lancaster as head of student recruitment.

**Questions:**

1. ***Nicola – how did you make the jump from Schools Liaison Officer to deputy head of admissions? Is that a big jump?***

Grade wise, not a big jump as different universities. Schools Liaison was part of admissions at Durham so very relevant experience.

1. ***Do you think going to Durham made a difference?***

**Simon** – No not really, could have done Student Ambassador work anywhere.

**Nicola** – Less about the specific institution and more about being proactive and involved, having lots of experience, take opportunities and find out how different areas work – also means getting a bigger network.

**Karen** – skills are transferable so having a breadth of knowledge really helps you bring a different perspective, it’s okay to move around a bit and cover different internal and external areas. Visibility helps – I was chair of governors at a school as well.

1. ***Experience is great but there are often not many opportunities to progress. What tips would you give for someone struggling to progress/ not having line management experience etc?***

**Simon** – doesn’t like asking for line management experience. Throw your hat in the ring anyway. The majority of people applying will be looking for progression, if you have a strong application then you are likely to be considered anyway,

**Nicola** – it doesn’t have to be experience within your job, you could have a separate qualification, experience in HELOA etc, even if you haven’t had specific experience within current role. Mentoring, coaching, secondments, etc. Speak to manager and look for external experience. If you need to then go sideways as well as up.

**Karen** – events involves being responsible for people, ordering prospectuses can involve working with budgets, look at every day experiences and see what you’ve got from them even if it’s not formal “experience”

1. ***Most beneficial activity or decision which made you nervous or uncomfortable beforehand?***

**Karen** – moving away from a university after 18+ years, leaving experience, relationships etc behind. Big risk but massive benefit.

**Nicola** – leaving the sector for a few years, for personal/health reasons, making huge decision to leave a senior position to move into the charity sector, something she didn’t know much about, was actually really helpful in developing knowledge and transferable skills.

**Simon** – big step out of comfort zone applying for current role from team of 5 to team of 30, much bigger remit, big jump and quite nerve-racking – don’t be put off applying just because you don’t meet the whole person spec as often fine anyway. Really glad he did it! Take a leap of faith even if it might be a big step.
\*Women much more likely to not do this than men\*

1. ***For people in recruitment and outreach thinking of making the next step – it might feel awkward asking manager for advice as lets them know you’re thinking of leaving?***

**Simon** – if you have a good relationship with your manager then talk to them, they recognise there is movement in the sector and have probably done it themselves to get to where they are now! This line of work requires it. Most people should be very open to these conversations (and you won’t get left out of the lunch club!) The more open you are the better.

**Nicola** – should be seen as a success when people are able to progress as shows you have set them up well to move on. Use PDR as a way to have these conversations – it’s good to want to be bettering yourself! If they want to keep you they’ll help you look at secondments/ internal progressions.

**Karen** – often managers have different takes on things so may be able to help you with applications and may have knowledge about diff job roles and institutions.

1. ***These roles require you to stay up to date with the sector – how do you keep this up with busy roles?***

**Karen** – Wonkhe, gov.uk, Neon, having ear to the ground, even just BBC education etc. Lucky to have people supporting with this! Just looking whenever get the chance. If you can build in time to do it then great but does end up being one of the first things to go with a busy schedule so learn to skim read!

**Nicola** – try and block out small chunks time to go through articles etc, put anything interesting looking in a “to read” folder, get good at sifting and prioritising. Go to HELOA events, keep a good network, you’ll keep hearing things and stay up to date.

**Simon** – Wonkhe is great; daily updates nicely summarised. There is usually someone who collates useful education information and circulates it so check if they have that at your institution. Read sector updates for 10 mins in the morning, diary permitting, while having breakfast! Try and make good habits. Talk to people! Get different takes and stay up to date.

1. ***Any interviews that really stand out/ top tips?***

**Karen** – the ones that stand out are when people really think about the answer and don’t give a ‘standard’ response. Using examples to answer questions. The best are when they really understand what the role is about and don’t just tag an answer on at the end.

**Simon** – so much of it is about how you come across in interview, will they fit in, were they friendly, relatable etc. Manner and how they conduct themselves is just as – and sometimes more – important.

**Nicola** – every interview is very similar, often have similar experiences, comes down to confidence and how they would fit into the team. Being able to see more strategic/ broadly than just the specific questions asked. Do research so they know you understand the job, but also how it fits into a bigger context.

**Simon** – think about what the panel are looking for, e.g. can I see this person going into a school, developing teacher relationships, engaging students, leading a team etc. not just what you know but how you’ll handle different situations. Also try and get experience in interview*ing.* Helps so much. Being a school governor is a great way to get involved in interview panels (as well as lots of other skills!)

**\*Chris M** – we have a NW contact for school governors so get in touch\*

1. ***Did being an ambassador spark your interest/ would you still be doing this if you hadn’t done that?***

**Nicola –** so many people fall into it through the SA route (no one grows up wanting to be it!), best way to learn the team and roles even exist – really beneficial and wouldn’t be doing this if I hadn’t done that first.

**Simon –** only knew this existed because of SA work, always finding new teams you didn’t know existed!

**Karen –** was never a SA, came into the sector after working in FE into an admin role and then moved around but didn’t do anything external for quite a long time.

1. ***Sometimes things don’t go to plan, how do we show resilience, ability to respond and build ourselves back up?***

**Simon** – can be hard, but try and keep a sense of perspective, take a step back, it’s not the end of the world, try something else and then you can show what you’ve learned.

**Nicola** – having external networks (like HELOA) means you can talk to other people in same position, go through ‘mistakes’ etc with them so you aren’t alone. Keep moving forward and look at different options. Talking it out with other people puts it back into context.

**Karen** – don’t give up and think about what HAS gone well. Things do go wrong but focus instead on what went right within it rather than the one thing that didn’t. Think about it holistically.

**Simon** – Managers know not everything works. There are probably lots of different factors at play. You are your own worst critic.

1. ***Top tips***

**Nicola:**

1. Network
2. Get a breadth of experience
3. Staff development through other courses/ projects
4. No “best” way to progress, do what’s right for you
5. Live the dream

**Simon –** You don’t have to move around different institutions necessarily, it’s different for everyone.

**Karen –** look at person specs for potential future job roles so you know where your gaps are before you’re considering applying. Good to know what areas need development well in advance of actually wanting to move on. Will give you a better idea of what you want.

**END.**