What more can be done to widen access to highly selective universities?

A Report from Sir Martin Harris, Director of Fair Access

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Introduction

1. This Report is written in response to an invitation from Lord Mandelson, set out in a letter to me from David Lammy dated 6 December 2009 (See Annex A). The Report asks me to consider:

- further action that could be taken to widen access to highly selective universities for those from under-privileged backgrounds

- how universities can ensure that measures for wider access are prioritised most effectively and do not suffer in a time of greater fiscal constraints

- how best individual universities can set and achieve targets for themselves

- how best to promote the partnership of schools and universities to identify and mentor the most talented young people from an early age

- whether the money currently used by universities under access agreements, mainly spent on bursaries for their students, can be better targeted in order to give more effective support to fair access, and to offer advice on future options.

2. There are two absolutely critical points to be made at the outset. Firstly, the terms of reference ask me to address issues relating to access to highly selective universities for those from underprivileged backgrounds. This I shall do, but nothing in what follows should be taken to belittle in any way the enormous contribution which very many other universities and colleges make to educating, training and enhancing the life chances of so many of our fellow citizens from all parts of our society. This background should be taken as read throughout. Secondly, the focus in this Report is on full-time home undergraduate students, as was intended by Ministers. It is important to stress at the outset, however, that part-time students form a very significant proportion of each undergraduate cohort, and that the part-time mode of study has played a central role in the success of the widening participation (WP) agenda described in what follows. I am confident that the needs of part-time students, noted again most recently by Alan Milburn[1], will be addressed in some detail by the Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance (hereafter referred to as the 'Browne Review') currently underway.

[1] The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions (2009) *Unleashing Aspiration: The Final Report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions*. (Milburn Report). London: Cabinet Office. Accessed at www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/strategy/publications.aspx (16 April 2010) Recommendation 43 states that 'The Government should use the opportunity of its review of the impact of variable tuition fees to consider a radical reshaping of the student support system. It should initiate a national debate on the trade-offs between higher fees, growing student places and increasing financial support for students. It should consider fairer financial support for those undertaking postgraduate and part-time courses, more targeted packages of financial support for students from average and less well-off families, and new support for students living and learning at their local university, including 'fee-free' higher education.'

3. In addressing the issues put to me in respect of full-time undergraduate students, I seek initially to establish a context within which the five specific points in David Lammy's letter may be situated – a context about which there is a far higher degree of consensus than might have been foreseen when the Higher Education Act 2004 was enacted. As I shall show briefly below (chapter 1), the determined efforts of the last decade to widen participation in higher education have, taking the sector as a whole, been very successful indeed. Of particular note is the recent increase in participation of the least privileged socio-economic groups. For probably the first time ever in a period of expansion of higher education, the growth in participation from these groups has been higher than that from more advantaged groups[2]. While current economic difficulties may well have further accentuated this growth in applications, the underlying upward trend is well established, and is due in significant measure to the long-term, cross-sector work in schools and colleges to drive up aspirations and attainment, and to major efforts on the part of higher education institutions (HEIs) to make appropriate provision for a very wide range of entrants.

4. However, the fact remains that applications and entrants to the most selective[3] universities are in varying degrees less representative

[2] Higher Education Funding Council for England (2010) *Trends in young participation in higher education: core results for England.* Issues paper 2010/03. Bristol: HEFCE p.2.

[3] For the purposes of this Report, we consider the most selective institutions or courses to be those for which both the entry requirements and the demand for places are high. We have used a number of measures to capture this characteristic. Most frequently we use the most selective third of universities by

of society as a whole. Mostly this is explained by attainment, but application rates are also a considerable factor. Of course, highly qualified students should apply to courses appropriate to their interests and abilities wherever they are provided, but it is important that applicants' decisions should be well informed; currently talented young women and men from disadvantaged backgrounds (the 'most able least likely'[4] group discussed at some length below) who could apply to selective universities, are disproportionately not doing so, so reducing their chances of upward social mobility. Here too the facts are not in dispute: they are presented in outline below (chapter 2). Where opinions start to differ, and at times to differ sharply, is when we ask whether this relative lack of opportunity for some able young people from disadvantaged backgrounds matters and if so, what should be done to address the issue. Much of what follows focuses on these questions. At this point, I would simply observe that to deny opportunities to young people of talent simply because, for example, their family lacks any previous experience of higher education, or because their school cannot offer a full range of options at age 14 or lacks the wherewithal to advise

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entry tariff points (see Annex C), the self selected 'mission' groupings of institutions that categorise themselves as research intensive and selective, and the Sutton Trust grouping of 13 highly selective universities. In reality there is a continuum of selectivity and the precise definitions for the groups we use are not crucial; their purpose is to provide summaries that illustrate that the characteristics of the HE sector and the profile of students at different types of institution vary significantly. For this analysis we have formed our summary groupings at the level of institution but recognise that there are highly selective courses delivered in institutions that are not generally highly selective.

[4] By 'most able least likely' we mean those young people with high ability who have the potential to do well at the most selective universities but who, as a consequence of their disadvantaged background, are the least likely of the high ability group to realise that potential. This may be simply because they do not apply to these institutions, or through unsuitable qualification route choices, or other factors relating to their background, especially their schooling, that depress their measured attainment below that which reflects their HE potential.

them, seems extremely difficult to justify. We are after all talking about real individuals whose futures deserve serious consideration.

5. Of course, some will argue that now is not the time to encourage yet more young people to apply to selective universities. They will point to the surfeit of well qualified young people currently applying to universities, highly selective and otherwise, a situation likely to continue for at least several years. I accept of course that there will never be enough places in selective universities to admit all the qualified candidates who would benefit from a place, particularly now - but that does not seem to me a reason to limit the pool of applicants by failing to encourage the 'most able least likely' to apply. The evidence suggests that once candidates with the requisite talent and attainment are in the relevant applications pool, they are treated fairly[5] and that, once they are admitted to university, similarly qualified students from less favoured backgrounds do at least as well as their peers[6]. Despite the current very real pressures, therefore, it seems to me that the agenda of encouraging fair access to selective universities and courses is a timeless one.

[5] Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2009) *Applications, Offers and Admissions to Research Led Universities*: *a joint report by the Sutton Trust and BIS*. Research Paper No. 5, accessed at www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/migratedD/publications/B/BIS-RP-005. "Young people with similar attainment who applied to one of the most academically demanding degree courses were around as likely to gat an offer, regardless of the type of school or college they attended."

[6] For example, see Higher Education Funding Council for England (2005) *Schooling effects on higher education achievement: further analysis - entry at 19*. Issues paper 2005/09. Bristol: HEFCE, which shows that "on a like-for-like basis, students from independent schools appear to do less well [in terms of degree results] than students from other schools and colleges."

Chapter 1

Participation in higher education overall is widening significantly

6. The long-standing discrepancies in the take-up of higher education (HE) opportunities between different social groups, in particular between social classes, are well known and widely recognised as unacceptable in a just and equitable society. Widening participation aims to provide equality of opportunity for all those with the potential to benefit from higher education regardless of their background. Given the deeply embedded and structural disadvantages that widening participation seeks to overcome, the solution was never going to be short or simple. It is unsurprising then that, to date, measures have at times shown frustratingly slow progress. This has led to a perception in some quarters that the efforts and the substantial investment to widen participation have seemed at times to have been less effective than hoped.

7. However, a recent report from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), *Trends in young participation in higher education: core results for England*, shows that there have been sustained and significant increases in the proportion of young people from our most disadvantaged groups entering HE since the mid-2000s. Taken together with recent increases in the HESA performance indicators[7], it seems likely that we

[7] The HESA performance indicators are published online at www.hesa.ac.uk/pi.

are now seeing the positive impact of long-term policies applied across the entire educational sector[8]. Far from being a failure, it appears that widening participation efforts over the past decade have been increasingly successful.

The Dearing Report

8. The origins of the broad policy objective of widening participation can be traced to the Robbins report of 1963[9] which rejected the concept of a limited 'pool of ability' and argued that HE was an important compensator for social disadvantage. The report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education[10] (the Dearing report) published in July 1997 built on and updated the aims of the Robbins report and is widely considered to be the key impetus behind recent WP policy. It highlighted that while participation had increased overall, there were still some groups that remained under-represented. In particular the differences in participation rates between the advantaged and disadvantaged socio-economic groups were identified to be large.

[8] Higher Education Funding Council for England (2010) *Trends in young participation in higher education.* Paragraphs 69-72.

[9] Committee on Higher Education (1963) *Higher Education: Report of the Committee Appointed by the Prime Minister Under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins 1961-63*, Cm 2154 (Robbins Report). London: HMSO.

[10] National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (1997) *Higher Education in the Learning Society*, *Summary report*, London: HMSO. Accessed at www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/ncihe (16 April 2010).

The Widening Participation allocation

9. The Dearing report put widening participation firmly on the map and led to a number of significant changes. For example, since 1999-2000, in recognition of the additional costs incurred in widening participation, HEFCE has given universities a Widening Participation allocation as part of their main teaching grant. The more widening participation students an institution has, the larger is its Widening Participation allocation. Over the last decade, institutions have developed a range of approaches to widen participation both individually and through partnerships, for example Aimhigher partnerships, and they have begun to embed widening participation activities much more strongly within their broader institutional strategies, a development that has enabled those activities to have much greater impact.

Widening participation strategic assessments and access agreements

10. To further support widening participation across the sector, in 2009 HEFCE made the continued receipt of the widening participation allocation conditional on the production of a Widening Participation Strategic Assessment (WPSA). The WPSA includes each university's admissions policy; the broad level of resources that it will commit to widening participation; and the measures and targets by which it will judge success. HEFCE has worked with OFFA to ensure that WPSAs are closely integrated with institutions' access agreements. These

agreements set out each institution's financial support for lower income students in the form of bursaries and scholarships and any additional outreach commitments. The WPSA and the Access Agreement are complementary while having clearly distinct roles. Legislation requires an Access Agreement to be in place and its content delivered if a university wishes to charge tuition fees above the basic amount (£1,285 in 2009-10), while the WPSA is part of a wider ongoing dialogue with HEFCE and OFFA around how best to develop and improve widening participation and fair access.

HEFCE's report on trends in young participation

11. Until recently, the measures of progress in widening participation have suggested that these developments have led to modest but steady progress, see Annex B. However the recent HEFCE report on trends in young participation[11] provides a far more positive picture. Arguably the most meaningful and robust participation measure available, it takes an area-based approach, drawing on the full range of HE student datasets[12] to provide powerful, accurate and meaningful data on the HE participation rates of those in our most disadvantaged communities over the last 15 years.

[11] HEFCE (2010) *Trends in young participation in higher education.* Young participation is defined as entrants aged 18 and 19.

[12] The report also uses child benefit data to provide the base population.

Step change in participation of disadvantaged students

12. This research provides the strongest evidence yet of a step change in the participation of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. It shows that the likelihood of those from the lowest participation areas participating in HE has increased by 30 per cent over the last five years alone and by 50 per cent over the last 15 years. Importantly, the gap between the participation rates of the most advantaged and the most disadvantaged areas has been narrowing, both in proportional terms and percentage point terms, since the mid 2000s. This is the first time that this has happened since the mid-1990s, and most likely ever. This significant narrowing of the gap has not occurred at the expense of fewer young people from advantaged areas entering higher education. Young people in advantaged areas are 5 per cent more likely to enter higher education than five years ago, and 15 per cent more likely compared to the mid-1990s[13].

Many factors have contributed to this growth

13. The precise causes of these significant rises in participation rates are likely to be complex and to a large extent unknowable as the effects of concurrent and interacting policies and social change cannot be isolated. However, it is clear from the HEFCE study that increased participation for disadvantaged young people closely tracks the outcomes of long term policies across the entire educational sector – policies such as the

[13] HEFCE (2010) *Trends in young participation in higher education.* p1-2.

improvement in GCSE attainment and substantial increased expenditure in schools. These policies were supported by other major programmes such as the introduction of the Educational Maintenance Allowance to encourage individuals to continue into further education, and the national Aimhigher programme. Both of these programmes, as well as the expansion of universities' own activities to increase participation through their outreach work with schools and colleges, and the development of flexible and accessible HE programmes, have played an important role in helping both to raise attainment and convert those increases into entry to higher education.

But a large gap remains between the most and the least advantaged

14. However, the gap in participation rates between the most and least disadvantaged remains significant: the participation rate of the most advantaged 20 per cent of young people is 57 per cent compared with a participation rate of 19 per cent for the least advantaged 20 per cent of young people[14]. Despite the very significant progress that has been made, there is still much more to be done in making access to HE more equitable for all groups in society. And, as the following sections demonstrate, the patterns of participation at highly selective universities

[14] HEFCE (2010) *Trends in young participation in higher education.* p5.

can be quite different from the sector as a whole and broader access to these institutions is an area where progress has been much slower[15].

15. As requested, this report focuses on what more can be done to improve access to selective institutions. However, it should not be forgotten that this is just one aspect of the broader WP agenda. Without continued investment in that broader agenda, there is a risk that the accelerating progress made to date across the sector will be stopped in its tracks. And if there is not sufficient access to higher education across universities and colleges of all types, the socially mobile, highly skilled workforce that lies at the heart of government's ambitions for a globally competitive economy and a cohesive and equitable society will simply not materialise.

[15] For example, see Office for Fair Access (2010) *Submission by OFFA to the Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance.* 2010/01. p26. Figures 7 and 8. Accessed at www.offa.org.uk/publications.

Chapter 2

Participation in the most selective universities is not widening

16. While progress on widening participation in HE as a whole is encouraging, many have suspected that further attention needs to be directed towards addressing the issue of widening access to the most selective universities. To date reliable evidence on the trends in participation by type of institution has been lacking. Recognising this, OFFA has commissioned a new analysis of such trends, undertaken by HEFCE analysts, building on the HEFCE young participation method. The results of this analysis, 'Trends in young participation by background and type of institution', are published at Annex C to this report and confirm that the recent success in widening participation to the sector as a whole has not been replicated in the most selective institutions.

17. The analysis shows that while there have been substantial increases in participation among the least advantaged 40 per cent of young people across higher education overall compared to the mid-1990s, the participation rate among the same group of young people at the top third of selective universities has remained almost flat over the same period[16]. Furthermore, increases in the participation rate of the most advantaged

[16] Annex C: Trends in Young Participation by background and type of institution, fig.12.

over the same period have led to relative differences in participation at these institutions increasing: the most advantaged 20 per cent of the young population were around six times more likely to attend in the mid-1990s but this increased to around seven times more likely by the mid-2000s[17]. It is interesting to note that since the mid-2000s, a period concurrent with the operation of the current fee and support arrangements, this ratio has not increased further.

18. This analysis also shows that, as the rest of the sector is making strong progress in widening participation, the gap between the participation rates of disadvantaged students in the most selective institutions and the rest of the sector has become wider over the past 15 years. At the same time that the relative chances of disadvantaged young people (the bottom 40 per cent) entering higher education compared to the most advantaged (the top 20 per cent) have improved from nearly four times less likely to three times less likely, the relative chances of them attending the most selective third of universities have slightly decreased.

Why disadvantaged students don't attend selective universities

19. Although there has been no overall change in the participation of disadvantaged young people at the most selective institutions as a whole, this does not mean that there has been a lack of effort or success in recruiting students who would have otherwise not gone. There are a

[17] Ibid., fig.14.

number of reasons why people from disadvantaged backgrounds don't go to highly selective universities or study highly selective courses. Firstly, and most significantly, analysis has confirmed that the single most important factor determining the probability of a student obtaining a place on one of the most academically demanding degree courses is the strength of the student's own A level (or equivalent) results[18]. Unsurprisingly, then, the high entry grades required by the most selective institutions account for most of the under-representation of disadvantaged students, as there is a clear correlation between advantage and educational attainment.

The link between academic attainment and advantage

20. The difference in educational attainment between pupils from poor and affluent backgrounds is well documented. The link between socio-economic background and educational attainment is already evident at 22 months[19] and bright children from poorer homes are increasingly likely to slip behind their less able but better-off peers as their primary education progresses[20]. The attainment gap continues to widen as children progress from primary school and through secondary school. Two thirds of pupils on free school meals who were among the top fifth of performers at the

[18] BIS internal analysis, as part of joint work undertaken with the Sutton Trust.

[19] Feinstein, L (1998) *Pre-school Educational Inequality?: British children in the 1970 cohort.* London: London School of Economics, Centre for Economic Performance Accessed at http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/20250/ (16 April 2010).

[20] Department for Education and Skills (2006) *Widening Participation in Higher Education*, accessed at www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/migratedd/publications/6/6820-dfes-wideningparticipation2.pdf "By age 7,children of low socio-economic status who were well above average on developmental scores at 22 months have been overtaken by children of high economic status who were well below average".

age of 11 were not among the top fifth of performers at GCSE level and half do not go to university[21]. GCSE performance also varies considerably by parental occupation, with the proportions attaining five good (A* - C) GCSEs, including English and mathematics, ranging from 76 per cent (higher professionals) to 28 per cent (routine occupations)[22].

Disadvantaged students less likely to study at post-16 level

21. The problem of the low proportion of disadvantaged pupils with high GCSE attainment is reflected in the high numbers of students from these backgrounds who do not progress to A level or equivalent Level 3 qualifications. Around nine out of ten young people whose parents are in higher professional occupations participate in full time education post 16, compared with around six out of ten whose parents are in routine occupations. Young people are also disproportionately likely to study at post-16 level according to the educational attainment of their parents – 75 per cent of pupils with at least one parent educated to degree level attain a Level 3 qualification at age 18 compared to 35 per cent where neither parent has A level qualifications[23]. And a significant proportion of

[21] Sutton Trust (2008) *Report to the National Council for Educational Excellence: Increasing higher education participation amongst disadvantaged young people and schools in poor communities*, accessed at www.suttontrust.com/reports/NCEE_interim_report.pdf (16 April 2010).

[22] Department for Business, Innovation and Skills analysis of Longitudinal Study of Young People in England data, available at http://iLSYPE.gide.net.

[23] Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009) *Youth Cohort Study & Longitudinal Study of Young People in England: The Activities and Experiences of 17 Year Olds: England 2008*, p51, accessed at www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SBU/b000850/Bull01_2009textvfinal.pdf (16 April 2010).

disadvantaged pupils who were identified in year 11 as very likely to apply for higher education do not in fact apply by the age of 18[24].

Disadvantaged students also less likely to obtain high grades at A level

22. Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds who *do* progress to post-16 education are less likely to attain the high grades required by selective universities than their more advantaged peers of similar underlying ability. Advantaged students account for a disproportionately large fraction of the top grades at A level. For example, independent (fee paying) schools account for around 15 per cent of all A level entries, but produce around 30 per cent of all A grades – around twice as many as might be expected. And they account for nearly a third of all students achieving three grade As[25]. This 'over-representation' of A grades amongst pupils at selective schools is most pronounced in many of the key subjects required by the most selective universities and courses, including maths and science (see Annex D). The difference in school performance is becoming more pronounced as the percentage of A level A grades obtained by pupils at selective schools has increased at around twice the rate of increase in non-selective schools and early evidence from the Independent Schools

[24] Ibid., p47.

[25] Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010) *GCE/Applied GCE A/AS and Equivalent Examination Results in England, 2008/09 (Revised)* SFR02/2010, accessed at www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000906/index.shtml.

Council also suggests that its member schools achieve twice the national average percentage of A* grades at A level[26].

23. This already depleted pool of able disadvantaged students may be further reduced by the subject requirements of highly selective courses at both GCSE and A level or equivalent. For example, only one in ten pupils in mainstream schools take at least one science A level compared with one in three pupils in independent and grammar schools[27]. To make appropriate choices, pupils necessarily rely in part on what subjects are available to them and in part on the quality of information, advice and guidance (IAG) offered to them, often long before they apply to university.

24. The picture then, is one of early inequality in attainment amongst pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds which increases incrementally through primary and secondary education. Disadvantaged pupils may well have had a more limited curriculum choice from the age of 14 (which we will explore in chapter 9) and are significantly less likely to progress to post-16 education than their advantaged peers, even if they are very able. When they do progress, they are less likely to attend schools or colleges with

[26] Sutton Trust (2010) *Sutton Trust Submission to Sir Martin Harris: Widening Access to Selective Universities*, accessed at www.suttontrust.com/reports/martin_harris.pdf. p10. (16 April 2010) "Preliminary research from the Independent Schools Council suggests that, if this year's criteria for an A* grade had been applied in 2009, over 16% of A level entries from its member schools would have achieved an A*, more than twice the national average."

[27] House of Lords (2006) *Science teaching in schools*, Report of the Science and Technology Committee, HL 257 Session 2005-06, London: The Stationery Office. Evidence from the Department for Education and Skills. Accessed at: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200506/ldselect/ldsctech/257/257.pdf (16 April 2010).

records of high attainment[28] and so less likely to achieve the highest grades. As many as 60,000 pupils (ten per cent of the cohort) were at some point in the top fifth of school performers, but did not enter higher education by the age of 19[29].

Universities have an important supporting role in raising attainment and informing subject choice in schools

25. Issues of attainment, and subject choice, are therefore crucial to broadening the applicant pool and so widening participation, both in higher education generally and in the most selective institutions. While it is clear that the most significant factors in raising attainment are predominantly issues for schools and colleges themselves and are therefore outside of the scope of this report, universities have an important role to play in supporting the efforts of schools and colleges to raise attainment through their outreach programmes and other school/college links, subjects to which I will return in later chapters.

Educational attainment does not explain everything

26. Once attainment is allowed for, the differences in participation rates on the most academically demanding courses by type of school or college can largely be explained by differences in the numbers and propensity of

[28] Higher Education Funding Council for England (2005) *Young Participation in Higher Education.* Bristol: HEFCE. Issues paper 2005/03. p46. POLAR maps of low participation show a striking correlation between the GCSE performance of schools and the participation rates of the areas in which they are situated.

[29] Sutton Trust (2008) *Wasted talent? Attrition rates of high achieving pupils between school and university*. London: Sutton Trust.

suitably qualified individuals from those schools to apply to selective courses or universities.

27. Looking at the 500 HE courses with the highest average entry qualifications, we see that 28 per cent of the students on such courses came from independent schools, while they make up only 13 per cent of 17-year-old A level candidates. Although some of that difference will be due to different attainment, BIS/Sutton Trust analysis[30] shows that it is also the case that a student with the equivalent of ABB at A level (including at least one 'core academic' A level) who attended an independent school had a 79 per cent chance of entering one of the 500 most selective degree courses, compared to 70 per cent for a similar student attending a state maintained school.

Bright disadvantaged students also less likely to apply to selective universities

28. The BIS/Sutton Trust analysis shows that if the application patterns were the same for all students based on attainment, we would see many more applications from the maintained sector. If students from state schools and further education providers were to apply to selective universities in

[30] Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2009) *Applications, Offers and Admissions to Research Led Universities*: *a joint report by the Sutton Trust and BIS*. Research Paper No. 5. One of the difficulties in this area of analysis is that although applicants may have the same tariff points it does not always follow that they would be considered equivalently qualified by admission tutors. For example, the points may be gained from different types – or number - of qualifications. The BIS/Sutton Trust research accounts that these figures are based on allows for this to some degree by restricting the tariff score to the best three A-levels and ensuring certain subjects are included. Nevertheless it remains the case that, for example, the subjects offered by applicants with equivalent tariff points may differ so that an admission tutor would not consider them 'equivalent'.

proportion to their attainment, we should expect to see around 4,500 additional pupils from the state sector[31] entering the top 500 courses each year. The research also finds that application rates from comprehensive schools in the top fifth of schools according to their overall A level attainment made half as many applications to 'Sutton 13' universities as their peers from independent schools with similar levels of attainment.

Lack of good quality advice may influence students' decisions

29. Therefore, even once attainment at A level or equivalent is accounted for, students with similar qualifications from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to apply to and attend the most selective courses or institutions than their more advantaged peers. This suggests that there are significant barriers, beyond attainment, that impact on potential applicants' decisions about where to go to university and whether to consider a selective course or institution. Some of these students will have made perfectly rational decisions to go to a university or college that offers the right course for them, for example where they have an interest in a subject that is better served by a particular institution. However, many will have made less informed decisions, perhaps influenced by a lack of good quality advice (whether from parent, peer, school or college) about the possibility of attending a highly selective institution. This lack of good quality advice may in turn lead to a lack of awareness about the benefits of attending such institutions or studying such courses and/or to perceptions about

[31] Including maintained schools, sixth form colleges and general/tertiary FE colleges.

social exclusivity deriving perhaps from a lack of social confidence. These are central issues which I shall explore in more detail.

30. The analysis at Annex C shows that the most disadvantaged young people are around seven times less likely to attend the most selective third of institutions than the most advantaged. The analysis also shows that these relative differences increase with the selectivity of the group and that within the most selective group the relative differences can be much higher. For a few institutions disadvantaged young people are fifteen times less likely to participate than advantaged young people.

31. One further factor that may be depressing the low participation rate of young people from disadvantaged areas in the most selective universities is the relatively slow growth rate of these universities compared to the rest of the sector. For example, OFFA analysis of the HESA performance indicators shows that while young full-time entrants to English higher education as a whole increased by 16.1 per cent between 2003-04 and 2008-09, entrants to Russell Group institutions increased by 1.3 per cent over the same period. When coupled with the increase in the young population and the disproportionate increase in A level A and A* grades in selective schools, this has led to a significant increase in the relative competition for places at the most selective universities. Therefore, to some degree, highly selective universities have had to increase significantly their efforts in widening access in recent years in order to

maintain their performance. However, while these conditions provide additional challenges for the most selective universities, as I have said in my introduction, limited numbers of places are not a reason to limit the pool of ‘most able’ applicants. I will now examine why fair access to the most selective institutions is important, what these institutions are already successfully doing to widen participation from disadvantaged students, and demonstrate how, without these efforts, participation amongst this group could well have been significantly worse.

Chapter 3

Why is fair access to the most selective universities important?

32. It is widely accepted as axiomatic that access to higher education should be based on individual academic merit and potential regardless of social background. However, as has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, the academic attainment and aspirations of pupils are highly correlated with their background and with the schools they attend, thus limiting the likelihood of their applying to or entering a selective course or university. This in turn limits their chances of entering the professional groups that have been so central to upward social mobility in Britain since the war. The Milburn Report makes clear why the professions are 'key to opening new opportunities for a second great wave of social mobility in the years ahead', and, more worryingly, concludes that 'social mobility into professional careers has slowed.' The Milburn analysis focuses primarily on family background and the type of school likely to have been attended by a young person entering such professions as the law, medicine, politics and the media, as well as on the average family income of such individuals. We have already seen how these factors influence a student's chances of applying to those selective universities which give most ready access to these same professions. To give just two examples, 'the typical doctor or lawyer of the future will today be growing up in a

family that is better off than five in six of all families in the UK', while 'the typical journalist or accountant of the future will today be growing up in a family that is better off than three in four families in the UK'[32]. A wealth of parallel data, in particular from the Sutton Trust, makes it clear that such patterns are replicated across other professions.

Lack of social mobility creates bitterness

33. This relative lack of social mobility has a damaging effect on communities where little prospect of advancement is perceived and feeds a sense of unfairness and social resentment that promotes a divided society[33]. The perception in some communities that the professions, and the highly selective universities that lead to them, are 'for others', has a damaging effect on aspiration and attainment, entrenching the narrow horizons that limit potential.

The economic imperative

34. As well as being socially unacceptable that too few people from disadvantaged backgrounds realise their full potential, it is also economically wasteful. A larger pool of very able applicants from across the social spectrum will drive up the quality of those admitted, creating a broader social and educational experience and, subsequently, broadening the social intake and experience of the professions. And

[32] The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions (2009) p21.

[33] Ibid. p27.

increasing the numbers from disadvantaged backgrounds who successfully graduate from highly selective institutions will, over time, increase expectations, aspiration and attainment within the communities from which they are drawn.

35. Clearly, selective universities are not the only route into the professions. Graduates from universities and colleges the length and breadth of the country access the major professions. However, it is true to say that graduates from the most selective institutions predominate within the most sought-after and influential careers, and in general, command higher salaries, earning significantly more over their lifetime than other graduates. Analysis shows that the average lifetime earning premium of the most selective quartile of universities is around 10 to 16 per cent higher than that of other universities and even higher for the most selective institutions of all[34].

Access to selective universities is key to social mobility

36. The Milburn Report suggests many ways in which some of the factors contributing to this uncomfortable situation[35] may be addressed. A number of these solutions concern universities in general and, by inference, highly selective universities in particular, since it is through them that many

[34] Hussain, I., McNally, S. and Telhaj, S. (2009) *University Quality and Graduate Wages in the UK*. London: London School of Economics, Centre for the Economics of Education. Available at http://cee.lse.ac.uk/cee%20dps/ceedp99.pdf (16 April 2010).

[35] The Panel on Fair Access to the Professions (2009) p25. 'We are concerned that social mobility is not what it could be in the UK and that the professions have become more socially exclusive over time'.

routes lie, especially to the higher echelons of the professions. So the goal of fair access to highly selective universities can be seen as not just worthwhile in itself but also as a means of recreating that upward social mobility, so widespread a generation ago, which has now, to some extent, stalled. So how does one ensure that selective universities open their doors wider to talented students from disadvantaged backgrounds? For no one is suggesting that selective universities should admit students who lack talent. As Andrew Grant, Chairman of the Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference, put it recently, 'we are all in favour of discovering talent, but the talent has to be there'. Quite so. The talent *is* there but how do universities discover it? This is the question to which I now turn, looking both at what the most selective universities are doing to widen access and at what can be done right across the education sector to address this intransigent problem. My specific recommendations should be seen in the context of the relevant recommendations made by the Milburn Report, especially recommendations 35-45, and the higher education recommendations from the National Council for Educational Excellence[36].

[36] National Council for Educational Excellence (2008) *Recommendations,* accessed at http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DCSF-00803-2008.

Chapter 4

What are the most selective universities doing to address fair access?

Selective universities are already engaging in many activities designed to raise aspirations and attainment

37. Highly selective institutions already make considerable efforts to widen their pool of applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds. Many of these activities are focused on raising aspirations and access to HE generally rather than improving access to one particular institution. Other activities are targeted at the most able pupils with a view to increasing applications to highly selective institutions, including their own. Activities currently carried out by highly selective institutions include:

- summer schools
- master classes
- student mentoring and ambassador schemes
- school and college visits to universities
- university visits to schools and colleges
- taster days in universities
- study skills
- information and guidance sessions
- the provision of bursaries and scholarships.

38. Some institutions also provide activities and events that are aimed at parents and teachers and, increasingly, schemes that are aimed at younger children, from primary age upwards. A smaller number of institutions sponsor Academies or are partners in Trust schools. Many also use contextual data to inform their decisions about which applicants to make offers to and whether to make an alternative offer, a question covered in more detail later (chapter 6).

Bursaries and scholarships on offer at selective universities

39. As well as these outreach and broader widening participation measures, all HEIs have established their own institutional financial support for students from lower income backgrounds, in addition to a relatively generous package of government grants and loans. Universities are free to set their own bursary levels, although OFFA has a higher minimum expectation for universities that have further to go in widening participation than it does for already diverse institutions. Our analysis clearly shows that core bursary levels[37] increase with institutional entry tariffs. In particular, three quarters of the higher entry tariff universities offered bursaries of over £1,000 compared to less than a quarter of lower entry tariff institutions[38]. All institutions offering £1,500 or above were in the higher entry tariff group with some selective institutions offering

[37] Core bursaries are means tested bursaries for students on the full maintenance grant - i.e. those with a family income of £25,000 or less.

[38] Annex C: Trends in Young Participation by background and type of institution, Fig.5.

bursaries of over £3,000, more than three times the sector average of just under £900. Such high bursary values, in part enabled by the lower numbers of eligible students at these universities, are designed to encourage greater numbers of applications to highly selective institutions from lower income students.

40. Selective institutions as a whole have exceeded OFFA's original expectations of investment against their access agreements – although their level of overall investment is slightly lower than the sector average, primarily because less selective institutions have, as a whole, invested considerably more than expected[39]. Survey data indicates that a significant minority of students from low income backgrounds were influenced in their choice of university by the bursary package and that this increased with the size of the bursary[40]. This would suggest that the large bursaries offered most frequently by the most selective universities should be affecting applications and entrants to these institutions. However, isolating a bursary effect from the complex set of factors that affect applicant choice is difficult and to date our analysis of the macro level data has not revealed any bursary effects that are distinguishable from other stronger institutional effects, such as entry tariff points. However, we are carrying out further, more sensitive, analysis using

[39] Office for Fair Access (2010) *Submission by OFFA to the Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance.* 2010/01. Table 6.

[40] Callender. C., Hopkin, R. and Wilkinson, D. (2009) *Higher Education Students' Awareness and Knowledge of Institutional Bursaries.* Bristol: OFFA, accessed at www.offa.org.uk/publications (16 April 2010).

individual UCAS application data which may shed further light on this. The results will be available in the coming months.

41. A HEFCE internal analysis of WPSAs concludes that, as all institutions undertake a broadly similar set of core interventions, there is no clear correlation between performance against the HESA performance indicator benchmarks and the activities or approach of the institution. Such correlations are also difficult to establish because of variations in the detail of the outreach programmes delivered and the diversity of the institutions themselves. There are also many external factors that influence the nature of the student cohort, for example changing patterns of attainment and the size of the underlying young population. Other factors such as how students perceive different institutions complicate matters further.

Current lack of evaluation and evidence

42. There is also limited evaluation and evidence around widening participation activities, particularly activities designed to raise aspirations generally. This is partly due to the inherent difficulty in disaggregating particular programmes from the multiplicity of factors that influence decisions about whether and where to attend university, as well as difficulties arising from the long-term nature of some outreach work and the fact that many outreach programmes are relatively new. Many institutions report that they have difficulty evaluating the impact of their

schemes as they are unable easily to track students who ultimately don't apply to their own institution, but may apply elsewhere.

43. Evaluation of a specific intervention or initiative will always be difficult given other changes to the educational landscape and in the absence of a clear control group. There is good evidence of the early impact of Aimhigher, for example, but the creation of a national programme in 2004 removed the potential for using a control group with comparable characteristics. Aimhigher Partnerships are seeking to address this by gathering common data against agreed definitions to enable long-term evaluation and monitoring at a local level. The aggregation of this data will provide a national picture[41]. At an institutional level, HEFCE is encouraging institutions to develop their approaches to evaluation in the longer term. It also requires institutions to report on the effectiveness of their WP activity in their annual WPSA progress reports. When WPSAs are refreshed in 2012 they will be expected to include a more comprehensive description of each institution's approach to evaluation (see paragraph 10).

Co-ordinated, sustained outreach works best

44. However, despite all the difficulties outlined above, some institutions and bodies *have* successfully evaluated the impact of certain of their outreach

[41] More information about the early impact of Aimhigher, and the current Aimhigher evaluation programme can be found at www.aimhigher.ac.uk/practitioner, under Programme information, Evaluation and monitoring.

programmes, or at least elements of them, providing valuable evidence of where outreach activities have had a significant positive effect. It is very clear, from my consultations for this report and in my conversations with the sector more generally, that there is a consensus of opinion that sustained actions, delivered over a number of years and co-ordinated so that they do not duplicate the efforts of other institutions or organisations, have a greater impact than isolated, or un-co-ordinated, interventions. This corresponds with the views that headteachers reported to us. These "extended outreach" schemes generally incorporate the range of interventions described above within a coherent progressive programme of co-ordinated support and events. Such schemes, where narrowly targeted at groups of very able students identified as having the potential to succeed in a selective institution, have been shown significantly to improve the likelihood of participants both applying to and entering such institutions. The Higher Education Progression Framework Guide published by Action on Access is a valuable resource that institutions can draw on to develop their approaches in this area[42].

Case study 1

The University of Leeds runs a Reach for Excellence programme providing support over a two year period for local, highly able 16-year-olds from disadvantaged backgrounds. The programme includes advice

[42] Action on Access (2008) *Higher Education Progression Framework Guide.* Ormskirk: Action on Access.

sessions, university visits, lectures, individual mentoring and a summer school.

Preliminary results show that the students are more likely to enter a research intensive university than similar students in a control group (49% compared to 25%) and are also more likely to enter higher education more generally (85% compared to 59% in the control group).

Sustained interaction helps demystify higher education

45. The precise content and balance of such schemes varies between institutions. For example, some schemes have a stronger focus on supporting students with information, advice and guidance, whereas others place a greater emphasis on raising academic attainment through academic enrichment programmes including study skills sessions, master classes, or revision sessions. It is the sustained and co-ordinated nature of the schemes, often combined with some high intensity activity, that appears to be essential to their success. Sustained interaction of this kind helps demystify higher education, giving pupils greater awareness of potential educational and career pathways and broadening what may be rather narrow horizons. This is particularly important for pupils who have limited family or peer experience of university or graduate professions and who, as a result, may have negative perceptions of highly selective institutions including anxiety about their social or academic exclusivity.

Case study 2

The **Universities of Manchester, Birmingham and Nottingham** are running a year-long Academic Enrichment Programme for year 12 students whose parents have not been to university and who are not in professional occupations. The programme includes revision classes, a summer school and e-mentoring. In the first year of the programme, 97% of students on the programme applied to a research-led university (in the Russell Group or 1994 Group) and almost half matriculated at a research-led university (36% at a Russell Group university and 11% at a 1994 Group university). UCAS data for subsequent years are not yet available, but interim data indicate that the number of participants subsequently enrolling in their host institution rose from 40 (of the first intake to the programme) to 61 (of the second intake). The third intake of students graduated from the Programme in spring 2010. Approximately 900 students have participated.

Clear access routes for disadvantaged students

46. Some of these 'extended outreach' schemes start by raising pupils' aspirations in general. Then, as very able pupils identify particular subject or career aspirations, they may be offered tailored outreach programmes linked to related academic activities with student mentors from relevant

degree subjects. Many schemes explicitly link their outreach programmes to clear access routes or pathways for disadvantaged students. For example, on successful completion of an outreach programme, a pupil may be guaranteed to have their application considered, or guaranteed an offer of a place, or an interview. Some universities take into account work delivered as part of the academic elements of their outreach programme in order to make pupils an alternative offer. We look at this in more detail in chapter 6.

Case study 3

The University of Sheffield runs an Outreach and Access to Medicine Scheme (SOAMS) providing support and guidance to local year 9 to 13 pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds with an interest in medicine or science. Participants attend four vocationally focussed activities per year over a number of years. They progress from generic sessions to familiarise participants and their parents with HE to lab based workshops, occupational placements and a four day residential summer school. Participants also benefit from e-mentoring by current medical students and bespoke study skills and revision sessions aimed at enhancing their academic attainment. Students who successfully complete the scheme are guaranteed an interview for medicine at Sheffield and twenty places are ring-fenced for these students and other applicants from widening participation backgrounds. If, at any stage, students on the access to medicine programme don’t meet the high requirements, the University works in

partnership with Sheffield Hallam University to transfer them onto their access programme for professional courses allied to medicine.

Recent progression surveys have found that significant proportions of the SOAMS cohort go on to study medicine or courses allied to medicine. For example, in 2009 around a quarter of respondents to the survey went on to study medicine and over a quarter to subjects allied to medicine. 76 per cent of the cohort responded to the survey.

The success of summer schools

47. Although the overall model of a sustained and co-ordinated approach is key, there is also some evidence that certain activities are particularly effective. For example, summer schools have been shown to be particularly effective in raising the aspirations, and consequently the application and entry rates of their participants to selective institutions. Often delivered either in collaboration with Aimhigher or the Sutton Trust, summer schools give pupils an experience of university life through an intensive programme at a university for a few days. Application and entry rates to selective universities for pupils that have been on Sutton Trust summer schools are considerably higher than those for students in comparator groups with similar attainment. Meanwhile participants at Aimhigher summer schools have application rates to higher education in general that are twice the national average. However, most Aimhigher summer schools are not specifically targeted at the most able and so far

no analysis has been carried out showing to which universities participants of Aimhigher summer schools held at the most selective institutions subsequently apply and are accepted.

Case study 4

Evidence from the **Sutton Trust** summer schools (delivered in England by the Universities of Bristol, Cambridge, Nottingham and Oxford and in Scotland by the University of St. Andrews) demonstrates that interventions of this nature have strong correlations with subsequent participation. Around six in ten students from the 2007 cohort ended up at Russell Group institutions and one in four ended up at one of the host universities. The application and admission rates for these pupils were considerably higher than for similarly well-qualified students from similar non-privileged backgrounds. A previous study has shown that attendance at a summer school increases the likelihood of a student going to one of the summer school universities by the equivalent of four additional A or A* grades at GCSE or having at least one parent with a degree qualification.

Aimhigher summer schools are required to collect individual-level records of their participants. These are collated by HEFCE, then combined with other data sources and analysed in an example of a centralised data-based evaluation. Published analysis has shown that Aimhigher Summer Schools have been successful in reaching the disadvantaged target groups. Early results from continuing analysis indicates that the HE participation rate of Summer School participants is twice that of other young people but that a

large part of this difference is accounted for by the high attainment levels of summer school participants.

Helping to raise attainment

48. Schemes that include attainment-based elements can also be very effective at increasing the conversion rate of pupils from applicants into entrants. For example, some universities work with applicants who are already holding university offers, providing additional tuition and revision events, often in maths and science-based subjects. The pupils in question typically attend schools unable to deliver this kind of academic support, routinely available in top-performing schools.

Case study 5

The STEP Easter scheme at the **University of Cambridge** targets state school students whose schools don't offer support for their Sixth Term Examination Paper and who already have a conditional offer to study Maths at Cambridge. It offers a four day residential course in the Easter break during which the students receive extra tuition. The residential course is followed up with ten weeks of STEP online mentoring for participants, delivered by the Further Maths Support Programme (FMSP). It is expected that around half of the 80 participants on the course will meet the STEP conditions of their offer to study at Cambridge in 2010.

The University of Lancaster runs a Further Maths Education Centre for students who wish to take Further Maths A-Level but whose schools do not currently have provision for this.

Students from **Goldsmiths College, University of London** and **Queen Mary, University of London** are involved in the Lewisham A* Academy in which student ambassadors work in schools to help year 10 students gain A and A* grades at GCSE.

Special entry routes

49. Many institutions have made structural changes to their programmes in order to provide special entry routes for applicants who do not have the standard required qualifications. These structural changes most commonly take the form of a foundation year or extended programme, where students gain the necessary skills, knowledge and experience required for the course. Successful completion results in progression onto the degree programme.

50. While such courses are undoubtedly a valuable tool in broadening participation and opening up opportunities, they are relatively expensive as an extra year of study is required and this carries with it associated costs to students, the Treasury, and institutions. It is also important that students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are capable of direct

entry are not deflected onto alternative routes that would unnecessarily extend the length of their study. Therefore, despite their success, additional years seem unlikely to be an affordable model in many cases.

Case study 6

The University of Newcastle offers a foundation year to the majority of its engineering, science and mathematics degree courses, designed for those who have shown that they have the ability to succeed but lack the necessary qualifications or subject knowledge to enter the degree directly. This approach has been in operation for many years, and whilst it was not designed specifically to attract students from WP backgrounds, it has proved an attractive option for those who have chosen the 'wrong' A level subjects and others with non-typical academic backgrounds (eg some mature students offering access qualifications without the requisite maths / science modules). The foundation year provides teaching in the key mathematical / science topics necessary for successful completion of the degree programme concerned.

Intensive local or regional outreach

51. Whilst it can be difficult to assess the impact of outreach activities on participation across the sector, it is easier for institutions to monitor the impact of intensive local outreach programmes on their own applications and entrants. By focusing some of their intensive activity and evaluation

on local areas of disadvantage, selective institutions can increase their own pool of disadvantaged applicants and, at the same time, encourage applications to selective institutions more generally.

Case study 7

The University of Newcastle's flagship PARTNERS scheme targets high potential WP and other disadvantaged students (based on HEFCE targeting criteria) from year 11 through working with 111 schools and colleges from the North East, Cumbria and parts of West Yorkshire. As well as outreach activities including general awareness-raising events, student shadowing and information about student finance and student life, eligible students are considered for a slightly lower offer than normal for the degree course when they apply through UCAS (eg BBB instead of AAA). They are also required, as part of their conditional offer, to attend and pass an academic Assessed Summer School which takes place at the end of Year 13 and is designed to give them the opportunity to demonstrate their academic potential.

More than 1,500 participants (PARTNERS) have successfully entered Newcastle University through the programme since 2000. Total applications from the participating schools and colleges have increased by at least 60% since PARTNERS began. The number of PARTNERS entering the University each year has increased steadily from 41 in 2000 to 223 in 2009. The degree outcomes of PARTNERS students

once at Newcastle are comparable with all other students and are slightly more likely to go on to postgraduate study.

Over the last five years, **The University of Essex** and **Queen Mary, University of London** have both seen increases of more than 80 per cent in applications and entrants from local schools and colleges to whom they have delivered intensive outreach programmes. Tracking the outcomes for pupils from 11-16 schools has been achieved by tracking the impact on applications from these schools' main post-16 providers.

Partnership working

52. As well as delivering their own outreach, many institutions also work in partnership with other organisations and charities outside the higher education sector. Such organisations may provide additional outreach around particular subject areas, or help institutions reach specific groups of disadvantaged students.

Case study 8

The **University of Durham** sends staff to the Annual Teachers' Conference organised by the Young, Gifted and Talented programme to give information and advice to teachers about how best to support their students when applying

to a high demand university.

The University of Loughborough has links with some teacher groups through the Local Authority and also sends staff to parents' evenings at local schools where they are available to answer questions from students and their parents about university life, funding and the application process.

The **University of Leeds** works with **the Frank Buttle Trust** to deliver undergraduate mentor support to children from care backgrounds. 47 English institutions now have the Frank Buttle Trust Quality Mark for Care Leavers in Higher Education. OFFA has supported this agenda over a number of years, by encouraging institutions to consider how their access agreements address the needs of care leavers, and continues to encourage institutions to consider the benefits of adopting the Quality Mark.

The Universities of Durham, Leeds, Manchester, Oxford and **Warwick** work with **the Ogden Trust** to place talented, young, enthusiastic science PhD students in schools as higher education science ambassadors. As well as providing valuable additional support to science teachers and their pupils, the scheme also gives the PhD students a chance to sample teaching part-time while carrying on with their PhDs.

53. Some institutions also work with complementary or supplementary schooling providers to deliver outreach to able pupils from disadvantaged communities.

Case study 9

IntoUniversity is a charity providing daily after-school academic support and mentoring for able but disadvantaged year 7 students who have home environments that are not conducive to study. It works with several higher education partner institutions in London, including **University College London, the London School of Economics** and the **Royal Veterinary College** to provide outreach within the context of their overall programme.

54. Whilst the overall statistics indicate that participation of disadvantaged students at the most selective institutions has remained relatively flat over recent years (paragraph 17), evaluation to date provides convincing evidence, particularly where it uses comparator groups, that the outreach programmes in place have had a positive effect on the participation of their target groups. It would therefore be fair to conclude that without these efforts we would have seen a decline in the both the absolute and relative participation rates of such students in the most selective third of institutions (paragraph 31).

More evaluation needed

55. In this context and given the current fiscal environment, it is extremely important that the sector places a greater emphasis on evaluating the effectiveness of their schemes in order to target resources at programmes with proven track records. Evaluation has been identified by

many of those I have consulted and in previous reports[43] as an area of weakness and so it is important that selective institutions continue to share good practice and knowledge of success. It is particularly important for large schemes and pilots such as the Realising Opportunities scheme, where there is an ambition to extend or roll out a successful model, to be robustly evaluated, for example by using methodologies that enable us to say with a degree of confidence whether they have made a difference. Indeed it is important for all universities to review their evaluation programmes to ensure that the have evidence of the effectiveness of their schemes.

Case study 10

The Sutton Trust is shortly to pilot an Academic Routes (STAR) programme at **the Universities of Exeter and Leeds** supporting academically able pupils at disadvantaged local schools on a clear pathway to a research-led university. A substantial share of the total budget for the activity has been allocated to the randomised control trial based evaluation – the first of its kind for an access initiative of this type.

56. Due to careful evaluation, there now appears to be sufficient evidence to extend summer schools targeted at the 'most able least likely', along the

[43] NAO Report: Widening participation in Higher Education (2008) concluded "There is scope for improving the achievement of value for money through directing activities towards those individuals who would benefit the most and building in evaluation measures when setting up widening participation initiatives." (p9).

lines of the Sutton Trust summer schools, and **I RECOMMEND that this is now adopted by all highly selective institutions.** There may also be a case for changing Aimhigher summer schools so that participants attend a summer school at an institution most suited to their GCSE achievement. Therefore, **I RECOMMEND that HEFCE examine the benefits of encouraging the highest achievers from Aimhigher target groups to attend summer schools and comparable events organised and delivered by highly selective universities.**

Case study 11

The University of Oxford has run Sutton Trust summer schools for over 3,000 pupils since 1997. To date, 52 per cent of participants have subsequently applied to Oxford, 38 per cent of whom were made offers. In recent years, Sutton Trust summer school participants to Oxford have enjoyed a 25 per cent success rate in achieving a place, compared with a 20 per cent success rate for the whole applicant cohort. On the back of this success, the University is significantly scaling up its summer school activity – this year it is launching the *UNIQ Residential Summer Schools (Widening access to Oxford)* which will offer a summer school to 3,700 pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds over five years. Promoting these summer schools in the national media, including a sustained advertising campaign in the News of the World, has resulted in 3,600 applications for 500 places in 2010.

57. Decisions about the precise nature of universities' outreach and access schemes are for them to determine, not least to allow the best fit to the individual circumstances of each university. However, as evidence grows, the onus will increase on selective institutions to demonstrate the impact of their particular efforts and to adopt proven schemes where these appear to be more effective than their own arrangements. In some cases, this may mean understanding why certain types of scheme are more effective or appropriate at one university than another.

58. This move towards the adoption of proven methods and better targeting is already taking place – already all institutions undertake a broad core of similar activities. However, based on the evidence to date, **I RECOMMEND that selective institutions increase the coverage and volume of successful extended outreach programmes, including the most intensive activities targeted at their most able students. These programmes should be co-ordinated so as to avoid duplicating the efforts of other institutions and organisations and should target students from at least early in year 9 – before students choose what to study for their GCSEs.**

59. I look later at how schools and local authorities must work in close partnership in order to identify students and deliver such interventions (chapter 9), and how this partnership can be best be achieved.

How universities could fund more targeted 'extended outreach'

60. Achieving this may mean concentrating more heavily on higher intensity, but better targeted, interventions, particularly from early in year 9, at the expense of some of the broader, less targeted activities. Value for money and evidence of impact is of increasing importance for university managers and governing bodies and we are already seeing evidence of this in universities' strategies, including WPSAs and their supporting documents. Although intensive and targeted schemes are often more expensive than broader approaches, where these are proven to work, value for money can often be demonstrated. For example, a university may decide that a well targeted summer school costing around £500 per head and with evidence of successful outcomes for a significant proportion of participants is better value for money in meeting its fair access objectives than a loosely targeted, or untargeted, bursary or scholarship worth £500 per year of study but with unclear results. Clearly, institutions will need to come to their own conclusions based on their own circumstances and the best evidence and practice available to them.

61. Additional investment would clearly be required to extend existing successful programmes or to roll out good practice more widely across selective institutions. However, a number of possible options are open to institutions in funding this expansion. Some element of the resource might be found simply by concentrating more heavily on outreach programmes that have been shown to be successful. However, when rebalancing in

this way, institutions must be careful not to reduce their effective contribution to collaborative commitments around Aimhigher and other important partnership working.

62. Some institutions may also be able to find additional resource by rebalancing their current expenditure between bursaries and scholarships, and additional outreach. For example, better targeting of bursary and scholarship schemes towards the poorest – many schemes currently offer bursaries to students with family incomes well above the national average[44] – would release investment for outreach without increasing current institutional access agreement commitments (OFFA has already started to encourage such revisions). I recognise that institutions will be keen to consider the impact of any reduction in their bursaries on both their recruitment and retention of students. However, my primary concern must be for the most disadvantaged groups and such changes need not impact on the level of support targeted at this group. **I RECOMMEND that selective universities should, as a matter of urgency, review the pattern of their expenditure on bursaries, scholarships and additional outreach, to improve the way they target students and ensure money is spent on effective initiatives.**

[44] For more information about average family incomes, see Department of Work and Pensions (2009) *Households Below Average Income 1994/5-2007/8*, Table 2.3. Accessed at http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/hbai/hbai2008/contents.asp.

63. If the fee cap were raised, investment in outreach could be considerably increased if current proportions of additional fee income invested in bursaries and outreach were maintained. Whilst recognising that the quantum of such expenditure is determined locally and additional fee income is not the only potential source of such investment, **I RECOMMEND that in considering any recommendation relating to future fee levels, the Browne Review should also consider whether there should be any broad conditions requiring the most selective universities to maintain the current proportions of additional fee income invested in bursaries and outreach.** In doing so it will need to take account of the extra costs of identifying and delivering successful outreach programmes to the most able least likely group.

Chapter 5

Next steps

64. Despite all that is being done by universities, both singly and together, and despite the wide range of collaborative efforts between schools, colleges and universities, our analysis shows that widening participation has broadly speaking not increased in the most selective third of institutions and there are still significant numbers of young people who have the potential to succeed in highly selective universities but who do not in fact apply. We shall also see below that for a given level of attainment those disadvantaged candidates who do apply are just as likely to succeed as their peers from more favoured backgrounds.

65. At the same time it is obvious that not all young people have an equal chance of attaining the highest grades of which they are capable, for a whole variety of reasons, including in particular the school they attend and the aspirations of their peers. These factors in turn cannot in general be dissociated from family income.

66. It seems to be generally agreed that the key to generating more qualified applicants for selective universities from the widest possible range of social and educational backgrounds is to raise aspiration levels as early as possible while a young person progresses through his/her schooling, in the hope and indeed expectation that this in turn may well increase

measurable attainment. It is clear that schools, colleges and universities must work together to identify and nurture talent and to make sure that high quality, independent advice and guidance about curricular choice and its consequences are available at critical times. With these goals in mind, we need to be sure that a number of requirements are met. Firstly, there should be agreement between all parties as to what it means in this context to identify the brightest, namely those most likely to be able to aim successfully at a highly selective university. Are the same criteria accepted by all concerned? Is there a tendency at times, perhaps, to judge potential applicants by a wider set of social skills as well as, or even at times instead of, intellectual talent and potential?

67. Parallel issues arise with special admissions tests, interviews and other supplementary means of separating one very good candidate from another. Many headteachers feel that such measures, recently seen by universities as making their selection procedures more transparent and difficult choices fairer, may inadvertently add to the perception of obstacles in the path of students from their schools and colleges. And the special coaching which some schools can and do provide to help their pupils prepare for such tests and interviews cannot conceivably be provided in all schools where the ‘most able least likely’ are to be found. Where an applicant already lacks the social confidence to apply to a highly selective institution, these extra stages in the selection process may seem more like hurdles, and may make entry into a highly selective institution

seem that much less appealing. For this reason, the 'Group of 13' universities in the Realising Opportunities project (see paragraph 69) decided against giving participants a guaranteed interview because, as not all other students are interviewed, they felt this might simply constitute an additional hurdle for the students within their programme. Turning to university entry tests, early work on the SAT® [45] to date suggests that it has only limited potential to aid selection of HE candidates that is not already captured by other means.

[45] Kirkup, C., Wheater, R., Morrison, J. and Durbin, B. (2010) *Use of an Aptitude Test in University Entrance - a Validity Study: updated analyses of higher education destinations, including 2007 entrants.* Slough: NFER. p16. "It is possible that the SAT® is reflecting factors that admissions tutors are already identifying and valuing (possibly demonstrated within applicants' personal statements or by means of other admissions tests and interviews for the most selective courses)".

Chapter 6

The formulation of an offer

68. What is clearly critical in determining which qualified or potentially qualified candidates apply to a selective institution is the nature of the offer made. This inevitably leads to the question which, if not properly analysed, can generate more heat than light, namely how and when to use 'contextual data,'[46] to enable a university to make an offer that differs in some way from the 'standard' offer for that course. We should bear in mind in particular that when universities take GCSE results into account when deciding to whom to make an offer (and also, for very selective courses such as medicine, deciding whom to invite for an interview), pupils may have taken their GCSEs in a different school, and therefore in a very different 'context', from the 16-19 institution where they are now studying their 'A' level courses and from which they actually apply. This makes the task of selecting applicants even more complex.

69. Making varied offers is of course nothing new – it has been part of the range of options that has always been open to admission tutors – but it has recently become the focus of much more widespread attention. For example, the University of Newcastle is leading the Realising Opportunities scheme, which brings together 13 of the country's leading research-intensive universities to develop and pilot a single, nationally available, compact scheme. The 'Group of 13', working together, aim to

[46] See Annex E for more information on contextual data.

develop a model to encourage and support 'most able but least likely' potential students to apply to a research-intensive university.

70. The pilot is designed to target disadvantaged year 12 students who are amongst the most academically talented in their year group, using criteria such as receipt of an Educational Maintenance Allowance or having had experience of local authority care. Pupils taking part in the pilot will have increased access to aspiration-raising activities organised by the universities, complete online programmes of study to enhance their research skills and receive mentoring support from current undergraduate students. The programme is designed to enhance the young person's ability to apply to, and be successful at, some of the country's leading institutions. Participation in the scheme will provide young people with additional advice and guidance to ensure that, whatever their eventual choices, these choices are well-informed and suited to the individual's needs, interests and career goals.

71. The universities will be piloting two models to assess their relative merits. Students will be able to choose between completing an assessed academic research assignment, or the Extended Project Qualification[47]. Successful completion of the full Realising Opportunities scheme will

[47] The Extended project is available as a stand-alone Level 3 qualification. It is a compulsory part of the Diploma programme but can also be taken as an optional part of an A level study programme, and so provides a link between A levels and Advanced Diplomas. An extended project is equivalent in size to half an A level and equivalent in standard to a full A level. For more information, visit: www.qcda.gov.uk.

ensure that the student's application is given additional consideration at the point of application, and may result in an alternative offer from one or more of the 13 participating universities. Details of the pilots and the consideration that students' applications will receive from the participating universities are being finalised, and will be set out in the information provided to participating schools and pupils.

72. Of course selective universities have had compacts with particular schools for many years. What is potentially significant about this project is that successful completion of an agreed set of academic tasks may well come to be deemed an appropriate means to fulfil (very partially of course) the admissions criteria for a set of selective universities spread widely across England.

73. In this context, it is also well worth looking in some detail at recent work in the University of Bristol. This university has for many years had a well-developed programme of outreach activities, but has now gone a significant step further. Academic research, analysing in detail the performance of three cohorts of actual students, has shown that, once admitted, students from disadvantaged school backgrounds progress at least as well as their peers from more favoured backgrounds[48]. Further

[48] Hoare, A (2009) *Contexting – Bristol fashion*. Paper presented at the University of Bristol Widening Participation Research Seminar, 23 September 2009, accessed at: www.bristol.ac.uk/academicregistry/raa/wpur-office/seminar/programme (slide 13).

detailed work examining the various discriminators between groups of students revealed that attendance at a 'low performing school' was the best indicator as to where young people of talent might be found who, if admitted, would be successful within the demanding environment of this highly selective university. Such low performing schools are identified through publicly available data from DCSF and UCAS, and further work has led to a very clear conclusion, namely that if students from such schools are accepted on the basis of one or two ‘A’ level grades less than applicants from higher performing schools, they will typically be as successful as their peers. Put in other terms, such applicants, despite perhaps getting an offer of ABB rather than AAA, are likely to perform equally well once admitted to university.

74. Separate research by the University of Bristol has suggested that while likely offer levels are not the only factor affecting whether or not students from disadvantaged backgrounds apply to Russell Group universities (see chapter 8 below), such students are more likely to accept offers and enter such institutions as offer levels are reduced. So we might expect that more and, at times lower, offers made by Bristol to those from low performing schools could go some way to raising the intake of these students to Bristol and by extension, other comparable universities adopting a similar approach, without in any way causing standards to decline.

75. So the analysis is clear. What the University of Bristol then decided, in the light of its research, was to identify applications from low performing schools in such a way that, in the context of the general findings just described, this fact was known to admissions tutors. This enables the selection process to proceed against a background of fuller knowledge of likely future potential, as well as of results thus far attained, in other words from within 'equi-potential' groups. At the very least, in the most competitive situations with a choice between many very well qualified candidates, contextual data may be a valuable way of helping to determine which candidates to admit. The decision as to who is actually admitted then remains as ever with the admissions tutor(s) of the relevant course, based on a holistic assessment of the individual applicant in question. At the same time, the university as a whole is able to monitor the progress it makes in creating a student body that is socially more inclusive, with all of the benefits that that brings both to the university and to society more widely, while fully maintaining the academic quality of that student body.

76. Such carefully constructed alternative routes to meet the admission requirements of selective universities can certainly serve to raise aspirations and consequently lead to attainment levels judged acceptable by the university in question. What they are certainly not is any form of ‘social engineering’ as characterised from time to time by certain sections of the media. This does *not* mean introducing ‘blanket formulae’;

contextual information is considered alongside other information when making an individual decision. On the other hand, the very personalisation which such an approach requires makes the whole process time-consuming and therefore more expensive. The costs may indeed be higher but the outcomes may justify this. I have suggested (paragraph 63) that the need to meet these extra costs may be one matter that the Browne Review needs to take account of in its deliberations.

Post Qualification Applications

77. Some of those we have consulted supported the recommendation of the Schwartz Report that we should move towards a full post-qualification applications (PQA) system. However, the evidence as to whether this is likely to benefit students from disadvantaged backgrounds, in other words whether pre-qualification admissions disadvantage such students, is inconclusive. Recent research by the University of Bristol shows that even when disadvantaged students apply after their results, and even when they do better than expected, and thus could apply to a selective university, they do not do so in higher proportions than seen with pre-qualification applications. This suggests that the timing of the application is not of itself a significant factor in students' decisions about which university to apply to and is less important than the level of the offer which the candidate receives. Clearly this is a complex matter, and we shall say no more of it here.

Chapter 7

University owned targets

78. In looking at this range of issues, I was asked to consider how best individual universities can set and achieve targets for themselves. This also links to the broader issue of universities maximising the impact of the money they invest in widening participation activities. (paragraph 57) Universities will always seek to ensure their outreach and other activities are cost-effective, and this will be increasingly true in the current financial climate.

79. There are of course long-standing, sector-wide WP performance indicators published by HESA, which encounter the difficulties inherent in applying a single methodology to such a diverse sector, particularly as the indicators were never intended to be targets but rather benchmarks. While I fully respect institutional autonomy, I nevertheless believe that highly selective universities should not only give themselves a set of targets in respect of their applications pool, as most already do; they should also determine appropriate targets for their own actual intakes in accordance with their own circumstances. The annual WPSA reporting to HEFCE and OFFA would then include each university's analysis from a WP perspective of its success in respect of these two successive stages. **I RECOMMEND that information on how well universities have met**

their own WP targets in respect of both applications and *actual entrants* to their particular institution should be put in the public domain.

80. Approaches to measuring success are being developed across the sector, some yielding interesting and exciting results that indicate the methodology and research that could be applied by other universities to their own data. For example, we have alluded earlier to the research undertaken by the University of Bristol. Much of the value of the analysis, and of the benchmarks that Bristol has set itself in response to that analysis, is that it uses the university's own data and takes account of the individual context of the university. This research would also appear to have the added value of helping to inform outreach activities, indicating the schools and areas where investment might have greatest effect. **I therefore RECOMMEND that HEFCE and OFFA continue to promote good practice in evaluating and monitoring widening participation. There should be an expectation that institutions undertake their own research and analysis – making use of national data where appropriate – to inform the development of future WPSAs. At the same time, SPA should continue to work on best practice in the field of admissions data, in particular their development of a suite of centrally available contextual data.** Such evaluation, at either university or group level, would benefit from appropriate peer review.

Chapter 8

Social and financial factors

81. Even if a young person has attainment levels that would enable them to apply with some chance of success to a selective university, there may be other factors that discourage them from applying. In its first submission to the Browne Review, the OFFA team demonstrated that the financial package in place since 2006 – consisting of fees, grants, loans and bursaries – has not deterred young people from seeking entry into higher education, although there is significantly more work to be done to publicise the availability of higher bursaries at selective universities. As I have already argued to the Review, I believe this will continue to be the case for any politically realistic package of fees and support in the coming years. We need to look primarily elsewhere for the factors that render an application to a selective university less likely, and it is to some of these that I now turn.

82. It is clear from discussions with non-selective maintained schools and colleges very successful in widening participation (that is, in getting their disadvantaged students into higher education), that there are at least three factors that deter their students from applying to highly selective universities. And remember these are applicants who have overcome other obstacles and are now qualified, sometimes well qualified, to enter higher education. Asked for example why they did not apply to Russell

Group institutions within a few miles of their college, well qualified, potential 'first of their family' entrants at one successful London college gave three main answers.

83. The first was that it was too expensive. This is partly a pernicious legacy of the campaign about fees half a decade ago. It is of course not more expensive to go to a selective university: on the contrary, the bursary will almost always be higher, often substantially so, exactly as was intended by Charles Clarke[49]. Professor Claire Callender, in a report commissioned by OFFA[50], recently showed that many students, their families and, most worryingly, even in some cases their school or college-based advisors were not aware of the level of bursaries for poorer students, that financial packages were often not explored until after students had accepted an offer or even arrived at university, and that the marketing of bursaries by universities to certain of their target groups could be much better. This is clearly an area where universities can and should do more. **I RECOMMEND that selective universities evaluate and take further steps to ensure that the information on their bursary packages is easily accessible, clear, and well understood, and available early enough to influence potential applicants' decisions about where to seek to go to university.** The Government and national agencies should also redouble their efforts to provide better information on bursary

[49] Secretary of State for the Department for Education and Skills at the time of the 2004 Higher Education Act introducing Variable Fees and Access Agreements including bursary expectations.

[50] Office for Fair Access (2009) *Awareness, take-up and impact of institutional bursaries and scholarships in England: Summary and Recommendations* 2009/07, accessed at www.offa.org.uk/publications. (16 April 2010).

packages, including raising awareness about the variability of bursary size and the significantly higher value of bursaries offered by most selective institutions.

84. The second reason given was that selective institutions were ‘harder to reach’. This was in a part of London immensely well served by public transport. I of course acknowledge this argument in a number of rural areas; but in inner London? Or in or near any other of our big cities, where the majority of potential students live?

85. In reality, of course, this pseudo-argument is an aspect of the third, and most deep-rooted, factor: that even the best qualified students in this college preferred to stay with their (perhaps less well qualified) peers, that is, to go to institutions where they believed they would feel more comfortable. ‘Ease of access’, in other words, may be a metaphorical rather than a literal concept. We may empathise with that preference – but it is one that may limit the chances of upward social mobility for those who so strongly need to feel part of their group at the age of 18 or 19. This shows the importance of the extended outreach programmes in which young people are introduced to new environments and peer groups around selective universities and which make them feel more comfortable and confident of fitting in to these universities.

86. It is worth considering at this point whether individuals' choices in respect of higher education are influenced primarily by relevant 'facts' (to the extent that there are any) or by perceptions. The answer is, of course, likely to be a complex mixture of the two. It has recently been argued, for example, that when students report that they have been deterred from seeking entry to university on financial grounds, this cannot be true, as the empirical evidence – that is, rising applications and admissions from all social groups – shows the contrary. I think it is possible to argue, however, as with the London students just described, that a perceived additional financial cost – e.g. by gaining entry to a Russell Group university – may be believed in with such certainty that it becomes the proximate cause for a decision even though that belief is in fact wrong. In reality, the putative student may not be aware, or may only be dimly aware, that his or her real reason for the choice of where to apply is, for example, the wish to remain in a social comfort zone, for which financial factors are in some way a surrogate.

87. As Professor Claire Callender put it[51]:

'All students who had heard of bursaries were asked about their views on bursaries and whether they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements. Debates about the distinction between actual social situations

[51] Callender. C., Hopkin, R. and Wilkinson, D. (2009) *Higher Education Students' Awareness and Knowledge of Institutional Bursaries.* p136. The quote at the end of the paragraph comes from: Kettley, N., Whitehead, J. and Raffan, J. (2007) Worried women, complacent men? Gendered responses to differential student funding in higher education, *Oxford Review of Education* Vol 34:1 pp 111-129.

and perceptions of those situations, and about the relationship between actions and attitudes have a long history in social science. However, the potentially powerful impact of misplaced perceptions of actuality on behaviour is well established, ergo the dictum that if people 'define situations as real, they are real in their consequences'.

88. It may of course be easier to say 'I can't afford it' than to give almost any other explanation for going to the same university as your classmates when you could have aimed higher. The Sutton Trust is actively engaged in exploring the motives of those who could have chosen a selective university but don't – their 'missing 3000'[52] – and their eventual conclusions will certainly be of use to us all.

[52] Sutton Trust (2004) *The missing 3,000: State school students under-represented at leading universities.* London: Sutton Trust. Accessed at: www.suttontrust.com/reports/Missing-3000-Report-2.pdf (16 April 2010).

Chapter 9

Choice of curriculum in secondary schools

89. Many of the factors that influence the likelihood of a young person with the requisite talent applying or not to a highly selective university arise however well before the 16-19 phase of their education discussed here. Before we examine a number of these factors, including a number which arise specifically in 11-16 schools, it is worth reiterating at this point that by far the biggest single group lost to higher education, at least at this stage of their lives, consists of those who leave education and training entirely at the age of 16. In essence, this is primarily an issue of widening participation rather than fair access, but it seems clear that the plans outlined in the ‘Raising the Participation Age’ programme can only be helpful in keeping young people within the pool where aspirations and attainments can be raised within the context of appropriate independent advice and guidance, and who may thus be guided in appropriate cases towards a selective university.

90. It is clear from my conversations with headteachers that the curriculum of 11-16 schools is inevitably designed to cover a coherent five-year period and to meet the criteria by which such schools are judged (see below), whereas that of an 11-18 institution will often have the later needs of the school and its pupils in its mind from the outset. This in turn may attract a different range of teaching staff. In other words, there is a discontinuity, a

break in the curriculum and in the advice and guidance given to pupils at 11-16 schools that does not arise in 11-18 schools. It's worth observing here that more than 50 per cent of young people attend 11-16 schools and that these schools are disproportionately found within our older conurbations. If one adds to that mix the fact that in many 11-16 schools, the number of potential applicants to highly selective universities may be very small, and that the curriculum may therefore very properly be focused on the needs of the great majority of its pupils, then the opportunities to nurture the 'most able least likely' are inevitably reduced.

91. Right at the heart of the matter, then, is the need to ensure that those young people with the requisite ability – the potential, that is, to succeed in a research-intensive university – who do not currently choose to apply but could do so with a fair chance of success, are identified as early as possible. I would go so far as to say that this must certainly not be later than the end of year 9, after which point such young people need to be given all possible advice, guidance and support, whether academic, pastoral or financial, until they move into Higher Education. Why the end of year 9? Because before the start of year 10, options are selected which may affect not only a young person's results at 16+, but also, in often unforeseen ways, the choices available after 16, and therefore, sometimes fairly directly, the <u>kind</u> of university to which a candidate may plausibly apply.

92. To give one simple but highly significant example, it is difficult (although not impossible) to study key science subjects successfully at 'A' level if those subjects have not been taken separately at GCSE. And anything that makes it harder to study science 'A' levels makes it harder to gain university entry in science-based subjects. This is true, for example, in the case of medicine where there is much concern about the social composition of the entry cohort, most recently, for example, in the BMA report 'Equality and Diversity in UK medical schools'[53]. Add to this that the range of sciences offered in independent and selective schools is very often wider, and that science-based subjects such as medicine are disproportionately offered by selective universities and some at least of the reasons for a skewed application pool are immediately very clear.

93. Similar issues arise with modern languages, less directly connected perhaps with specific professions but surely another important part of the advanced skills base which this country needs. These too are increasingly concentrated in a small number of, in general, highly selective universities, while the proportion of the cohort taking a language at GCSE has declined from a peak of 78 per cent in 2001 to 44 per cent in 2009[54]. While the relevant 'A' level results seem to indicate that many able linguists are still going through to study language post-16, they can

[53] British Medical Association (2009) *Equality and Diversity in UK medical schools*, accessed at www.bma.org.uk/equality_diversity/age/equalityanddiversityinukmedschools.jsp.

[54] DCSF (2002) *GCSE/GNVQ and GCE A/AS/VCE/AGNVQ examination results 2000/01 – England*. Statistical bulletin, accessed at www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SBU/b000334/bweb06-2002.pdf and DCSF (2010) *GCE/Applied GCE A/AS and Equivalent Examination Results in England, 2008/09 (Revised)* SFR02/2010, accessed at www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000906/index.shtml.

only do so if they attend a school or college that offers the requisite choices at 14 and are encouraged/aware of the consequences of not studying a language. Currently comprehensive school pupils are two and a half times less likely to take a language at A level compared with independently schooled pupils[55]. So we see that another route into selective universities may be more open to some than others.

94. Let me, however, return to the question of the availability of science subjects for all pupils. Although all young people at 14 with the requisite ability have a statutory entitlement to study science courses leading to at least two GCSEs (with a plan for all students in maintained schools to have access to triple science GCSEs by 2014), that provision is not always readily available, particularly if the young person does not press for it. Advice and guidance, and particularly the possible consequences in terms of later post-16 choices (and thereby of higher education options), are evidently of critical importance at this stage – but so too is the willingness and capacity of the school, alone or in conjunction with others, to make the necessary curricular arrangements. Self-evidently, specialist teachers need to be available too. We heard, for example, of a National Challenge school where there was just one pupil for whom single subject physics was appropriate, and the immense efforts that were needed to make special 'twilight' arrangements for this pupil.

[55] DCSF (2010) *GCE/Applied GCE A/AS and Equivalent Examination Results in England, 2008/09 (Revised)* SFR02/2010. Table 18.

95. A more cost-effective way of providing this additional support may be through the concept of the extended school day, a key strand of 'Going the Extra Mile'[56], as well as by further developing supplementary/complementary schooling, sometimes based on distinct cultural or faith groups, with additional teaching and other support made available at evenings or weekends. Important though this latter route undoubtedly is, care must be taken not to overlook students who do not belong to any cultural or faith groups, often those living in the most deprived neighbourhoods and whose route forward may be among the most difficult. For such young people, programmes such as 'IntoUniversity'[57] also clearly have a valuable role to play.

96. There is another point. The form that national league tables take in respect of 11-16 schools inevitably gives great weight to overall performance at GCSE and in particular to the proportion of students who gain A* – C grades. While there are a range of performance measures for each school published by DCSF, some of these measures gain greater public prominence by being published by the press. The measures can clearly be an incentive towards 'playing safe', putting the perceived needs of the institution as a whole before that of the individual pupils, particularly if they are a small minority. A recent report by CILT, the National Centre

[56] For information about the Extra Mile project, visit www.teachernet.gov.uk/teachingandlearning/schoolstandards/extramile/.

[57] For more information, visit www.intouniversity.org.

for Languages, has partly attributed the falling number of candidates taking languages at Key Stage 4 to this issue[58]. As one headteacher told us, offering a more demanding curriculum to brighter pupils increased the risk of perceived (relative) failure, especially for a school already in the spotlight. And this led to a cautious approach when meeting the curricular needs of the ablest.

97. All of these things – appropriate advice and guidance at the point of GCSE options selection, the availability of a full range of curricular choices for all pupils able or potentially able to benefit, and effective collaborative arrangements where individual 11-16 schools cannot reasonably make in-house arrangements for every pupil – will help to increase the application pool for selective universities.

98. Given these perceptions and despite the obvious practical difficulties associated with access to timely and comparable data, **I RECOMMEND that DCSF should consider whether one of the measures by which all schools, including 11–16 schools, are publicly evaluated should be a progression measure relating to the performance and destinations of (former) pupils at 18+. Ideally this would relate to individual schools; at the very least, it should relate to local authorities as a whole.** Such a measure could build on DCSF's work on

[58] CILT (2010) Language Trends survey, accessed at www.cilt.org.uk/home/research_and_statistics/language_trends_surveys/secondary/2009.aspx (16 April 2010).

the School Report Card and complement the existing local authority indicator that measures the 'gap' between the proportions of 15-year-olds eligible for free school meals (FSM) and those not eligible for FSM progressing to higher education at the age of 18 or 19[59]. We would also suggest that government looks more broadly at the current range of published measures with a view to rebalancing the incentives for a school to provide access to three science GCSEs rather than two. As a very senior headteacher put it, all maintained schools, including 11-16 schools, should be subject to 'intelligent accountability' in respect of their brightest youngsters, a view for which there appears to be widespread support.

School and university partnerships and better IAG

99. Seen from the perspective of many schools and colleges, the most effective method of raising aspirations and encouraging pupils to consider highly selective HE is a long-term partnership between a school or college and a selective university, working on its own behalf or, preferably, on behalf of a set of similar universities, such as the 'Group of 13'. This may well take place against the background of wider-ranging school/HEI partnership programmes such as Aimhigher, which have a statistically significant impact on increasing progression ratios more generally. Sustained in-depth work, with consistent availability of comprehensive and impartial advice and guidance to pupils over a period

[59] This is one of 198 national indicators introduced in the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review to help focus the delivery of outcomes by local government on national priorities.

of years, is an important way to increase aspiration and hence attainment[60]. It is worth noting once more that a break at age 16 means that efforts for pupils who change institution at this age need to be redoubled – but this is the reality with which we have to deal. **I therefore RECOMMEND that selective universities, preferably in groups, directly employ appropriate staffing to supplement, on a peripatetic basis, the academic and financial advice and guidance available within the school and college sector, particularly at the ages of 14 and 16.** In line with the National Council for Educational Excellence (NCEE) recommendations we agree that it is appropriate for all schools, including 11-16 schools, to have a senior member of staff responsible for careers and education guidance, ensuring that such guidance and information is up to date.

100. This recommendation is entirely consistent with an emerging consensus on the importance of high quality, independent information, advice and guidance (IAG). The recent Milburn report, for example, highlighted the importance of IAG in a number of its recommendations. One of these recommendations was that `*All universities should work with schools to ensure that higher education related information, advice and*

[60] Blenkinsop, S., McCrone, T., Wade, P. and Morris, M. (2006) *How do young people make choices at 14 and 16?* DfES Research Report 773. London: DfES. This research suggests that by 14 many young people already have a strong sense of what they want to do – but often do not have the required decision-making skills. The research suggests that IAG is most effective when it is comprehensive and impartial, delivered by trained staff within the school with the support of external professionals, and has curriculum time dedicated to it. The research also shows a link between schools which appeared to be effective in relation to curriculum management, student support, staff expectations and school leadership, and the young people who were making the most rational, thought-through decisions.

guidance, and outreach and mentoring programmes are provided from primary school level onwards'. This clearly complements our more specific recommendation here.

101. The evidence and analysis undertaken to support the work of the NCEE identified the crucial impact that good, timely IAG, or the lack of it, could have on a young person's progression options. Research shows that the quality of IAG can have a significant effect on subject choice, with effective IAG leading to more rational choices that are less influenced by family and friends, and ineffective IAG leading to more changeable decisions over time and leading to comfort seeking or defeatist approaches to decision making[61]. The NCEE also supported early awareness and aspiration-raising, while acknowledging the practical difficulties. This resulted in HEFCE, through Aimhigher, running a small number of pilots in primary schools, the evaluation of which will be of interest across the sector. The NCEE also stressed, as we have done above, the importance of advice at age 14 on curriculum choices with a view to encouraging progression, where appropriate, to the most selective courses, ensuring that young people understand the benefits of HE including the differential returns from some courses.

102. The Government has responded to the issues identified by the NCEE and others by publishing its new IAG strategy for young people

[61] Blenkinsop et al (2006).

‘Quality, Choice and Aspiration’. The proposals and plans set out in this strategy have the potential to address many of the weaknesses in the current arrangements but whether these will be seriously adopted by local authorities, schools and individual teachers has yet to be seen. Government would do well to keep up the momentum in this crucial area.

103. There is one other factor that is perhaps worth stressing to potential students in the ‘most able least likely’ category, namely the probable personal benefit they will derive from successfully completing a course at a selective university. This likely additional economic gain – especially in the light of ongoing misperceptions about relative costs – and the enhanced chances of job satisfaction and consequential social benefits can all usefully be part of the advice and guidance provided to students. All may serve to increase aspiration and hopefully, attainment also.

104. In sum, many critical decisions that affect the likelihood of a ‘most able least likely’ candidate applying plausibly to a selective university are made substantially sooner than in year 13, very often in an 11-16 school. It is therefore very important to identify individuals with high academic potential at this point, so that appropriate advice, guidance and support can be provided and that the links with selective universities which I envisage can have most impact. Schools can be reluctant at times to identify individuals with higher than average academic potential; and this of course is not a straightforward task as young people display a range of

diverse talents and aptitudes which can develop at different paces over time. Furthermore, some teachers will spell out that they are philosophically opposed to elitism. But this is category confusion. Excellence is not a synonym for elitism. What we do need to do is ensure that the UK continues to support excellence in its university sector and that access to such institutions is ‘fair’, regardless of the school or college a young person attends between 11 and 16 years of age. This means identifying, guiding and supporting those potentially able to benefit from securing a place in a highly selective institution. In this way, upward social mobility, currently stalled, can be resumed.

105. For this reason I believe it may be necessary in certain circumstances for central or local authorities to insist that school and college partnerships with selective universities work as envisaged here. The most selective universities must have meaningful access not just to entire cohorts – not a very effective use of a university’s time – but to talented individuals whom schools can readily identify at least from early on in Key stage 3. In a given school such individuals may be very few in numbers.

106. Local authorities have a strategic lead to ensure that the IAG services offered within their schools and elsewhere meet the needs of the pupils within their areas. The supplementary assistance from universities outlined here can help them meet this responsibility in the case of 'most able least likely' pupils. Local authorities are also charged with ensuring

that their overall educational provision meets the requirement of the young people in their district, including as far as possible the creation of the range of skills required to meet local employment needs. Finally, local authorities have a key role in respect of the curricular entitlements of pupils, described earlier, which can perhaps best be met by encouraging schools, whether separately or collaboratively, to make the special arrangements that some young people evidently need.

Conclusions and recommendations

107. We have seen that WP as a whole has been a story of considerable success and that the introduction of 'higher fees' in the form of a deferred graduate contribution, coupled with an appropriate package of student support (grants, loans and bursaries), elements of which are targeted and variable, has not adversely affected growth in demand for higher education. For many in the sector and more generally, the most recent figures from HEFCE[62] are particularly encouraging, showing that for the first time ever in a period of expansion, growth in entrants from those in less advantaged families has both proportionately and absolutely exceeded that from better off families. Moreover, this growth has not been at the expense of young people from families where, in many cases, higher education is seen as a normal expectation.

108. There remains however much to be done, in particular to encourage young people with the requisite ability and talent from poorer families seriously to consider the possibility of applying to a highly selective university.

109. We have seen that information about bursaries, including the fact that these may well be higher for students from lower income families admitted to selective universities, is not always known to students,

[62] Higher Education Funding Council for England (2010) *Trends in young participation in higher education: core results for England*.

parents and, critically, to advisors. We have recommended that universities take further steps, individually and collectively, to address this situation. This will be easier to achieve if some of our more general recommendations about closer links between selective universities and schools are in due course adopted.

110. And indeed, the essential core of my recommendations is that selective universities, almost certainly working in groups to maximise regional coverage and of course in close partnership with schools-based colleagues, should take substantial further steps to identify, at the earliest possible time, those young people of talent from poorer families with least experience of higher education – those 'most able but least likely' to apply to such universities. I have suggested that the process must start not later than the end of year 9, when curricular decisions are made which, as we have seen, may have far-reaching consequences for students. I have further suggested that for such partnerships to work as effectively as possible, there needs to be a realisation that in many cases, particularly in individual 11-16 schools, the absolute numbers of potential beneficiaries of such support may be very small – but this is absolutely not a reason to overlook them. Clearly very close collaboration between universities and schools is needed to identify those young people most likely to benefit from such intensive support and then to provide the intensive, independent advice and guidance – pastoral, curricular and

financial – that all commentators agree is essential if real progress is to be made.

111. The second critical stage for many individual students is the transition from one school to another at age 16. It is only by ensuring that appropriate support is well targeted at specific young people at this point that there can be anything approaching a coherent move from GCSE to 'A' Level courses and higher education for a particular young person. This is clearly a resource-intensive process and one where, because of the change of institution, there is a big risk of discontinuity in that support. Most important of all at this stage is the need to dissuade those with the requisite talent from leaving full-time education – a move that will inevitably exclude them from subsequent advice, guidance and encouragement.

112. This Report also looks in some detail at the ways in which selective universities might formulate admission offers to students from 'equi-potential' groups, using for instance the well-developed methodology used by the University of Bristol. Our purpose is to make the more general point that it is incumbent on selective universities to develop and test their own individual methodologies for ensuring that access to their courses is fair. This local responsibility is consistent with our view that institutional autonomy, specifically including a university's admission policy, can best be preserved and enhanced by universities selecting their

own goals and demonstrating transparently how these goals are being met (see Recommendation 6). Institutions have much to learn from each other, and HEFCE, OFFA and SPA can continue to help by promulgating best practice. However, unless institutions act with openness and determination in this matter, the ever-present pressure to use national benchmarks which only tell one part of the overall story may grow.

113. Finally what I have recommended is not without resource implications. We have seen that all selective universities engage in outreach programme of various kinds, some of which are strikingly successful. Clearly, existing resources can be used to best effect by learning from best practice elsewhere in the sector. We have also called on selective institutions to re-examine their additional fee expenditure on bursaries and outreach activities, to consider whether fair access might best be helped by diverting part of this expenditure into the extended outreach and schools-focused activities strongly recommended here. Finally, in considering the fee levels appropriate for full-time home and EU undergraduates in future years, the Browne Review will wish to bear in mind the extra costs of the measures outlined here. The goal of fair access is too important for the opportunity to be missed at this crucial time.

Summary of recommendations

I recommend that:

Recommendation 1

summer schools targeted at the 'most able least likely', along the lines of the Sutton Trust summer schools, are now adopted by all highly selective institutions (paragraph 56)

Recommendation 2

HEFCE examine the benefits of encouraging the highest achievers from Aimhigher target groups to attend summer schools and comparable events organised and delivered by highly selective universities (paragraph 56)

Recommendation 3

selective institutions increase the coverage and volume of successful extended outreach programmes, including the most intensive activities targeted at their most able students. These programmes should be co-ordinated so as to avoid duplicating the efforts of other institutions and organisations and should target students from at least early in year 9 – before students choose what to study for their GCSEs (paragraph 58)

Recommendation 4

selective universities should, as a matter of urgency, review the pattern of their expenditure on bursaries, scholarships and additional outreach, to

improve the way they target students and ensure money is spent on effective initiatives (paragraph 62)

Recommendation 5

in considering any recommendation relating to future fee levels, the Browne Review should also consider whether there should be any broad conditions requiring the most selective universities to maintain the current proportions of additional fee income invested in bursaries and outreach (paragraph 63)

Recommendation 6

information on how well universities have met their own WP targets in respect of both applications *and actual entrants* to their particular institution should be put in the public domain (paragraph 79)

Recommendation 7

HEFCE and OFFA continue to promote good practice in evaluating and monitoring widening participation. There should be an expectation that institutions undertake their own research and analysis – making use of national data where appropriate – to inform the development of future WPSAs. At the same time, SPA should continue to work on best practice in the field of admissions data, in particular their development of a suite of centrally available contextual data (paragraph 80)

Recommendation 8

selective universities evaluate and take further steps to ensure that the information on their bursary packages is easily accessible, clear, well understood, and available early enough to influence potential applicants' decisions about where to seek to go to university (paragraph 83)

Recommendation 9

DCSF should consider further whether one of the measures by which all schools, including 11–16 schools, are publicly evaluated should be a progression measure relating to the performance of (former) pupils at 18+. Ideally this would relate to individual schools; at the very least, it should relate to local authorities as a whole (paragraph 98)

Recommendation 10

selective universities, preferably in groups, directly employ appropriate staffing to supplement, on a peripatetic basis, the academic and financial advice and guidance available within the school and college sector, particularly at the ages of 14 and 16 (paragraph 99).

Annex A – Letter from Rt Hon David Lammy MP to Sir Martin Harris, 6 December 2009

BIS | Department for Business Innovation & Skills

Sir Martin Harris
President's Office
Clare Hall
Herschel Road
Cambridge
CB3 PAL

December 2009

Dear Sir Martin,

I wanted to write to thank you for agreeing to undertake the review into fair access described in the HE framework, *Higher Ambitions*, and to confirm the timetable and scope for that work.

As we set out in *Higher Ambitions*, this Government is committed to ensuring that there are no caps on talent in Britain. We have succeeded in widening access to university over the last decade, but this progress has been uneven across the system, with our most selective institutions seeing only modest increases. Fairer access for educationally disadvantaged but able pupils has to remain a key part of how our world class universities see their missions.

The review you are undertaking has the potential to make a significant contribution to this Government's wider ambitions in respect of social mobility and social justice and there will be important links to be drawn with the work of Alan Milburn on Fair Access to the Professions. I hope your report can draw on, and develop, the work of the Milburn group where there is overlap with the scope of your own review.

I am pleased to hear that you are already in discussion with my officials and others from across the sector to begin the groundwork for your report. As you know I am keen that your work helps inform the fees review and, for this reason, I would like you to submit your report to me at the end of March or very early April.

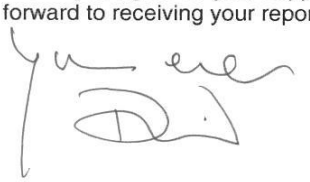
I would like your report to consider:

- further action that could be taken to widen access to highly selective universities for those from under privileged backgrounds;
- how universities can ensure that measures for wider access are prioritised most effectively and do not suffer in a time of greater fiscal constraints;
- how best individual universities can set and achieve targets for themselves;
- how best to promote the partnership of schools and universities to identify and mentor the most talented young people from an early age;
- whether the money currently used by universities under access agreements, mainly spent on bursaries for their students, can be better targeted in order to give more effective support to fair access, and to offer advice on future options.

I know that in developing conclusions and recommendations in these areas you will be consulting with a number of Vice Chancellors from across the HE sector. I believe this to be vitally important, both to build on the knowledge and experience that already exists in the sector and to help bring about a consensus.

For day to day issues or queries Bev Thomas, Deputy Director for Widening Participation and Quality Teaching, will be happy to help and I would like to keep in touch with your work as it progresses over the next few months and I am asking my office to look at suitable dates.

Thank you again for your support with this important agenda and I look forward to receiving your report next year.



DAVID LAMMY

Annex B – Widening Participation performance across the whole higher education sector

1. Access Performance Indicator summary tables

HESA produces the Performance Indicators that cover publicly-funded higher education institutions in the UK.

Young full-time first degree entrants to **English** HE institutions:

	Proportion of young full-time first degree entrants to university from:				
	State schools	Lower social classes (IIIM, IV, V)	NS-SEC 4-7 (1)	Low participation neighbourhoods	Low participation neighbourhoods (POLAR2) (2)
1997/98	81.0	24.7	n.a.	11.4	n.a.
1998/99	84.4	24.9	n.a.	11.6	n.a.
1999/00	84.1	25.1	n.a.	11.7	n.a.
2000/01	85.0	25.3	n.a.	11.8	n.a.
2001/02	85.2	25.5	n.a.	12.4	n.a.
2002/03	86.4	n.a.	27.9	12.5	n.a.
2003/04	86.1	n.a.	28.2	13.3	n.a.
2004/05	85.9	n.a.	27.9	13.1	n.a.
2005/06	86.9	n.a.	29.1	13.5	9.2
2006/07	87.2	n.a.	29.8	n.a.	9.6
2007/08	87.4	n.a.	29.4	n.a.	9.9
2008/09	88.0	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	10.2

n. a. = not available

(1) The socio-economic group classification was introduced in 2002/03 to replace the social class groupings. The two classifications are not directly comparable. In addition, the 2008/09 data is not comparable with NS-SEC data published previously and has therefore been excluded from the time series data above.

(2) In 2006/07 the method for defining low participation neighbourhoods changed and indicators are based on the new POLAR2 method. Using this new method, figures for the 2005/06 academic year have been calculated for comparative purposes. This new method is not comparable with the low participation data produced previously and hence no comparison can been made between the two methods.

2. Full-time Young Participation by Socio-Economic Class (FYPSEC)

The Full-Time Young Participation by Socio-Economic Class (FYPSEC) measure shows the proportion of young people from the top three and bottom four socio-economic classes who participate for the first time in full-time higher education, together with the difference (or “gap”) between these two participation rates.

Overall FYPSEC figures:

	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Participation rate for NS-SEC 1-3	45.2%	42.0%	42.4%	43.8%	40.6%	41.2%
Participation rate for NS-SEC 4-7	18.1%	18.3%	18.0%	20.3%	19.5%	21.0%
Gap	27.2%	23.6%	24.4%	23.5%	21.1%	20.2%

Between 2002/03 and 2007/08, the gap has reduced 7.0 percentage points, and since 2005/06 by 3.3 percentage points.

Annex C – OFFA commissioned analysis from HEFCE on Trends in Young Participation by selectivity of institution

Trends in young participation by selectivity of institution

Key points

- This report analyses young participation trends by both background and selectivity of the institution attended.
- There are much greater participation differences by background for the most selective third of institutions than there are for HE as a whole.
- The participation of disadvantaged young people in the most selective institutions is low and has not increased since the mid-1990s.
- The most advantaged 20 per cent of young people are seven times more likely to enter the most selective institutions than the most disadvantaged 40 per cent.
- This ratio has risen from six times more likely in the mid-1990s but has not increased further since the mid-2000s.
- The participation of disadvantaged young people in the less selective two-thirds of institutions has increased, especially so in recent years.
- Young people from all backgrounds now have broadly equal participation rates in the least selective third of institutions.

Summary

Measuring participation trends by selectivity of institution

1. Young participation in higher education as a whole is known to have widened in recent years but how access to different types of institutions has changed has been unclear. This new analysis answers that question by reporting participation trends for young people in England split by both background and the selectivity of institution attended. The analysis looks at entry to English higher education institutions for which trends through time can be reliably measured. These institutions account for the large majority of young entrants and are representative of the key trends for young participation in higher education as a whole.

2. Selectivity – what level of educational attainment is typically required to gain admission – is an important characteristic of institutions in discussions of fair access to higher education. The UCAS tariff system gives a summary measure of educational attainment that covers a wide range of qualifications used in entry to higher education.

We classify institutions according to whether their young entrants have, on average, higher tariff, medium tariff or lower tariff scores from their entry qualifications (relative to other institutions). For this analysis, the higher tariff group is taken as the most selective third of institutions and the lower tariff group as the least selective third. These groups are shown to differ in other ways, for example the bursaries they offer to lower income entrants and the representative bodies they join.

3. The relative participation of advantaged and disadvantaged young people in individual institutions varies widely and is associated with the tariff group that the institution is in. In lower tariff institutions disadvantaged young people typically have only slightly lower participation rates than advantaged young people. For some lower tariff institutions the participation rates of disadvantaged young people are higher than for advantaged young people, up to twice as high for a few institutions. Disadvantaged young people are much less likely to enter higher tariff institutions than advantaged young people, in some cases as much as 15 times less likely.

Large differences by background in entry to selective institutions remain intact

4. There are much greater differences by background for participation in higher tariff institutions than for participation in HE as a whole. The most advantaged 20 per cent have substantially higher participation rates at higher tariff institutions than any other group, including other advantaged groups. Their participation rate in these institutions has increased from the mid-1990s but has been largely unchanged in recent years. The participation rate of the most disadvantaged 40 per cent in these higher tariff institutions is low and has not increased since either the mid-1990s or in more recent years.

5. The relative participation differences between advantaged and disadvantaged young people at higher tariff institutions are large and – unlike participation in HE as a whole – are not reducing. The most advantaged 20 per cent of young people were six times more likely than the most disadvantaged 40 per cent to enter these institutions in the mid-1990s. This ratio has risen to seven times more likely by the mid-2000s but has not increased further in recent years.

At less selective institutions participation by background now broadly equal

6. The participation of the most disadvantaged 40 per cent of young people in medium and lower entry tariff institutions is greater than it is for higher tariff institutions. The participation rate of the most disadvantaged young people in both medium and lower tariff institutions has been increasing, particularly so since the mid-2000s.

7. The differences by background for participation in lower tariff institutions are much smaller than for participation in HE as a whole. These differences have been reducing through time as the participation rates of young people from different backgrounds in lower tariff institutions have converged. In the mid-1990s the most advantaged 20 per cent were around twice as likely to enter these institutions as the most disadvantaged 40 per cent. Today that ratio has fallen to be almost one: young people from advantaged and disadvantage backgrounds have near equal participation rates in lower tariff institutions.

Introduction and outline of analysis

8. The recent study[1] by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) uses a method of measuring young participation rates that can report consistently on trends from the mid-1990s to the present day. It shows that the proportion of young people who enter higher education at ages 18 or 19 ('young participation') differs substantially between advantaged and disadvantaged areas. In the late 2000s, fewer than one in five young people from the most disadvantaged areas entered higher education compared to more than one in two for the most advantaged areas. But these differences would have been larger if it were not for 'substantial and sustained' increases in the participation rate of young people living in the most disadvantaged areas in recent years. Over five cohorts from the mid-2000s the chances of the most disadvantaged young people entering higher education increased (proportionally) by around +30 per cent.

9. The HEFCE analysis uses a single participation measure that covers entrants to all types of higher education. It does not report on participation trends for different types of institution – a particular concern for 'fair access' discussions – and whether they differ from the picture for participation in HE as a whole. The institutional-level Performance Indicator statistics[2] show that there is differential access by background across institutions but, being based only on entrants, they cannot report on trends in participation rates.

10. The new analysis[3] reported here answers the 'fair access' question of how trends in participation for different types of institutions have changed. It extends the methods of young participation measurement used in the HEFCE report to analyse young participation rates in different types of institutions. The modifications to the young participation method required for this, and the effect they have, are described in paragraphs 11 to 15. To reflect the dominant issues in 'fair access' we classify institutions by their 'selectivity'. We measure this through the average tariff points from all the entry qualifications of their young entrants. How institutions are classified into higher, medium and lower average entry tariff groups, and the nature of those groups, is set out in paragraphs 16 to 21. The patterns of participation by young people from different backgrounds in each of these selectivity groupings are described in paragraphs 22 to 26. Detailed participation trends for both advantaged and disadvantaged young people by the selectivity groups are reported in paragraphs 27 to 34.

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[1] HEFCE 2010, 'Trends in young participation in higher education: core results for England', HEFCE 2010/03, Higher Education Funding Council for England. Report available at www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2010/10_03.

[2] Reported by HESA (www.hesa.ac.uk).

[3] This analysis was undertaken at the request of OFFA by Dr Mark Corver at HEFCE. OFFA is responsible for the scope and content of this work.

Measuring young participation trends by institutional groups

11. The key to a secure analysis of participation trends by institutional groups is to ensure that the calculated trends reflect real changes in the proportion of young people who attend these institutions, and not the many other changes in institutional-level data and structures that occur over long periods. To achieve this consistency, and to match the remit of OFFA for English institutions, the young participation measure used in the HEFCE report is modified in a number of ways for this analysis[4], listed below.

i. Include HE at English HEIs only. We remove participation in HE provided outside of England (to reflect OFFA's remit) or at Further Education Colleges (to help consistency over the period).

ii. Include full-time HE only. This aids the institutional-level estimates using UCAS[5] data.

iii. Exclude indirectly funded HE ('franchised provision') and certain types of nursing students. This aids the institutional-level estimates using UCAS data and avoids the distortion of trends by changes in the extent of indirectly funded activity.

iv. Exclude those institutions that are not fully present and identifiable in both the HESA and the UCAS data over the analysis time period. This can be a consequence of institutions not being present in the HESA student record for the whole period, certain types of mergers or de-mergers, not using UCAS as the primary admission route or not consenting to the use of their UCAS data for this type of analysis.

v. Exclude the first cohort (94:95). This cohort draws on the first year, 1994-95, of the HESA student record which has some institutional-specific data coverage issues. These can be reliably overcome for national-level reporting but would risk introducing excessive uncertainly at the institutional level.

12. Applying these restrictions means that we can be sure that we are looking at the same 'institutional entities' (that is, allowing for any mergers, etc or different

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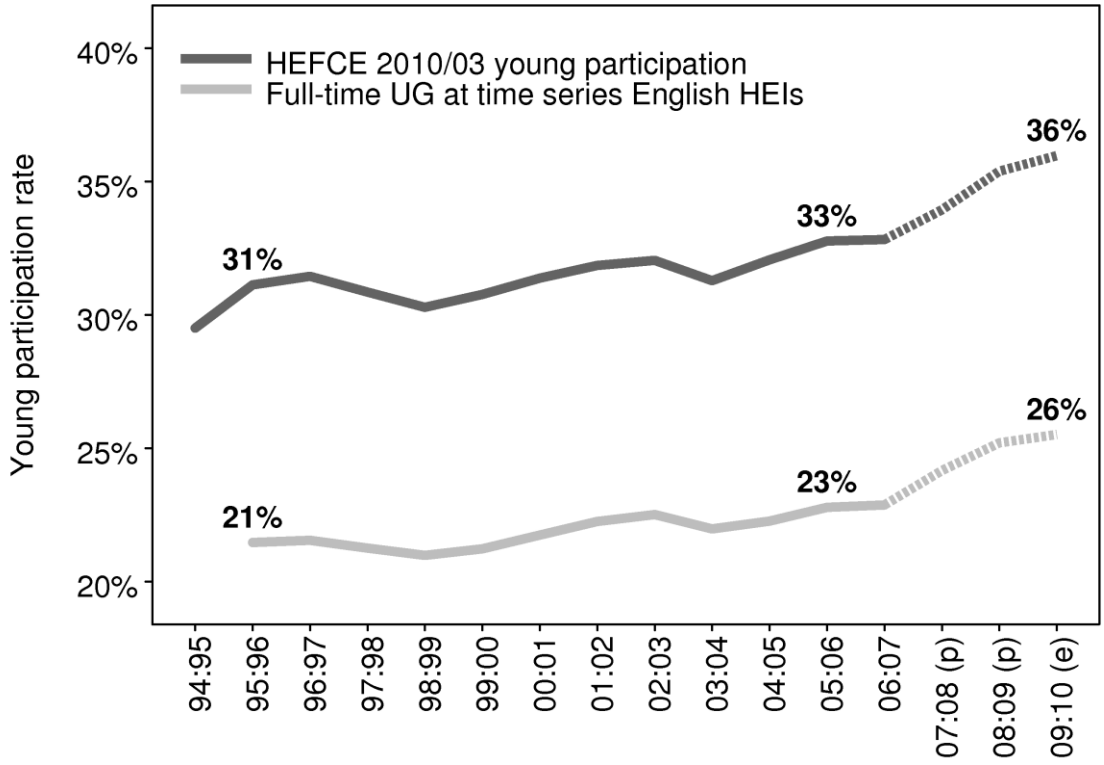
[4] This modified analysis draws upon data sets provided by the Higher Education Statistics Agency and UCAS. Additional data resources used are the Office for National Statistics National Statistics Postcode Directory and 2001 Census: Standard Area Statistics (England and Wales). Census output is Crown copyright and is reproduced with the permission of the Controller of HMSO and the Queen's Printer for Scotland.

[5] UCAS is the organisation responsible for managing applications to higher education courses in the UK and – under an agreement for collaboration for research and analysis purposes – provides HEFCE with data on higher education applications and acceptances. For more information on UCAS see www.ucas.com. OFFA is grateful to UCAS for their assistance in this work.

representations in different data sets) through time. They also allow us to reliably draw upon UCAS HE admissions data, extending the participation sequence where the student record data is not yet fully available[6].

13. These restrictions mean that the time series HEI young participation measure includes fewer entrants, making it around 10 percentage points lower (for England as a whole) that the HEFCE 2010/03 full young participation measure. However, the time series HEI measure does represent the large majority of overall young participation and, importantly, shows the same key trends as the full measure. In particular, it faithfully reflects the profile of increases in participation for England as whole (Figure 1), disadvantaged areas (Figure 2) and advantaged areas (Figure 3). This encapsulation of the key full measure trends within the time series HEI subset gives confidence that the findings in this analysis can be taken as reflecting key features of young participation as a whole.

Figure 1 Young participation for England, comparison of HEFCE 2010/03 measure and the time series English HEIs measure



[6] UCAS data is used in part or full to help estimate the participation rates for the 07:08, 08:09 and 09:10 cohorts, see paragraph 40 in HEFCE 2010/03. All parts of the participation trend that rely on UCAS-based estimates are shown with dashed lines.

Figure 2 Young participation for areas with the lowest proportions of children with graduate parents, comparison of HEFCE 2010/03 measure with the time series English HEIs measure

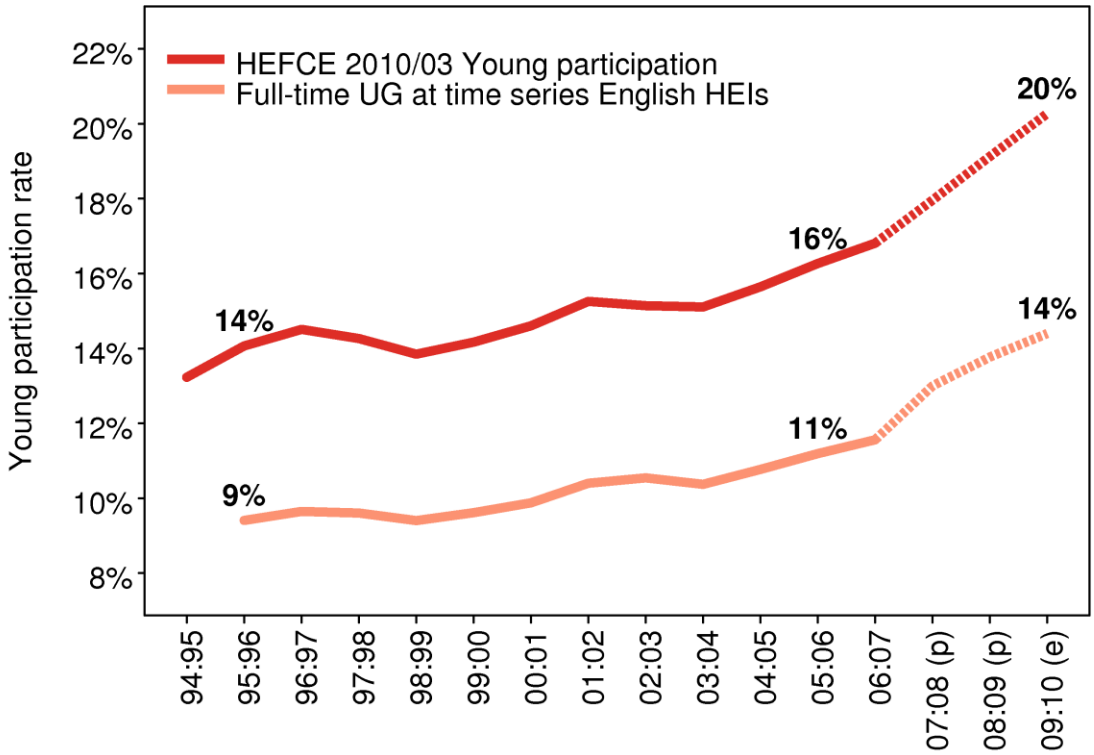
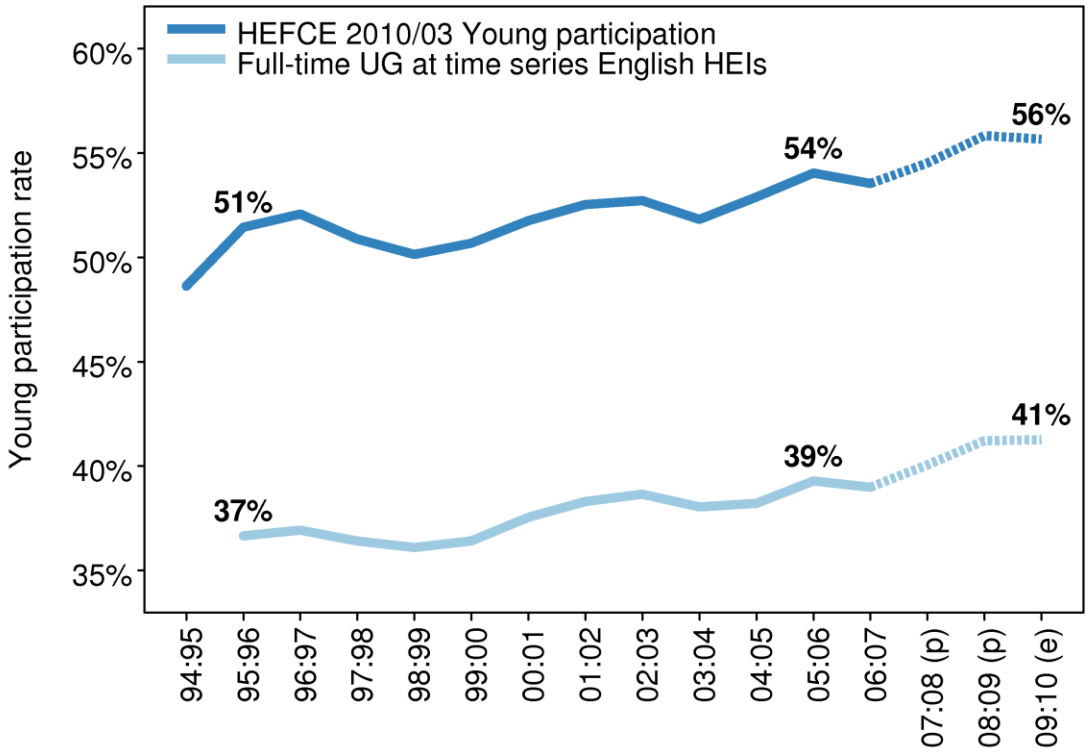


Figure 3 Young participation for areas with the highest proportions of children with graduate parents, comparison of HEFCE 2010/03 measure with the time series English HEIs measure



Defining advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds

14. We identify the different backgrounds of young people by using area-based groups. The reasons for this approach are set out in HEFCE 2010/03 (paragraphs 46 to 49). The HEFCE report used a number of different area-based classifications and found that the key participation trends by background were common across these different classifications. In this analysis we use the area classification based on the level of parental education (HEFCE 2010/03, paragraphs 58 to 60) to identify advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds. We use this classification because it is almost as strongly discriminating of young participation rates as using participation rates themselves but avoids the difficulty of making institutional-level adjustments to the measured rates (HEFCE 2010/03, paragraph 51).

15. There are five (equal population) levels of this parental education classification. The most disadvantaged 20 per cent, those areas where children are least likely to have a HE qualified parent, are identified as quintile one ('Q1') and the most advantaged 20 per cent (where children are most likely to have graduate parents) are identified as quintile five ('Q5'). The 2001 Census records that 10 per cent of children in Q1 areas had a HE-qualified parent, compared to 48 per cent in Q5 areas.

Grouping institutions by selectivity

16. One way of grouping institutions that is relevant to fair access discussions is by the typical level of entry qualifications that their young entrants have. The UCAS tariff system[7] gives a summary measure of attainment relevant to entry to HE that covers a wide range of entry qualifications. We calculate the average tariff score for each institution based on English domiciled 18 year old acceptances from the 2007 and 2008 UCAS entry cycles where a tariff point total is recorded[8].

17. We use the institutional-level averages to rank institutions into three broad entry tariff groups. These are, Figure 4, lower entry tariff institutions (average less than 260 points), medium entry tariff institutions (average 260 or more but less than 375 points) and higher entry tariff institutions (375 tariff points or more). The groups are defined to be

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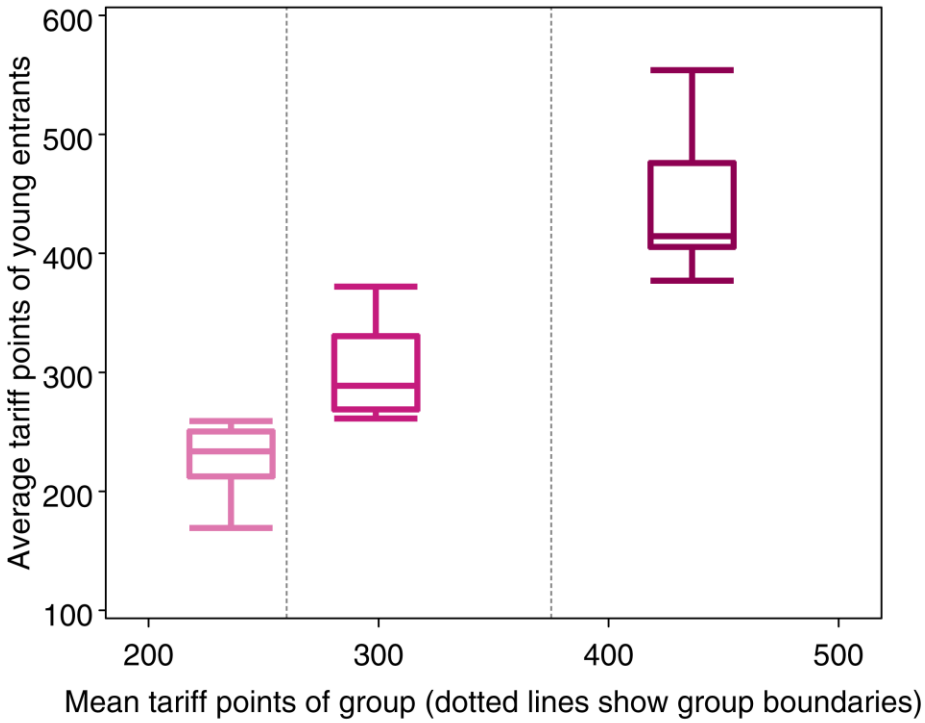
[7] The tariff system is described at www.ucas.ac.uk/students/ucas_tariff. The range of qualifications covered by the tariff system has changed through time and not all qualifications are covered. Most of the young entrants covered by this analysis will be presenting with GCE A levels where an 'A' grade contributes 120 tariff points to the overall tariff score.

[8] 18 year old acceptances are used to reduce complications from qualifications being combined that have been taken at different times. The large majority (93 per cent) of this group of acceptances have tariff points recorded, though this can fall to around two-thirds for some institutions (this only affects the calculation of the average tariff points, not the participation rates). There is a strong relationship between the proportion of 'missing' tariff acceptances and the mean tariff points of non-missing acceptances. Accepted applicants holding qualifications that are not assigned a tariff point value are unlikely to be materially affecting the relative ordering of institutions by entry qualifications.

roughly equal in terms of young entrants (50,000 to 60,000 by the end of the period) – so that the total time series HEI young participation rate in each group is comparable – but represent different numbers of institutions[9]. The tariff point thresholds used are arbitrary in that they are those dictated by wanting equal sized institutional groups; they are not based on any judgement of a significant tariff point threshold. There will be variations in average entry tariff within institutions, and the relationship between offer level (which may be a truer measure of selectivity but, due to their diverse specification, are difficult to analyse) and the observed entry qualifications may differ across institutions (or courses). Nevertheless, the institutional groups formed do represent real differences in the attainment levels required to gain admission, and they differentiate institutions in a way that reflects many 'fair access' discussions.

Figure 4 Distribution of entry tariff averages for institutions by entry tariff group

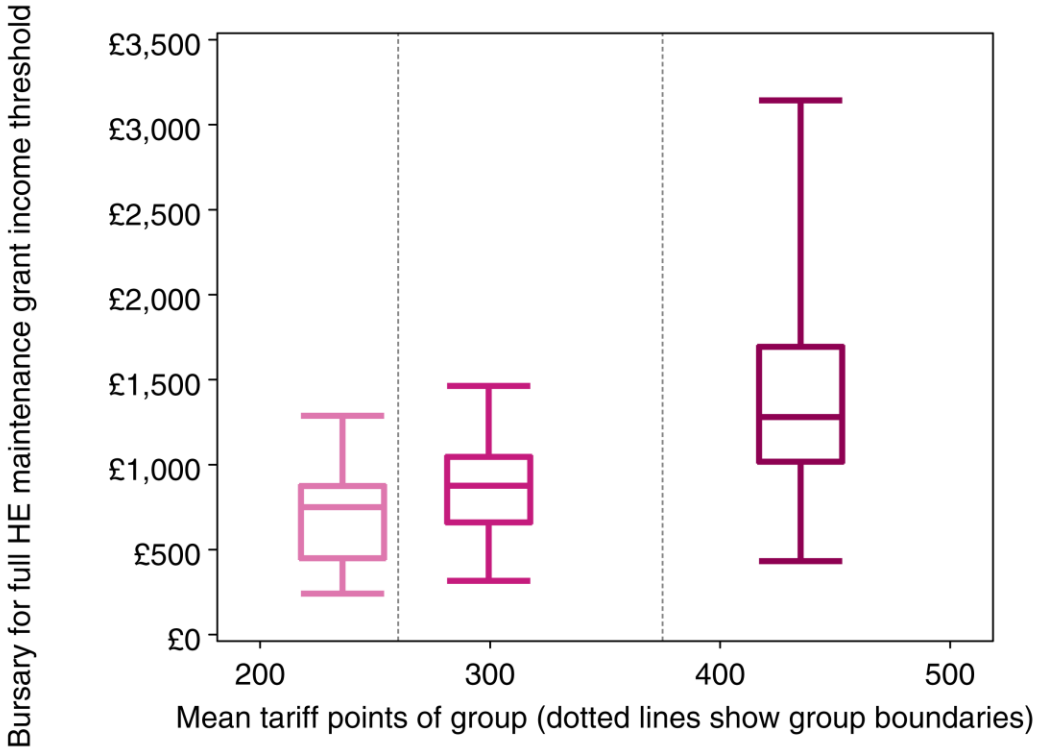


Note: The box encompasses the central 50 per cent of institutions (the middle line locates the median). The tails extend to the minimum and maximum values. The distribution shown is defined by the number of institutions (rather than the number of entrants).

[9] There are 23 institutions in the higher tariff group, 30 in the medium tariff group and 34 in the lower tariff group. These counts represent the institution entities for academic year 2009-10 (mergers can result in the counts varying for other years).

18. Figure 5 shows the distribution of average bursary levels for institutions within each entry tariff group. Institutions set their bursary schemes to meet their own objectives, leading to a range of support and threshold systems across institutions. For this analysis we use the level of bursary support that a student at the upper income threshold for the full HE maintenance grant would receive. This is averaged over schemes covering the academic years 2006-07 to 2009-10[10]. There is a range of bursary levels within each group but, in general, bursary levels increase with institutional entry tariff averages. In particular, three quarters of the higher entry tariff institutions offered average bursaries of over £1,000 compared to less than a quarter of the lower entry tariff institutions.

Figure 5 Distribution of average bursary levels (at the full HE maintenance grant threshold) for institutions by entry tariff group



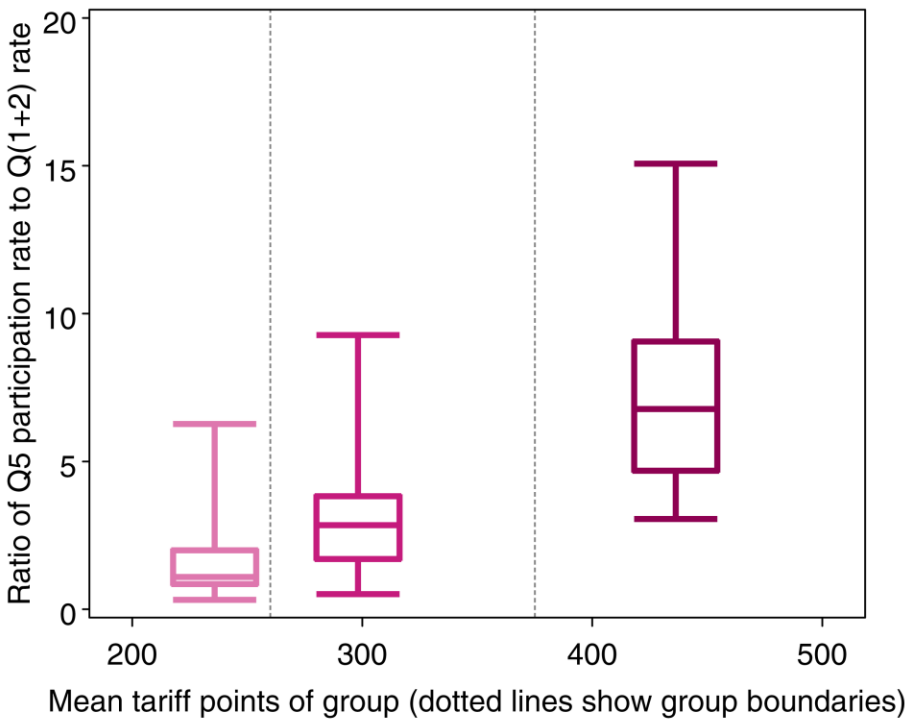
Note: The box encompasses the central 50 per cent of institutions (the middle line locates the median). The tails extend to the minimum and maximum values. The distribution shown is defined by the number of institutions (rather than the number of entrants). Bursary information is an average over any schemes for 2006-07 to 2009-10.

[10] The average is calculated over years where the institution reported a bursary scheme. This includes any guaranteed bursary at this income threshold where there is not a statutory obligation to do so but excludes any bursary conditional on, for example, academic merit. These data are obtained from OFFA's statistical databases.

19. A simple measure of the pattern of young participation in an institution is the ratio of the participation rate of young people from the most advantaged 20 per cent to that of young people from the most disadvantaged 40 per cent of neighbourhoods. For participation in the time-series HEIs overall this ratio has averaged 2.6 in recent years (combined 06:07 to 09:10 cohorts) but there is a wide variation across institutions.

20. Figure 6 reports the distribution of this ratio for institutions within the three tariff groups. There is a strong differentiation of this ratio across the groups. Three-quarters of the institutions in the lower entry tariff group have a ratio below two, with a substantial minority having a ratio below one, and the lowest ratios at 0.5 or less. This means that although young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have substantially lower participation rates overall they are actually more likely than those from advantaged backgrounds to enter particular lower tariff institutions, sometimes twice as likely. This does not happen at higher tariff institutions where the ratio is always above 3.0. Three-quarters of the higher entry tariff institutions have a ratio of five or above, with a substantial minority recording much higher ratios, ranging up to institutions where the most advantaged young people are 15 times more likely to enter than disadvantaged young people.

Figure 6 Distribution of the ratio of the participation rate of Q5 against that of the combined Q1 and Q2 quintiles for institutions by entry tariff group

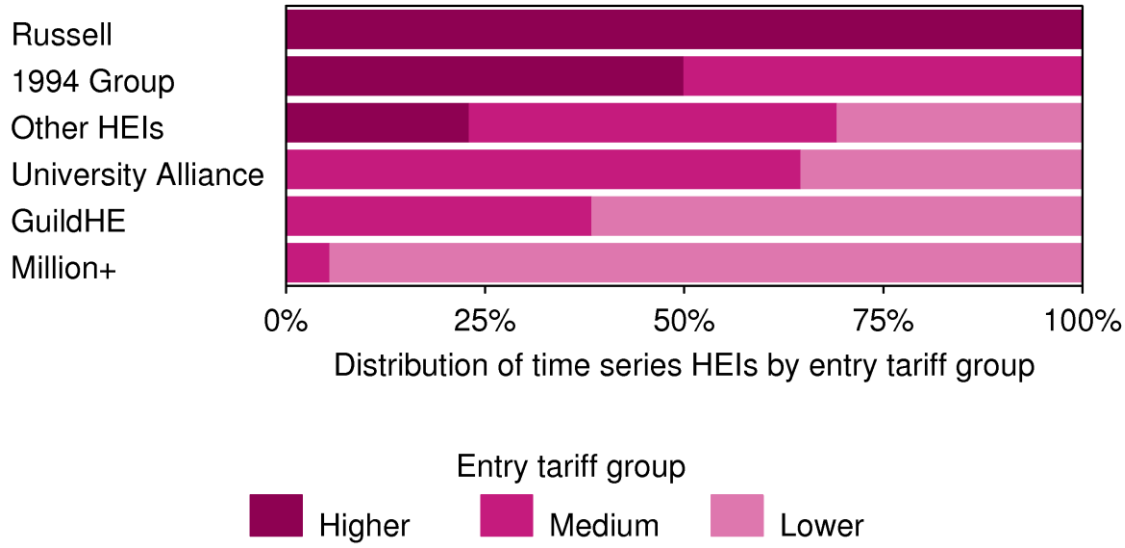


Note: The box covers the first and third quartiles (the line locates the median). The tails extend to the minimum and maximum values. The distribution is by number of

institutions. The participation ratio is calculated from the combined 06:07, 07:08, 08:09 and 09:10 cohorts.

21. The different nature of HEIs across the three entry tariff groupings is also reflected in the representative bodies that they are members of. Figure 7 shows the distribution of time series HEIs that are also members of selected representative bodies across the three entry tariff groups. There is a strong pattern across the representative bodies: for example, those time-series HEIs in the Russell Group are all in the higher entry tariff grouping.

Figure 7 Distribution of representative body membership across entry tariff groups (for time series HEIs).

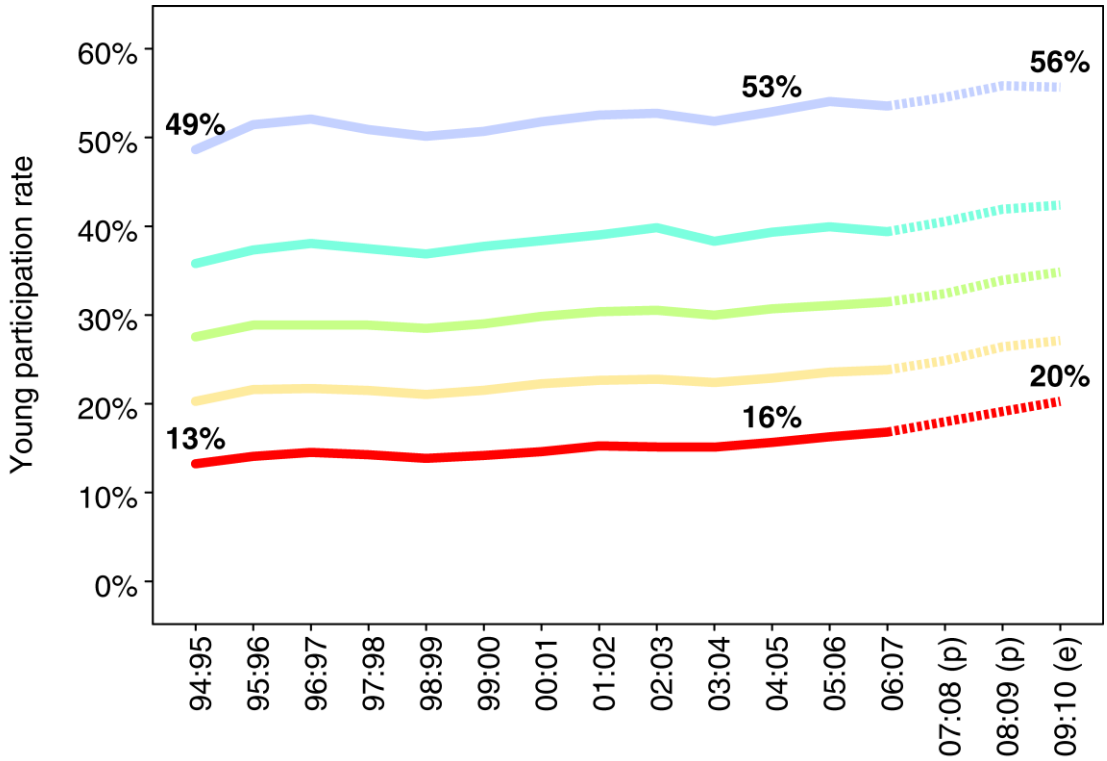


Note: Distribution of institutions. Institutions may belong to more than one representative bodies. 'Other HEIs' covers institutions not in any of listed representative bodies.

Young participation by background and selectivity

22. The full measure of young participation used in the HEFCE 2010/03 report demonstrated large differences in participation rates across the parental-education defined area backgrounds (reproduced in Figure 8). For the 09:10 cohort 56 per cent of young people from the most advantaged areas entered HE compared to 20 per cent in the most disadvantaged areas.

Figure 8 Trends in young participation for areas grouped by the proportion of children with graduate parents (from HEFCE 2010/03, Figure 19)



23. The following figures also report the participation rates by the same parental-education based classification of areas. But, instead of reporting the overall young participation rate, they consider – in turn– just young participation at higher tariff (Figure 9), medium tariff (Figure 10) and lower tariff (Figure 11) time series HEI groups[11].

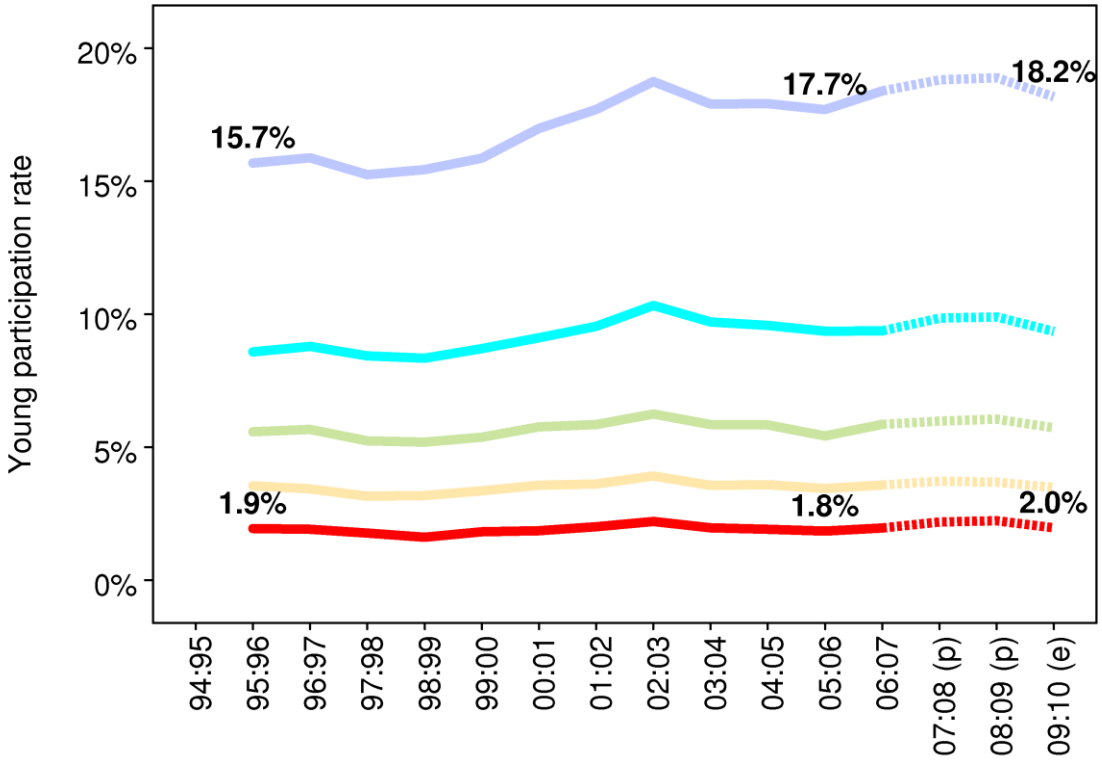
24. In these figures the participation rates are reported to the nearest 0.1 percentage point: with some rates being very small (for example, less than two per cent of most disadvantaged enter higher tariff institutions) rounding to the nearest percentage point risks concealing important detail. Reporting participation rates for institutional groups, rather than individual institutions, helps reduce the random year to year variability in the rates (resulting from the small numbers of entrants from particular backgrounds to particular institutions). However the expected random year to year variation is still

[11] The time series measure does not extend to the 94:95 cohort for the reasons given in paragraph 11. The 94:95 marker on the cohort axis is retained as a reminder of this for comparison against the trends in the HEFCE report (which do include this cohort).

appreciable. As a guide, where the participation rate propensity for young people from a background quintile is low, less than 4 per cent for example, then the observed participation rate can fluctuate by at least +/- 0.1 percentage points around that value through random variation alone[12]. Where the rate for a quintile is higher, around 20 per cent say, this range becomes at least +/- 0.2 percentage points.

25. Young participation in higher tariff institutions (Figure 9) shows much larger proportional differences across area backgrounds than was found for young participation in all HE. In the most disadvantaged areas only around 2 per cent, 1 in 50, of young people enter HE in this higher tariff third of English HEIs, and that participation rate has not changed materially over the period. Young people living in the most advantaged areas have much higher participation rates, around 18 per cent, just under 1 in 5, and this has risen slightly since the mid-1990s (though mostly prior to the 03:04 cohort). There is a notably large gap in the higher tariff institution participation rate between the most advantaged quintile of young people and the rest of the population: young people living in Q5 areas are around twice as likely to enter higher tariff institutions as those from even the second most advantaged – Q4 – quintile of areas.

Figure 9 Trends in young participation in higher tariff time series HEIs for areas grouped by the proportion of children with graduate parents



[12] Based on a binomial distribution of entrants and the annual cohort sizes in the analysis period. The range indicated would be expected to cover at least 9 out of 10 observed rates. In practice other factors would act to increase this range.

26. The trend, and relative participation rates, in medium tariff institutions (Figure 10) are closer to that of participation in HE as a whole, but with young people from all backgrounds showing a clearer increasing participation trend in the 2000s. The pattern and trend of participation in lower tariff institutions (Figure 11) is very different from that for HE as a whole. In the mid-1990s differences in participation rates in lower tariff institutions by background were much lower than for HE as a whole: young people from the most advantaged backgrounds were only twice as likely to enter this type of institution as those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. Over the next decade this difference diminished as the participation rate of advantaged young people in lower tariff institutions decreased and that of the disadvantaged increased. Through the late 2000s the participation rate in lower tariff institutions of young people from all area backgrounds has increased, with the most rapid increase being for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The estimates for the 09:10 cohort indicate that the participation rates in lower tariff institutions by background have almost converged. Young people from very different area backgrounds now have a near equal chance of entering this type of HE. Consequently the composition of entrants to HEIs in this group is very close to that of the young population as a whole.

Figure 10 Trends in young participation in medium tariff time series HEIs for areas grouped by the proportion of children with graduate parents

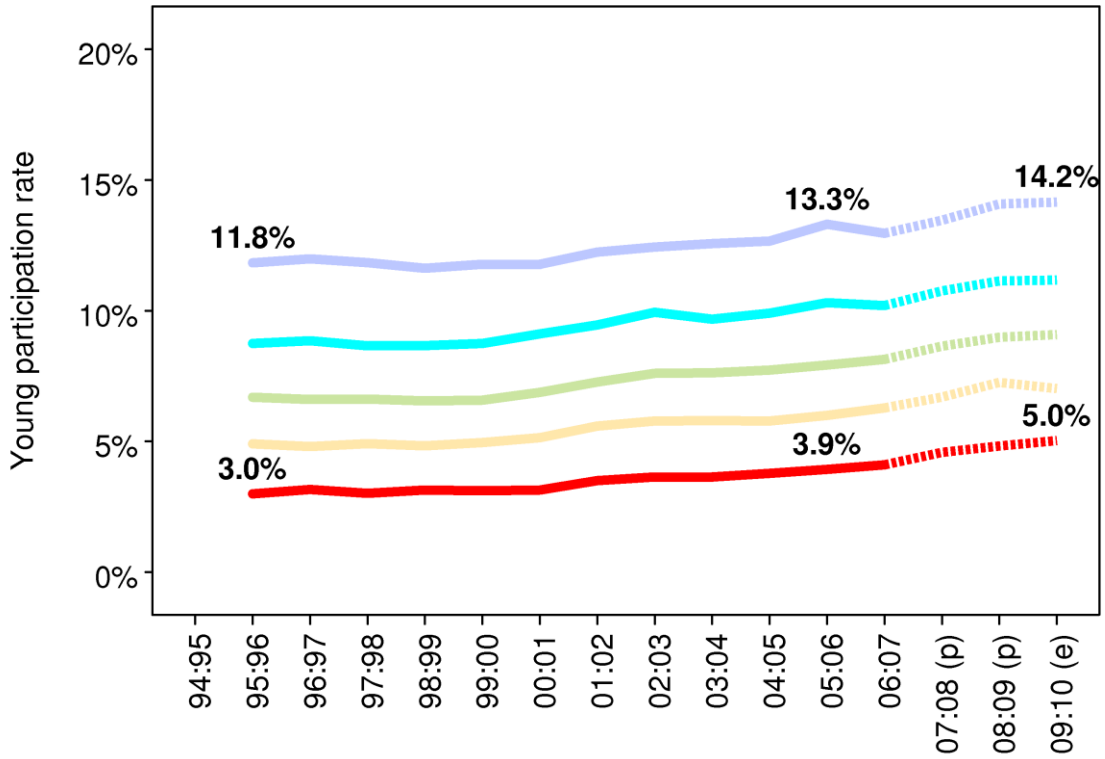
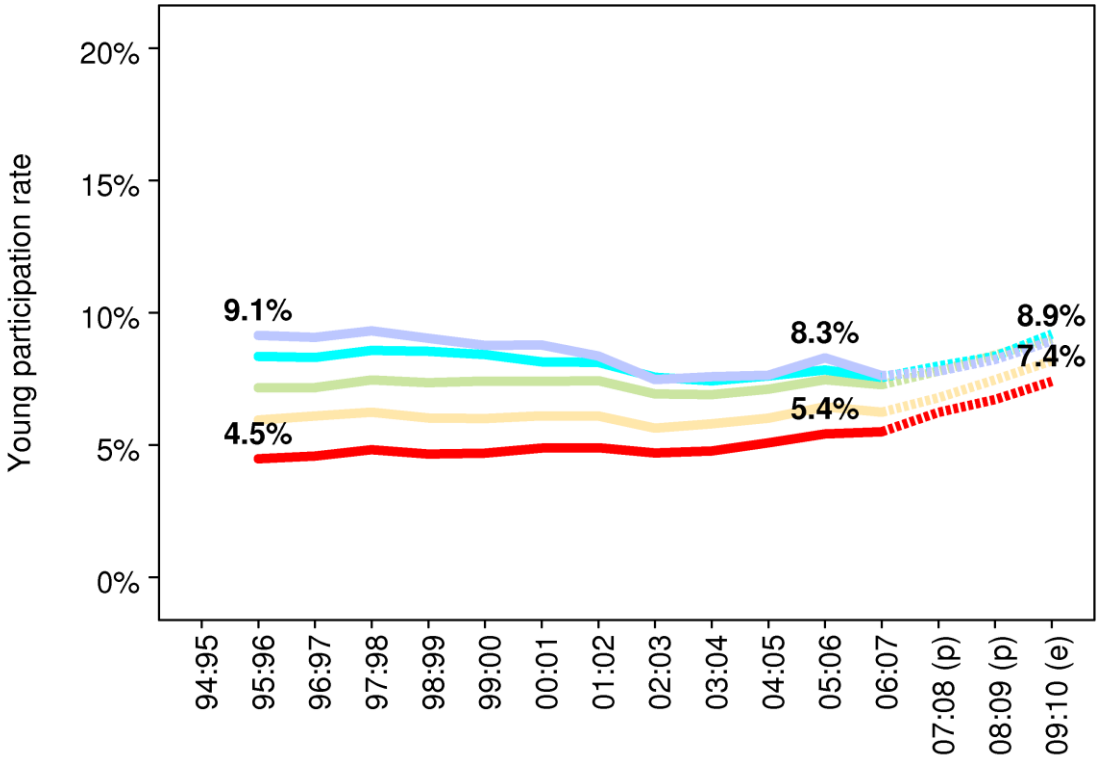


Figure 11 Trends in young participation in lower tariff time series HEIs for areas grouped by the proportion of children with graduate parents

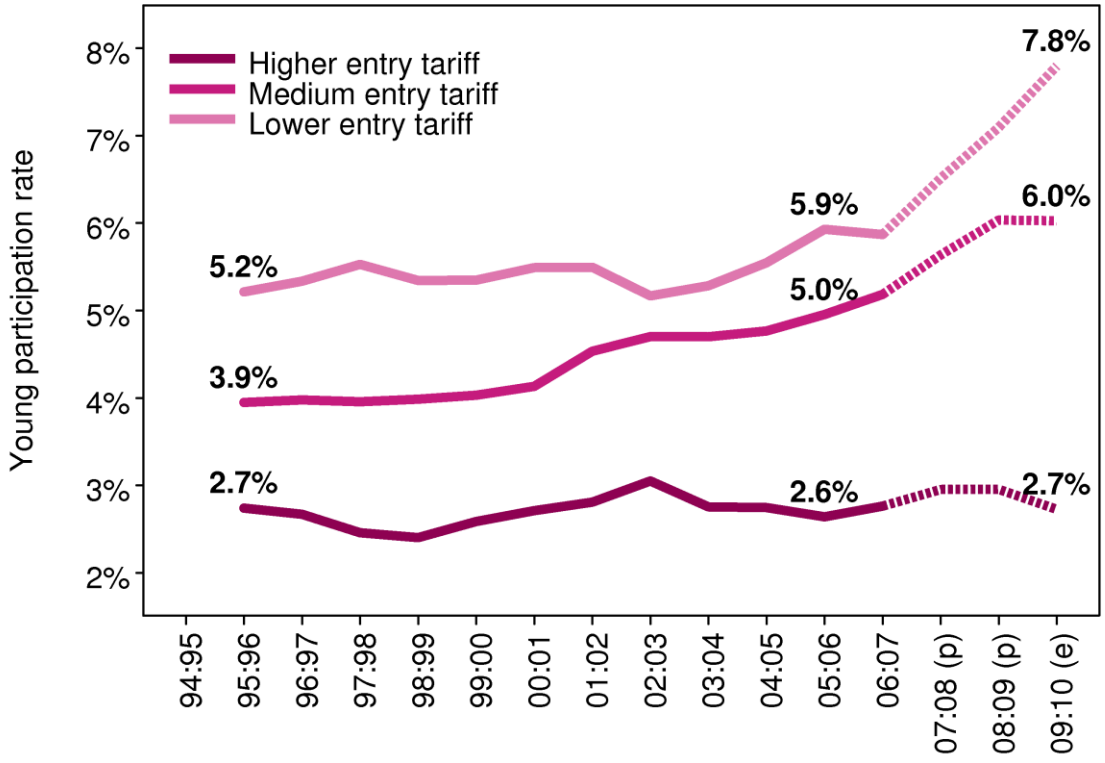


Trends in young participation by background and selectivity

27. The range of participation rates between advantaged and disadvantaged areas is often so large it can be difficult to assess trends when the rates for all backgrounds are shown together. The following figures look more closely at the participation trends of the most disadvantaged and advantaged young people in the entry tariff institutional groups.

28. The analysis by background showed that the participation rate of the most disadvantaged quintile in the higher tariff institutions is low. The resulting small entrant counts lead to proportionally high random variation from cohort to cohort. To limit this when looking at the participation trends in detail, and to reflect the fact that Q2 has similarly low rates and typically the same trend at higher tariff institutions, we aggregate the Q1 and Q2 background groups. This aggregation creates a broader disadvantaged group, (similar in size to the group used in HEFCE widening participation funding calculations) that represents around 40 per cent of young people in England. We retain the Q5 group as the most advantaged 20 per cent of young people as this group shows some distinctly different patterns.

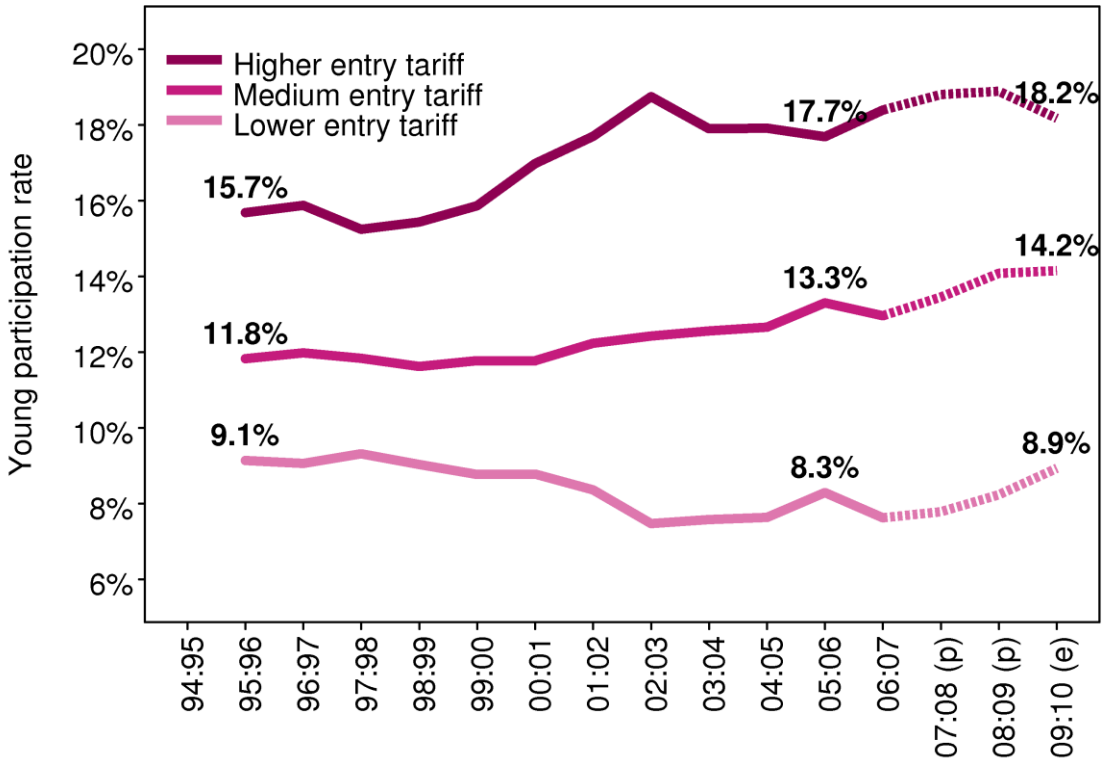
Figure 12 Participation rates of disadvantaged young people (Q1 and Q2) in entry tariff institution groups



29. Figure 12 shows the young participation rate of the most disadvantaged 40 per cent (the aggregated Q1 and Q2 area groups) of young people in each of the three entry tariff groupings of institutions. The participation rate in higher tariff institutions is low at 2.7 per cent and no higher at the end of the 2000s than it was in the mid-1990s. Young people in these disadvantaged areas are much more likely to enter medium or lower tariff

institutions than higher tariff institutions. The participation rates in these lower and middle tariff institutions have increased over the period from 5.2 per cent to 7.8 per cent and 3.9 per cent to 6.0 per cent respectively. Participation rates in lower tariff institutions have risen especially strongly, from 5.9 per cent to 7.8 per cent, across the five cohorts from the mid-2000s.

Figure 13 Participation rates of advantaged young people (Q5) in entry tariff institution groups

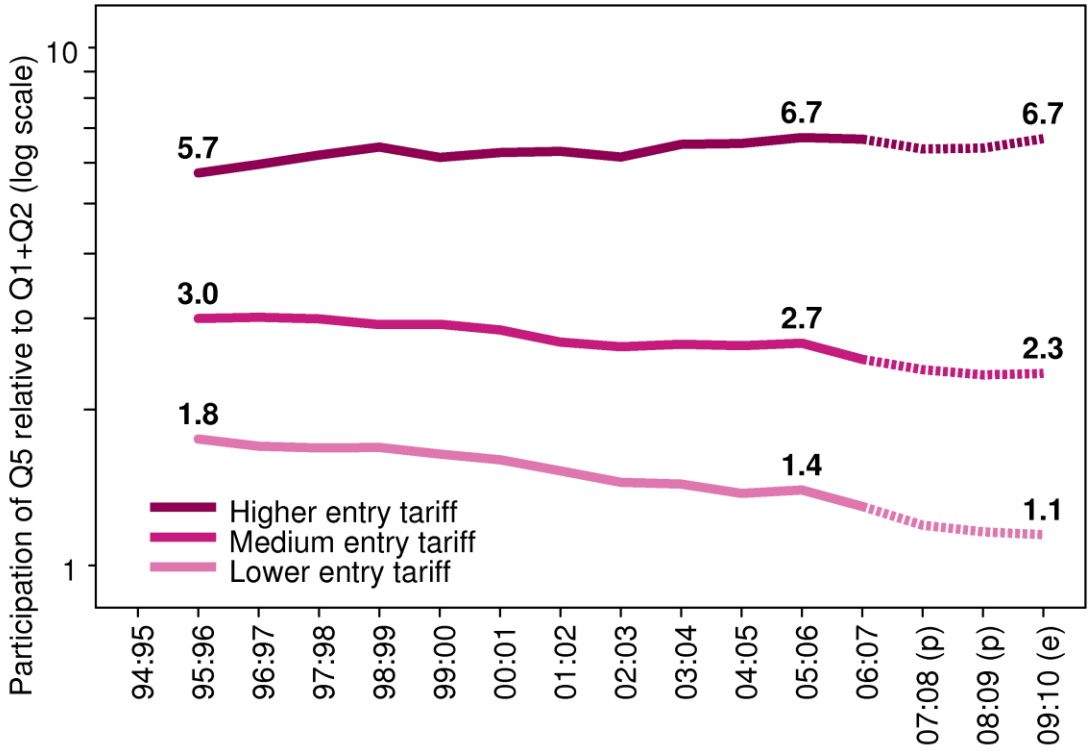


30. The participation patterns for young people living in the most educationally advantaged 20 per cent of areas (Figure 13) are different in several respects. Firstly, the participation rates in all the institutional groups are higher than is the case for the disadvantaged areas. Within this pattern of higher participation rates overall, the relative participation importance of the three entry tariff groups is reversed compared to that seen for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The participation rate of young people living in the most advantaged areas is highest in higher tariff institutions (around 18 per cent), then medium tariff institutions (around 14 per cent) followed by the lower tariff institutions (around 9 per cent). The combination of higher overall participation and the inversion of the relative importance of the entry tariff groups leads to the difference in participation rates by background being most pronounced for the higher tariff institutions. Around 18 per cent of young people from the most advantaged areas enter one of these higher tariff institutions compared to less than 3 per cent of young people from the disadvantaged Q1 and Q2 groups.

31. The trends in participation for advantaged young people also differ from their disadvantaged peers. Young people from the most advantaged areas are more likely to participate in a higher tariff institution now than in the mid-1990s, compared to no change for young people from the disadvantaged areas. Participation rates in medium tariff institutions have also been increasing, but the concentration of increases in the later part of the period that was seen for disadvantaged young people is less evident. In clear contrast to the rapid increases in participation in lower tariff institutions seen for disadvantaged areas, the trend for the most advantaged young people is flat overall, with recent small rises offsetting small declines that occurred between the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s.

32. Figure 14 plots the relative participation rate in each tariff group of young people from the most advantaged areas compared to those from the disadvantaged Q1 and Q2 areas; that is, for each cohort how much more likely to enter that group of institutions are the most advantaged 20 per cent of young people compared to the most disadvantaged 40 per cent of young people. This relative measure focuses on changes in the composition of entrants to the institutional groups and is not affected by changes in the overall – or institutional group – young participation rate. Figure 14 shows this ratio on a logarithmic scale so that similar proportional falls in this statistic result in similar visual travel along the vertical axis.

Figure 14 Participation rate of Q5 young people relative to that of Q1 and Q2 combined, by entry tariff group



33. Figure 14 summarises the different patterns and trends in participation in the entry tariff groups that this analysis has found. The substantial increases in the participation rate of the most disadvantaged in lower tariff institutions, combined with a near-static pattern for the most advantaged, has caused the relative participation advantage of most advantaged in lower tariff institutions to fall from an already low 1.8 in the mid-1990s to 1.1 for the 09:10 cohort. Participation in lower tariff institutions has always shown smaller differences by background than HE as a whole, and the increases in participation by the disadvantaged in recent years has created a situation of near-equal access by background to lower tariff institutions.

34. The relative participation advantage of the most advantaged has also declined for participation in the medium tariff institutions. It has fallen from 3.0 in the mid-1990s to 2.3 today, a result of the more rapid (proportional) increase in the participation rate in medium tariff institutions by those from disadvantaged backgrounds. The trends for relative participation in the higher tariff institutions show a different pattern from the other two tariff groups. Relative differences in participation in higher tariff institutions between advantaged and disadvantaged young people are high and, in contrast to the declines for the other institutional groups, show a trend of increasing relative differences. Between the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s the ratio of advantaged to disadvantaged participation at higher tariff institutions increased from 5.7 to 6.7. Since the mid-2000s there has been no further increase in this ratio.

Annex D – Sutton Trust evidence to OFFA, January 2010

GCE A-Level: improvements at grade A, 2002 to 2009, by school/college type

Type of school/college	Increase in percentage of A grades	
	2002 to 2008	**2008 to 2009**
Comprehensive	+4	+1
Secondary Modern	+1	+1
FE/sixth form college	+5	+1
Maintained selective	+8	+1
Independent	+9	+2

Independent school A level entries and A grades as percentage of total entries and A grades

	% of total entries (2008)	% of total A grades (2008)
Economics	33.1	48.4
Physics	22.7	35.3
Maths	21.3	31.4
Chemistry	21.2	33.5
Geography	19.5	32.5
History	17.7	33.0
Biology	17.2	30.5
English	10.7	23.5
All subjects	**14.8**	**28.6**

Source: Independent Schools Council Bulletin 52

Preliminary research from the ISC suggests that, if this year's criteria for an A* grade had been applied in 2009, over 16 per cent of A level entries from its member schools would have achieved an A*, more than twice the national average.

Annex E – What is contextual data?

Source: Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA)

Within the admissions to HE full-time undergraduate process, contextual data can be defined as data or information which may be part of, or additional to, that provided by the applicant in UCAS Apply that sets the application in its educational context, giving data or information about the:

- personal circumstances of an individual applicant (e.g. illness, disrupted schooling, criminal conviction, receipt of EMA) and/ or
- background information pertaining to the applicant, both educational and socio economic (e.g. school performance at GSCE or equivalent, progression from the school/college to HE, postcode linked to low participation neighbourhood).

SPA has developed principles surrounding contextual data and is working on good practice to give context to fair admissions decision making as well as working to support institutions in issues around what data is used, how it is used and the institution's research to support this as adding value in admissions decision making.

Principles of the use of Contextual Data in admissions *(agreed by the SPA Steering Group 18 March 2010) these will be on the SPA website and circulated to HEIs in May 2010.*

1. The use of contextual data within a course's entry criteria/ decision making must be
   - research based and justifiable to ensure the use of data adds value to the process and that HE providers adhere to good practice
   - relevant to the purpose for which it is being used e.g. to add context to the admissions decision making process

- valid and reliable (bearing in mind that much of the data, for example via UCAS, is self declared)
- used to improve inclusivity, by recognising disadvantage using evidence based judgement (i.e. applicants may not be treated in exactly the same way as different factors may be considered, all applicants are individuals with different backgrounds)
- transparent to applicants and their advisors in terms of what contextual data is used, if any, how it will be used and when it is used. This must be communicated to applicants in a transparent, clear and timely manner via Entry Profiles, WP activities, HE websites etc. (see section 4 below).

2. Regular monitoring of the use of the data and related audit trails should be an integral part of the admissions process.
3. Admissions staff using contextual data in decision making should be aware of the issues surrounding contextual data, professional development and training may be appropriate to ensure staff understand, and can interpret and use, the data.
4. Applicants needing additional learner support or practical advice during their application, transition or when registered as a student, should receive appropriate transition and in-session learner support to ensure their potential continues to be developed.

How is contextual data used?

- for widening participation – to target aspiration raising and WP and fair access activities
- to inform the decision as to who to interview
- to inform admissions decision making
- to identify applicants who may need additional learner support or practical advice during their application process, transition or when registered as a student
- to help assess applicants eligible for bursaries or other financial support
- for statistical and qualitative monitoring and reporting purposes.

Contextual data is increasingly being used by institutions to help them identify ‘the best students’ for them. ‘Best’ is defined by the institution as meeting its mission and teaching and learning strategies and thus will vary not only by institution but also by programme within an institution. More higher education institutions are taking forward the debate, initiated in the Schwartz Report (2004) on the use of contextual data for fair admissions and widening participation. This has been supported in various recent reports including the Government’s *Higher*

Ambitions (November 2009*)*, the HE strategy for the future and Alan Milburn's *Unleashing Aspirations*, the report of the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions, the majority of whose recommendations were accepted by the Government in January 2010. The information may be used to assist in the differentiation of applications with excellent qualifications, but this is not its only role.

Contextual data can be used as part of holistic decision making, and does not necessarily mean that additional activities and involvement with HEIs would mean a lower offer; it could mean the difference between an offer being made or not. In an increasingly diverse applicant pool, those applicants who have experienced educational, social or other disadvantage may not have had the same opportunities to develop their academic potential and prepare for HE and this may have affected their academic achievement. Contextual information can be used to better understand attainment information.

Contextual data should be used consistently and fairly when admitting applicants to a course or programme, however there is no 'one size fits all', there may be one practice in one HEI/ course and another in a different HEI/ course. This may be quite justifiable and fair. In all cases, why the data is being collected and how it is being used should be made clear and transparent to applicants.

Basket of Data

Institutions use more data than is available from the applicant in UCAS Apply, much of which is self declared. Currently institutions individually collect and use additional information from a number of sources (e.g. DCSF, UCAS, HEFCE Polar data). There are some issues around dispersal of information across these agencies and in some cases the consistency and comparability of data across different administrations. SPA and the HE sector are currently working with the relevant bodies with the goal of an agreed 'basket' of information being available to universities through one source. This is still at consultation stage, though the following draft 'basket' of information has been agreed in discussion with the Russell Group.

Educational Background 'Hard data'

- Progression rates to higher education (percentage determined by cohort size) from school/college

- School performance – Average (mean) school GCSE performance for 5 A*-C GCSE (including English/Welsh and Mathematics)[75]
- Average (mean) school 'Best Eight' GCSE performance
- Progression from Year 11 to further education
- Average (mean) of QCA points per qualification (per entry and per student)[76]

Socio-Economic Background

- In receipt of (or entitled to) free school meal (school rates and individual)
- In receipt of (or entitled to) an Educational Maintenance Allowance (including levels)
- Lives in a low progression to higher education neighbourhood
- Socio-economic class IIIM-VII
- Have been in care for greater than six months

N.B. The proposed basket of data would need to be available across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Although the notes refer to information on GCSEs and A Levels, of course information will also need to be obtained on other English qualifications e.g. BTEC and other national qualifications, Advanced Diplomas, IB, Standard and Higher qualifications in Scotland, Welsh Baccalaureate and other appropriate qualifications.

For more information on the use of contextual data please visit SPA at **www.spa.ac.uk**

[75] Require national average
[76] Require national average