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Title

Employers, quality and standards in higher education : shared values and vocabularies or elitism and inequalities? / Louise Morley and Sarah Aynsley

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Abstract

This paper is based on a research project funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England which investigated employers' needs for information on higher education quality and standards. A key issue was identifying the type of knowledge that employers utilise in graduate recruitment. A finding of the study was that information on quality and standards was being used by some employers in a way that could undermine equity and widening participation initiatives. Whereas employers reported that, in initial recruitment, they placed least emphasis on information about quality and standards and most emphasis on graduates' interpersonal and communication skills, over a quarter used league tables/Top 20 lists in their decision-making processes and 80 per cent of employers cited the importance of the reputation of the higher education institution in their decision making about marketing and individual recruitment of graduates. Reputation was based on real or imagined league tables, ?grapevine? knowledge, personal, regional and professional networks,

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performance of past graduates and prejudice against new universities. The hierarchy of opportunity within the labour market often appeared to correspond to a highly stratified higher education sector.
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