Let's Talk about PQA

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HELOA 2020 National Conference

Stratford-upon-Avon

17 January 2020

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A brief update on me!

- Boards
  - Open University
  - Student Loans Co
  - United Learning
  - The Access Project (chair)
  - The Dyson Institute (chair)
  - London Interdisciplinary School
  - Education Cubed
  - Founders4Schools
- Advisory
  - HEPI
  - Cairneagle
  - The Student Room – Enlitened (wellbeing and student engagement app)

Context

- Recurring debate about PQA
- Unconditional offers
- Equality
- Undermatch/overmatch
- Admissions reviews
  - Office for Students
  - UUK

Unconditional Offers – a catalyst?

- UCAS data on U offers
- Marketisation
- "Bums on seats'

Universities must end 'incentivised' unconditional offers, education secretary Gavin Williamson says

'Bums on seats' degrees fail students, minister tells universities

20 universities account for bulk of rise in unconditional places

Ucas figures show institutions rely heavily on unconditional offers to attract students

BBC NEWS

Home   UK   World   Business   Politics   Tech   Science   Health   Family & Education

Family & Education   Young Reporter   Global Education

'Conditional unconditional' offers on the rise

By Katherine Sellgren
BBC News education reporter

17 December 2019

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UCAS data

UCAS END OF CYCLE REPORT 2019

CHAPTER 5: UNCONDITIONAL OFFER-MAKING

> 37.7% of 18 year old applicants from England, Northern Ireland, and Wales received an offer with an unconditional component.

> Over a quarter of applicants received a conditional unconditional offer.

> 8.5% of offers made were conditional unconditional.

> Applicants from advantaged backgrounds remain more likely to receive a conditional unconditional offer than applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds.

> Arts applicants are most likely to receive a direct unconditional offer, as assessment of an applicant's portfolio can determine their suitability for their course.

UCAS

PQA – a brief history

- Swartz Review – 2004

- Students at the Heart of the System
    2011 White Paper

- 2011/12 – UCAS Admissions Process Review

Making applications

6.3 The Steering Group asks the Secretary of State for Education and Skills to set up a high-level implementation group as soon as possible to achieve post-qualification applications (PQA). The current system, relying on predicted grades, cannot be fair. It does not meet the Steering Group's recommended principles of fair admissions, since it is based on data which are not reliable, it is not transparent for applicants or institutions, and may present barriers to applicants who lack self-confidence.

A review of the benefits of Post-Qualification Application (PQA)

5.39 An area we want to examine further is whether a system of Post-Qualification Application (PQA) would promote fairer access. PQA involves students applying to higher education once their exam results are known, rather than relying on predicted grades. There continues to be considerable interest in such a system across the education sector.

UCAS

ADMISSIONS PROCESS REVIEW
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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PQA – the unassailable (?) logic

It just makes sense!

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Common arguments

- Too many students' grades are underpredicted
- It would be better for disadvantaged students
- Everyone would know where they stand
- Everywhere else in the world does it
- etc

What is PQA?

- Post Qualifications Admissions?
- Or, Post Qualifications Applications?

PQA

PQA – a solution looking for a problem?

- >92% get offers
- Three quarters get into first/firm choice
- Predicted grade system works for vast majority
- Conditional offers motivate students
  - (And it seems that *'unconditional'* offers de-motivate students)
- Applicants have plenty of time to make choices, visit universities, arrange accommodation, apply for loans
- Plenty of options if something goes wrong (Extra, Clearing, Adjustment)
- Schools/colleges free to concentrate on small number of students who find themselves in Clearing or want to change their minds

Main arguments against.....

- Timetable
  - Would students do their research earlier in the cycle?
- Transactions
  - Applications
  - Open Days
  - Accommodation
  - Student Finance

Post Qualifications Applications & Admissions Transactions

- In numbers…..
  - C.400,000 school leavers needing post-results advice and guidance
  - Currently x5 applications each = 1.7million applications
  - (Reduce to two applications = 800,000 applications)
  - 400,000 students needing support around decisions
  - 400,000 student finance applications
  - 6-8 weeks between exam results published and start of university term

- And what about…
  - Open day visits
  - Accommodation
  - Pre-enrolment paperwork

And all in the school holidays!

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Main arguments against.....

- Timetable
  - Would students do their research earlier in the cycle?
- Transactions
  - Applications
  - Open Days
  - Accommodation
  - Student Finance
- School holidays
- Disadvantage for disadvantaged
- One big Clearing
- We already have PQA – it's called 'Clearing'
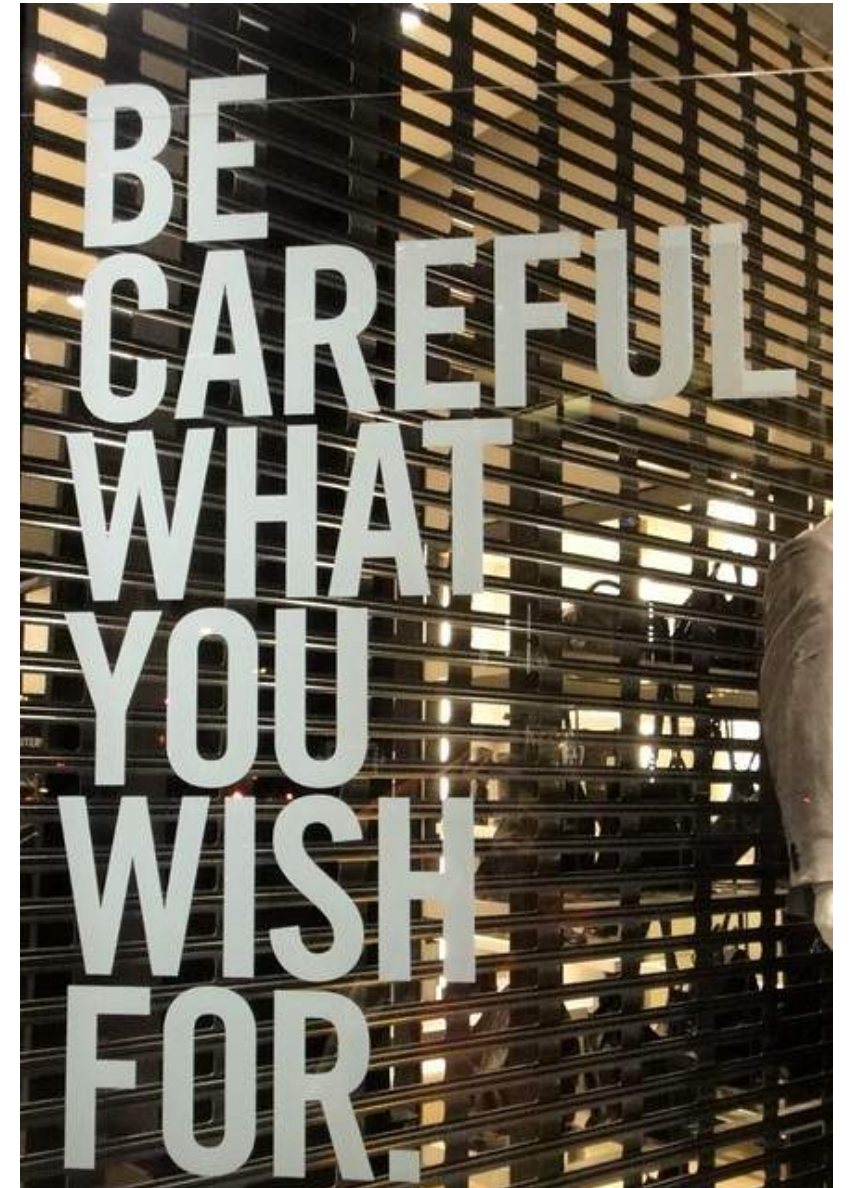- University Planning/budgeting

Could the wider system be improved?

- number of choices
- ranking of choices
- parallel v sequential applications
- insurance choices
- firm offer dates
- fixed conditions
- start dates
- application cycle deadlines
- Oxbridge dates and rules

Final Message…..

Thank you!

Please contact me on mary@curnockcook.com

And follow me on Twitter @MaryCurnockCook