WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP: ENABLING SOCIAL MOBILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The final report of the
Social Mobility Advisory Group

Universities UK

FOREWORD

Universities transform lives. Going to university leads to new ways of seeing the world, to new horizons and networks, and to significantly enhanced job opportunities. But not everyone benefits in the same way. Fewer students from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds go to university, and when they do they tend not to do as well as their more privileged peers. The influence of background continues long after graduation.

A student's race, gender and disability may also affect their experience. Although overall students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds have high rates of participation at university, this varies regionally and between institutions, and also between different racial groups. Male and female students tend to choose different subjects, and more women than men go to university. Compared to their peers, graduate outcomes are not as good for black and minority ethnic students, nor for disabled students.

Universities have long worked hard to remedy the impact of disadvantage, and they have made progress with extensive, ambitious and innovative programmes. But differences remain, and are stark.

The Social Mobility Advisory Group was set up in October 2015, at the request of Jo Johnson MP, Minister of State for Universities and Science, with the aim of identifying practical ways to address inequality in higher education. The Advisory Group has considered the evidence and drawn together recommendations as to ways forward, acknowledging that there will be no simple solutions to embedded social inequality that passes from generation to generation. No one organisation or sector can resolve such deep-rooted inequalities. Instead, the extensive work that universities have been carrying out over many years needs to be built on, and collaborations and partnerships extended. Change will be incremental.

Some consistent themes have emerged, not least the need for a rigorously evidence-based approach to social mobility. It is too easy to draw mistaken conclusions based on out-of-date information or old-fashioned assumptions. Evaluation is essential to inform and shape future work. In a world where a student's future is shaped by the choices that they make, particularly in relation to what university to attend and what course to study, all students need effective information, advice and guidance. We also need to move away from the perception that people only have one chance for university study at the age of 18. For many people from disadvantaged backgrounds, going to university later in life will be the only opportunity they have. Now, more than ever before, the UK needs more highly skilled graduates of all ages, and mature learners have to be part of the solution.

Most importantly of all, sustained change can only be achieved through collaboration and partnership. Universities need to continue working closely with schools and colleges in a range of different ways, given the very strong correlation between a pupil's prior attainment at school and their outcomes at and beyond university. Working with employers is also critical. It is no good for a student to graduate with

flying colours if they cannot get a job. Students' unions, who have a deep understanding of the opportunities and barriers that students face, must be involved.

These are complex issues and they will affect different universities in different ways. Universities in the UK are profoundly diverse, and any meaningful response will need to reflect the individual university's geographical location and circumstances.

The Advisory Group's recommendations are only a beginning. Universities UK will work with its members, and with schools, employers, students' unions, the third sector and other partners, to take forward the recommendations.

Thanks are due to members of the Advisory Group, and those involved in the Reference Groups, for their considerable insight and expertise in shaping this report.

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CONTENTS

ANNEXES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

In October 2015, Universities UK was invited by the Minister of State for Universities and Science, Jo Johnson MP, to provide advice on how universities in England could build on their contribution to social mobility. Universities UK was asked to form an advisory group to focus efforts on improving educational and career outcomes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, those with a disability, as well as those from black, minority and ethnic backgrounds. The focus of the report is England.

Universities recognise their role in improving social mobility. However, the sector does not operate in isolation. There is an overwhelming correlation between a student's experience at school, and their outcomes at university. The role of employers is also critical in terms of graduate outcomes, for young and mature students alike. Schools, colleges and employers all need to be part of the solution. There are also many charities which play an import role as a broker to support universities in widening access and engaging with employers. Partnership working and improved collaboration at every level is a theme that pervades the report.

Exploring patterns of disadvantage inevitably involves generic characterisations of social groups, for instance in relation to socio-economic status, race, gender or disability. These characteristics overlap and, at the heart of widening participation and success, each student is an individual. Effective responses must take account of both the generic and the individual, and these two approaches to identifying and responding to disadvantage are reflected in the terms of the report.

Throughout its work, the Advisory Group has directed its focus towards the entire student journey, from application to university, to experience at university and then graduate outcomes, whether postgraduate education or employment.

THE EVIDENCE

Based on extensive analysis, evidence gathering and input from experts and practitioners the Advisory Group has grounded its findings and recommendations in the evidence.

The report starts by summarising the evidence as to where disadvantage lies. It demonstrates that socio-economic disadvantage continues to be the most significant driver of inequality in terms of access to and outcomes from higher education. Eighteen year-olds from the most advantaged groups remain 2.4 times more likely to enter university than their disadvantaged peers, and 6.3 times more likely to attend one of the most selective institutions in the UK[1]. Having graduated from university, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to go into professional jobs, and if they do they are likely to be paid less[2].

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[1] UCAS (2015) *End of Cycle report 2015*
[2] HEFCE (2015) *Differences in employment outcomes: Equality and diversity characteristics*, IFS (2016) *How English domiciled graduate earnings vary with gender, institution attended, subject and socio-economic background*

The data also reveals the pervasive gap in degree attainment and labour market outcomes between ethnic groups and between disabled and non-disabled students. Research by HEFCE[3] found that in 2013–14 there was an unexplained difference of 15 percentage points between the proportions of white and BME graduates achieving a first or upper second degree, and an unexplained gap of three percentage points between the proportions of disabled and non-disabled graduates doing the same. HEFCE also found[4] that graduates from almost all BME groups were less likely than white graduates to go into employment after graduation, with an unexplained difference of over seven percentage points for Chinese and black African graduates and with the gaps in the proportions going onto professional employment actually increasing over time. The differences in the proportion of disabled students going into employment ranged from two to three percentage points immediately after study, and again gaps in the proportions going into professional employment grew over time.

Age poses different challenges, including the importance of the availability of opportunities to study flexibly. Mature students also need to be part of the solution. This is not only important in terms of promoting social mobility, but critical in relation to economic growth and enhancing productivity.

Although the report primarily refers to undergraduates, addressing the inequalities in access at the postgraduate level is also important, particularly as there is a gap of two percentage points between the proportion of graduates from disadvantaged and advantaged backgrounds who go on to postgraduate study.

The existence of 'cold spots' where higher education participation is low illustrates the complex and important relationship between person and place. Effective responses to inequality in higher education must therefore be grounded in localities or regions.

PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

Prior attainment at school has a significant influence on the higher education outcomes for young people, with research for BIS[5] finding that GCSE attainment was the strongest predictor of whether pupils went on to higher education. This reinforces the importance of universities working collaboratively across the education sector. The report highlights the many forms this collaboration takes, the impact this has already made and how these partnerships can be improved. The merger of higher education teaching into the Department for Education presents an unparalleled opportunity for supporting this process. The report also notes the important, often undervalued, role of the charitable sector in acting as a broker for outreach and graduate employability.

Information, advice and guidance (IAG) play a central role in shaping students choices. Students from more privileged backgrounds benefit from effective IAG from their schools, their parents and broader networks. This is often absent, or less

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[3] HEFCE (2015) *Differences in degree outcomes: The effect of subject and student characteristics*
[4] HEFCE (2015) *Differences in employment outcomes: Equality and diversity characteristics*
[5] BIS (2015) *Socio-economic, ethnic and gender differences in higher education*

effective, for students from more disadvantaged backgrounds who may not have the same cultural capital at home and through their networks. The quality of IAG in state schools is also often patchy, reinforcing disadvantage for state school pupils. In an increasingly differentiated sector where student choice shapes outcomes, it will be critical to ensure that IAG is broadly coherent and joined-up between schools, colleges, universities, charities and employers. IAG for mature students is largely non-existent. The report therefore recommends improving IAG relating to opportunities for mature students, including information on the increasing diversity of routes both into and through higher education and the role of higher and degree level apprenticeships.

The report highlights the critical role of employers for improving social mobility, given the mass of evidence which points to socio-economic background still being the most important factor in determining a graduate's career – often irrespective of the university attended. There is a need to enhance collaborative activity between the higher education sector and employers, particularly with small and medium enterprises, with more needing to be done to improve the inclusivity of recruitment practices, including the monitoring and publication of recruitment data, especially from underrepresented groups, and sharing effective practice and interventions.

POLICY AND THE CHANGING HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

The environment in which universities work has a significant impact on social mobility. The role of government policy, for instance in relation to funding, regulation and increased competition between higher education institutions, impacts on social mobility, as do Local Enterprise Partnerships, local government, the media and university league tables. The report notes the importance of national structures aligning with the new funding models, acknowledging that the creation of the Office for Students, working with the sector, provides an opportunity to develop a clearer and more joined-up national approach for tackling the priorities identified in the report.

INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICE

The sector is committed to tackling social mobility and inequality. There are numerous examples of serious and innovative initiatives across the country. However, the report also reveals that there is more still to do, particularly in widening participation for under-represented groups and solving the attainment gap in graduate outcomes and employment.

In part this will involve enhanced collaboration with schools, with different forms of collaboration reflecting an institution's strengths and mission and the particular needs of the locality or region. It may also require wider use of contextual admissions processes in which universities identify an applicant's potential as well as their prior attainment in determining admissions. More still needs to be done to ensure that contextual admissions are better understood by potential applicants and the wider public, and more generally to identify and share good practice across the sector.

The report describes the importance of developing an institution-wide approach to addressing the differences in degree attainment between different ethnic groups and between disabled and non-disabled students. The evidence clearly reveals that there is no single solution and a variety of approaches need to be adopted with interventions and strategies of necessity varying from institution to institution. Activity that is already under way needs to be built on in terms of developing an inclusive curriculum as well as addressing wider issues such as the culture of a university and the diversity of the staff population. Resources already available in the sector, and the impact that these tools are securing, need to be evaluated and more widely shared across the sector.

The evidence also demonstrated that there are a range of interventions that could help address differences in graduate outcomes. These include collaborations with employers on the development of degrees, the embedding of employability into the curriculum, and the provision of opportunities for students to engage in social action, volunteering or participation in outward mobility programmes. University careers' services are also integral to brokering links with employers, for instance in facilitating work experience including internships and placements.

In summary, more effective evaluation of policies and interventions is needed across all parts of the student lifecycle, with an emphasis on interventions that maximise outcomes. To support this, the report recommends the establishment of an 'Evidence and Impact Exchange' that would systematically evaluate and promote the evidence relating to higher education's role in supporting social mobility. It would also support the dissemination of data to help build greater strategic coherence and coordination, as well as greater use of evidence to inform policy, funding and regulation, institutional decision making, and the effective use of resources.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations in the report reflect the fact that change can only be achieved if the education sector, government, employers, students' unions and the charitable sector, all work together in a more collaborative way to provide greater coordination and coherence at a policy, regional and institutional level. To facilitate this, better and more consistent use of data will be required and a greater priority accorded to effective communications, particularly to students (young and mature). More effective evaluation of policies and interventions is also required and a focus on 'what works' underpinned by a robust and systematic use of the evidence.

The recommendations summarised below reflect the fact that the sector is diverse, with different challenges, missions and strategies. The evidence shows that ensuring that institutions have the flexibility to respond to different local regional and national circumstances within the changing funding and regulatory environment will be critical if faster progress is to be achieved.

- The establishment of an independent 'Evidence and Impact Exchange' to systematically evaluate and promote the evidence relating to the role of higher education in supporting social mobility and to support the sharing of data from schools through to employers. This will help build greater strategic coherence and coordination between all parties and allow for more effective targeting of interventions at each stage of the student lifecycle.

- A greater focus on outreach activities by universities, colleges and employers to support attainment in schools. This should be supported by a systematic review of the evidence on the impact and effectiveness of these interventions by the Evidence and Impact Exchange.

- Further consideration to be given to developing, strengthening and expanding universities links with schools. The form this takes will depend on institutional mission and local circumstances and should include an evaluation of impact.

- Higher education institutions to monitor their admissions, retention, attainment, transition to postgraduate study and graduate employment data to identify where there may be gaps, particularly in relation to race, socio-economic status, gender and disability, and to explore how these gaps can be addressed. This could include using higher education sector frameworks already in place.

- The expansion of datasets to enable universities to assess their work on social mobility, including the development of a shared basket of indicators in relation to socio-economic disadvantage.

- Greater use of contextual data to inform offer-making, supported by the identification and sharing of good practice.

- The development of a directory of charitable third sector organisations across the country to enhance school, college, university and employer collaboration.

- Greater coordination of information and advice across schools, universities and employers, particularly in terms of the impact of subject choice and the qualifications taken at school and graduate careers.

- Universities UK to work with government to develop a more robust approach to information, advice and guidance, including greater alignment between government and higher education sector communications around social mobility and higher education. To include raising awareness of the different routes into and through higher education and the promotion of the value of lifelong learning and the value of part-time study.

- Universities UK to work with employers and other local partners including

Local Enterprise Partnerships and the new Metro Mayors to tackle disadvantage at a regional level. This will include monitoring and publication of data on the recruitment of underrepresented groups by graduate employers.

- Universities to work with league table providers to understand the potential impact of league tables on social mobility.

NEXT STEPS

This report is as an initial assessment of social mobility in higher education. It identifies a number of areas for action as well as specific recommendations for different stakeholders as set out in chapter 5. Following the publication of the report, Universities UK will work with the sector and with partners to implement the recommendations. A report on the progress made against the recommendations will be published by Universities UK by the end of 2017.

INTRODUCTION

1. Social mobility describes people's ability to improve on their own family social position or their own current status through opportunities provided in their society. Along with schools, employers and the charitable sector, higher education has an important role to play in providing and promoting those opportunities.

2. The Social Mobility Advisory Group was established in response to a letter from the Minister of State for Universities and Science, Jo Johnson MP, dated 7 October 2015. The letter asked the Advisory Group to identify action to:

   - Increase the number of students from disadvantaged and under-represented backgrounds entering higher education
   - Increase the number of black and minority ethnic (BME) students and white boys entering higher education
   - Improve degree attainment and graduate outcomes for BME students
   - Reduce barriers for disabled students so they can fully participate in higher education and achieve strong outcomes. The Minister particularly flagged the experience of students experiencing mental health difficulties
   - Consider how the role of data can support social mobility objectives, and evaluate the impact of progress towards these objectives.

3. These are significant and important challenges. Progress across these areas will ensure higher education continues to play a critical role in creating opportunity for all.

4. The Advisory Group's work coincides with a period of considerable change for students and universities. Higher education continues to expand and diversify, presenting new opportunities and pathways to higher level skills and employment. We have seen changes to the funding for higher education, with students now making a considerable contribution to the overall costs of their studies. This means that there is an increasing focus on the value and benefit derived from going to university. The Higher Education and Research Bill is set to reconfigure the functions and responsibilities of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Office for Fair Access (OFFA), both of which have played critical roles in supporting and promoting social mobility, and merging them into the Office for Students (OfS). Funding to support widening access and participation is being reduced and there is a greater emphasis on institutions supporting this through fee income. A new prime minister and cabinet are in post, with new priorities, including an enhanced focus on seeking social mobility, social justice[6] and education reform. Responsibility for students has been transferred to the Department for Education, presenting an opportunity to align policy across schools, colleges and

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[6] Statement from Prime Minister Theresa May, 13 July 2016
https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/statement-from-the-new-prime-minister-theresa-may.
Alongside this, the Prime Minister has launched an audit which will show how public services treat different from different backgrounds. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-orders-government-audit-to-tackle-racial-disparities-in-public-service-outcomes

higher education. The EU referendum has also raised difficult questions about social cohesion within the United Kingdom, with universities positioned to play a potentially central role within their communities in addressing some of the divisions revealed by the referendum vote.

5. This changing and sometimes uncertain context presents a number of challenges for universities, but also a unique opportunity to take a fresh look at some of the historical systems, structures and approaches to identify where changes can be made to support further progress.

6. In doing this it is important to build on the substantial progress made to date. The higher education sector has a long history of supporting social mobility and social cohesion. A commitment by universities to engage with all students who have the ability and desire to engage in university study notwithstanding their background and personal characteristics is integral to their missions and identities. All institutions will also have a deep-rooted belief in the transformative nature of education. More recently there has been a stronger competitive drive for universities to recruit students, so it also makes sense from many universities' perspective to ensure that all students with the ability and desire to study at university, can do so. Restricting the field of recruitment is unlikely to be a viable approach either in strategic or competitive terms.

7. The last ten years have seen a substantial expansion of higher education's work to encourage and support participation by students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This includes the development of new routes into and through higher education, including through degree apprenticeships, the creation of extensive partnerships and collaborations with both primary and secondary schools, the sponsoring of academies, university technology colleges and free schools, as well as working collaboratively with the charitable sector and employers. Outreach programmes and activities are extensive, and frequently imaginative and innovative. Once at university, that support continues with programmes and activities that provide academic assistance, as well as practical advice and guidance in terms of accessing the many wider benefits that universities offer from work placements, opportunities to engage in social action and volunteering to studying abroad. Increasingly the focus is on graduate employability which is a priority for many students. This report has sought to capture some of that activity and identify what works well, and proposes recommendations for reforms and activities that can support further progress.

8. The specific objectives set out in the minister's letter are important. This report goes further and examines the contribution that higher education can and does make in terms of providing opportunities for the half a million mature students who may have been unable to study earlier, and career-changers wishing to reskill or upskill, often on a part-time basis, later in life. This is not only important in terms of promoting social mobility, but critical in relation to economic growth and enhancing productivity. In a globally competitive economy, with an older workforce that will potentially be working longer, success depends on developing skills and unlocking talent wherever that may be and at

whatever age. Between 2014 and 2024, it has been estimated that 72% of all newly created jobs and 51% of all jobs, will require graduate level skills[7] – and they cannot all be filled by young graduates.

9. A priority for this report has been to ground its findings and recommendations in the evidence, both in terms of identifying the scale of the challenge and where the priorities for action lie. Chapter 1 sets out a summary of the evidence, describes what the data tells us and what the priorities should be. Universities do not operate in isolation, and their work has to be seen alongside the work being done for instance by schools, further education colleges, employers and the charitable sector. Chapter 2 looks at what these different organisations do and how they interact with each other. Chapter 3 examines a number of higher education specific issues, including government policy and the influence of deregulation and the market on social mobility. Chapter 4 looks in detail at what the higher education sector is doing and where the opportunities for improvement are, and Chapter 5 concludes with the recommendations. These are included in bold within the main body of the report. In addition to the specific recommendations there are a number of actions set out in the report, primarily aimed at Universities UK, which will be taken forward. Universities UK will also play a central role in supporting its members and working with other stakeholders to implement the recommendations. A report on the progress made against the recommendations will be published by Universities UK by the end of 2017.

10. Finally, it is important to stress that this work has inevitably involved generic characterisations in terms of socio-economic status, race, gender and disability. These definitions, primarily reflecting legal or social characterisations, are important because they reveal patterns of disadvantage affecting certain groups of people that would be lost if individuals were assessed in isolation. However, the definitions do not reflect self-determined cultural identities, and students from certain backgrounds or with certain personal identities do not of course all behave in the same way nor make the same choices. Indeed, at the heart of the widening participation and success agenda is the individual student, regardless of their background. This report seeks to engage with both approaches, considering both the patterns of disadvantage affecting certain groups while also recognising that each student is an individual.

PROCESS

11. Since the Advisory Group was established it has met three times, on 5 February 2016, 10 May 2016 and 17 June 2016. An Academic Reference Group and Practitioners' Reference Group, established to support the Advisory Group's work, have each met three times. Roundtables have also been held with employers, schools and alternative providers. The outcomes of these discussions are reflected in the report. Extensive engagement has also taken place with a number of stakeholders and higher education institutions.

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[7] UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2016) *Working Futures 2014 to 2024*

12. This report is primarily concerned with higher education in England. However, engagement with institutions and stakeholders in the devolved administrations has been important, not least to ensure the cross border implication of any recommendations beyond England are recognised and considered.

13. The full list of those involved in the Advisory Group, the Academic Reference and Practitioners' Groups and the roundtable discussions can be found at Annexe C. We would like to thank all of those that have taken time to contribute to this report for the significant expertise, experience and knowledge provided.

1. WHAT THE EVIDENCE TELLS US

14. A student's decision to go to university, the way they engage with and experience higher education, as well as their outcomes and employment prospects will be influenced by a number of factors. For young students this will particularly depend on their prior experience and attainment at school. For mature students their choices, experiences and outcomes will depend on a whole range of factors primarily relating to their personal and economic circumstances, and often the availability of accessible part-time study. The aggregated impact of all these individual choices, experiences and outcomes reveal, however, significant differences according to socio-economic background, race and disability.

15. This chapter sets out what the evidence tells us about disadvantage. The evidence points to substantially different outcomes for students from different social and economic backgrounds throughout the student lifecycle, and for black and minority ethnic (BME) students and students with disabilities in terms of graduate outcomes in particular.

16. It is vital to understand what the evidence tells us about these aggregated differences across the student lifecycle and where disadvantage lies. Unless these differences are properly understood, universities are unlikely to be able to provide an effective environment for the individual student that takes proper account of their background and characteristics, to ensure that they can fulfil their potential.

17. Historically, the focus of widening participation and social mobility has tended to be on access, the assumption being that once at university disadvantage will automatically level out. However, there is a growing acknowledgement that disadvantage is present throughout university and reflected in graduate outcomes. Further, the recent and substantial expansion of student and graduate numbers, a tougher graduate employment market, and the impact of graduate loan repayments, mean that the focus is inevitably shifting to graduate outcomes, particularly in terms of employment.

18. Much of the evidence on access draws upon UCAS data[8]. This means that it primarily covers those who apply for and accept a full-time undergraduate place through UCAS, rather than actual enrolments in higher education. UCAS data is also more likely to cover young applicants than those aged 21 and over.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC/CLASS BACKGROUND

19. The consistently most disadvantaged group in terms of higher education participation and access is those students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

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[8] This is because the focus is on the likelihood of participation as opposed to those who actually enrol in higher education. Information on enrolments is provided by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). The latest data available is for the academic year 2014–15.

20. Definitions of disadvantage are contested and complex. In terms of widening participation, the measure most commonly used in the higher education sector is Participation of Local Areas (POLAR) data. POLAR is a measure of relative rather than absolute disadvantage, and defines disadvantage by reference to participation in higher education rather than, for instance, family income or other measures more clearly linked to socio-economic status. The measure classifies census wards into five groups based on the proportion of 18-year-olds who enter higher education aged 18 or 19 years old. Quintile 1 is the lowest participation group, and quintile 5 the highest. POLAR3 is the latest iteration.

21. POLAR is used to inform targeting and to support analysis of widening participation activities by universities and by other sector stakeholders. These include the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), which uses it as part of its UK Performance Indicators (UKPI) analysis of widening participation at UK universities, and the Office for Fair Access (OFFA), which publishes the UKPI analysis as part of its annual institutional self-assessment and commentary. POLAR was created by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), which uses it to calculate its widening participation funding allocations.

22. As an area-based measure, POLAR does have its limitations: it does not align with the definitions of disadvantage used, for instance, in schools or by employers and although the classification is found to correlate with other measures of disadvantage, in many cases the correlation is not as strong as might be assumed. For example, there are several wards which have among the highest young higher education participation rates but are classed by other measures as being more disadvantaged than some wards which have average young higher education participation rates[9]. Nonetheless, POLAR is widely recognised and continues to provide a useful tool for capturing the multi-dimensional aspects of socio-economic disadvantage across different higher education data sources. POLAR also closely correlates with other measures of socio-economic disadvantage, including the complex multivariate analysis developed by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) as part of a recent report for the (then) Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)[10]. It is therefore the measure used in this report. Notwithstanding this, however, our discussions with practitioners and schools indicates POLAR on its own is regarded as too blunt an instrument to inform the sector's work on social mobility. In view of this the Advisory Group **recommends the creation of a basket of indicators shared across the sector to measure disadvantage in applicants and students using both population-based and individual indicators. These would sit alongside other data which institutions may wish to use e.g. course specific data. Consideration should also be given to how universities can be supported to monitor their own student body using these indicators and how these compare with the indicators**

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[9] (HEFCE) Further information on POLAR3: an analysis of geography, disadvantage and entrants to higher education http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2014/201401/
[10] HEFCE (2014) *Further information on POLAR3: An analysis of geography, disadvantage and entrants to higher education;* BIS (2015) *Socio-economic, ethnic and gender differences in HE participation*

used by schools and employers. The Practitioners' Reference Group (PRG[11]) will evolve into a community of practice and will support this task. We believe that this would be of significant benefit to institutions and policy makers in understanding and responding effectively to the challenges of participation by disadvantaged groups.

23. Entry rates to higher education for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds as measured by POLAR3 are lower than those for advantaged pupils. In 2015, 18.5% of 18-year-olds from England in quintile 1 (the least advantaged group) accepted offers to study on a full-time undergraduate programme via UCAS, compared to 44.9% in quintile 5 (the most advantaged)[12]. That means that 18-year-olds in quintile 5 are 2.4 times more likely to enter higher education than 18-year-olds in quintile 1. The latest figures from UCAS during Clearing suggest that a similar gap will remain in 2016[13].

24. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are also significantly less likely to attend high tariff institutions or courses. Access to high tariff institutions or courses is often termed 'fair access'[14]. In 2015, data from the UCAS end of cycle report showed that 3.3% of 18-year-olds from quintile 1 accepted offers to study full-time undergraduate programmes at high tariff institutions, compared to 20.7% for pupils from quintile 5[15].

25. Having entered higher education, people from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to drop out than those from more advantaged backgrounds. Although the UK-wide non-continuation rates[16] for both disadvantaged and more advantaged students rose in the latest year for which we have data (2013–14) following longer-term reductions, the rate for more advantaged students rose by less (6% proportionally compared to 13% for POLAR3 quintile 1); the England-only rates for disadvantaged students have been stable for the past two years. In 2013–14 young disadvantaged entrants were 1.4 times more likely to drop out than those from a disadvantaged background.

26. Those from disadvantaged backgrounds appear to continue to be disadvantaged when it comes to degree attainment and employment outcomes. HEFCE found an unexplained gap of three percentage points in the proportions of 2013–14 graduates from quintile 1 obtaining a first or upper second class degree,

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[11] This is a group of higher education expert practitioners and members of the charitable sector which was originally established by the Advisory Group to provide support in addressing the challenges set out in chapter 1. This group will work with UUK to support the implementation of the recommendations and other activities determined by the Advisory Group.
[12] UCAS (2015) *End of Cycle Report 2015*
[13] UCAS (2016) Daily Clearing analysis 2016 https://www.ucas.com/corporate/data-and-analysis/ucas-undergraduate-releases/daily-clearing-analysis-2016
[14] Although fair access is generally considered to mean access to highly selective institutions it is important to note that there are highly selective courses across many higher education institutions. Widening participation refers to the much more extensive issue of able students who never progress onto higher education.
[15] UCAS (2015) *End of Cycle Report 2015*
[16] HESA (2016) *UKPIs: Non-continuation rates (table T3b)*

compared to quintile 5 graduates[17]. They also found[18] that 2010–11 graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds were less likely to go on to professional employment.

27. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) report, *How English domiciled graduate earnings vary with gender, institution attended, subject and socio-economic background* (April 2016), emphasises still further how important parental background is in terms of graduate outcomes.

28. Disadvantaged students, defined by reference to numbers living in low-participation neighbourhoods, are not a homogenous group, and there are various intersecting characteristics which compound the disadvantage. In particular, gender, ethnicity, and regional location (eg rural and coastal areas as opposed to metropolitan and London areas) also have a bearing.

GENDER

29. Men have lower participation rates, retention, degree attainment, and progression than their female counterparts. Women are more likely than men to apply for and enter higher education via UCAS and the gap between the sexes has grown in recent years, with women now 36% more likely to apply for and 35% more likely to enter higher education via UCAS than men. Looking at the student body, women made up 57% of UK undergraduates at English higher education institutions in 2014–15, and 58% of first years.

30. As with place, analysis suggests that gender can compound other categories of disadvantage. Differences in attainment at school between the sexes are important in explaining this. Girls make up a larger proportion of those entering A-level exams, despite there being fewer girls than boys in the 18-year-old population, and achieve higher grades. 54.5% of girls' A-level entries were graded A* to B in 2016, compared to 50.9% of boys'[19].

31. A 2015 BIS study[20] suggests that prior attainment explains the difference in participation by boys and girls, and that once it is controlled for, boys are slightly more likely than girls of a similar background to attend university, including the most selective institutions. The problems for boys from lower socio-economic groups are magnified by differences in subject choice by boys and girls. Four of the five subject areas with the highest proportions of students from POLAR3 quintile 1 in HESA's UKPIs for 2014–15[21] are large and have significantly more women than men, particularly at undergraduate level (education, mass communications, creative arts and law).

[17] HEFCE (2015) *Differences in degree outcomes: The effect of subject and student characteristics*
[18] HEFCE (2016) *Differences in employment outcomes: Comparison of 2008–09 and 2010–11 first degree graduates*
[19] Joint Council for Qualifications CIC (2016) *Provisional GCE A Level Results – June 2016*
[20] BIS (2015), *Socio-economic, ethnic and gender differences in HE participation*
[21] HESA (2016) UKPIs: Widening participation of under-represented groups (table sp6)

32. There are also differences in gender in terms of employment outcomes. The recently published analysis by HEFCE[22] which looks at the differences in employment outcomes for two cohorts of first degree graduates, 2008–09 and 2010–11, shows that in both cohorts white female graduates had higher overall employment rates, yet male graduates had higher professional employment rates six and 40 months after graduation. Although female graduates are more likely to be in work, analysis of the HESA Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education salary data shows that female graduates earn considerably less than male graduates regardless of subject choice[23].

STUDENTS FROM BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS

33. BME as a definition is widely recognised and used to identify patterns of marginalisation and segregation caused by attitudes toward an individual's ethnicity. We recognise the limitations of this definition, particularly the assumption that minority ethnic students are a homogenous group. Where possible, this report presents data disaggregated by more detailed ethnic groups in addition to data consolidating BME students as a group.

34. Overall, young BME higher education participation rates are higher than those of their young white peers. Research for BIS found that this was also true at the most selective (high tariff) institutions, except for pupils from black Caribbean and black other groups[24]. This is reinforced by UCAS analysis[25] which found that the entry rate for black 18-year-olds to higher tariff providers in 2015 was 5.6%, compared to 8.1% for the white group, with other ethnic groups having higher rates of entry than both the black and white cohorts. This analysis also found that the pattern of these entry rates by ethnic group closely reflects the pattern of entry rates by A-level attainment at ABB+.

35. Despite generally high participation rates the representation of students from ethnic minorities does vary across ethnic group. For example, Chinese 18-year-olds have much higher entry rates than all other ethnic groups under UCAS's analysis. Representation also varies by place and institution type, with a higher proportion of the BME undergraduate body based at low tariff institutions and institutions in London and the West Midlands than elsewhere in the UK[26]. It is also worth noting that both BIS research[27] and experimental statistics for HESA[28] suggest that there are higher proportions of BME students at alternative providers than at publicly-funded providers.

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[22] HEFCE (2016) *Differences in employment outcomes: Comparison of 2008-09 and 2010-11 first degree graduates* http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2016/201618/
[23] The Visible Hand in Economics (25 July 2015) *The male wage premium* http://www.tvhe.co.nz/2015/07/25/the-male-wage-premium/
[24] BIS (2015) *Socio-economic, ethnic and gender differences in HE participation,* and UCAS (2015) End of Cycle report. In this instance 'black other' means with non-Caribbean or African heritage.
[25] UCAS (2015) *End of cycle report*
[26] HEFCE analysis of HESA (2016) student record
[27] BIS (2016) *Understanding the market of alternative higher education providers and their students in 2014*
[28] HESA (2016) *Experimental SFR 235*

36. There has been concern expressed by some researchers, the government, and media commentators that unconscious bias about applicants' ethnicity may influence offer-making by institutions. While it should be noted that institutions do not receive data on the ethnicity of an applicant via UCAS until the applicant has a confirmed place with that institution, it is possible that inferences about applicants' ethnicity could be made, for example by their name or by school attended. UCAS's recent report on unconscious bias in admissions[29] surveyed the available evidence base and concluded that there did not appear to be evidence of systemic bias in offer-making and, discerning whether unconscious bias is at play, is by its very nature, complex. We return to this issue in more detail in the section on admissions in chapter 4.

37. Once in higher education some BME groups also appear to have lower than expected retention rates, although these do vary by subject and ethnic group[30]. HEFCE's analysis of the latest non-continuation rates shows that students from black and mixed heritage are between 1 and 2.6 percentage points more likely to drop out than would be expected given their other characteristics[31].

38. The largest gaps for BME students are in their degree attainment. When HEFCE examined degree outcomes for 2006–07 entrants, they found that all BME groups (black, Chinese, Indian, other Asian and other/unknown) were less likely than would be expected to obtain first or upper-second class degrees, with the gap over ten percentage points for black students and around eight percentage points for other Asian students[32]. HEFCE's later analysis of degree outcomes by entry qualifications found an unexplained gap of 15 percentage points between white and BME graduates in 2013–14, similar to the observed difference of 16 percentage points. The gaps ranged from five percentage points for graduates with four As at A-level, to 18 percentage points for graduates with non-A-level entry qualifications[33].

39. Employment outcomes for BME students are also poor. HEFCE analysis found that graduates from almost all BME groups were less likely than white graduates to go on to employment or further study six months after graduating. Once controlled for student characteristics, the biggest gaps were for graduates from Chinese and black African backgrounds, both of whom were over seven percentage points less likely to be employed than would be expected if they were white. Graduates from Pakistani backgrounds were also over six percentage points less likely to be in employment.

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[29] UCAS (2016) https://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/ucas-unconscious-bias-report-2016
[30] Higher Education Academy (2014) *Undergraduate retention and attainment across the disciplines*
[31] HEFCE (2015) 'Non-continuation rates: Trends and profiles' http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/ncr/nhe/
[32] HEFCE (2013) *Higher education and beyond: Outcomes from full-time first degree study*. Although HEFCE did not control for differential participation rates across ethnic groups, separate analysis by Universities UK suggests that the gap remains even when these are controlled for. In this context, other Asian means not Bangladeshi, Indian or Pakistani.
[33] HEFCE (2015) *Differences in degree outcomes: The effect of subject and student characteristics*

40. The gaps tended to be smaller for professional employment, but graduates from both Bangladeshi and black African backgrounds were more than six percentage points less likely to be in professional employment than would be expected if they were white. Forty months after graduation many of the gaps in professional employment rates increased, with graduates with Pakistani, black Caribbean and black African heritage all having professional employment rates over eight percentage points below what would be expected, and graduates with Bangladeshi heritage having a gap of nearly seven percentage points[34].

STUDENTS FROM WHITE BACKGROUNDS

41. White groups have the lowest overall higher education participation rates of all ethnic groups. There is a particularly negative synergy between socio-economic background and ethnicity when it comes to participation in higher education by white working class boys and girls. Research for BIS[35] suggests that white British pupils in the two lowest socio-economic groups (using their own rich measure of socio-economic status) have lower rates of participation in higher education than any other group. This was also highlighted by Prime Minister Theresa May as a key area of concern in her first speech as Prime Minister[36].

42. There has also been some suggestion that there is a specific problem with white working-class boys, or white boys more generally, accessing higher education. Analysis by UCAS[37] of higher education participation of 18-year-old state school pupils in the POLAR3 quintile 3 by sex, ethnicity, and free school meal status; and of 18-year-old state school pupils who received free school meals by POLAR3 quintile suggests that, under both measures, white boys from the most disadvantaged groups have the lowest entry rates to higher education (below 10%). In both cases, however, they are closely followed by disadvantaged white girls (8% and 13% on the different measures) and mixed-race boys (11% and 14% on the different measures), who make up the second and third lowest entry rates. The absolute difference between disadvantaged white boys and girls is also lower than the difference between the sexes for any other ethnic and socio-economic group (the proportional difference is larger, but this is largely because of the very low bases in both cases).

43. It is clear that there is an issue with the participation rate of white boys from the lowest socio-economic groups. But there is also an issue of a similar magnitude with disadvantaged white girls and mixed race boys. In all three cases, part of this issue will be driven by low prior attainment: all three groups have low average performance at GCSE, with GCSE performance a strong predictor of entry to higher education.

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[34] HEFCE (2015) *Differences in employment outcomes: Equality and diversity characteristics*
[35] BIS (2015) *Socio-economic ethnic and gender differences in higher education*
[36] https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/statement-from-the-new-prime-minister-theresa-may
[37] UCAS (2015) End of Cycle Report 2015

DISABLED STUDENTS

44. The number of first year undergraduate students reporting a disability in England has increased from just over 43,200 in 2007–08 to just over 56,000 in 2014–15[38]. Students reporting a disability, particularly those not in receipt of the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA), have lower degree attainment and progression into employment compared to those not reporting a disability.

45. There are gaps between the proportion of declared disabled and non-disabled students who obtain first and upper second class degrees. HEFCE found an unexplained gap of three percentage points in the proportions of 2013–14 graduates with disabilities obtaining a first or upper second[39]. Its earlier analysis by DSA status found that disabled graduates not in receipt of the DSA were three percentage points less likely than would be expected to get a top degree classification, while the likelihood that those in receipt of the DSA was in line with what was expected[40]. These gaps carry through to employment outcomes, where HEFCE found that disabled students were between 1.9 (for those not receiving the DSA) and 3.2 percentage points (for those receiving the DSA) less likely to be in employment or further study six months after graduation than non-disabled students with the same characteristics.

46. Interestingly, HEFCE found no immediate gap in professional employment rates, but found that 40 months after graduation gaps had opened up. Those who received the DSA were 3.1 percentage points less likely to be in professional employment than their non-disabled peers, while disabled graduates who had not received the DSA were 3.5 percentage points less likely to be in professional employment. This is in a broader context of poor disability employment rates nationally, with Scope noting[41] that the gap between disabled and non-disabled employment rates has been broadly static, at around 30%, for over a decade.

47. The Advisory Group was asked to look specifically at the experience of students with a mental health condition. Data from the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU)[42] shows that there has been a significant and rapid growth in the number of students presenting with a mental health condition. Its 2015 statistical report[43] shows that since 2007–08 the proportion of disabled students disclosing a mental health condition increased from 5.9% to 12.8% in 2013–14 (from 0.4% to 1.3% of the entire student population). Research commissioned in 2015 by HEFCE for its review of provision and support for disabled students[44] showed that this increase varied significantly across the sector, with some institutions reporting no change and others reporting an increase of 4.5%. Variation also

[38] HESA (multiple years) Student Record
[39] HEFCE (2015) *Differences in degree outcomes: The effect of subject and student characteristics*
[40] HEFCE (2013) *Higher education and beyond: Outcomes from full-time first degree study*
[41] Scope (2014) *A million futures: halving the disability employment gap*
[42] The Equality Challenge Unit works to further and support equality and diversity for staff and students in higher education institutions across the UK and in colleges in Scotland. It provides a central resource of advice and guidance for the sector. Further information is available at http://www.ecu.ac.uk/
[43] ECU (2015) *Equality in higher education: statistical report 2014. Part 2: Students*
[44] HEFCE (2015) *Understanding provision for students with mental health problems and intensive support needs*. Report to HEFCE by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) and Researching Equity, Access and Partnership (REAP)

occurred by type of institution, with higher numbers reported at specialist institutions and the lowest at institutions with medium tariff requirements. Research[45] has also shown that some mature students who have a disability (or a long-term health problem) are only able to study part time because they need flexibility to meet their personal study needs. This reinforces the importance of the availability of flexible and part-time provision.

MATURE STUDENTS

48. In relation to all these categories of disadvantage, it is important to consider the position of older students alongside that of school leavers. Higher education is not just about 18-year-olds coming straight from school or college. Indeed, for large numbers 'of people, access to higher education and to its transformative effects may only be feasible later in life. Many mature students, particularly those aged 25 and above, come from disadvantaged backgrounds and a large number are from minority ethnic groups.

49. Over the last six years there has been a significant and continuing decline in mature and part-time participation. Undergraduates aged over 25 fell by 37% between 2009–10 and 2014–15, and part-time entrants fell by 50% in the same period. In response to this significant fall, in 2013 Universities UK published a review of part-time higher education which looked into this decline and identified areas for action, as well as the areas where more information was needed to inform policy decisions[46]. In 2015 Universities UK established an independent Student Funding Panel to assess the impact of the student funding system in England on students. This also included potential options for reform of part-time funding received through a call for evidence including ensuring equity in maintenance support provided to full-time and part-time students and restoring loans to access and public funding for Equivalent or Lower Qualifications (ELQ)[47]. As we show in chapter 3 the government has since announced plans to introduce maintenance loans for part-time students and has further relaxed the ELQ policy with eligibility for tuition fee loans extended to part-time.

50. To leave mature students out of consideration of social mobility risks effectively excluding a large proportion of the population. Focusing on older students will also help to meet wider national policy objectives such as up-skilling the workforce to satisfy demands for high level skills and improving productivity. Mature students often wish to study part time (they may lack the time to undertake full-time study, lack geographical mobility or be more debt adverse than younger students) so it is important to ensure the nationwide provision of

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[45] Butcher J (2015) *'Shoe-horned and side-lined'? Challenges for part-time learners in the new HE landscape, Higher Education Academy* https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resource/shoe-horned-and-side-lined-challenges-part-time-learners-new-he-landscape

[46] http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2013/power-of-part-time.pdf

[47] Students studying in higher education are assessed to see whether they are looking to study at the same level to a qualification they already hold or at a lower level to a qualification they already hold. Students categorised as studying for an ELQ may be charged a tuition fee rate that is higher than the standard published rates. This is because in 2008 the government announced that it would no longer provide funding to support universities teaching students who were classed as ELQ status.

high quality part-time study opportunities. The inclusion of older students in efforts to improve social mobility would therefore be good policy, and would help achieve goals of increasing the number of students from under-represented backgrounds more generally.

POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

51. The inequalities evident at undergraduate level can also be seen at postgraduate level on the basis of social class, gender and ethnicity. There are also differences in immediate transition to postgraduate study by first degree institution. Rates are substantially higher in research-intensive universities. Analysis by HEFCE[48] shows how participation in postgraduate study, one year after graduation, varies by quintile, with 5.3% of quintile 1 2013–14 graduates moving into postgraduate taught study compared to 7.5% of quintile 5 students. These differences are reversed for transition onto 'other postgraduate' study – that is, courses with certificates, diplomas or for credit – rather than Masters or research qualifications. Graduates from quintile 1 are between 1 and 2 percentage points more likely to obtain these types of qualifications than graduates from quintile 5.

52. The same analysis showed differences in progression for other groups. In the year after they graduated, 7.1% of male 2013–14 graduates began postgraduate taught courses compared to 6.1% of female graduates from the same year, and 2.1% of male graduates began postgraduate research courses compared to 1.0% of female graduates. 6.3% of UK-domiciled white 2013–14 qualifiers were studying postgraduate taught courses within a year of graduation, compared to 7.1% of UK-domiciled BME students. However, notwithstanding more BME students undertaking postgraduate taught courses, they were less likely to transition to postgraduate research (1.0% BME compared to 1.9% white).

53. A number of professional and 'graduate-level' jobs now require a postgraduate qualification. Making sure that there is equal opportunity to access postgraduate study is therefore an important mechanism for improving employment outcomes for underrepresented groups. In addition, engaging in postgraduate study provides an important pathway to undertaking postgraduate research, with postgraduate researchers being likely to form a large part of the next generation of the academic staff cohort within universities. Improving this flow through to the postgraduate research population will also assist in making sure that universities' staff profiles better reflect the diversity of the student cohort.

MULTIPLE CHARACTERISTICS

54. While this section has categorised students according to their backgrounds or the broadly-defined equality characteristics (that is gender, ethnicity or declared disability), many of these characteristics overlap, for instance in relation to age and ethnicity, or gender and economic disadvantage (often termed 'intersectionality'). In its End of Cycle Report 2015, UCAS highlighted the importance of considering multiple equality characteristics in order to gain a

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[48] HEFCE (2016) *Transitions into postgraduate study, 2002–2013-14*

more in-depth understanding of underrepresentation and disadvantage in higher education. So while the average entry rate for 18-year-olds from POLAR quintile 3 who attended a state school was 28%, the entry rate for the subset of quintile 3 students who were white, male and received free school meals was just 9%. In the same report UCAS proposed a statistical method to track equality across multiple characteristics and reported some results using this classification. The importance of looking at the intersectionality of characteristics as a tool to support effective targeting of initiatives across the student lifecycle is reinforced by OFFA in its latest guidance[49] on access agreements.

PLACE

55. There is also evidence which suggests that the relationship between geography and social mobility is important. It is a relationship that is being increasingly acknowledged, particularly as a consequence of HEFCE's research in this area. Most recently it has identified areas where the level of young participation in higher education is either higher or lower than expected given levels of attainment at GSCE[50].

56. Many universities see themselves as anchor institutions within their local community, working with local and regional partners to promote economic, social and cultural regeneration. In the past, social mobility has been analysed at national or individual institutional level, with responses tending to follow those polarities. However, increasingly the focus is on regional responses, with universities working with partners in their regions to develop sustained initiatives that align with broader regional agendas (see paragraphs 244-247).

57. The role of place and region must therefore form part of the social mobility agenda for higher education. That said, mature students in areas without access to higher education are unlikely to be geographically mobile and may only be able to access higher education through part-time study or distance learning, highlighting again the need for the availability of an attractive, inclusive part-time offer.

SUMMARY OF THE PRIORITIES BASED ON THE EVIDENCE

58. In summary, **the evidence suggests that socio-economic disadvantage has more persistent and far-reaching impact on access to and outcomes from higher education than any other student characteristic.** It affects entry to university, particularly to high tariff institutions and courses, across the range of measures: fair access, retention, degree outcomes, and progression to postgraduate study and/or to graduate employment.

59. In considering **students from disadvantaged backgrounds**, the evidence suggests there should be a particular focus on **access for white working-**

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[49] https://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/strategic-access-agreement-guidance.pdf
[50] HEFCE (2016) *Gaps in young participation in higher education*
http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/gaps/

class men, though noting that white working-class women and those from a mixed race background are not that far behind. There is also a strong correlation between gender, disadvantage and prior attainment.

60. In relation to **BME students** the focus should be on **improving their progression through higher education and into the labour market**. Specific attention should be paid to **improving retention rates for all non-white ethnic groups** (apart from students of Chinese ethnicity), **reducing the gap in degree attainment between ethnic groups**, particularly for black students and Asian students[51], and **improving employment rates** – particularly long-term professional employment rates – for students with black, Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage.

61. For those students with **disabilities**, the focus must be on **increasing graduate outcomes, employment rates**, and particularly long-term professional employment rates. Specific consideration should be given to students presenting with a mental health condition.

62. **Age** poses different challenges. The priority should be to **increase the numbers of mature students going to university**, and ensuring the availability of opportunities to study flexibly, particularly **part time**. It is also important that **government takes older students into account when making policy**.

63. **The inequalities evident at undergraduate level can also be seen at postgraduate level** on the basis of social class, gender and ethnicity. There are also differences in immediate transition to postgraduate study by first degree institution. **There should be equal opportunities to access postgraduate study** irrespective of background.

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[51] However, it is important to note here that although Chinese and Indian students achieve *above* the sector adjusted average for achieving a degree they are *below* the benchmark for achieving a first or upper second class degree. (HEFCE (2013) *HE and beyond: Outcomes from first-time first degree study*

2. WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

64. The higher education sector does not operate in isolation. Universities admit students whose qualifications – and expectations[52] – are shaped by many people and organisations, most obviously for younger students by their experiences and attainment at school. Students may also have had their experience shaped by a further education college or alternative provider, and many will have been supported by a charity in accessing higher education. When students graduate, decisions about whom to employ, into what role and on what career pathway, will be determined in large part by employers.

65. This chapter examines the significant role played by different parties in informing the decisions that students make about university, their prior attainment, the outcomes they achieve, and the jobs they secure when leaving university. It also makes specific reference to how these parties and the higher education sector, working collaboratively, can support a more coordinated approach to social mobility which will be important in addressing the challenges set out in chapter 1. The significant opportunities presented by policy-making for schools, further education colleges and higher education coming together within one government department are also highlighted.

SCHOOLS

66. Schools have a critical role to play in improving social mobility. The report, *Cracking the Code: how schools can improve social mobility* by the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission[53], illustrates what schools are currently doing to support social mobility, and the steps taken by highly effective schools to support young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. These include:

- using the Pupil Premium more strategically
- building a culture of high expectations and inclusivity
- a continual focus on the quality of teaching
- tailored strategies to engage parents
- preparing students for all aspects of life, not just exams

67. There is also evidence that shows that some schools have delivered dramatic changes in educational outcomes for young people. For example in London, the London Councils report *The higher education journey of young London residents[54]* (July 2015) shows that disadvantaged young people now perform better than in any other region in England. They are 38% more likely to get five good GCSEs, including English and maths, than children elsewhere.

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[52] We specifically use the word 'expectations here' – as does the DfE in the 2016 latest Schools White Paper – as the evidence shows that there is generally no poverty of aspiration among young people.
[53] Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (2014) *Cracking the code: how schools can improve social mobility*
[54] Storan J, Tindell G and Weeden, S (2015). *The higher education journey of young London residents. London Councils*

PRIOR ATTAINMENT

68. There is a close correlation between attainment at school and university experience and success at university. This correlation is strong in relation to participation for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and BME students, particularly in terms of entry to high tariff institutions and courses. The importance of raising standards across all schools and addressing the attainment gap between advantaged and disadvantaged pupils has already been recognised by the Department for Education (DfE) in its recent Schools White Paper, *Education Excellence Everywhere*[55]. This paper shows how the attainment gap opens early and widens, particularly at secondary levels, and urges schools to prioritise closing that gap. The focus on raising attainment at school was reiterated by Prime Minister Theresa May in her first speech[56] on education policy.

69. Research for BIS suggests that low prior attainment is entirely responsible for the gap between male and female participation in higher education, and is responsible for most of the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged pupils[57]. The same research found that GCSE results[58] are more indicative of higher education participation than A-levels, BTECs[59] and other level 3 qualifications. Although GCSE attainment is a good predictor of future higher education participation, as we note in paragraph 55, research by the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE) shows that differences also occur in higher education participation across different places. This suggests that while GCSE attainment is the most powerful predictor, it is not the only explanatory factor for higher education participation – reiterating the importance of a place-based approach to social mobility.

70. The research for BIS also highlighted the lower school attainment of pupils eligible for free school meals, particularly boys and those from certain ethnic groups. Only 42% of pupils eligible for free school meals achieve five or more A* to C grades including English and maths at GCSE compared to 70% of all other pupils, and only 10% of them achieve the English Baccalaureate[60]. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals who achieve five or more A* to C grades at GCSE is particularly low – below 30% – in the case of white boys,

[55] DfE (2016) *Education Excellence Everywhere*, Schools White Paper
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/educational-excellence-everywhere
[56] https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/britain-the-great-meritocracy-prime-ministers-speech
[57] BIS (2015) *Socio-economic, ethnic and gender differences in higher education participation*
[58] Department for Education (2016) *GCSE and equivalent results in England 2014/15 (Revised)*
[59] BTECs (Business and Technology Education Council) belong to a group of qualifications known as Applied General qualifications. These qualifications provide learning in a vocational area rather than for a single occupation, for example applied science, business or sport, and enable learners to develop transferable knowledge and schools. Initially these qualifications were not considered a definitive route into higher education, however, in recent years this has changed, due in part to the government policy of raising the participation age for education and training to 18. For further information see UCAS's publication Progression Pathways (2016) https://www.ucas.com/advisers/guides-and-resources/qualification-reform/progression-pathways
[60] This is a performance measure for schools, awarded when a pupil secures a grade C or above in English, mathematics, history or geography, the sciences, and a language. It is also notable that high-attaining disadvantaged pupils are significantly less likely to enter the Ebacc than other high attainers, with 59% entering compared with 73% of other high attainers (Department for Employment figures, August 2016)

black boys with non-African heritage, boys with mixed white and black Caribbean heritage, and girls from the traveller and Roma communities.

Collaboration between schools, colleges and universities

71. The close correlation between attainment at level 3 and university success reinforces the importance of universities working collaboratively with schools to help raise attainment. Many higher education institutions have already developed increasingly deep relationships with schools, ranging from outreach activities to supporting schools in the local community to sponsoring academies, free schools and university technical colleges (UTCs). We highlight the range of outreach activities in chapter 4 but focus here on higher education-school interaction, the impact this has made and how these partnerships can be improved.

72. Almost ten years ago (2007) Universities UK surveyed[61] all universities in England on how they engaged with, and supported, schools and colleges, to see 'what works' and how engagement could be improved. We had a 100% response which resulted in a wealth of evidence demonstrating that there was a wide spectrum of engagement. Beyond widening participation and outreach activities this included activities relating to student progression and transition to higher education, to curriculum enrichment and support, to teaching and learning styles, subject specialism, training of the school and college workforce, governance support and direct partnerships with schools including sponsorship. From this research it was clear that the rationale for engagement varied, with institutions adopting different approaches reflecting their diverse missions and different local circumstances. We concluded that there was 'no one size fits all' and that any attempt to prescribe certain forms of engagement in preference could stifle the innovation and activity that was going on.

73. Since this survey the number of universities entering into sponsorship arrangements with schools has increased considerably. Research by HEFCE[62] indicates that there are now around 60 higher education institutions involved in sponsorship relationships with around 150 schools. Likewise, the research into the nature and scale of universities' involvement in these schools, also found that motivations for sponsoring schools varied, and so did the ways in which engagement took place.

74. Sponsorship of schools by universities has been highlighted in Theresa May's speech on education policy[63] and is included in a recent consultation from the DfE, *Schools that work for everyone[64]*. This report does not cover the detail of these specific proposals. However, as a general principle any new proposals

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[61] Higher education engagement with schools and colleges: partnership development http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2009/engagement-schools-colleges.pdf
[62] http://www.hefce.ac.uk/workprovide/schools/
[63] https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/britain-the-great-meritocracy-prime-ministers-speech
[64] The consultation proposes that higher education institutions wishing to charge a fee above £6,000 pa should be required to either establish a new school or sponsor an academy. https://consult.education.gov.uk/school-frameworks/schools-that-work-for-everyone

should allow universities the flexibility to consider the evidence and target funding in a way that works best for the school and students to help raise attainment. It is also important to acknowledge the wide-ranging collaborative partnerships that have been developed across higher and further education, and schools to support the progression of students, alongside the measures to improve attainment set out in the Green Paper.

75. The HEFCE analysis also explored the impact of sponsorship on pupils' attainment. This showed that GCSE and equivalent data for the schools sponsored by a university had improved over time to meet the sector average, like other sponsor-led academies. This is noteworthy as many of the schools that were sponsored faced challenges with attainment. However, the research also showed that GCSE attainment levels remained static, suggesting that the changes were due to improved attainment in other level 2 qualifications.

76. We welcome the current work by HEFCE to look at the longer-term impact of sponsorship, especially on academic performance in the schools and progression on to higher education and its plan to provide universities with a tool-kit to help them identify the key factors to consider when developing such arrangements. Building on this work **we recommend a systematic review of the evidence on the effectiveness of activities undertaken by higher education institutions and employers to support the raising of attainment in schools. This should be undertaken by the new Evidence and Impact Exchange proposed later in our recommendations** (see paragraph 236). Research by the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement on school and university partnerships is also relevant here by highlighting what makes an effective engagement for universities and pupils[65].

77. The Advisory Group's discussion with schools highlighted that the ending of the collaborative planning framework afforded by Aimhigher and Lifelong Learning Networks in 2011 had resulted in a lack of coordination in engagement between the higher education and school sectors. Some schools and colleges receive many offers of outreach and others, particularly in rural and coastal areas, receive none. In response to this, HEFCE's collaborative outreach schemes, the National Networks for Collaborative Outreach and (its most recent scheme) the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP)[66] should provide an important mechanism for facilitating more coherent and coordinated partnership working between all sectors.

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[65] This is an initiative funded by the research councils to support the enriching of the curriculum and to motivate young people to be excited about research and to raise their aspirations for further study and future lives. https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/work-with-us/current-projects/school-university-partnerships-initiative

[66] The NCOP is a four-year programme from 2017 to 2020, developed by HEFCE in response to the government's ambition to double the proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education by 2020. It will support intensive outreach by consortia aimed at increasing participation in higher education in 997 wards where higher education participation rates are low overall, and lower than expected given Key Stage 4 GCSE (and equivalent) attainment levels. The model used to allocate NCOP funding is targeted and draws on HEFCE's Gaps analysis: this includes gaps in participation based on (a) Key Stage 4 attainment only and (b) Key Stage 4 attainment and ethnicity (see Chapter 2). Funding for the programme will remain at £60 million per calendar year for the first two years.

78. The NCOPs are also well positioned to support a more coordinated transition across different parts of the education system by encouraging broad local partnerships of schools, colleges, universities, chambers of commerce, trade unions, politicians and local authorities to form Raising Participation Action Groups in areas where a young higher education participation rate is low and a substantial participation gap exists.

79. Although about half of the HEFCE-funded higher education sector is involved in sponsorship relationships, this only represents around 150 schools – a small proportion of non-state-maintained schools. This raises the question of how activity like this, and school-higher education engagement more broadly, can be scaled up to ensure that no school is disadvantaged, particularly schools in areas where there is no higher education provision. **We recommend that higher education institutions explore how different models of higher education and school interaction can be further developed and scaled up. Many, if not all, universities are already actively involved in schools collaborations, including the provision of home-work clubs, summer schools or teaching support. The form this takes will depend on institutional strengths and local circumstances and may include collaboration both with and outside NCOPs, for example with successful charitable organisations.**

Changes in qualifications and the school system

80. Since 2010 the government has implemented a series of changes to the school system including new performance indicators and adjusted funding levels. (The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimated in April 2016 that there would be at least a 7% real terms reduction in per-pupil spending between 2015–16 and 2019–20[67].) Qualifications are also undergoing significant reforms, and as we show in paragraphs 82–83 there has been a significant shift in the types of qualifications with which many young people are applying to university. Given these changes are still being implemented it is not possible to say if, or how, these could impact on participation in higher education. We suggest therefore that the DfE and HEFCE should keep this under observation.

81. Reforms to A-levels have seen the decoupling of the AS from the A-level, so that many English students will now apply to higher education without AS results. For many disadvantaged applicants the AS has in the past shown the trajectory of their progress since GCSE and as a result provided a basis on which universities could offer them a place. It is not until September 2020 that applicants from England will apply holding a full set of both reformed A-levels and GCSEs. This means that universities can anticipate a much greater diversity of qualifications held by applicants. The admissions environment is further complicated by the divergence of A-levels and GCSEs across the UK and reforms to vocational qualifications. UCAS and the Supporting Professionalism in

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[67] (2016) House of Commons Briefing Paper, No 06702, *School funding in England. Current system and proposals for 'fairer school funding'* www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN06702.pdf

Admissions programme (SPA) are working with the higher education sector to ensure that universities are aware of these reforms. Universities have already begun responding to these changes by producing qualification reform statements expressing their commitment to being flexible with schools and colleges during this transition[68].

Increase in take-up of vocational qualifications such as BTECs

82. Alongside the changes in A-levels, there has been an increase in the number of students entering higher education from schools and colleges with vocational qualifications, particularly BTECs[69] or a portfolio of BTECs and A-levels. Analysis by the Social Market Foundation[70] found that between 2006 and 2014 the number of pupils completing BTECs rose from 45,000 to 150,000 and that almost 100,000 (one in four) students entering university had a BTEC qualification compared to just under 50,000 in 2008. The fastest growing route of all was among students studying a combination of A-levels and BTECs. A higher proportion of students with BTECs identify as BME than do those with other qualifications. A higher proportion of first degree students who had previously achieved a BTEC also come from low participation areas (18% of BTEC qualifiers come from quintile 1 as opposed to 8% of A-level qualifiers and 13% of all first year, first degree, students in England), and report having parents with no higher education experience[71]. Surveys with schools have suggested that higher education institutions are likely to see a continued increase in the numbers of students applying with BTECs,[72] although 2015 admissions data showed a fall in the number of BTEC applicants.

83. Understanding BTECs is important as not all courses, particularly in some high tariff institutions, will be accessible with BTEC qualifications only, and some do not accept BTECs at all. In addition, some applicants may need additional support in making the transition to higher education. These changes require the higher education sector, schools and students to have a better understanding of the different qualification pathways and the implications for progression. This will become even more important with the streamlining of the national system of technical qualifications and the expansion in apprenticeships (see paragraphs 97–102). The work by the University Vocational Awards Council and UCAS to

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[68] https://www.ucas.com/advisers/guides-and-resources/qualification-reform
[69] BTECs belong to Applied General qualifications, which provide learning in a vocational area rather than a single occupation, for example applied science or sport. There are a range of other vocational qualifications alongside BTECs in this category by other awarding organisations such as City and Guilds, and OCR. Alongside these are Tech Levels which are designed for students who have a clear idea about the occupation they wish to pursue.
[70] Social Mobility Foundation (2016) Passports to Progress. How do vocational qualifications help young people in building their careers? Part One at http://www.smf.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Social-Market-Foundation-Passports-to-Progress-Vocational-Qualifications-Embargoed-0001-070716.pdf,.
[71] Universities analysis of HESA (2016) Student record
[72] The change to linear A-levels, the withdrawal of applied A-levels and the constraints of funding may result in more schools and colleges offering qualifications other than A-levels to a wider cohort of students. See the UCAS report on Progression Pathways published in January 2016 https://www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/progression-pathways-report-final-v2.pdf

identify the support needed to progress onto higher education from level 3 vocational qualifications will be particularly important here[73].

School performance measures

84. Changes to measuring school performance are also relevant in terms of the potential impact these may have on the subjects being offered by a school and therefore available for potential applicants to higher education[74]. In August 2016 the DfE published the performance indicators[75] to be used by schools in 2016–17. The five headline measures are progress, attainment, progress in English and maths, retention and destinations. The destination measure helpfully refers to the number of students entering higher education. This is further broken down into the number of students entering the 'top third' of higher education institutions, the Russell Group and Oxford or Cambridge. We note that this focus on specific parts of the higher education sector could detract from efforts to ensure that students apply to the course and institution that best suits their circumstances and ability.

Policy coherence across schools, colleges and universities

85. The recent move of higher education policy into the DfE provides significant new opportunities for alignment of policy across schools, colleges and universities. This could be particularly helpful in facilitating the alignment of data across all sectors and within higher education. The move should also support a more joined-up approach to collaboration between schools, colleges and universities.

Information, advice and guidance

86. Reforms to the school system and the development of a higher education market (see chapter 3), highlight the importance of having effective information, advice and guidance (IAG) available. This was reflected at the SMAG Schools' Roundtable, along with concern at the current role and status of careers advice in state schools. This issue partly arises from the consequences of the abolition of the Connexions service, with responsibility for careers advice being transferred to schools with support from the National Careers Service.

87. The lack of systematic provision of careers advice in schools has led to the creation of the Careers and Enterprise Company[76]. This had been designed to broker partnerships between schools, further education colleges and employers.

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[73] The UVAC, with the backing of Ofqual and UCAS, has set up a Higher Education and Awarding Organisation Vocational Qualifications Committee. This committee is looking at how to encourage the higher education sector to engage in the development of level 3 vocational qualifications.
[74] From 2016, the English state school performance at key stage 4 (GCSE) is measured using a basket of measures. These include EBACC passes (passes at GCSE A*–C in English, maths, two sciences, a language, history or geography) and Attainment 8, that is an average standard reached in eight subjects (English and maths double weighted, three EBACC subjects, and three other subjects from a government-approved list). In light of these measures schools are incentivised to prioritise delivery of a minimum of English, maths, science (but only two qualifications), languages (but only one qualification) and either history or geography.
[75] DfE (2016) School and college performance tables, Statement of Intent, August 2014 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-and-college-performance-tables-2016-statement-of-intent
[76] https://www.careersandenterprise.co.uk/

However, schools' delegates suggested that further work was needed to develop a greater coherence between all parties in the advice provided to pupils, particularly in terms of graduate careers, the impact of subject choices, and the qualifications taken at schools for entry to some higher education courses. To facilitate this, Universities UK will engage directly with the Careers and Enterprise Company to explore how coordination with the higher education sector can be enhanced.

88. The difficulty for applicants to navigate their way through the wide range of data sources available and knowing which source to use was also noted. Ensuring that information is clearly signposted on websites and embedding careers advice into outreach activities will help address this. We also suggest that HEFCE's work on public information[77] should consider how this might be better streamlined so that students and their families have a clearer idea of the best information sources to use. Inevitably this particularly impacts on students from disadvantaged backgrounds or those whose parents have not been to university, and who may not have the same access to networks and information and therefore need to access information via other channels such as institutional websites.[78]

89. A lack of funding to support IAG was also an issue; this was thought to have resulted in the compounding of inequalities, particularly in schools with lower levels of funding (this is likely to be true in rural and coastal areas, which tend to have lower levels of higher education participation more generally).

90. The absence of professional IAG, and of a careers service for 16- to 18-year-olds, was reinforced in the latest report of the House of Lords Select Committee on Social Mobility[79] which called for a new gold standard in independent careers advice which would move responsibility away from schools. This is to be welcomed, together with the inclusion of benchmarks from the Gatsby Good Career Guidance[80] in the DfE statutory guidance to support schools and colleges in implementing their careers advice duty.

91. The DfE in the Schools White Paper recognises the need to develop a strategy to improve careers provision. **We recommend that the new strategy on careers provision ensures that joined-up and coherent careers advice is delivered to young people in schools and colleges so that the post-16 options are properly explained and not presented as mutually exclusive. The higher education sector should be engaged in the development of the strategy.**

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[77] http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/roiconsult/

[78] In September 2016 a website Advancing Access http://www.advancingaccess.ac.uk/ was launched by the Russell Group to provide good practice examples and how-to guides for teachers and college staff helping pupils with post-16 subject choices and university decisions.

[79] http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldselect/ldsocmob/120/120.pdf

[80] http://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/gatsby-sir-john-holman-good-career-guidance-2014.pdf

92. In summary, although it is not appropriate or feasible for universities to act as a substitute for effective careers advice in schools, there is a clear and important role for greater collaboration between schools and universities in the advice that is given to students. This coordination between schools and universities could have a specific focus on the experience of BME and disabled students, whose graduate outcomes, as outlined in chapter 1, lag behind those of their peers. At present, there is little evidence of coordination in careers advice between schools and universities for these groups. The collaborative relationships maintained since the closure of Aimhigher will support this process. HEFCE's National Collaborative Outreach Programme will also provide an important mechanism to facilitate more strategic coordination of IAG across all parties.

93. Universities and schools engaged in teacher training should explore how each route could have a component part that familiarises teachers with the widening participation agenda and connects them with outreach providers. Universities UK will consult with the DfE and other relevant bodies on how this can be taken forward.

FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES

94. Further education colleges have an important role in access and widening participation to higher education. They are important suppliers of higher education students, as well as providing higher education courses, historically for part-time, local and employer-supported students. All of these categories have a high incidence of students from widening participation backgrounds.

95. Colleges supply a third of higher education students. Research from BIS[81] indicates that 29% came from the most deprived neighborhoods in the country, and 41% (160,395) of the 2011–12 tracked college cohorts were from the lowest two POLAR quintile groups, representing the most educationally disadvantaged areas in England.

96. Colleges, as a major supplier of students to higher education and through their own higher education provision, therefore have an important role to play in contributing to improving access to higher education and supporting the government's ambitions to make faster progress.

DIVERSE PATHWAYS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

97. Many students go to university with traditional GCSE and A-level qualifications but many, particularly mature students, do not. Increasing numbers of students are coming in to higher education through different routes, entering at different times in their lives, choosing different modes of study and studying a broader range of qualifications. Increasing the possibility for entrants to hold different qualifications or to use prior experience as an entrance qualification offers a further opening up of higher education, particularly for those excluded when younger by educational disadvantage. Degree apprenticeships also have an important role here, as do BTECs and other vocational qualifications, along with

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[81] BIS Research Paper 239 (2015) *Progression of college students in England to Higher Education*

Access to Higher Education qualifications[82], foundation degrees and higher national certificates (HNCs) and diplomas.

98. Enhancing the diversity of routes into higher education is good for social mobility and good for meeting the country's skills needs. The government's productivity plan stresses the importance to the UK economy of addressing shortfalls in intermediate, advanced-professional and technical skills. The UK higher education sector already has a strong interest in this agenda and has been working with further education colleges at the local level to deliver vocational qualifications. According to HESA data[83], universities are currently the named providers of 8,917 HNCs, 7,794 higher national diplomas and 51,138 foundation degrees, with many of these delivered in partnership with further education colleges.

99. Universities are also engaging with the delivery of degree apprenticeships. In a very short space of time, around 40 universities have developed and are now delivering degree apprenticeships. From no degree apprenticeships in 2014–15, there are now over 2,000 starts[84]. In autumn 2016, Universities UK will conduct a survey of its members on their approaches to degree apprenticeships. This will provide a better understanding of the strategies, motivations, challenges and the barriers universities face and will help inform future policy. These apprenticeships will play a key role in cementing collaborations between universities and businesses, boosting UK productivity, and providing a new pathway into higher education and to a career. It is anticipated that work-based models of learning such as higher and degree apprenticeships will continue to be important in attracting different groups of students, particularly those who may not previously have considered higher education as a route to employment.

100. Alongside apprenticeships the government has recently set out plans to deliver a streamlined national system of technical qualifications to support young people and adults into skilled employment.[85] Each person at 16 will be given a choice between an academic and a technical option, with a bridging provision to move from one option to another. The technical option will be built around 15 routes to skilled employment with standards being set by employers.

101. Although we endorse the intention to improve the quality and relevance of qualifications and to improve the status of technical education, we are concerned that the technical side only offers the possibility of higher and degree apprenticeships. We believe universities should be able to engage with both options and at all levels.

102. Information on these options, particularly the flexibility provided by the bridging provision, must be integrated into information, advice and guidance in the very early stages.

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[82] https://www.accesstohe.ac.uk/Pages/Default.aspx
[83] HESA Student Record 2013–14
[84] UUK (2016) Supply and demand for higher level skills
[85] Post-16 Skills Plan https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-16-skills-plan-and-independent-report-on-technical-education

Information, advice and guidance for mature students

103. Improving IAG in schools and colleges – and between schools, colleges and universities – is essential to improve the quality of decisions made by young students. But it will do little to assist the choices made by mature students. A properly functioning higher education market will require IAG provision that is able to embrace and accurately reflect *all* students and not just those in a school or college setting. This should include clearer information about loans and financial support as well as the opportunities for flexible learning, including part-time studying options, and how to apply in the absence of a central admissions service for part time.

104. Many universities recognise skills and experience that an applicant may have already gained in the workplace. This process is known as Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)[86]; it can be particularly helpful for mature applicants who have been out of formal education for a long time. To ensure potential applicants are aware of this facility, institutions are encouraged to give prominence to APEL on their websites.

ALTERNATIVE PROVIDERS

105. The 2012 reforms to remove barriers to entry for alternative higher education providers were aimed at encouraging a level playing field for providers of all types. These reforms have been developed in the 2016 White Paper and Higher Education and Research Bill, to further open up the market to alternative providers. There is no comprehensive data available from HESA so it is difficult to estimate the size of the current student body at alternative providers. However, from Student Loans Company data we know that in 2014 there were 37,559 registered students from England who accessed tuition fee loans for study at the 124 alternative providers with specific course designation based in England[87].

106. The above numbers illustrate the breadth of provision by the non–publicly-funded higher education sector. These range from very small, often specialist, institutions, with fewer than 100 students, through to much larger and often more generalist institutions which operate and function like public universities with their own degree awarding powers and/or university title, and academic infrastructure.

107. A 2016 BIS survey[88] found that as many as 46%[89] of students in privately funded institutions were from BME groups, while data from the Student Loans Company shows that students at alternative providers are more likely to come

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[86] APEL or Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning is a process that enables an individual to receive formal recognition for skills and knowledge they already possess and which have not been previously assessed or awarded credit.

[87] There are many more alternative providers of higher education who do not have designated status for their students to access support in terms of loans and grants. Research for BIS by IFF Research Ltd published in May 2016 identified some 732 alternative providers of higher education which served somewhere between 245,000 and 295,000 students as of spring 2014.

[88] BIS (2016) *Understanding the market of alternative higher education providers and their students in 2014*

[89] Recently released HESA data (HESA Experimental SFR 235 https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/15-06-2016/sfr235-alternative-providers

from lower income backgrounds.[90] This is reinforced by data from both the 2016 BIS/IFF report and the 2016 HESA reports which suggest that the student population in alternative providers is predominately from a widening participation background. In view of this, growth in their numbers and in the number of students studying with them may have a positive impact on social mobility.

108. A strong message from an Alternative Providers' Roundtable held to inform this report was that they believed, in many cases, that they were in a strong position to provide diverse pathways into higher education in ways that benefit students from disadvantaged backgrounds. They could also provide smaller, local colleges and universities with specific facilities or course design to enable more vulnerable learners to feel safe and supported, such as one to one teaching and flexible pathways through education allowing students to step in and out of degree courses when they need to.

109. Alternative providers were also able to offer students flexible course pathways towards degree qualifications, as opposed to exit awards should a student wish to leave their course before obtaining a degree. The most recent HESA data suggests that alternative providers offer more flexible routes to degrees with 40% of the students in the HESA sample undertaking HND or HNC courses, and this increases to 50% for those who were not undertaking a 'First Degree'.

110. Both of these factors have significant impact on the retention rates at alternative providers as defined by the HESA non-continuation metric. As we move towards a new regulatory environment for higher education it will be important to ensure that there is a continued focus on promoting, supporting and monitoring participation and retention. Independent Higher Education[91], the representative body for alternative providers, is working with government and sector organisations to ensure that regulations and data around retention better encourage the flexibility that widening participation students' need to achieve social mobility.

111. It will be important that any changes to the regulatory environment ensure that different routes into and through higher education can be supported and encouraged, and that student choice is protected. An awareness of the support needed for those from disadvantaged backgrounds to succeed is also critical. This will involve further consideration of issues such as whether and how alternative providers may access public support for social mobility through the Student Opportunity Fund and the way retention data is used within the context of a new regulatory framework.

112. **We recommend that the Practitioners' Reference Group should explore the flexible pathways and transitions between schools,**

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90 In 2012–13, 77% of students at alternative providers were eligible for the full maintenance grant compared to 43% at public providers.
91 Independent Higher Education http://independenthe.com/

colleges, alternative providers and universities with better data to articulate the transition at each stage.

CHARITIES AND THE THIRD SECTOR

113. There are many charities working either exclusively or in part to address social mobility in higher education, seeing higher education as one of the best levers available to address wider social disadvantage. The charitable or 'third' sector acts as a broker to support universities in widening access and in linking universities with employers at the other end of the student lifecycle.

114. Many charities have a regional focus, with a number working in London and the south east. Sometimes these organisations are associated with particular groups of universities, and can focus on addressing social mobility in a particular professional area, for instance supporting disadvantaged or BME graduates into professional careers. As such, these organisations have a critical role to play in supporting the delivery of the priorities as set out in chapter 1. There is currently no directory or list of all educational charities. Knowing what these are, where they are located and their reach will be important in supporting a more coordinated approach between charities, schools, colleges and universities. This information will also be useful to those engaged with HEFCE's National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOPs) in exploring whether more could be done to link charities with NCOPs. We therefore **recommend that the Practitioners' Reference Group, working with the charitable sector, should develop a map of charitable sector activities.** This will help efforts to raise attainment to be scaled up in 'cold spots' in conjunction with the NCOP funding bids.

115. Alongside charitable sector activities, there are some innovative initiatives looking at how outcomes-based commissioning can support social mobility, particularly on a regional basis. The impact that these initiatives can have deserves close consideration in the context of evaluating how central funds can be allocated most effectively. It is proposed that the potential impact of such models of outcomes-based commissioning should be considered by the Evidence and Impact Exchange we recommend later in the report, and examples of successful initiatives promoted by the exchange (see section on evaluation and impact paragraphs 233–238).

EMPLOYERS

116. This section of the report and its recommendations have been significantly informed by discussions at a roundtable with a group of employers (see Annexe C). This meeting was arranged by the Advisory Group to capture a broader range of views on employers' graduate recruitment practices and how collaboration with the higher education sector could be enhanced.

117. As shown in chapter 1[92] graduate outcomes are substantially influenced by student background. This is partly to do with 'push' factors: there is evidence that students from lower socio-economic groups are less likely to engage in opportunities outside of the curriculum that boost employability (for example, internships, extracurricular activities and opportunities to work / study abroad). However, there are also 'pull' factors associated with employers' practices that affect these data.[93] This is problematic for universities because they cannot easily influence the decisions that employers make as to whom to recruit and at what salary. There is also evidence of a strong bias from certain employers to engage with and recruit from high tariff universities, which typically have a lower proportion of students from lower-socio-economic groups. This is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Visits by top employers to universities campuses[94]
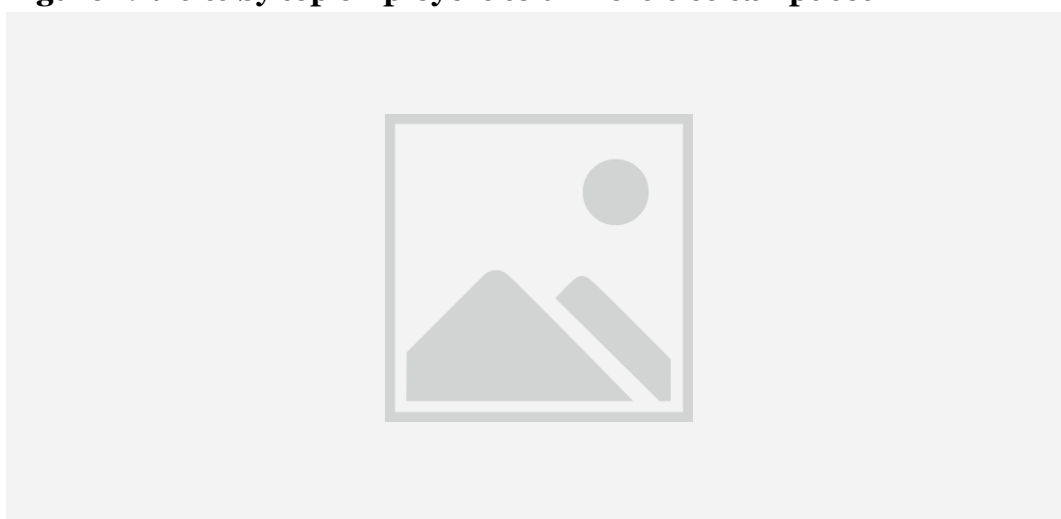
Source: University of Leicester in progress report by the Independent Reviewer on Social Mobility and Child Poverty, 2012

118. While universities have a responsibility to support the progression of students from under-represented groups, employers also have an important role to play, not least in ensuring that their practices do not risk undermining the efforts in the education sector. Collaborative working with universities will play an important role in enhancing social mobility. Indeed, many employers are now taking steps to ensure that their graduate recruitment policies are inclusive. This not only helps ensure that their graduate intake is more representative of the communities they serve, it also supports their own corporate social responsibility agendas.

119. The recent Bridge Group report, *Inspiring policy: graduate outcomes and social mobility*[95], describes how employers are beginning to adopt a more

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[92] HEFCE (2016) Differences in employment outcomes: Comparison of 2008-09 and 2010-11 first degree graduates http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2016/201618/
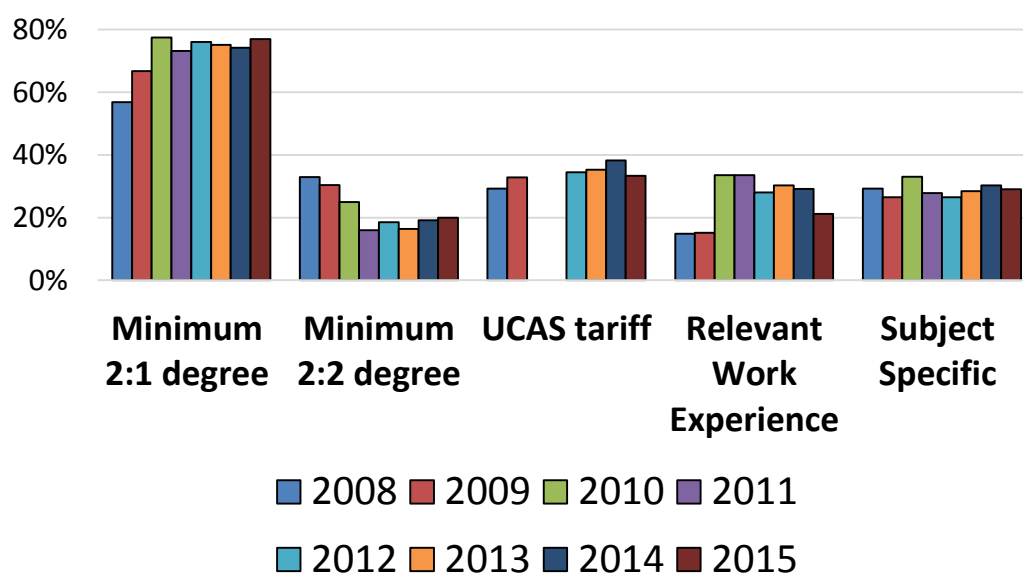[93] The Bridge Group (2016) *Inspiring Policy: Graduate outcomes and Social Mobility* http://www.thebridgegroup.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/BG-Employability-Report-FINAL.pdf
[94] www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/80188/Higher-Education.pdf

inclusive approach to candidates' applications, including removing specific UCAS tariff or A-level scores from their entry requirements, and by masking material during the recruitment process. However, it was also acknowledged that although some employers had begun to publish and monitor data on recruitment this was still limited. In view of this, **we recommend that work should be undertaken with graduate employers to coordinate and promote the monitoring and publication of data on recruitment of under-represented groups, particularly graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds, and BME and disabled graduates.** This will require a common understanding of socio-economic backgrounds, and an approach is currently being developed by the Bridge Group in partnership with the Cabinet Office[96].

120. The use of screening criteria is perceived to be especially limiting to employers' efforts to support social mobility. The latest data in Figure 2 below, from the Association of Graduate Recruiters, reveals that around 40% of leading graduate employers still have a minimum UCAS tariff requirement, and a similar proportion require relevant work experience. Although these criteria may be useful to help sift through candidates in large-volume recruitment, we know from the data that candidates from lower socio-economic backgrounds may be less likely to achieve the higher grades at A-level (or equivalent qualifications) and may have less access to relevant work experience.

Figure 2: Screening criteria used by leading graduate employers

Source, Association of Graduate Recruiters: 2015

[95] The Bridge Group (2016) *Inspiring Policy: Graduate Outcomes and Social Mobility* http://www.thebridgegroup.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/BG-Employability-Report-FINAL.pdf
[96] Cabinet Office (2016) *Engagement Document: Developing a Common set of Measures for Employers on the Socio-Economic Backgrounds of their Workforce and Applicants* https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/525928/6_2224_co_engagement_document_employer_measures_on_socio_economic_background.pdf

121. How employers engage with students on higher education campuses was also raised at our roundtable discussion. Employers were aware that in delivering recruitment events at an institution they were only able to reach self-selected students. Although this practice is to be encouraged, employers were also keen to explore how these engagement opportunities could reach a wider range of students, including those from lower socio-economic groups, who may be less likely to opt into such events that are typically held in the evening or could be off campus. In view of this the Advisory Group supports the recommendation by the Bridge Group in its research into socio-economic diversity in the Fast Stream[97] that employers should, where possible and desirable, engage academically with students, delivering workshops, case studies, and co-delivering seminars and lectures. This form of engagement would enable a more diverse audience to be reached and is likely to be more impactful in terms of encouraging students who may not have previously considered applying.

122. To support the sharing of good practice in recruitment **we recommend that consideration is given to exploring how best to share the evidence on effective practice and evaluation of interventions and outcomes, potentially by linking into the new Evidence and Impact Exchange proposed later in our recommendations** (see paragraph 236) as well as options for benchmarking performance. This will require employers to take a more robust approach to monitoring candidates' socio-economic backgrounds and to ensuring evaluation and transparency in recruitment practices.

123. **We recommend better coordination of outreach activities between employers and between employers and universities. This could include the promotion of sector-specific collaboration models and career advice**. This was highlighted in our employers' roundtable and could involve coordination of activities and coordination in terms of how to measure impact and evaluation. It could also include better feedback loops from graduate employers to higher education institutions about the employability skills of graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds, and where more support was needed, along with better coordination of careers advice between universities and employers. This feedback should include evidence about where candidates are not successful in the selection process, such that specific interventions can be designed to address this. Consideration could also be given to supporting and promoting sector-specific collaborative models to deliver more effective outreach, for instance as with PRIME (for the legal profession) or Access Accountancy (for accountancy).

124. Given the significance of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the UK labour market as a destination for graduates, **we recommend that Universities UK, working with employers and their representative bodies, should explore how universities can support SMEs and other**

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97 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/socio-economic-diversity-in-the-fast-stream-the-bridge-report

employers through a regional approach to tackling disadvantage. This should include engaging with regional structures such as Local Enterprise Partnerships and City Deals, and the broader role universities play in their local communities.

125. There was interest from employers in exploring how they and universities could improve collaboration more broadly. **To support this Universities UK through its work with its members and employers, will explore how to increase and enhance the links between employers and the curriculum and the student experience, through activities such as placements, internships and mentoring as well as new models of delivery and partnerships such as degree apprenticeships.** This could build on the evidence of employability activities set out in access agreements and the evidence obtained from Universities UK's Skills Review[98], which will explore collaboration between universities and employers in more detail.

126. The employers who participated in our roundtable discussion were keen to continue working with Universities UK and GuildHE and agreed that the roundtable should evolve into an Employers' Forum which would act as the mechanism for taking this work forward.

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[98] UUK's Skills Review issued a call for evidence in September 2016. This sought feedback from employers on skills and employability strategies, the value of work experience, addressing the mismatch of skills, and the most effective approaches to supporting skills development and securing employment. For more information see http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/Pages/review-of-skills.aspx

3. POLICY AND A CHANGING HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

127. The last chapter focused primarily on the wider environment and some of the changes needed to ensure higher education is working effectively with partners and is well placed to meet the challenging objectives identified in chapter 1. This chapter examines some of the higher education-specific areas relating to the role of competition, the developing market, government policy, funding and regulation, the shift from grants to loans, and other external factors. It also considers the actions needed to deliver a higher education system that allows universities to contribute most fully to social mobility and to ensure that all students are supported to achieve their full potential.

INCREASED STUDENT CHOICE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A HIGHER EDUCATION MARKET

128. The reforms set out by the government in its 2011 White Paper and further developed in its 2016 White Paper and the Higher Education and Research Bill have been and continue to be significant, impacting on the perceptions and behaviours of students and on institutional strategy and decision-making. This in turn has implications for the contribution that higher education makes to social mobility.

129. One of the most significant changes has been the removal of restrictions on the overall numbers of students who can go to university. Removing artificial limits on the numbers of students an institution can recruit has removed one potential barrier to access. It has also offered opportunities to develop and meet demand for more flexible and creative routes into and through higher education. However, as we have already highlighted in chapter 2, for these opportunities to be fully realised, effective provision of information, advice and guidance is required. This should have the capacity to embrace and reflect the diversity of students – both young and mature – and of institutions (see chapter 5 for recommendations on information, advice and guidance).

130. The removal of student number controls has been one contributing factor to an increase in competition between universities to attract domestic undergraduate students. While there has been limited competition in terms of fee levels[99], institutions have aimed to maintain and in some cases increase their student numbers (and therefore their market share and income) by[100]:

- scrutinising the courses they offer to gain a better understanding of their relative market position and the needs of the student population they attract

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[99] The former Office for Fair Trading found in 2014 that there were a number of reasons why tuition fees are concentrated around the level of the fee cap, including the increase in fees occurring simultaneously with a reduction in teaching funding, excess demand for university places overall, demand not being particularly price sensitive, and the potential for students to interpret lower fees as an indicator of lower quality.
[100] Universities UK (2013) *The funding environment for universities* and Universities UK (2014) *Trends in undergraduate recruitment*

- distinguishing their courses from those of other institutions, both nationally and regionally, through marketing activities and advertising campaigns
- developing offer-making strategies through examining the qualifications of students, coordinating offer-making across the institution, introducing or expanding the use of unconditional offers, making earlier offers, and improving the speed with which offers are made
- introducing financial and other incentives to attract students, and the use of scholarships and bursaries
- an increasing focus on outcomes, particularly graduate employment measures, as part of the information set provided to students, and greater collaboration with employers
- improving the provision of information for students, from pre-application to application, and then to post-entry stages; institutions have become more conscious of the range of information students use to make their decisions, including prospectuses, course listings sites (such as ucas.com, unistats, Which?, whatuni), league tables, school visits, open days and higher education fairs

131. Greater competition has acted as a driver for institutions to focus on recruiting students from lower participation backgrounds, including students from disadvantaged backgrounds. At the aggregate level this should mean that the market is working with the grain of widening participation and to support social mobility (see paragraphs 169–172 for progress in widening participation). At an institutional level it may, however, also mean that a limited number of institutions are recruiting larger numbers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, thereby narrowing rather than expanding their social mix. This is an area which requires further monitoring and analysis by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)/ the new Office for Students (OfS), but it is unlikely that increased competition on its own will be able to achieve an increase in progress in widening participation.

132. In addition, the ability of institutions to recruit and retain students will impact on their overall income, which in turn will affect their ability to invest fee income in widening access and student success activities.

133. Other consequences of increased competition include the potential disincentive for collaboration between institutions, and potentially, at least for the time being, an increasing focus on traditional three-year, full-time, on-campus first degree provision[101]. Higher fees have also led to students becoming (understandably) more demanding, which for some institutions has necessitated new approaches to widening participation and support for students, including more flexible delivery and teaching and learning tailored to the individual. There is also evidence that greater exposure to market forces has led to an increased focus on evaluating activities and providing evidence on the impact of university spending on widening participation and student success.[102]

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[101] Student Funding Panel (2015) *An analysis of the design, impact and options for reform of the student fees and loans system in England*
[102] OFFA (2016) *Outcomes of access agreement monitoring for 2014–15*

COORDINATION IN GOVERNMENT POLICY ON SOCIAL MOBILITY ACROSS SCHOOLS, FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION

134. Government policy on social mobility between schools, colleges and universities has not been as effectively coordinated as it could be. This has led, for example, to different definitions and indicators of disadvantage being used between the Department for Education (DfE) and the former Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), with the same student potentially being characterised in two different ways as they progressed from school to university. The recent changes to the machinery of government reforms, with responsibility for students moving from BIS into DfE, presents an unparalleled opportunity to address this issue.

FUNDING AND REGULATION

Sources of funding of widening access and student success

135. This section sets out the funding sources involved in supporting widening access and student outcomes. This covers investment by institutions, and government funding allocated to institutions as demonstrated in Figure 3. Details of the type of activities and interventions are set out in chapter 4.

Figure 3: Sources of funding for widening participation and student success in 2016

136. Changes to public spending and the 2010 reforms to higher education funding significantly changed the role and scope of institutional spending and government funding and how oversight of these two sources is maintained.

Access agreements

137. The reforms to higher education changed the composition of income institutions receive, with an increase in fee levels for domestic undergraduate students accompanied by reductions in teaching grants. In order to charge fees above £6,000 a year, institutions were required to set out in access agreements the range of support to under-represented groups that they intend to offer, both financial

and non-financial. This builds on the previous approach whereby access agreements would show the proportion of fee income above basic levels that institutions would invest in support measures, to be agreed with, and monitored by, the Office for Fair Access (OFFA), and updated annually.

138. In 2011–12 universities in England spent £444.1 million on access agreements, increasing to £725.4 million[103] by 2014–15. This has since increased further, with planned expenditure for 2017–18 access agreements standing at £833.5 million.[104] As we move towards a steady state in the new funding system, expenditure is expected to reach £3 billion for the four years from 2015–16 onwards (in cash terms). This excludes the impact of inflationary increases in the fee cap which would also provide cash, but not real terms, increases to total expenditure.

Teaching funding for widening access and successful student outcomes

139. Government grants to support widening access were until 2015–16 allocated to institutions via student opportunity funding by HEFCE, which was intended to help meet the extra costs associated with recruiting and retaining students from under-represented groups, which cannot be met through income received from tuition fees. In its 2015 spending review statement, the government announced that this funding would reduce by up to half by 2019–20. Responding to the reduction HEFCE held a consultation on how best to target the remaining funding. This has resulted in an increase in funding for the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) from £30 million to £60 million in 2017–18 and the removal of formulaic allocations for widening access for part-time and full-time students. Support for disabled students will continue at the increased level (see paragraphs 153–155), but its investment in supporting student success will be targeted more intensively on those institutions recruiting the highest proportions of at risk students from disadvantaged backgrounds and part-time students. Given the recent declines in the number of part-time students entering higher education it is hoped that this investment will help support higher education institutions in providing a viable part-time offer.

140. The need to commit to investment in widening access and student access (as well as to non-financial measures) as part of access agreements has been a key driver behind an overall increase in total funding. Increases in institutional investment have more than offset the decrease in government grant funding via HEFCE. Figure 4 shows that in 2015–16 £1.1 billion was spent in total, representing a 34% increase in cash terms and 26% in real terms compared to 2011–12.

Shift in the balance of funding

143. The balance of funding has shifted, with investment from institutions increasing by 62% and government grant funding decreasing by 0.2% since 2011–12. This has resulted in a shift of the balance in investment from government grants to 34% in 2015–16 compared with 45% in 2011–12. In 2015–16, universities invested an average of 25% of their additional fee income (the portion of fee above £6,000) on

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[103] OFFA (2016) *Outcomes of access agreement monitoring for 2014-15*
[104] https://www.offa.org.uk/press-releases/2017-18-access-agreement-decisions/

widening access and student success activities – though individual percentages ranged from 10% to 54%.

Figure 4: Funding for widening access and student success from 2011 to 2016
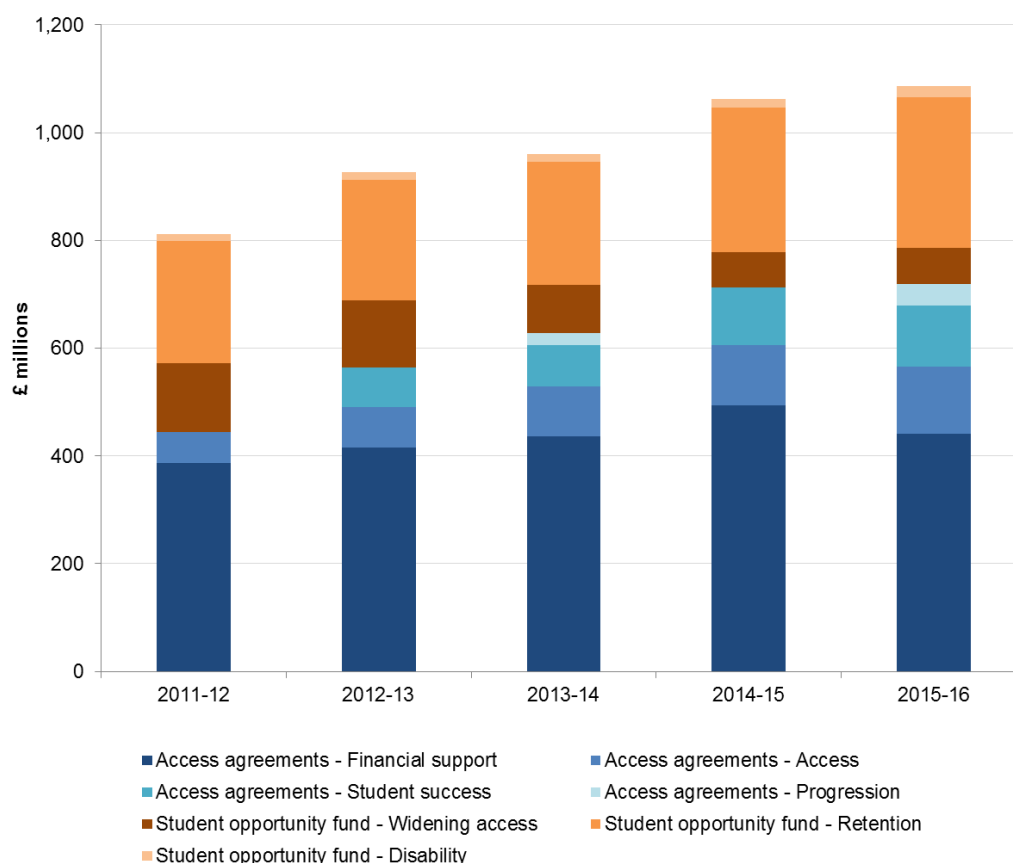
Source: OFFA and HEFCE

144. Although the balance of funding has shifted from direct public funding to tuition fee income, it is important that an element of direct public funding continues for the following reasons:

- The competitive environment may lead to institutions spending less on widening participation activities than desired. Evidence submitted to Universities UK's Student Funding Panel in 2015 showed that there are competing priorities for the use of fee income, for example running surpluses to manage year-on-year uncertainty in student numbers or to invest in capital expenditure[105].

- The competitive environment can lead to less collaboration between institutions due to increased competition for student numbers, particularly at the local level[106]; however, we know that collaboration is important for improving access for underrepresented groups.

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[105] UUK (2015) *Student Funding Panel Report*, pages 43–44
[106] HEFCE (2013) *Literature review of research into widening participation,* which found that the increasingly competitive environment had impacted on more collaborative approaches

- Institutions that recruit a greater proportion of students from under-represented groups face additional costs in supporting them. Student success in higher education correlates closely with prior entry qualifications. Students with lower 'traditional' qualifications (such as A-levels), or 'non-traditional' qualifications (for instance vocational Level 3) or no formal entry qualifications at all, are most at risk of withdrawing early from their studies and not fulfilling their potential; as such these students may need more support to achieve the best possible outcomes. This additional support, which can include academic as well as pastoral support, incurs additional costs for institutions. These institutions may also face financial constraints in meeting these additional costs if they are unable to increase their fees to the upper limit of the fee cap (for example, due to student demand).

145. While mainstreaming some types of activities can help to reduce the additional costs associated with delivering support to under-represented groups, some additional individual-level costs remain, such as in the provision of support for disabled students. This includes the need to develop inclusive teaching and learning environments and the investment needed to move to a social model of disability (see paragraphs 153–155).

146. Alongside the reductions in public funding to support widening participation activity, inflationary increases in the fee cap for institutions performing well in the Teaching Excellence Framework (see paragraphs 157–162) will be introduced from 2017–18. This means that the balance of funding for widening participation activities from public funding to fee income is likely to shift further over time. This begs the question of how remaining public funding can be targeted most effectively to support the success of students from under-represented groups across their time at university. We believe there is a strong case for future funding and regulation in this area to be more evidence led. An Evidence and Impact Exchange, as proposed later in this report, could develop a robust evidence base on priority areas of focus for widening participation and on the initiatives and activities that are successful in supporting access.

147. Better evaluation of the impact of spending is needed to inform future investment by both government and institutions. This is currently hampered by the split of oversight of public and institutional widening participation funding between HEFCE and OFFA. The creation of the OfS will create an opportunity to address this. We return to evaluation and impact in chapter 4.

148. It will be important that the OfS works with the sector to develop a clearer, joined-up national approach for tackling the priorities highlighted in this report and the government's ambitions for social mobility. To support this we encourage higher education institutions to engage fully in the development of the OfS to ensure that its functions will facilitate the greatest levels of progress against social mobility ambitions.

SHIFTS IN FUNDING FROM GRANTS TO LOANS, AND THE INTRODUCTION OF NEW LOANS

149. The previous paragraphs refer to changes to funding and the potential impact of this on the work of institutions to promote social mobility. However, the significant shift from grants to loans signalled in the 2015 Budget, the 2015 Autumn Statement and the 2016 Budget may impact on student behaviour. These changes include:

- the replacement of all undergraduate student maintenance grants with loans from 2016–17, resulting in a £766 increase in overall maintenance support for students with a household income of £25,000 or less at the cost of increased loan debt
- the replacement of grants for students studying nursing, midwifery and allied health subjects with student loans from 2017–18, resulting in a 25% increase in financial support available for living costs during study; at the same time the government is removing the cap on the number of places universities can offer in these subjects
- the introduction of maintenance loans for part-time undergraduate students from 2018–19, which it is estimated will benefit around 150,000 students a year by 2020 and the further relaxation of the Equivalent or Lower Qualifications policy with eligibility for tuition fee loans extended to part-time students
- the introduction of loans of up to £10,000 for postgraduate Masters courses from 2016–17 and the development of a similar scheme to provide loans of up to £25,000 for doctoral students from 2018–19

150. All of these changes will have separate, and also combined, effects on both students and institutions in the delivery of activities in support of widening participation. For students, the changes result in a significant increase in the level of borrowing, taking into account the cumulative impact of taking out loans at various levels of study[107]. Some evidence also suggests that those from low-income backgrounds, ethnic minorities, female lone parents and mature student groups are more debt averse[108] than other student groups.

151. While the changes may mean increased levels of debt for some students, the changes do provide increased overall support for living costs. For some groups, such as those studying part-time or for postgraduate courses, this will result in the availability of support for living costs where previously there was very little or none available. This may encourage those who currently find support for living costs a barrier – such as those with low incomes or childcare responsibilities[109] – to undertake part-time undergraduate study, or engage in postgraduate study. The raising of the age limit on Masters loans to include more mature students is welcome.

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[107] For example, students could potentially have loans for further education, undergraduate and postgraduate study leading to significant levels of debt that will need to be paid back concurrently.
[108] BIS (2015) Equality analysis: Freezing the student loan repayment threshold
[109] ibid

152. Although we know that previous major changes to state support for students, such as the introduction of fee loans, did not have a negative impact on participation, it is not possible to know how this shift from grant to loans may affect participation among underrepresented groups. It will be important that HEFCE/OfS and DfE monitor the impact of these changes closely.

GOVERNMENT POLICY ON DISABLED STUDENTS

153. In 2015 the government announced changes to its approach to allocating Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) funding. The changes put a greater onus on higher education institutions to fund support for disabled students, removing DSA for certain types of non-medical help, specialist accommodation and costs for various computer accessories. The aim was to move away from the medical approach towards inclusive models of support. This was reinforced in the 2016 HEFCE grant letter, which identified the development of inclusive approaches to supporting disabled students as a priority for HEFCE teaching funding.

154. In 2014–15 HEFCE carried out a review of the provision and support for disabled students, focusing on support for students with specific learning difficulties and students with mental health problems or intensive support needs. Alongside differences in attainment outcomes as set out in chapter 1, the review highlighted that institutions faced a number of additional challenges in supporting disabled students. This included responding to the changes in DSAs; the rapid rise in students reporting disabilities, particularly mental health issues; moving to a social model of support[110]; working with external agencies and increased pressure on resources – all at a time when institutions increasingly need to fund widening participation activities from tuition fee income.

155. To support the sector in meeting these challenges, particularly the move towards the social model of disability, HEFCE has increased funding for disabled students from £20 million in 2015–16 to £40 million in 2016–17 and has announced that this level of funding will be maintained for 2017–18. This will be important in facilitating institutions to continue to invest in this area. We explore how the sector is responding to these challenges in chapter 4.

POSTGRADUATE FUNDING POLICY

156. For 2016–17, HEFCE has allocated over £400 million in taught and research postgraduate education. The current teaching funding model for taught postgraduate education mirrors the undergraduate model and aims to address areas where the money institutions receive through tuition fees alone may be insufficient to meet all their costs. Since 2012–13, HEFCE has provided a supplement of £1,100 for postgraduate taught students. The 2016–17 allocations announced in March 2016 included around £164 million to support postgraduate taught students. In order to support postgraduate taught students, particularly those who would not otherwise progress to this level, HEFCE allocated £75

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[110] This emphasises that disability is caused by the way society is organised, rather than by a person's impairment or difference and looks at ways of removing barriers that restrict life choices for disabled people.

million through the Postgraduate Support Scheme[111] over the years 2014–15 and 2015–16. The first year funded a number of pilot projects and the second distributed £50 million funding to higher education institutions via a formulaic allocation. An evaluation of the first year by Paul Wakeling[112] at the University of York highlighted that funding was a key issue for many home masters students, with two-thirds self-funding and noted that until the new loans for masters students began in autumn 2016, there had been no 'automatic' funding available. The outcomes of the evaluation of the 2015–16 scheme, due in spring 2017, will be important in exploring whether the loans are sufficient to enable the most disadvantaged students to participate and if the loans have widened access as opposed to just increasing access.

THE TEACHING EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK

157. The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), is due to be introduced in stages, with a trial of the full assessment process introduced in academic year 2017–18. It is being designed to 'provide students with the information they need to judge teaching quality'. In relation to social mobility the TEF aims to create 'incentives that reward institutions who do best at retention and progression of disadvantaged students through their college years'. Institutions which are successful in the TEF are able, should they wish, to maintain their fees in line with inflation from academic year 2017–18.

158. Although students from disadvantaged groups often perform poorly in some of the proposed TEF measures, it is suggested that the metrics for these groups will be appropriately benchmarked. This will be supported by an approach that allows for institutions to supplement the metrics with contextual and supporting evidence, which can include evidence relevant to social mobility. It is essential that this benchmarking is based on robust statistical models that have the confidence of the sector. The basket of metrics should also be reviewed regularly. For example, there is a growing body of evidence suggesting that the labour market outcomes of disadvantaged students are poorer, even comparing students taking the same subjects at the same institutions[113]. Thus any labour market outcome indicator used in the TEF must not discourage institutions from recruiting disadvantaged students.

159. As the TEF develops, close attention will also need to be given to the robustness of statistical benchmarking of institutional performance based on subject mix and student intake, approaches to splitting of metrics by student characteristics, and the presentation of other contextual factors, such as local economic context. It will be important to demonstrate that the final judgements on TEF ratings are reached by the panel in a transparent and defensible way, using a set of robust criteria which allow for and take into account diversity across the sector and the different contexts in which institutions are operating. The diversity of

[111] http://www.hefce.ac.uk/sas/PSS/
[112] Ibid.
[113] Jack Britton, Lorraine Dearden, Neil Shephard and Anne Vignoles (2016) IFS Working Paper (W16/06) *How English domiciled graduate earnings vary with gender, institution attended, subject and socio-economic background*

pedagogical practice and missions should also be reflected in the qualitative elements of the TEF.

160. The TEF ratings should also make a constructive contribution to student decision making, including students from disadvantaged backgrounds. There should be a process of testing how much weight students give to an institution's TEF rating against other influencing factors (such as fees, location, reputation, course design etc) when making their decision on which institution to attend, with supporting material explaining what the ratings mean.

161. The TEF should be evaluated in order to understand how it has influenced student decision making and institutional recruitment and the impact on social mobility and widening participation objectives. More specifically, the piloting of discipline-level assessments (TEF 3) should not proceed until the lessons regarding the costs and benefits of TEF 2 have been analysed.

162. Universities UK will continue to work closely with the DfE and the higher education sector throughout the development of the TEF to ensure that it supports students in making decisions and does not hamper institutions' efforts in supporting social mobility.

THE IMPACT OF LEAGUE TABLES

163. The effect of league table metrics on institutions' behaviour has been raised many times during the course of the Advisory Group's work. Currently all of the main national league tables – the Guardian University Guide, the Complete University Guide, and The Sunday Times and The Times Good University Guide – are based on assessments of undergraduate provision and are constructed from publicly available data collected by HESA, HEFCE and other organisations. The metrics used by these three league tables are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The metrics used by three national league table compliers

The Guardian University Guide 2016[114]

Entry scores
National Student Survey – teaching
National Student Survey – assessment and feedback
National Student Survey – overall satisfaction
Student staff ratios
Value-added scores
Expenditure per student
Career prospects

The Complete University Guide[115]

Entry standards
Student satisfaction
Research quality
Research intensity
Graduate prospects
Student-staff ratio
Academic services spend
Facilities spend
Good honours
Degree completion

The Sunday Times and the Times Good University Guide[116]

Entry standards
National Student Survey – teaching quality
National Student Survey – student experience
Research quality
Graduate prospects
Firsts and 2:1s
Completion rates
Student-staff ratios
Services and facilities spend

164. In contrast to the approach taken in the TEF, where the assessment methodology aims to 'create incentives that reward institutions who do best at retention and progression of disadvantaged students', some of the metrics used in the most prominent league tables can create disincentives for institutions to recruit students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

165. As shown above, all the league tables use entry standards (reflecting the average attainment on entry as recorded by UCAS tariff scores[117]) as a metric. As some underrepresented student groups may have low pre-higher education attainment – including as a result of having less opportunity to take additional qualifications – accepting significant numbers of these students, for example on the basis of

[114] Full methodology https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/may/23/methodology-behind-the-guardian-university-guide-2017

[115] Full methodology http://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/league-tables/methodology/

[116] Full methodology http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/education/gooduniversityguide/tables/

[117] https://www.ucas.com/ucas/undergraduate/getting-started/entry-requirements/tariff/tariff-tables

contextual data that the institution may have used, may result in a reduction in the average entry tariff for an institution. This could have a knock-on negative effect on the institution's position in the league table and therefore mitigate against accepting greater numbers of these students. Currently only The Guardian includes a 'value-added score' which partially addresses this issue by applying a greater weight to students with lower than average attainment who go on to achieve a good outcome.

166. Chapter 1 of this report illustrated how some underrepresented student groups may fare poorly in the job market after graduation, despite attending the same university and studying the same subject as students from advantaged backgrounds. Graduate prospects is also a metric used by all three league tables. Thus, as above, the recruitment of disadvantaged students and students from BME groups could impact on an institution's performance in the league tables, and could therefore act as a disincentive to recruiting these students.

167. In view of these concerns, **Universities UK will arrange a roundtable discussion with league table compilers, the higher education sector and experts in the area to understand the potential for league tables to impact on social mobility. These discussions could produce a common set of principles and commitments to underpin the development of league tables. How these tables are interpreted by parents, students and schools is equally important and should also be taken into account.**

4. HIGHER EDUCATION

168. Higher education institutions and providers are diverse, with different strategies, strengths, priorities and student cohorts. However, all institutions have a strong commitment to addressing the challenges of social mobility. In this chapter we set out how institutions are using investment in social mobility and explore how the sector supports the student at each stage of the student lifecycle, with case studies illustrating some of what they are doing. We then explore how institutions, with government and the other parts of the education system, can work together to improve social mobility.

PROGRESS SO FAR

169. There is always more that universities can do to support social mobility, but we have seen considerable progress to date. Between 2009 and 2015 both the proportion and the absolute number of young full-time undergraduate students in England from the most disadvantaged group (POLAR3 quintile 1 increased, by 19% and 29%[118] respectively, and university entry rates for this group increased by 36%[119]. There have also been increases in the proportion (up by 47%) and absolute number (up by 49%) of full-time undergraduates who self-report as disabled. This may represent an opening up of higher education to those with disabilities (though it may also be due to changes in student behaviour in terms of declaring disabilities)[120]. There has also been a 14% increase in the number of full-time UK undergraduates from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups at English higher education institutions, with comparisons with the 2011 census suggesting that all non-white ethnic groups are now well represented in the sector[121]. Examples of the type of activities to support widening participation and student success are set out in the text box below.

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[118] HESA (2008, 2016) *UKPIs: Widening participation of under-represented groups (table T1a)*
[119] UCAS (2015) *End of Cycle Report 2015*
[120] HESA (2016) Student Record
[121] UUK analysis of Office for National Statistics (2011) Census: Aggregate Data
http://infuse.ukdataservice.ac.uk

Examples of student support by universities

- Outreach activities into schools, sometimes involving families, to raise attainment and encourage participation and offer support when making applications. These can involve student volunteers as mentors and advisors in local primary and secondary schools and to the parents of school children.
- Development of partnerships with schools, including sponsorship of schools and academies.
- Activities to encourage participation and support student success targeted at specific student groups, such as care leavers, students estranged from their parents[122], mature students, refugees and asylum seekers.
- The use of data by institutions outside of prior attainment. This could include socio-economic background data, self-declared information by the applicant (eg that they have been in care), pre-applicant data from outreach and widening participation activities, or background information provided in the application.
- Use of 'open educational resources[123]', in schools and elsewhere, to support participation and student success once in higher education.
- Supporting the development of alternative pathways, for example progression from further education to higher education through articulated progression routes, the provision of foundation years, etc.
- Provision of information, advice and guidance to support students entering and moving on to further study and employment.
- Provision of financial support to students, including disabled students.
- Activities to support the transition and retention of undergraduates, for example partnering them with local employers, with a particular focus on disadvantaged students, student mentors, providing placements and work experience.
- Provision of opportunities for social action and extracurricular activities to support employability.

170. To deliver these activities, higher education institutions and others – including government – have invested substantial resources, all of which have been critical in contributing to the significant progress seen in social mobility. Details of the scale and balance of funding are set out in chapter 3.

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[122] For further information on the portal available for adults estranged from their family see http://standalone.org.uk/about/
[123] 'Open educational resources' are teaching and learning materials that are freely available online for everyone to use, whether you are an instructor, student or self-learner.

171. It is worth noting that some of the interventions highlighted in the text box above are likely to form part of a university's broader commitment to improving the quality of its teaching and learning, improving the wider student experience, supporting growth at a local and regional level, and strengthening civic society. Because of this, some activities may not necessarily be explicitly categorised as targeted at supporting social mobility or addressing inequality. It is therefore important that the work of institutions and providers in this area is seen as part of a broader institutional strategy.

172. There are over 130 higher education institutions in England that report to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), all of which operate in their own particular setting with different aims and different goals – and therefore with different widening participation, retention and progression issues. All of these institutions will have a strong commitment to addressing the challenges of social mobility but the way that they do this will differ. [124] One of the reasons why the sector has been able to make progress on widening participation in recent years is precisely that its diversity and range of missions allow institutions to respond to different local, regional and national circumstances – and most importantly respond to the increasingly diverse requirements of students.

DIVERSITY OF PROVISION

173. Universities offer a diverse range of provision offering all-important flexibility to a broad range of students. The diversity of students entering higher education is increasing: not all students are able or want to enter higher education at 18, study full-time, or study for a degree. As such, higher education institutions are adapting to students with different priorities and needs, including when and how they learn, the experiences they want and the support they need. The text box below illustrates the different ways in which higher education is delivered and can be experienced. This diversity in provision is critical in ensuring that older learners have the opportunity to participate.

Different delivery models within higher education

Different entry routes into higher education

- More students are presenting with vocational qualifications such as BTECs or a portfolio of vocational qualifications and A-levels.
- The Access to Higher Education Diploma is an important qualification aimed at providing a second chance for adults who left school without the qualifications needed to access higher education.
- Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) is an important entry route for mature students who may have already gained skills through working.
- Degree apprenticeships and work-based learning (WBL) routes are important for those wishing to 'learn and earn'.

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[124] *The Uses and Impact of HEFCE funding for widening participation. Report to HEFCE by CFE and Edge Hill University*

The timing of entry – multiple entry points

- Some universities and alternative providers have multiple entry points and are open for study most weeks of the year.

Length of study

- This varies and can include two-year degrees and the ability to study flexibly, ie taking modules and building up to a qualification.

The mode of study

- This refers to those who wish to study more flexibly or part time. There are a number of models for organising delivery of part-time learning:

    - complete integration: part-time and full-time students learn together
    - partial integration: part-time and full-time students learn together for a portion of time
    - no integration
- Full-time and part-time learning and teaching can vary, for example this could take place:

    - in partnership with or at other educational institutions (this could be with a further education or overseas college under validation or franchise arrangements)
    - at employers' premises (ie work-based learning)
    - electronically (ie through on-line distance learning. This could also include combinations, eg a blended mode which combines on-line and face-to-face learning and teaching)

Range of qualifications taken in higher education

- Such as those below Level 6 on the FHEQ framework[125] (foundation degrees, diplomas, higher national diplomas). The UK higher education sector already has a strong interest in this agenda and has been working with further education colleges and alternative providers at the local level to deliver vocational qualifications. According to HESA data[126], universities are currently the named providers of 8,917 HNCs, 7,794 higher national diplomas and 51,138 foundation degrees, with many of these delivered in partnership with further education colleges.
- Higher and degree apprenticeships. Significant activity to develop and deliver technical education is also under way across the higher education sector. This includes bespoke courses for employers, skills masterclasses, and skills training sessions.

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[125] For information on higher education frameworks see http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2718#.V_N4I_krIYo
[126] HESA Student Record 2013–14

Higher education provision at further education colleges
• Whereby a student is registered and taught at a further education college.

Franchised provision
• Whereby a student is taught at a further education college but is registered at a university.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH STUDENTS AND STUDENTS' UNIONS

174. The relationship between students' unions and their universities is critical in ensuring that strategies to widen participation and support student success meet the changing needs of both new and potential students. We recognise that it is important that unions and institutions work together to create a shared understanding of where such strategies should focus. We recognise that no single model of widening participation will meet the needs of every individual, and acknowledge that this is both part of the challenge and part of the solution to effective collaboration between students' unions and universities.

175. The notion of 'engaging students' is heard frequently in higher education but it can be interpreted in different ways. In this context it means encouraging active participation, raising aspiration, generating a sense of belonging and wellbeing within the university, and creating individuals who are better prepared to contribute to and engage in the world around them when they graduate. Meeting these goals requires constructive engagement between unions and institutions. Students' unions know their students, and are able to advocate on their behalf and give an insight into the needs of students from many different backgrounds. This knowledge can then inform institutional policy and ensure that this is based on what will have the greatest benefit for those who need it most. We encourage universities to continue to work with their students' unions and build on the excellent work that is already underway to support access and student support. This should help ensure that widening participation work is truly co-produced, appropriately targeted, and effectively recognises, reaches and gives voice to the individuals it is designed to support.

OUTREACH

176. Universities commit significant investment to support outreach activities, as demonstrated in 2017–18 access agreements[127], where higher education institutions committed £171.1 million on pre-entry activities to raise attainment and aspirations (up from £149.5 million in 2016–17). The type of activity and approach will vary according to an institution's mission and the local agenda. Examples of activities include:

- outreach work in communities
- homework clubs

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[127] https://www.offa.org.uk/press-releases/2017-18-access-agreement-decisions/

- campus visits and taster days
- mentoring and e-mentoring
- student ambassadors
- masterclasses
- summer schools and activity in schools and colleges
- conferences, study days, presentations, workshops, revision days etc

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Case study: De Montfort University's Square Mile Project

De Montfort University's Square Mile project uses the university's academic expertise and student volunteers to provide free support to local primary and secondary schools. This support ranges from mentoring in maths, English and science, to providing speech therapy support and IT training for parents and children. The project helps children in the local community to improve their academic attainment, prepare them for university and, perhaps most importantly, give them a sense of belonging to a university community, helping to improve their access to and retention in higher education.

The project also improves De Montfort students' employability, giving them skills which help them stand out when they graduate. Because many of the Square Mile projects are embedded in degree programmes, they are open to students from all backgrounds, helping to reduce some of the employment gaps outlined in chapter 1.

Case study: University of Manchester Higher Partnership

Through the Greater Manchester Higher Partnership, the University of Manchester has commissioned Brightside to deliver an online mentoring intervention with a targeted group of young white male learners from lower socio-economic groups across Greater Manchester in 2016. This project aims to address the barriers which prevent white males from working-class backgrounds from achieving their academic potential, and accessing higher education and work-related experiences. Evaluation from this pilot will inform development of future activities with this targeted cohort.

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177. Although aspiration-raising activities can be helpful, in our discussions with schools it was clear that raising aspirations was not generally an area of concern – most pupils had aspirations to do well. Outreach work to support the raising of expectations and to create a high expectations culture was generally considered much more important.[128]

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[128] Interestingly, this mirrors the language used in the Schools White Paper 'Education Excellence Everywhere' and would imply that changing the language from 'aspirations' to 'expectations' would be more appropriate.

178. Schools also welcomed a much greater focus on outreach activities to support the raising of attainment and standards, such as subject study days or even bespoke subject-specific support. Given the importance of attainment as a lever for enabling individuals to progress, an increasing focus by the higher education sector on activities to support attainment and raising standards is important. **We recommend a greater focus on academically-based outreach activities targeted at supporting attainment and raising standards and university level skills. To support this we propose that the Evidence and Impact Exchange should conduct a systematic review of the evidence base.**

179. This is particularly important for white working-class children, where research by LKMco[129] shows that low attainment at school accounts for much of the problem of low participation in higher education. Ensuring sustained, targeted outreach work that starts at primary school is critical if we are to improve access for this group, along with ensuring that pupils are informed about their options and know why higher education is relevant to pupils' future plans.

180. If outreach activities are to be made more effective and scaled up, institutions need to know what works, yet evidence in this area is currently limited. We return later in this chapter to focus specifically on evaluation and impact. We note, however, that the Office for Fair Access's (OFFA)[130] work, in conjunction with the Sutton Trust, on evidencing the impact of outreach will be useful. So too will the research by the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE)[131] to identify the impact of higher education-school interaction, including the impact on pupil attainment and identifying evidenced methods of raising attainment. The outcomes of this research will be able to be rolled-out through the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP)[132] as well as by universities in the course of their normal outreach activities.

181. The championing of what works and sharing of good practice across the sector will also be important. The new Evidence and Impact Exchange, proposed later in this chapter, will provide an important vehicle to support this. **Universities UK will actively engage with HEFCE, OFFA and other bodies including those in the charity sector, to promote improved and expanded links with schools and to share effective practice and improve the evidence of impact in this area.**

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[129] The education and youth 'think and action tank' (2016) *White working class boys and higher education: widening participation*

[130] OFFA (2016) *Improving the evaluation of outreach* https://www.offa.org.uk/publications/research-in-progress/improving-outreach-evaluation/

[131] HEFCE (2016) *Schools sponsored by higher education* http://www.hefce.ac.uk/workprovide/schools/analysis/

[132] This is a new programme by HEFCE which aims to increase the number of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education by 2020. It invites organisations to submit proposals for funds to work collaboratively on outreach programmes in specific local areas (see paragraph 77).

> **Case study: Reaching East, Reaching London**
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> Continuum, the centre for widening participation policy studies based at the University of East London (UEL), has been leading the Reaching East, Reaching London collaborative project, funded by the HEFCE under the National Networks for Collaborative Outreach funding stream.
>
> The project has developed an online map and data dashboard of all state funded secondary schools in London and parts of Essex. The dashboard is aimed at higher education outreach teams who need contextual data on schools to use in their decision making processes and to design specific outreach events. The dashboard map is based on POLAR3 data and includes a wide variety of contextual data at school level, including information about the school, free school meals percentages, Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 achievement, ethnicity, gender, English as a second language, numbers into higher education, universities attended and outreach data collected from all higher education institutions in London. The institutions involved in these projects were UEL, University College London and Greenwich, with Ravensbourne and Goldsmiths partnering in two smaller projects.
>
> Phase two of the project is now under way which includes a needs and capacity analysis working closely with schools in East London to develop a toolkit for outreach practitioners and schools.

182. Schools were keen for outreach to be sustained and meaningful. The requirement for consortia to set clear milestones and targets in their NCOP bids will help here, but we recommend more sustained and coordinated early engagement with pupils, particularly pre-GCSE and in primary schools. The project led by Research Councils UK[133] to explore partnerships between universities and schools and colleges will also be important due to its focus on embedding sustainable engagement.

183. As well as outreach targeted at young people, a much stronger focus on outreach provision to target mature learners will be critical if the significant drop in numbers of mature students choosing to go to university is to be reversed. Universities do this already in a variety of ways: working with the local community or engaging with faith groups, employers and trade unions; or promoting short courses, offering modular and credit-based study pathways, and using open educational resources. These activities can be helpful in re-engaging prospective students with learning. Raising the visibility of opportunities for credit-accruing work placements along with the availability of academic and pastoral support and flexible study options could also be useful. Some institutions have highlighted using alumni or older learners as ambassadors in

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[133] http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/pe/PartnershipsInitiative/

pre-entry events as useful in encouraging mature learners. **To incentivise more outreach more research is needed to better understand the results of outreach activity targeted at mature learners. We suggest that this is taken forward by the new Evidence and Impact Exchange (see paragraphs 233–238)**.

184. There is a clear risk that gains in undergraduate widening participation could be annulled by widening inequalities at postgraduate level. Evidence from the Wakeling report[134] which sets out the findings from HEFCE's £25 million pilot Postgraduate Support Scheme in 2014-15 to improve progression to postgraduate education found that there was latent and frustrated demand for postgraduate taught study particularly for disadvantaged students. In addition, the availability of targeted funding, particularly for student fees and living costs, was shown to be critical for student success at postgraduate level. However, finance alone was insufficient since it addressed only one particular point in the much longer process of entry to post graduate taught study. Widening participation activity involving information, advice and guidance was also required. This should include the development of systematic programmes of inreach (that is, where institutions provide information to their own undergraduates) and outreach. This should also include better collaboration between institutions and should focus on providing information, advice and guidance, and identify 'cold spots' for postgraduate participation. Wakeling also suggested that better data was required. This means improving the linkage of existing data between first degree and postgraduate levels. It also requires collecting more information on postgraduate students' backgrounds and circumstances.

ADMISSIONS PRACTICE

185. As indicated in chapter 2, in recent years higher education admissions have been affected by the removal of the cap on student numbers and the introduction of market reforms, combined with changes to policy on qualifications and information, advice and guidance. Within this dynamic environment, higher education institutions seek to ensure that their admissions systems are fair, effective and transparent. They are assisted in doing this by the Supporting Professionalism in Admissions programme (SPA)[135].

Fair admissions

186. There are many decisions around the higher education admissions process which are necessarily subjective; applicants, advisers and admissions staff all make judgements in identifying the best match of student to university or college course. Within these, all admissions decisions should be fair and not influenced by an individual's ethnicity, background or other intrinsic characteristics. To support this, the sector has developed a set of principles to underpin fair

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[134] Programme analysis of HEFCE's Postgraduate Support Scheme: Final report to ESRC and HEFCE http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/Year/2015/pssfinal/
[135] This body was established by the sector to support the professionalisation of admissions in 2006. It is currently funded by UCAS.

admissions[136]. These have been in place since the Schwartz report, *Fair admissions to Higher Education: Recommendations for good practice,* was published in 2004 and are embedded in the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) *Expectation for the recruitment, selection and admission of students*[137]. However, there is a challenge for a higher education sector that wishes to target and promote access to higher education from under-represented students, but which needs to avoid discrimination, positive or negative, within admissions decisions. The SPA programme has produced a briefing on positive action in admissions[138] and other organisations, such as the Equality Challenge Unit, are working with higher education institutions to support students from protected characteristic groups into higher education. Although there is good practice across much of the sector it is important that universities regularly review and evaluate their admissions practice and investigate unexplained differences in offer-making or admissions outcomes.

Offer rates

187. As highlighted in chapter 1, data released recently by UCAS covering applications, offers and placed applicants by sex, area background and ethnic group suggests that across all tariff groups and at an aggregate national level for England, the offer rates for applicants from POLAR3 quintile 1 (the most disadvantaged group) and for Asian and black applicants are slightly below what would otherwise be expected, given the level of their predicted grades and the general subject area of the course for which they are applying. At the same time those for POLAR3 quintile 5 (the most advantaged group) and white applicants are slightly above what would otherwise be expected. The differences are small, with the gaps in the 2015 offer rates between 0.2 and 2.1 percentage points larger than the expected variation across the three groups. UCAS suggests that there may be factors which explain this such as the subjects studied and the grades held by applicants. For example, UCAS's calculations could only account for the total level of predicted grades and the *mix* of predicted grades, or A-level or other subjects, personal statements and references. UCAS states that it is not possible to take these further factors into account without making assumptions about how universities should offer from pooled averages from across the sector, something which is not a good match to the differing academic offer making policies used by institutions.

188. It should also be noted that UCAS has shown that the differences in offer-making are too small to have a material impact on the differences seen in entry rates. Nonetheless, it is important that institutions look at their own offer-making to ensure that it follows good practice and minimises any risk of bias. It may be that masking of some data by centralised admissions teams on applications could help to ensure that all applicants are treated equally. However, it should be noted that universities and colleges do not receive information about an applicant's ethnicity from UCAS until after the applicant

[136] What is fair admissions? www.spa.ac.uk/resources/what-fair-admissions
[122] QAA Quality Code part B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-b
[123] SPA Equality Briefing: Positive action in admissions www.spa.ac.uk/resources/positive-action

has been accepted for entry. A number of universities have projects underway to examine this issue.[139] This is an area which should be investigated further using admissions data using the Administrative Data Research Network and when findings from the projects already underway are published.

189. We also propose that within the existing work that HEFCE is undertaking to provide greater clarity and transparency in published information, thought should be given to how best to raise awareness of the range of actual attained grades that candidates are admitted have. This allows candidates and their advisers to better understand the requirements of a course. To have value, the information would need to be available at the level of an individual degree course.

190. We support the work already underway by institutions to ensure staff awareness of the potential for bias in admissions and the need to take action. We encourage all institutions to consider unconscious bias training for staff involved in admissions. The guidance and good practice resources on unconscious bias by SPA provide a valuable tool for institutions[140], along with the module on good practice being developed as part of SPA's online toolkit[141].

Contextualised admissions

191. In order to identify applicants who may have lower prior attainment as a result of disadvantage rather than because of lower potential, many institutions make use of contextual information and data. This enables an institution to assess an applicant in the context of the circumstances in which their attainment has been achieved[142]. Principles for the use of contextual data and information in admissions[143] were produced by SPA in consultation with the higher education sector, schools and colleges and approved by the SPA Steering Group. They provide a good practice reference point for the sector when considering or using contextualised admissions, including decision-making.

192. Many universities use contextual data to inform choices about whether to invite applicants to interview, make them an offer which may mean making a lower offer for a place, or to inform a decision on an application. Institutions also use contextual data to target outreach activities where they are most needed. Contextualised admissions must be evidence-based, justifiable, valid and reliable to ensure they add value to the admissions process. To support contextualised admissions, UCAS via their Contextual Data Service[144] provides additional

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[139] UCAS (2016) *Unconscious Bias Report 2016* www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/ucas-unconscious-bias-report-2016

[140] Resources are on the SPA website: www.spa.ac.uk/resources/unconscious-bias

[141] www.spa.ac.uk/good-practice-toolkit

[142] Contextual data includes educational, geo-demographic and socio-economic background data. It could also include broader data such as the university's own data and research. Contextual information includes self-declared information by the applicant, such as having been in care, pre-applicant data from outreach and widening participation activities, or background information provided by the application.

[143] See SPA website www.spa.ac.uk/resources/how-contextualised-admissions-used

[144] See SPA (2016), *Contextualised Admissions – Contextual data and information including the UCAS Contextual Data Service*

information for institutions. Together this enables an institution to build up a holistic picture of applicants.

193. Although much progress has been made in expanding the use of contextualised admissions, understanding outside of higher education institutions is still limited, meaning that applicants, their parents, guardians and teachers may not be aware of the opportunities available to them. It is important that potential applicants and advisers are aware of the data an institution uses, why they use it and when they use it as part of the contextualised admissions process. This should dispel perceptions that some people hold that higher education is an unobtainable goal. **Universities are encouraged to consider how to make the use of contextual data better understood by potential applicants and others and to use contextual data that is both transparent and evidence-based. Where appropriate, institutions may wish to consider the use of contextualised offer-making informed by SPA's advice. To support this process SPA should continue to identify, and share, good practice in the use of contextual admissions.**

194. The use of compact or articulation agreements with local schools and colleges provides another vehicle for supporting progression to higher education. These agreements guarantee applicants from these schools and colleges interviews, and in some cases offers, for particular courses.

> **Case study: King's College London extended medical degree**
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> As part of its commitment to widening access, King's College London offers an extended medical degree which opens up its medical degree to pupils from non-selective state schools in London, Kent and the Medway with BBB or above in their A-levels. Students take the first stage of a medical degree over two years, rather than the usual one year, allowing the first stage to be studied at a slower pace and with greater student support.
>
> The scheme has run since 2001 and more than 150 students have successfully graduated. Each year King's accepts another 50 and there are more than 300 students currently studying on the programme. The retention and success rates for the programme are high, despite the challenges faced by non-traditional students, and 92% of entrants stay and complete their degree.
>
> A similar scheme is also run at the University of Southampton.

195. The 'gold standard' of information and data about an applicant is data that relates directly to the individual. However, the data that is actually available to admissions staff is often less granular, relating to household, school or area/neighbourhood. This means that admissions staff cannot be certain that the characteristics of (for example) the neighbourhood accurately reflect the disadvantage experienced by the individual. To mitigate this risk, universities

often combine data from several sources to reduce the likelihood of false positives. The more information and data a higher education institution is able to access, the more accurate their picture of the context in which an applicant has studied, worked and lived. This not only informs an understanding of that applicant's academic achievements, but also their access to opportunities such as work experience and extracurricular activities.

Mature students

196. Mature applicants often have different priorities and needs than the predominantly young higher education undergraduate market, which, if not addressed, may leave them feeling marginalised, increasing the risk they will disengage from seeking entry to higher education. Mature applicants may, for example, feel less able to engage in the full range of activities and the social aspects of campus life, they may need more flexibility in arranging interviews and visits around work commitments, they may have additional financial concerns, or they may need more support around family commitments. They may also be more interested in part-time or other more flexible options for learning. It is important for higher education institutions to consider the needs of mature students in their marketing, recruitment and student support, and for careers advisers to be aware of the full range of options open to learners of all ages, as referred to at paragraphs 103–104.

Case study: Part-time students: University of Leeds

Leeds' Lifelong Learning Centre (LLC) has developed the JumpStart course to give adults in the local community a taste of subjects studied at university and to provide necessary information and support to demystify and alleviate the fear of going to university. JumpStart has a number of different entry routes – some have been working towards a GCSE at college, some find out about it through word of mouth, and others are referred by tutors at the LLC.

Part of the course is taught online, introducing students to this form of learning. Feedback from participants has been positive, with reports of increased confidence in academic study. In addition to this, the LLC has run part-time foundation degrees that are aimed at adults in work who are undertaking higher education qualifications for career enhancement.

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197. Currently many mature applicants enter higher education with a range of qualifications including Access to Higher Education diplomas, higher national certificates or diplomas. Sometimes applicants will enter without formal qualifications; in which circumstances institutions use Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), which is an official recognition of skills and knowledge gained outside of a formal educational setting, and Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL), which can be used to officially recognise part-completion of formal courses. Access to Higher Education qualifications play an important

role, particularly in enabling mature learners to follow vocational pathways (notably in social work, social studies, nursing and other subjects allied to medicine), as well as in preparing individuals for the workplace. In view of this we support the continued funding for validation of these qualifications by HEFCE.

198. Ensuring that university admissions processes and entry requirements take account of the diverse range of qualifications and routes by which students enter higher education will be critical in ensuring that no students are disadvantaged, especially as current reforms to post-16 academic and vocational qualifications are embedded and as take-up of higher level apprenticeships increases. Open access is a route which removes barriers, offering routes for students with low or no qualifications.

Case study: Brookes Bridges

Based in the most deprived areas of Oxfordshire and the surrounding region, Oxford Brookes University's 'Brookes Bridges' project up-skills and re-skills adults who have previously left formal education and who are motivated to progress to further and higher education.

The project offers short, community-based courses as a means of progression into higher education and therefore employment. Brookes Bridges has been extremely effective in targeting mature learners: 93% of learners were aged over 21 when they participated, 66% of participants were the first in their families to go on to higher education and 41% were from a BME background. An estimated 35% of participants entered formal education at level 3 or below within six months of completing a Brookes Bridges programme. Recent analysis has shown that 24% of Brookes Bridges participants (2011–12 to 2014–15) have subsequently entered higher education, with just over half of these enrolling at Oxford Brookes.

IMPROVING STUDENT EXPERIENCE, RETENTION AND DEGREE OUTCOMES

199. Widening participation and access to higher education are not sufficient to support social mobility; support for students to be successful in higher education[145] and beyond is also required. The percentage of UK-domiciled first degree entrants not continuing into second year has remained steady, at around seven per cent in 2012–13. Although this figure is low compared to other OECD countries[146] a more nuanced picture lies behind this, particularly when we consider students with different characteristics. Likewise, research by HEFCE[147] has shown that there are significant variations in degree outcome for students

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[145] This is known as retention and refers to completing a programme of study within a specific timeframe.
[146] HEFCE analysis http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/ncr/
[147] Higher education and beyond: outcomes from full-time first degree study (HEFCE 2013/15)

from different ethnic backgrounds and for disabled students and across disciplines. It is therefore not surprising that during the last few years there has been an increase in investment by institutions in activities to support students to succeed. For example, in the 2017–18 access agreements[148] institutions committed £185.7 million to retention and success, up from £148.4 million in 2016–17.

200. This has been mirrored by a focus from institutions and sector bodies on exploring 'what works' to support retention and student success.

RETENTION

201. To date, there has been a strong consensus that **engagement and a sense of belonging are at the heart of successful retention and success**. Evidence obtained from the projects co-funded by the HEFCE and Paul Hamlyn Foundation-funded programme *What Works?: Student retention and success programme[149]* found that to be effective, all interventions and activities should nurture a culture of belonging for all students. Although the full findings from this research will not be available until spring 2017, the emerging findings are clear. Student belonging is achieved through:

- *Meaningful interaction between staff and students* to support the development of knowledge, expectations and confidence to be successful.

- *A higher education experience relevant to students' interests and future goals,* recognising that this will differ depending on ethnicity, background and age.

- *Supportive peer relations*. The importance of peer group support and social integration was also demonstrated in a recent survey of students by Unite Students[150] which found that there were a number of factors outside the academic environment which could contribute to student wellbeing and retention. This included resilience and 'life skills' such as planning, goal setting, self-management, the ability to recover from a setback; access to social networks, student accommodation and external support services as well as family support. What is particularly noticeable in the table below is how the difference in the student experience varies from social classes AB (the highest social class) to DE (the lowest).

[148] https://www.offa.org.uk/press-releases/2017-18-access-agreement-decisions/
[149] Thomas L (2012) Building student engagement and belonging in Higher Education at a time of change: final report from the *What Works? Student Retention and student success programme*. London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation http://www.phf.org.uk/publications/works-student-retention-success-final-report/
[150] UNITE (2016) *Unite Students Insight Report* http://www.unite-students.com/about-us/insightreport

Socio-economic group disadvantage	Socio-economic group DE (lowest socio grade)	Socio-economic group AB (highest socio grade)
Life satisfaction	66%	77%
Considered dropping out	43%	34%
Happy with flatmate relationships	56%	69%
Integrated in accommodation	40%	56%
Making friends is a benefit of living with other students	70%	76%
Peer support in difficult times	38%	44%
Stressed about managing money	46%	36%
Feeling unsuccessful about managing money	17%	11%

Source: Student resilience: Unite students insight report 2016 (slide presented at Universities UK members' meeting September 2016)

202. The HEFCE/Hamlyn research also found that this was particularly important in relation to teaching and learning, reinforcing the importance of having inclusive, student-centred learning and teaching at the heart of strategies to support effective student retention and success. Furthermore, it was evident that there was no single intervention but a number of interventions which could nurture a sense of engagement and belonging. These included the development of peer networks and friendships, creating links with academics, improving academic skills, the development of a student's confidence, and demonstrating future relevance especially to employment outcomes.

203. The analysis also showed that the exact type of intervention or approach is less important than the way it is offered and its intended outcomes. The researchers concluded that interventions and approaches should be planned and informed by the **principles** as set out in the text box below.

1. **Mainstream:** embed interventions and approaches into mainstream provision to ensure all students participate and benefit from them

2. **Proactive and developmental:** activities should proactively engage students and develop their capacity for engagement

3. **Relevant:** activities need to be informative, useful and relevant to students' academic interests and goals; the potential benefits of engaging should be explicit

4. **Well timed and appropriate media:** early engagement is essential to student retention and success. Information may be better delivered via a range of media, as students' learning styles and needs will differ from each other and over time

5. **Collaborative:** activities should encourage collaboration and engagement with fellow students and members of staff

6. **Monitored:** the extent and quality of students' engagement should be monitored and follow-up action taken where levels of engagement are low

204. The findings from the 'What Works' programme drew attention to the student experience at the local level and in particular required academics to deliver more inclusive and engaging experiences. However, it was also noted that this can only be achieved within **a facilitative strategic environment. Having an institution wide approach is therefore critical.** The pillars to support such an approach are set out in the text box below.

1. **Commitment to a culture of belonging** that is explicit through institutional leadership in internal and external communications and documentation such as the strategic plan, website, prospectus and all policies.

2. **Nurturing belonging and improving retention and success should be a priority for all staff** as a significant minority of students think about leaving, and changes need to be mainstreamed to maximise the success of all students. This requires the development of staff capacity to nurture a culture of belonging.

3. **Student capacity to engage and belong should be developed early on** by establishing clear expectations, the purpose and the value of engaging and belonging, the development of skills to engage, and opportunities to engage.

4. **The availability of high-quality institutional data** to identify higher rates of withdrawal, non-progression and non-completion.

5. **Systems to be in place to monitor student behaviour**, particularly participation and performance, to identify students at risk of withdrawing and action taken when at-risk behaviour is observed.

6. **Work to be undertaken in partnership with staff and students to review data and experience about student belonging, retention and success**. Change should be implemented across the student lifecycle and throughout the institution at all levels, and its impact evaluated.

205. This research is important as it demonstrates the importance of understanding the local context. It also emphasises the need to secure commitment from senior management teams and resources to respond; having access to evidence and data to identify retention and success issues across disciplines and student groups, and an understanding of why and when students leave. It also highlights the need for a programme of interventions across the whole student experience rather than relying on a single intervention. The research also shows that interventions are likely to consist of a range of models which could combine both top-down and bottom-up approaches involving a cross institutional team – including students as partners. Ensuring that interventions are monitored and evaluated at different levels (individual student, module, programme, student characteristics) is also important. We return to this again in paragraphs 233–238.

Degree outcomes

206. The influence of student characteristics also affects degree outcomes. This varies across different groups; the largest gaps in attainment achieved are for BME students. The research by HEFCE[151] explored why this may be the case and provides a valuable resource for institutions by highlighting 'what works' and the types of interventions needed to address differential outcomes. It also recognises that the actual approach and interventions required will vary depending on institutional circumstances, mission and the make-up of the student population. Nonetheless these provide an important reference point in addressing the priorities identified in chapter 1.

Factors influencing degree attainment

- ***The curricula, learning and teaching and assessment practices*** – curricula should be co-developed in partnership with students, relevant, and include user friendly learning, teaching and assessment practices

- ***Relationships between staff and students and among students*** – having a sense of belonging was critical in supporting outcomes

- ***Psychosocial and identity factors*** – students' learning and attainment was facilitated by ensuring students felt supported and encouraged in their daily interactions within their institutions and with staff

- ***Differences in social, cultural and economic capital*** –recurring differences in how students experience higher education, how they network and how they draw on external support, and how their financial situation could affect their experience and learning

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207. The Higher Education Academy's (HEA) undergraduate retention and attainment across the disciplines report[152] has also shown that the **disciplinary context** is a factor; not only does the disciplinary context interact with student characteristics, it can also exert an independent effect on both student retention and attainment. Thus, some disciplines had retention rates of 93% while others had rates of 99%. Similarly, attainment varied across disciplines, for example subjects within the broad arts and humanities area (except for art and design) all recorded higher rates of upper degrees than the sector as a whole. This points to the need to better understand the curricula, cultures and practice at the disciplinary level as well as how these interact with student characteristics.

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[151] HEFCE (2015) *Causes in different student outcomes*
http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/Year/2015/diffout/Title,104725,en.html
[152] This report presents an analysis of data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency relating to undergraduate students participating in the academic year 2010 –11 and includes all students who were taking a degree in a single identifiable discipline. See HEA (2014) *Undergraduate retention and attainment across disciplines*, https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resource/undergraduate-retention-and-attainment-across-disciplines, and HEA (2015), *Undergraduate recruitment and attainment* https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resource/undergraduate-student-retention-and-attainment

208. Both the HEA and HEFCE's findings illustrate the range of factors that can lead to different attainment rates. The overarching message here is that addressing attainment gaps is complex and there is no single solution. Different interventions and strategies are needed. This includes the development of an inclusive environment which promotes equality, opportunity and achievement for all. Engaging students in this process is also critical, particularly in terms of developing curricula and pedagogy.

Sector resources

209. To support this process **we recommend that institutions consider the range of frameworks that have already been developed for the sector. This includes the series of frameworks[153] developed by the Higher Education Academy in collaboration with the sector and the equality charters developed by the Equality Challenge Unit**.

210. The Higher Education Academy frameworks series are evidence-based and provide the higher education sector with a national reference point to enable the institution to develop its own approach according to local circumstances as well as benchmarking performance. The frameworks include toolkits[154] which bring together useful resources to enhance teaching practice and to improve student learning outcomes.

211. The Equality Challenge Unit's Race Equality Charter provides a framework through which institutions identify and reflect on institutional and cultural barriers standing in the way of minority ethnic staff and students. A particular area of focus is student progression and attainment, which is an important mechanism for supporting institutions in addressing gaps in retention and outcomes[155]. The charter also provides a framework to support the delivery of an institution-wide approach by covering curriculum design, professional and support staff, and academic staff. Charters can also support institutions in increasing the diversity of their staff profile. This is important given the increasing diversity of students engaging in higher education.

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[153] The HEA Framework series for student success consist of seven frameworks (transforming assessment; embedding employability; student access, retention and attainment; internationalising higher education; flexible learning; student engagement through partnership; and student success; further information available at https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/frameworks-toolkits/frameworks
[154] https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/frameworks-toolkits/welcome-hea-toolkits
[155] Further information is available at http://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/race-equality-charter/

> **Case study: Kingston University and the Equality Challenge Unit Race Equality Charter**
>
> Kingston University is one of the first institutions to be awarded the Race Equality Charter for its ongoing commitment and active steps to improve race equality for their staff and students. One of the reasons for the award was the university's groundbreaking work to address the BME attainment gap, making it an institutional key performance indicator which the board of governors and senior management team are accountable for and all staff are responsible for.
>
> Kingston's approach uses a value-added score, which takes account of a student's entry qualification and degree subject to predict an expected degree outcome based on historical sector data. Scores are produced by ethnic group for the university as a whole and for each faculty, school and course. These are then discussed with deans, heads of school, course leads and at school and faculty away days so that everyone in the organisation becomes comfortable discussing the attainment gap and is clear about the relative performance of white and BME students on the courses. This has helped the university to focus on the causes and potential solutions to improving the attainment of BME students. The attainment gap has fallen from 30.4% in 2011–12 to 18.3% in 2014–15, a fall of 40% in three years.

212. HEFCE's 2015 research highlighted the importance of evaluating interventions and learning from others about what works. The HEA, in collaboration with Kingston University, has done exactly that. By comparing how a number of institutions have sought to address the attainment gap they have come up with a number of key lessons learned. These reinforce the outcomes from the HEFCE research regarding the need for a whole-institution approach and recognises that, fundamentally, this has to be about changing organisational structure.

213. HEFCE's research also showed that institutions varied in their awareness of differential outcomes. **The Advisory Group recommends that institutions monitor and scrutinise their own retention and attainment data to identify any gaps between student groups' gender, race and disability (at both undergraduate and postgraduate level). Where gaps exist institutions should develop an action plan with metrics to measure progress.**[156] Regular reporting of progress to the senior management team and the governing body can also foster buy-in and commitment by senior leadership. The work that is currently taking place in the field of student analytics[157] and student information systems will be important here.

214. As noted in chapter 2, students may enter higher education with a wide range of qualifications such as BTECs or APEL. Some courses, particularly in high tariff institutions, may not immediately lend themselves to students presenting with these qualifications and experience. Where this is the case, to ensure that

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[156] This aligns with the conditions attached to the Teaching Excellence Framework.
[157] Student analytics is defined by the Society for Learning Analytics Research as the measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of data about learners and their contexts, for the purposes of understanding and optimising learning and the environments in which it occurs.

students are able to access the curriculum, institutions may be required to redesign introductory courses or review the delivery of transition and bridging support in the first year or prior to the first year. Additional support may be required throughout the degree to ensure that these students are able to engage successfully throughout their course.

Using behavioural insights to support student success

215. Using behavioural insights to support student success is still very new in the UK. However, this could provide a way to support students in their journey to higher education, as has been demonstrated in the United States[158]. To explore how this can work, King's College London is working with the Behavioural Insights Team at the Cabinet Office to document the experiences and opportunities for widening participation students across the student lifecycle. This will help the university to understand how students maximise their time at university. By understanding what their most successful students do (termed 'beneficial behaviours') the university is able to share this practice with other students as well as addressing 'barrier behaviours'.

216. The second phase will involve designing and implementing 'nudges' to encourage students to take up key opportunities and engage in the behaviours that support a successful outcome. This will include text messaging and other nudges at critical points in the student journey. We suggest that the outcomes of this trail should be considered and disseminated via the Evidence and Impact Exchange.

Support for disabled students

217. To further support disabled students Universities UK, in partnership with a number of stakeholders[159], has established a sector-led group, the Disabled Students Sector Leadership Group. This group supports the sector in responding to the changes in the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) and to move towards more inclusive practice. To support this process the group is developing guidance which will be available in autumn 2017 and will:

- articulate the strategic drivers and benefits of inclusive practice for institutions and students and encourage institutional buy-in
- identify key barriers to learning for disabled and non-disabled students and explore how to address these
- set out some short- and medium-term interventions and options for achieving improved inclusivity
- identify a set of principles for making reasonable adjustments

218. The Advisory Group welcomes the establishment of the group, and commends its plans to the sector. These will provide a valuable resource to enhance institutions' own activities in this area. Furthermore, as we show later in this

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[158] The Better Make Room campaign uses text prompts and goal setting to help first generation students successfully transition to higher education, see https://bettermakeroom.org/
[159] This included GuildHE, the Association of Colleges, the NUS and the ECU.

section, the implementation of inclusive practice will also be important in addressing the differential outcomes experienced by disabled students.

> **Case study: Coventry University Maths Centre and Centre for Academic Writing**
>
> Coventry University's Maths Centre and Centre for Academic Writing provide dedicated support to students with dyslexia or dyscalculia as part of the university's commitment to supporting disabled students throughout their studies. In three years, continuation rates for disabled students have risen by 6.7% to 90.8%, indicating that the programme is having an impact.
>
> Other support for disabled students at the university includes a pre-entry residential summer school for new students with disclosed disabilities, and a social group for students on the autistic spectrum. The university's Welfare and Disabilities Office offers disability screening, faculty-based learning support coordinators, specialist equipment loans, study support drop-in sessions and disability awareness training for staff and students.

Mental health and wellbeing

219. The challenges set by the minister in chapter 1 make specific reference to students with a mental health condition. This is not surprising given the latest evidence collated by HEFCE[160], which indicated a rapid rise in students reporting disabilities – particularly a mental health condition. Between 2008–09 and 2012–13 there was a 130% increase in demand for university-provided student mental health services. Related to this sharp growth in demand, there is a strong public narrative of a crisis of mental health in our universities. A recent, well-publicised NUS survey for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Students showed just under 80% of students experiencing mental health problems.

220. It is also important to look at student mental health within the broader context of national wellbeing. The Five Year Forward View for Mental Health[161] and Future in Mind[162] indicate a particular emphasis on mental health promotion and prevention, early intervention and quick access to good quality care for children and young people. However, with these declared strategic priorities largely not yet translated into services commissioned for students, university support services are reporting gaps in provision, long waiting times to access NHS care and severe psychiatric illness referred back onto campus.

221. Although there are multiple public, private and charitable organisations seeking to address these issues (including statutory NHS bodies and services, university support services, students' unions, activist charitable bodies and many others), the scale of the issue suggests that there is more work to do. In view of this,

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[160] http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/Year/2015/mh/Title,104768,en.html
[161] https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Mental-Health-Taskforce-FYFV-final.pdf
[162] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-mental-health-services-for-young-people

Universities UK has agreed to work with partners and stakeholders to develop and promote a whole-university approach to mental wellbeing. The project will gather evidence on prevalence and demand as well as the effectiveness of interventions, develop case-studies on effective practice and develop a narrative to support engagement and transformation.

The role of credit transfer in facilitating social mobility

222. The Advisory Group considered whether universities should adopt more flexible approaches to credit earned by students during their courses and facilitate the transfer of students between institutions. The argument made is that this could aid social mobility, particularly for mature students. Students are already able to transfer between higher education institutions, with decisions typically handled on a case by case basis. While many institutions use an academic credit model, ultimately the decision to accept academic credit is down to the receiving institution and depends on a variety of factors, including the comparability of a subject to the receiving programme and entry criteria.

223. The benefits to social mobility from encouraging a more flexible approach to credit transfer are currently under-evaluated. It is not clear that there is significant demand at present for a credit transfer system and transferring between institutions can be disruptive to the continuity of a student's studies even where there is academic continuity between courses. This is likely to be most pronounced for students from more disadvantaged backgrounds who study locally and where changing to another institution in a different location may not be possible.

224. Recognition of prior learning may present opportunities for more flexible pathways into university study through recognition of accredited vocational qualifications. As part of the discussions around its White Paper the government initiated a call for evidence on credit transfer[163]. It will be important that the higher education sector engages constructively with this to examine ways in which credit transfer could be delivered and, most importantly, communicates the options and opportunities to students.

GRADUATE OUTCOMES

225. Students increasingly report that one of the main reasons for choosing to go to university is the fact that it will increase their chances of securing the job or career that they want. However, as described in chapter 1, there are differences in employment outcomes for graduates from different groups. This section looks at activities to narrow the gap in employment outcomes from advantaged and disadvantaged groups.

226. Universities have long undertaken extensive activity to support graduate employability and workforce development. This has included working with employers on the development of degrees, co-funded provision, embedding

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[163] 'Accelerated Courses and Switching University or Degree: Call for Evidence' https://bisgovuk.citizenspace.com/he/accelerated-courses-and-switching

employability within the curriculum, the provision of access to relevant work experience and familiarity with the labour market, as well as promoting the value of engagement in the wider student experience. This work has also been supported by sector bodies such as the HEA, which has developed a framework to help institutions systematically embed employability across the institution[164].

227. University careers services clearly have a significant contribution to make in terms of social mobility and graduate outcomes. For some students this will focus on preparing for entry to the labour market. For others the focus will be on support to progress, develop or change careers. Careers services also have an important role to play in promoting graduate outcomes among students from under-represented groups and to broker links with employers, particularly in facilitating internships, placements and other opportunities for work experience. At the employers' roundtable it was reported that some employers from the small and medium enterprise (SME) sector felt overlooked by careers services, whose focus has been on working closely with large graduate recruiters. In view of the increasing importance of SMEs in the labour market, strategies to develop links with SMEs will become more important.

228. Alongside careers services, some university departments have begun to develop activities that support employability among students and directly contribute to teaching and learning in specific subject areas. This helps to raise students' awareness of employment options and illustrates what is involved in particular jobs. Engagement with academics can alsoinfluence students' career choices.

Case study: University of Sussex First-Generation Scholars programme

The University of Sussex's award-winning First Generation Scholars scheme (FGS) programme provides a wide range of support and initiatives to increase participation in higher education among under-represented groups.

The university works in target areas where there has traditionally been a low progression rate into higher education across the south of England. As children enter year 9, a variety of methods are used, including visits to the campus, summer schools and events to engage children – and their parents – in higher education.

When at Sussex, FGS participants are supported throughout their studies with numerous workshops and social programmes aimed at improving social mobility. These students are also able to improve their employability skills through internships and supported study abroad opportunities. For example, in the summer several hundred FGS students take part in funded internships at home or overseas, for example in China. Students are also offered the chance to participate in paid research internships to explore the possibility of postgraduate study and a research career.

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[164] See HEA Framework for embedding employability in higher education: https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/enhancement/frameworks/framework-embedding-employability-higher-education

> The scheme has been extremely successful, with 90% of FGS students graduating in 2015 and either moving into graduate-level employment or further study. This was a higher percentage than among the graduate cohort overall.

229. There is much evidence which asserts that extracurricular activities, volunteering[165] and outward mobility programmes[166] (see paragraphs 230–232) can be helpful in improving the employability of students from disadvantaged groups by developing the skills valued by employers such as communication, team-working and leadership. However, as research by Professor Mary Stuart, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Lincoln, has revealed, there are fewer opportunities for those from less privileged backgrounds to benefit from such opportunities. This is because many of these students have to work as well as study or have caring responsibilities, and therefore may have less time available to engage in extracurricular activities.

230. Partly in response to these issues, Universities UK, in partnership with the National Union of Students, in 2015 published *Breaking down the barriers to youth social action and opportunities*[167]. This report maps out the barriers disadvantaged students may face arising from cultural and social differences and includes a **Social Action Higher Education Framework[168]** to support both universities and students' unions in removing barriers to social action. This was followed by a roundtable discussion in 2016 with leaders in higher education and employers resulting in the development of an action plan[169] to embed and increase social action across all UK universities. This included encouraging the higher education sector to engage with the #iwill campaign[170] which aims to double the number of young people involved in meaningful social action by 2020. The increased emphasis on supporting character and resilience in the secondary sector and the expansion of the National Citizen Service[171] should also be helpful in supporting students to prepare for adult life, including further study and work. Annexe B, sets out the evidence of how youth social action can boost social mobility into, and after, university.

231. Research by the UK Higher Education International Unit (now Universities UK International) into outward student mobility demonstrates how international experience can improve academic and employment outcomes for students[172]. The

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[165] Stuart M (2012) Mobility and Higher Education: The life experiences of first generation entrants in higher education

[166] UK Higher Education International Unit (2016), *Gone International. The value of mobility* http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/gone-international-2016-value-mobility.aspx

[167] http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2015/breaking-down-the-barriers.pdf

[168] http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2015/breaking-down-the-barriers.pdf

[169] A report of the roundtable discussion and the action plan is available at http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/roundtable-on-social-action.aspx

[170] Details on the #iwill campaign are available at http://www.iwill.org.uk/

[171] Information on the National Citizen service is available at http://www.ncsyes.co.uk/what-is-ncs

[172] Gone International. The value of mobility (February 2016) http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/gone-international-2016-value-mobility.aspx

research demonstrates that UK-domiciled students who have been mobile are less likely to be unemployed six months after graduation than their peers who did not participate in a mobility programme. The differential in employment outcomes is more noteworthy for graduates from disadvantaged or minority ethnic backgrounds. Yet these groups – who derive the most benefit – are those most underrepresented in mobility programmes. HESA data from 2014–15 shows that over 60% of mobile students come from the top two socio-economic classifications and 82% are white[173].

232. Working with both widening participation and international officers, the Go International team at Universities UK International held a workshop to develop an action plan to support universities in providing more opportunities for students from less advantaged backgrounds to access international experiences during their studies[174] and to share examples of good practice. In view of the benefits of this activity in enhancing outcomes for disadvantaged students, the Advisory Group urges government to extend funding for these activities.

EVALUATION AND IMPACT

233. Universities make a significant commitment to outreach work and initiatives to improve social mobility. In its recent *Access agreement monitoring for 2014–15: institutional evaluation, and equality and diversity* report[175], OFFA reported on institutions' work in evaluation of widening participation activity and financial support in the most recent academic year. It found that 70% of institutions actively evaluated their activities and programmes in 2014–15. OFFA also highlights that the proportion of institutions reporting that they were at an advanced stage of their evaluation had doubled since 2013–14, increasing from 7% to 14% in 2014–15. In this report, OFFA has also indicated that, while the majority (79%) of institutions evaluated their financial support in 2014–15, fewer than half (45%) evaluated their financial support by analysing the impact on behaviour, such as access, retention and attainment figures. OFFA is continuing to work with the sector to develop more robust and effective approaches.

234. Likewise, HEFCE continues to emphasise the importance of institutions monitoring and evaluating the impact of interventions. Its research to explore differential attainment and progression outcomes across different student groups[176] found that institutional interventions did not always work from an evidence base. Furthermore, there were generally fewer evaluations of activities, especially of long-term interventions. In view of this HEFCE has developed an evaluation framework to support institutions in determining impact and developing a more consistent approach across the sector. Figure 5 describes the framework.

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[173] http://go.international.ac.uk/student-profiles-and-identities
[174] Widening participation in student mobility programmes: http://go.international.ac.uk/widening-participation-student-mobility-programmes-workshop-resources
[175] https://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/2016-05-Access-agreement-monitoring-for-2014-15-institutional-evaluation-and-equality-and-diversity.pdf
[176] HEFCE (2015) Causes of differences in student outcomes http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/Year/2015/diffout/Title,104725,en.html

Figure 5: Conceptual framework for evaluating widening participation
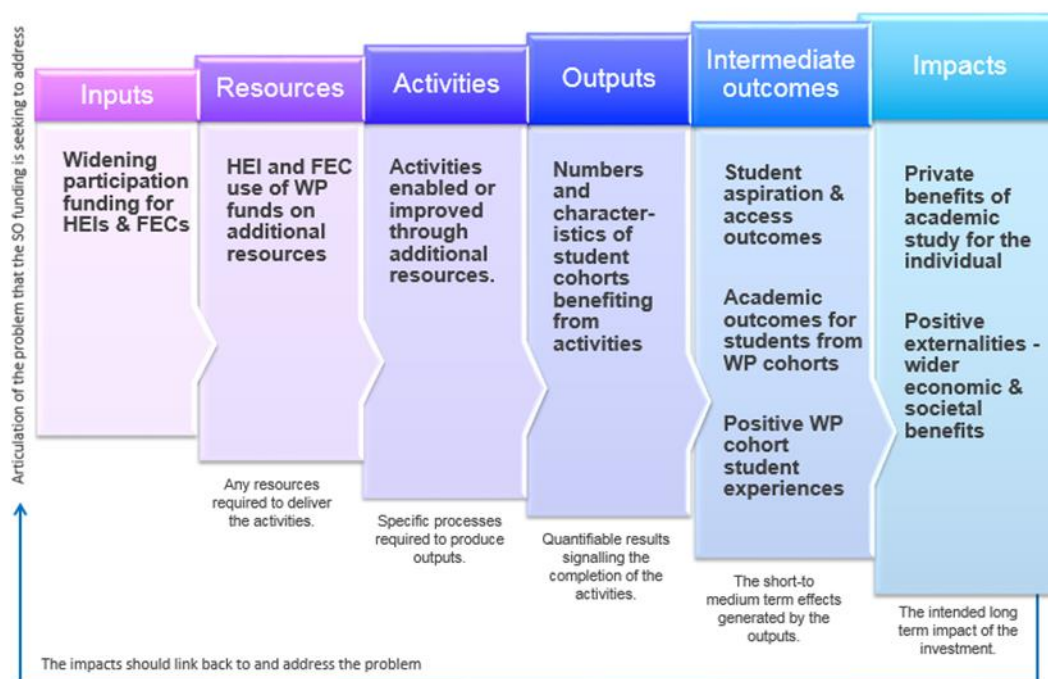
Source: CFE Research 2015

235. Evaluating impact is only part of the story; the sharing of the evaluations and what works will also be important if we are to scale up activity and enhance progress. There is currently no vehicle for individual institutions to share the outcomes of evaluations of activities or to share any kind of good practice, or to grow shared knowledge in the sector.

236. **To address this the Advisory Group recommends that Universities UK, working with HEFCE, OFFA and other stakeholders, should establish an independent central function (working title: 'Evidence and Impact Exchange'). This would systematically evaluate and promote the evidence relating to higher education's role in supporting social mobility**. Its design should be informed by the experiences of the current 'what works centres'.[177] There is a particular need to improve the sharing of qualitative data. This Evidence and Impact Exchange should support the capacity to use evidence across the sector, with a strong role to coordinate evidence-gathering and evaluation across bodies and organisations (including those mentioned above) with an interest in supporting social mobility, resulting in greater strategic coherence and coordination.

237. With the creation of the OfS there is an opportunity for this new approach, aided by the Evidence and Impact Exchange, to provide more systematic evidence to inform future public funding initiatives and requirements linked to access

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[177] What Works Centres are different from standard research centres. They enable policy makers, commissioners and practitioners to make decisions based upon strong evidence of what works and to provide cost-efficient, useful services. https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-works-network#more-about-the-what-works-centres

agreements. We believe there is a strong case for future funding and innovative practice to support social mobility.

238. The alignment of the oversight of public and institutional funding between HEFCE and OFFA in the OfS, alongside the development of a national evidence framework, will also bring greater coherence to the sector's work on widening access and supporting successful outcomes. It will both improve evidence of impact to enable assurance and accountability to government and the wider public and help institutions to refine and improve their work.

Tracking of individuals

239. One area that has proved problematic in the past is tracking the progress of individuals who have gone on university-sponsored outreach programmes. However, this is now being addressed by the extension nationally of the HEFCE-sponsored Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT)[178] programme. UCAS is also developing a digital ID service to facilitate access to personal data from students participating in widening participation activities where they consent to this; once developed this service will enable universities to track participants on outreach activities into and through higher education. In developing the digital ID service **we recommend that UCAS works with universities to devise a consent statement for their digital ID services that will cover all outreach programmes across the UK. This in turn will allow UCAS to provide personal tracking data for those who consent alongside intervention tracking data. This will support the sector in its evaluation of outreach activities.**

240. Improved analysis of prior attainment, including by student characteristics and of progression rates will support the development of more effective widening participation initiatives. **We therefore recommend the better sharing of data between schools, colleges and universities to allow each sector to understand the trajectories of students and to target widening participation activities more effectively. The move of higher education into the DfE provides an ideal opportunity to deliver more effective coordination and the sharing of data across the sectors. Although we recognise that the methods used to address disadvantage may continue to differ between the national school system and the autonomous higher education sector, this should not preclude better sharing of data in relation to prior attainment at both level 2 and 3 (with a particular focus on the impact of socio-economic disadvantage, ethnicity and disability). Neither should it impede better coordination and a more consistent approach to data on progression from level 3 qualifications to higher education.**

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[178] The Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) is a monitoring and evaluation service tracking engagement in outreach activities and building evidence of future student achievement. https://www.highereducationaccesstracker.org.uk/login.aspx

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

241. The growth in investment and activity in widening access work has been relatively rapid, taking place over only the last 10 to 15 years. This growth has outpaced the ability of the sector to put in place systematic professional standards to underpin the delivery of this work and structured opportunities for workforce development. Staff enter widening participation teams from diverse routes and their progression through institutional hierarchies is unclear, while the majority of academic staff have received little or no training on what widening participation means and how it impacts on their work. The development and professionalisation of the workforce is, like the effective use of data and evidence-based practice, one of the key principles of improvements in service delivery common to any policy area. Hence, it is crucial that greater attention is paid to – and investment made in – enhancing the capabilities of those working not just in schools, but also those in higher education at all levels and in both the professional and academic areas.

242. Alongside sector bodies such as the HEA and the ECU there are a number of professional networks, associations and charitable organisations including FACE (Forum for Access and Continuing Education)[179], Action on Access[180], NEON[181], and the Higher Education Race Action Group[182] that between them offer a variety of professional development events and services to support the development of practitioners working in widening participation and equality and diversity, researchers and policy makers from across the higher education sector.

243. The annual Universities UK and Action on Access Summit[183] is now in its sixth year. The summit offers a national platform to explore and debate widening participation policy, practice and research, through plenary inputs and a wide range of expert-led professional development workshops. Exploring how academic staff can receive training in supporting the access, retention and success of students from under-represented groups is also important. The launch of a new programme[184] to link widening participation practitioners and academics by the OFFA, in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Newcastle, Australia, will support this process by encouraging the sharing of what works, by bringing together practitioners and academic mentors to develop and publish papers on successful initiatives in academic journals.

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[179] Forum for Access and Continuing Education, http://www.f-a-c-e.org.uk/
[180] Action on Access, http://actiononaccess.org/
[181] NEON is the professional organisation for widening access to higher education in England, with over 80 organisational members including 57 higher education providers, http://www.educationopportunities.co.uk/
[182] http://www.ecu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/HIGHER-EDUCATION-RACE-ACTION-GROUP-TOR-2012-2.pdf
[183] Annual Access to HE Summit is organised in partnership between Universities UK and Action on Access.
[184] https://www.offa.org.uk/press-releases/new-programme-link-wp-practitioners-academics/

UNIVERSITIES AND REGIONALISATION

244. In the past, social mobility has been analysed at national or individual institutional level, with responses tending to follow those polarities. However, increasingly the focus is on regional responses, with universities working with partners in their regions, including Local Enterprise Partnerships, to develop sustained initiatives that align with broader regional agendas. The NCOPs will also be important here. This regional focus is relevant to the socio-economic and ethnic mix of applicants to institutions, pre-higher education attainment, the skills needs in the local economy and graduate employment possibilities. It also aligns with recent government thinking on devolution to English regions and cities and the instigation of metro mayors from 2017[185]. Some agreements in this area have already been announced, such as City Deals[186] and more are expected. Universities have a key role as anchor institutions driving growth and meeting skills needs; it is important that universities and colleges play a central role in this agenda.

245. The government's devolution agenda allows for more collaboration at a regional level and could help to enhance collaboration between employers, higher education institutions, schools, colleges and other stakeholders.

246. This focus on regionalisation aligns with work carried out by HEFCE and others in relation to the role of place in social mobility.

247. The ability of people to be geographically mobile is also relevant. The concept of the 'local graduate' is critical here, specifically people from backgrounds that may restrict their mobility and who therefore are unlikely to travel far to work or study. There may be lower economic returns in going to university for these groups; however, there will be significant added value in the contribution they make to their communities and local economies.

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[185] A metro mayor is the chair of a combined authority that has agreed to a Devolution Deal. Combined authorities are made up of several local authorities. Metro mayors will have powers and responsibilities to make strategic decisions across whole city regions in contrast to existing mayors or local council leaders that can only make decisions for, and on behalf, of their local authority.
[186] Thirty-nine Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Local Growth deals (these were announced in 2014, 26 City Deals (these are agreements between government and a city) were announced between 2012 and 2013 in England, and ten devolution deals have been announced since 2014.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter we review the emerging themes from this report and make recommendations to help address the areas of disadvantage identified in chapter 1.

DATA

The role of data is growing in significance, particularly in an environment where student choice is so influential in determining outcomes. The effective use of data will be an essential tool in driving future developments. Data is relevant to social mobility because it underpins the effective information, advice and guidance that needs to be provided to students and their families. Data provides the information needed by universities and decision-makers to identify issues and then to respond to and evaluate initiatives and policies. It is also critical in terms of introducing greater accountability and transparency.

We therefore propose the following:

Recommendation 1

Notwithstanding that POLAR measures participation in higher education and not disadvantage, it remains an essential tool, as a proxy, for understanding disadvantage and is widely used by policy makers, researchers and institutions. However, in discussion with higher education practitioners, schools and other bodies it is clear that this is now regarded as too blunt an instrument on its own to inform the sector's work on social mobility. We therefore propose the creation of a basket of indicators shared across the sector to measure disadvantage in applicants and students, using both population-based and individual indicators. These would sit alongside other data which institutions may wish to use, eg course-specific data. Consideration should also be given to how the basket of indicators compares with measures of disadvantage used by schools and employers. This is work that the Practitioners' Reference Group has agreed to take forward. The Group will also explore how universities can be supported to monitor their own student body as a whole using these indicators.

Recommendation 2

Work should be undertaken with graduate employers to coordinate and promote their monitoring and publication of data on recruitment of under-represented groups, particularly graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds, and black and minority ethnic and disabled graduates. This will require a common understanding of socio-economic backgrounds, which is currently being developed by the Cabinet Office in partnership with the Bridge Group: *Developing a Common set of Measures for Employers on the Socio-Economic Backgrounds of their Workforce and Applicants*[187]. This work should align with the work on POLAR identified above and will be taken forward by the Employers' Forum.

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[187] This process has engaged a large number of employers and academic experts and will be published in autumn 2016.
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/525928/6_2224_co_engagement_document_employer_measures_on_socio_economic_background.pdf

Recommendation 3

There should be better sharing of data between schools, colleges, universities and educational charities, to enable each sector to understand the trajectories of students and to facilitate better targeting and coordination of widening participation activities. The move of higher education into the Department for Education provides an ideal opportunity to ensure more effective coordination and the sharing of data across the sectors. We recognise that the methods used to address disadvantage may continue to differ between the national school system and the autonomous higher education sector. Nevertheless, this should not preclude better sharing of data in relation to prior attainment at both level 2 and 3 (with a particular focus on the impact of socio-economic disadvantage, ethnicity and disability), and a more consistent and coordinated approach to data on progression from level 3 to higher education.

Recommendation 4

The Practitioners' Reference Group should explore the range of flexible pathways and transitions between schools, colleges, alternative providers and universities with better data to articulate the transition at each stage.

Recommendation 5

In developing its digital ID service, UCAS should work with the sector to devise a consent statement that would enable students engaged in outreach programmes across the UK to share their progress. This will allow UCAS to provide personal tracking data for those who consent alongside intervention tracking data.

EVALUATION AND UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT WORKS

Throughout the Advisory Group's work and reflected in this report is a strong and consistent message about the need for effective evaluation of policies and interventions that support and promote the contribution of higher education to social mobility. There needs to be a focus on 'what works', underpinned by a robust and systematic use of the evidence, to inform policy and effective institutional decision making. There have been positive moves in this direction in recent years, but it is clear that more needs to be done if we are to address the inequalities set out in chapter 1.

We therefore propose the following:

Recommendation 6

Universities UK, working with other stakeholders including the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Office for Fair Access, should establish an independent central function (working title: 'Evidence and Impact Exchange') that would systematically evaluate and promote the evidence relating to higher education's role in supporting social mobility. Its design should be informed by the experiences of the current 'what works centres'. There is a particular need to improve the sharing of qualitative data; this function should also support the capacity to use evidence across the sector, and throughout the UK, with a strong role to coordinate

evidence-gathering and evaluation across those bodies and organisations (including those mentioned above) with an interest in supporting social mobility. This will bring greater strategic coherence and coordination. This could also include the use of social media to share innovative practice, such as an 'education innovator' podcast.

Recommendation 7

In view of the close correlation between attainment at school and university experience and success, the Evidence and Impact Exchange should be used to undertake a systematic review of the evidence on the effectiveness of activities undertaken by higher education institutions and employers to support the raising of attainment in schools. This links to recommendation 13(i).

Recommendation 8

To incentivise more outreach aimed at mature students, more research is needed to understand the results of outreach activity targeted at mature students. We suggest that this is taken forward by the Evidence and Impact Exchange.

INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE, AND COMMUNICATIONS

This report has identified information, advice and guidance (IAG) as critical in supporting the decisions made by students in navigating pathways into higher education and then deciding on their graduate outcomes. There are a number of significant challenges across the current schools and post-16 landscape. We also know that although universities deliver extensive activity to support employability, graduate outcomes can differ according to a graduate's background. The perception that people have only one chance at the age of 18 needs to change, by promoting the role of lifelong learning. The machinery of government changes which have seen higher education move into the Department for Education create an unparalleled opportunity for addressing these issues. Universities UK will work closely with the department to support this.

We therefore propose the following:

Recommendation 9

The new Department for Education strategy on careers provision should ensure that joined-up and coherent careers advice is delivered to young people in schools and colleges so that the post-16 options are properly explained. The particular difficulties experienced by BME, disadvantaged and disabled students should also be taken into account. Higher education institutions and employers should be involved in the development of the strategy to ensure coordinated advice and guidance that takes account of graduate employment options. The higher education sector should also continue to build information on graduate options into outreach activities and activities throughout the student lifecycle.

Recommendation 10

Universities UK will work with government to develop a more robust approach to IAG, including greater alignment between government and higher education sector

communications around social mobility and higher education. Although responsibility for communications about higher education primarily rests with universities, it is important there is consistency of messages from higher education and government, particularly in terms of social mobility. This strategy should particularly seek to:

(i)   extend and promote the role and contribution of contextual data, and the significance of prior attainment in admissions and fair access

(ii) enhance the awareness among students of different routes into higher education, the range of courses, the graduate outcomes achieved in relation to those courses, and the different modes of study (part time, online) available. There should be a particular focus on encouraging up-skilling or reskilling of mature students and the promotion of lifelong learning, along with the value of part-time study.

Recommendation 11

Universities UK will work with the higher education sector and Vitae, an organisation supporting the professional development of researchers, to improve information, advice and careers guidance in relation to postgraduate study and research. Consideration should also be given to exploring the development of systematic programmes of inreach and outreach and identifying 'cold spots' for postgraduate participation.

LEAGUE TABLES

The effect of league table metrics on institutions' behaviour has been raised many times during the course of the Advisory Group's work, in that some metrics could disincentivise action on social mobility.

We therefore propose the following:

Recommendation 12

Universities UK will arrange a roundtable discussion with league table compliers, the higher education sector and experts in the area to gain a better understanding of the potential impact of league tables on social mobility. These discussions could produce a common set of principles and commitments to underpin the development of league tables. How these tables are interpreted by parents, students and schools is equally important and should also be taken into account.

INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICE

Although different institutions will adopt different strategies to address issues of social mobility in a way that aligns with their own mission and priorities, evidence obtained by the Advisory Group suggests that all institutions remain committed to improving access and success for all students, whatever their backgrounds. This is reflected in the progress that has been made over recent years. It is also clear that significant challenges remain for some students, particularly for students from

disadvantaged backgrounds, students from black and minority ethnic groups and disabled students. We make a number of recommendations to help institutions address these challenges. Alongside this, the Practitioners' Reference Group will evolve into a Community of Practice Network to provide a forum for overseeing progress.

We therefore propose the following:

Recommendation 13

Given that the primary barrier to participation in higher education and particularly high tariff institutions for students from disadvantaged backgrounds is low prior attainment, higher education institutions should review what more can be done to support the raising of prior attainment.

This might include:

(i) A greater focus on academically based outreach activities, where appropriate, targeted at supporting attainment and university level skills. This will be supported by the systematic review of the evidence of these activities (see recommendation 7).

(ii) The creation of a map of charitable sector activities to enhance school, college, university and employer collaborations.

(iii) Higher education institutions to explore how different models of higher education and school interaction can be further developed, strengthened and scaled up. Many, if not all universities, are already actively involved in collaborations with schools such as the provision of homework clubs, summer schools or teaching support. The form this takes will depend on institutional strengths and local circumstances and may include collaboration both with and outside NCOPs, for example with successful charitable organisations. Consideration should also be given to evaluating the difference that these interactions make with schools.

(iv) Universities UK will actively engage with the Higher Education Funding Council for England and the Office for Fair Access, the charitable sector and other bodies across the UK to promote improved and expanded links with schools and share effective practice, and to improve the evidence of impact in this area.

(v) Higher education institutions are encouraged to consider how to make the use of contextual data better understood by potential applicants and others and to use contextual data that is both transparent and evidence-based. Where appropriate institutions may wish to consider the use of contextualised offer-making informed by advice from the Supporting Professionalism in Admissions programme. To support this process, the Supporting Professionalism in Admissions programme should continue to identify, and share good practice, in the use of contextual admissions.

Recommendation 14

As well as breaking down barriers to higher education, students from different backgrounds may need support to achieve their full potential. To this end we recommend that higher education institutions:

(i) Monitor and scrutinise their admissions, retention, attainment, transition to postgraduate study and graduate employment data to identify where there may be gaps – particularly in relation to race, socio-economic status, gender or disability – and explore how these gaps can be addressed.

(ii) Consider using frameworks that have already been established by the sector such as the frameworks developed by the Higher Education Academy and the Equality Challenge Unit's Gender Equality Charter and the Race Equality Charter. These will support institutions in implementing a whole-institutional approach to differential outcomes involving students, academics and professional staff working together, with support from senior leaders.

(iii) Review the guidance provided by the Disability Sector Leadership Group to support delivery of inclusive practice and the move towards a social model of disability (to be published at the end of October 2016).

GRADUATE OUTCOMES

Recommendation 15

Employers have an important role to play in promoting social mobility in graduate outcomes. Universities UK will work with the Employers' Forum to deliver the following:

(i) Explore how best to share evidence on effective practice, and evaluation of interventions and outcomes, such as recruitment practices and the use of contextual data, potentially by linking into the proposed 'Evidence and Impact Exchange'

(ii) Support better coordination of outreach activities between employers, and between employers and universities. This could include the promotion of sector-specific collaborative models, and the provision of careers advice.

(iii) Given the significance of small and medium enterprises (SME) in the UK labour market as a destination for graduates and the importance of the role of universities and colleges in their local communities, review how universities can engage with and support SMEs and other employers and regional partners (such as the Local Enterprise Partnerships, City Deals and Metro Mayors) to develop a regional approach to tackling disadvantage

(iv) Explore how universities can work with employers to enhance the links between employers and the curriculum and the student experience through activities such as placements, internships and mentoring as well as new models of delivery and partnership such as degree apprenticeships.

NEXT STEPS

This report identifies a number of areas for action. Universities UK will work with the higher education, schools, employers and charitable sectors to implement the recommendations. This process will begin with an implementation plan which will be developed and agreed with the parties involved. The focus of this report is England, but social mobility is a priority shared across the UK. Universities UK will explore synergies with activities and initiatives being taken forward in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. A report on the progress made against the recommendations will be published by Universities UK at the end of 2017.

ANNEXE A: SOCIAL MOBILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A SUMMARY OF CURRENT CHALLENGES

Widening participation and ensuring fair access is an area of significant interest to the higher education sector and universities are already committed to delivering progress in these areas. In 2014–15 higher education institutions in England spent £725.4 million of their tuition fee income on widening participation, in addition to the £357 million allocated to them for this purpose by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) under the Student Opportunity Fund. This is a continuation of investment which higher education institutions and government have been making for some time, and which has already had significant success in widening access and increasing participation in higher education.

Between 2006 and 2015 the proportion of 18-year-olds from England in the most disadvantaged group (POLAR3[188] quintile 1) going on to full-time undergraduate courses through UCAS increased by 65%, from 11.2% to 18.5%, and for those 18-year-olds receiving free school meals the entry rate increased by 80% from 9.1% to 16.4%[189]. At the same time, both the proportion and the absolute number of young full-time undergraduate students in England from the most disadvantaged group have increased[190].

There have also been impressive increases in the proportion and absolute number of both full- and part-time undergraduates in receipt of the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) over the same period, with the proportion of full-time undergraduates receiving the DSA rising by 67% between 2006–07 and 2014–15 and the proportion of part-time undergraduates receiving it rising by 135%[191].

The number of full-time UK undergraduate students from black and minority ethnic groups at English higher education institutions has also increased, rising by 16% between 2007–08 and 2014–15. Comparison with data from the 2011 census on the proportion of 18 to 29 year-olds in each ethnic group in the population also suggests that students from non-white groups are well represented in English higher education institutions, although they are not equally distributed. Non-continuation rates are also continuing to fall for all ethnic groups, although some remain above what would be expected given students' other characteristics[192]. It is also worth noting that this success has been achieved within a context where social mobility across the UK more broadly has remained low as indicated by the research on social mobility by Professor Stephen Machin et al[193].

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[188] POLAR (Participation of Local Areas) is a widening participation measure which classifies census wards five groups, based on the proportion of 18-year-olds who enter higher education aged 18 or 19 years-old. The groups range from quintile 1 (areas with the lowest young participation) to quintile 5 (areas with the highest young participation). POLAR3 is the latest iteration of the measure, with 2015 the first year that UCAS have reported on it.

[189] UCAS (2015), *End of Cycle Report 2015*

[190] HESA (2008, 2016), *UKPIs: Widening participation of under-represented groups (table T1a)*

[191] HESA (2008, 2016), *UKPIs: Widening participation of students who are in receipt of DSA (table T7)*

[192] HEFCE (2016), *Non-continuation rates: Trends and profiles*, available from http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/ncr/

[193] S. Machin, '10 Years On: Britain's Low Social Mobility Problem', lecture, 10 December 2015.

However, despite these successes there is further to go, not least in widening access to those from disadvantaged backgrounds and improving outcomes from higher education for those from black and minority ethnic groups. The rest of this paper outlines those challenges and potential methods for responding to those challenges and in order to do this it uses broad categories to identify patterns of disadvantage. We recognise that these are not always representative and that individual experiences and behaviour will in some cases be different from this.

1: ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION

State of play and current challenges

There is a variation in the rates at which different groups participate in higher education on the basis of socio-economic status, ethnicity, region and gender. The biggest gaps are for white students from the lowest socio-economic groups, with part of the reason for the gap being low pre-higher education attainment.

Disadvantaged pupils

Definitions of disadvantage are contested and complex. The measure most commonly used in the higher education sector, and used in this report is POLAR, a measure of relative rather than absolute disadvantage, measuring participation in higher education rather than, for instance, socio-economic status.

There has been some criticism of POLAR in recent years, primarily that as an area based measure it will miss some variation in individual circumstances, but also that its focus is too narrow. HEFCE has carried out an evaluation of POLAR3 (the latest iteration of POLAR) which highlights a number of findings in relation to the suitability of POLAR as a measure of disadvantage. These are set out below:

- Although POLAR correlates with other measures of disadvantage, for instance those based on schools (school type or percentage claiming free school meals) or those based on individual circumstances (free school meal claimant or school attainment) the relationships are not perfect. The example often given is London where areas with levels of high deprivation are not always grouped in quintile 1 and may therefore be overlooked when targeting disadvantaged students if using POLAR only.

- The relationship between POLAR and other measures of disadvantage in England highlights the need for a range of different measures to be used when targeting disadvantaged students. This could include measures based on income deprivation (such as the IDACI), individual-based measures (for example free school meals status), school-based measures (school type) and other area-based measures (the percentage of pupils on free school meals).

- POLAR also does not work well in areas with relatively high rates of participation in higher education such as Scotland, because it is unable to distinguish adequately between different groups. Consequently, Scotland does

not use POLAR and instead uses the Scottish IMD (Indices of Multiple Deprivation) and NS-SEC.

Entry rates for disadvantaged pupils as measured by POLAR3 are lower than those for advantaged pupils. In 2015, 18.5% of 18 year olds from England in quintile 1 (the least advantaged) accepted offers to study full-time undergraduate programmes at a UK university via UCAS, compared to 44.9% in quintile 5 (the most advantaged). The entry rate for those in quintile 1 has risen in recent years and the gap between these two rates has fallen, but it remains high. Those in quintile 5 are 2.4 times more likely than those in quintile 1 to accept an offer to enter full-time higher education via UCAS. The latest figures from UCAS during Clearing suggest that a similar gap will remain in 2016[194].

The most recent figures released by UCAS, in their 2015 End of Cycle report, suggest that the rate of growth for quintile 1 entrants is slowing. Growth in the quintile 1 entry rate in 2014 was 8.5% whilst growth in 2015 was 3.9%, similar to growth in the entry rates for quintiles 2, 3 and 4 (though higher than growth in quintile 5). UCAS also introduced a new measure of inequality in their 2015 report looking at multiple equality dimensions. Under this measure they found that a wider gap exists between the most and least advantaged groups, and that growth in the least advantaged group had slowed more than under POLAR3.

Recent research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) for the former Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)[195] suggests that most (but not all) of the difference between participation in higher education by socio-economic status can be explained by prior attainment and other background characteristics (such as those examined below). They place particular focus on attainment at GCSE, which had more importance than attainment at key stage 5 in their analysis. However, a statistically significant gap remained even when attainment and background characteristics were controlled for.

Ethnic minorities

Using the 2011 census data on the proportion of 18 to 29 year-olds in each ethnic group in the population, students from ethnic minority groups are well represented in English and Welsh higher education institutions. UCAS analysis of the proportion of 18-year-old former state school students entering full-time higher education through UCAS suggests that the entry rates are lowest for pupils from the white ethnic group[196]. The IFS's research also suggests that pupils from all other ethnic groups are significantly more likely than white British pupils to go on to higher education.

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[194] UCAS (2016) Daily Clearing analysis 2016 https://www.ucas.com/corporate/data-and-analysis/ucas-undergraduate-releases/daily-clearing-analysis-2016
[195] BIS (2015) *Socio-economic, ethnic and gender differences in HE participation*
[196] Because these entry rates only cover former state school pupils and require UCAS to match up their data with another database (the National Pupil Database), they are likely to underrepresent the rate for white students, who (with students of Chinese, Indian and mixed heritage) have among the highest rate of private school attendance and, as the largest group, are most likely to be affected by the conservative matching between the databases.

However, the representation of students from ethnic minorities does vary across ethnic group and Chinese 18-year-olds have much higher entry rates than all other ethnic groups under UCAS's analysis. Representation also varies by place and institution type, with a higher proportion of the black and minority ethnic (BME) undergraduate body based at low tariff institutions, and institutions in London and the West Midlands, than elsewhere in the UK[197]. It is also worth noting that both BIS research[198] and experimental statistics for the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)[199] suggests there are higher proportions of black and minority ethnic students at alternative higher education providers than at publically-funded providers.

Place

Higher education participation rates vary by place, with 2015 UCAS 18-year-old entry rates[200] varying by over 10 percentage points between English regions (from 38.6% in London to 27.6% in the South West) and by far more between parliamentary constituencies (from 14.5% in Bristol South to 56.4% in Richmond Park).

Research by the Sutton Trust[201] and analysis by HEFCE[202] suggest that place can compound the issues of disadvantage, with entry rates for those in the most disadvantaged groups varying depending on where they lived. HEFCE found that the young (18 and 19 year-old) entry rates for those in quintile 1 varied across the UK regions, with differences between the quintile 1 regional entry rates and the total regional entry rates. For all 18-year-olds and for 18 and 19 year-olds in quintile 1 specifically, London has higher entry rates than the rest of the country[203]. However, although for all 18-year-olds, the South East and East of England have the third and fourth strongest entry rates in the nine English regions, they have the lowest entry rates for those in quintile 1.

This is partly a legacy of differences in attainment at school in different parts of the country as highlighted by the Sutton Trust in their report[204], which found that pupils from the West Midlands were least likely to go on to study at Key Stage 5. The Social Market Foundation has also released research[205] showing that inequalities between English regions in pupil performance in exams at age 16 have, in some cases, worsened since the 1980s, with Yorkshire, the Midlands and the North East performing worst and London and the South East performing best.

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[197] HEFCE analysis of HESA (2016) student record
[198] BIS (2016) *Understanding the market of alternative higher education providers and their students in 2014*
[199] HESA (2016) *Experimental SFR 235*
[200] UCAS (2015) *End of Cycle Report 2015*
[201] Sutton Trust (2015), *Background to Success: Differences in A-level entries by ethnicity, neighbourhood and gender*
[202] HEFCE (2013) *Trends in young participation in higher education*
[203] For further analysis of what is happening in London please also see London Councils (2016) *The higher education journey of young London residents*
[204] Sutton Trust (2015) *Background to Success: Differences in A-level entries by ethnicity, neighbourhood and gender*
[205] Social Market Foundation (2016) *Educational inequalities in England and Wales*

However, it is not solely an issue of attainment. HEFCE analysis[206] has found that in some areas participation is below what would be expected given the level of GCSE attainment (a key indicator for going on to higher education). These include areas in South and East London, West Yorkshire and the West Midlands, suggesting that in some cases these gaps are also not a result of a lack of local higher education institutions. It is also worth noting that there are considerable differences in the proportions and numbers of young people in quintile 1 across the regions, with the largest proportion (a third) in the North East.

Sex

Women are more likely than men to apply for and enter higher education via UCAS and the gap between the sexes has grown in recent years, with women now 36% more likely to apply for[207] and 35% more likely to enter[208] higher education via UCAS than men. This is true across all ethnic groups[209], although the entry rate for men is growing faster than that for women in all groups except those with white and mixed heritage, suggesting that some work is being undertaken to address these gaps. It is also true across other developed nations, with only Switzerland, Japan and Germany having a higher proportion of male than female graduates from bachelor's programmes in 2013[210].

As with place, analysis suggests that sex can compound issues of disadvantage. The entry rate for those in quintile 1 varies considerably between the sexes, with 22.4% of 18-year-old women in quintile 1 accepting a higher education place via UCAS in 2015, compared to 14.7% of the equivalent men. This gap has grown since 2014, with 18-year-old women in quintile 1 now 52% more likely to accept a full-time place at university via UCAS, rather than 48% more likely in 2014. It must be remembered though that the proportional gap is affected by the low base (the gap between women and men in the highest quintile is proportionally much lower at 23% but in absolute terms is greater) and that although the entry rate for women in quintile 1 grew by more than that for men between 2014 and 2015, the reverse was true between 2013 and 2014.

Differences in attainment at school between the sexes are important in explaining this. Women make up a larger proportion of those entering A-level exams, despite there being fewer women than men in the 18-year-old population, and achieve higher grades (55.2% of girls' A-level entries were graded A*-B in 2015, compared to 51.5% of boys'[211]). The IFS's work for BIS[212] suggests that prior attainment explains the difference between participation by boys and girls, and that once it is taken into account boys are slightly more likely than girls of a similar background to attend

[206] HEFCE (2015) *Gaps in young participation in higher education* http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/yp/gaps/
[207] UCAS (2016) *UK application rates by the January deadline: 2016 cycle*
[208] UCAS (2016) *End of Cycle report.*
[209] UCAS (2016) *End of Cycle report.*
[210] OECD (2015) *Education at a glance*
[211] Department for Education (2016) *Revised A level and other level 3 results in England, 2014/2015*
[212] BIS (2015) *Socio-economic, ethnic and gender differences in HE participation*

university, including the most selective institutions. They also note that the gap between boys' and girls' attainment at school is falling slightly over time[213].

The problems for boys from lower socio-economic groups are also likely to be magnified by differences in subject choice by boys and girls. Four of the five subject areas with the highest proportions of students from POLAR3 quintile 1 in HESA's UK Performance Indicators (UKPIs) for 2014–15[214] are large and have significantly more women than men, particularly at undergraduate level (education, mass communications, creative arts and law). It is also worth noting that this is not a new issue, and may actually be improving: the proportion of UK undergraduates who were female fell from 59% in 2004–05 to 57% in 2014–15[215].

Disadvantaged pupils by ethnicity

Entry rates also vary by ethnicity within socio-economic groups. The IFS's research[216] suggests that white British pupils in the two lowest socio-economic groups (using their own rich measure of socio-economic group, though similar results were produced when POLAR2 was used as a proxy) have lower rates of participation in higher education than any other ethnic group. Once background characteristics and prior attainment were controlled for in the lowest socio-economic group this gap remained, although it was slightly smaller, and it appears to be growing over time. This suggests that lower prior attainment on the part of white British pupils from the lowest socio-economic group was part of the reason for the gap. However, there are clearly other factors at play and their importance is increasing. The research also suggests that the gap in higher education participation between socio-economic groups is largest for white pupils.

There has been some suggestion that there is a specific problem with white working-class boys, or white boys more generally, accessing higher education. UCAS have undertaken analysis of higher education participation by ethnicity, sex and socio-economic group, looking at 18-year-old state school pupils in the POLAR3 quintile 3 by sex, ethnicity, and free school meal status; and at 18-year-old state school pupils who received free school meals by POLAR3 quintile[217]. Their analysis suggests that under both measures white boys from the most disadvantaged groups have the lowest entry rates to higher education (below 10%). In both cases, however, they are closely followed by disadvantaged white girls (8% and 13% on the different measures) and mixed race boys (11% and 14% on the different measures), who make up the second and third lowest entry rates. The absolute difference between disadvantaged white boys and girls is also lower than the difference between the sexes for any other ethnic and socio-economic group (the proportional difference is larger, but this is largely because of the very low bases in both cases).

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[213] The difference in point between girls and boys is now 5.4 points, down from 6.5 in 2010, or the difference between a C and a C+. Boys make up a larger proportion of the vocational studies group at key stage 5, but the gap between boys' and girls' results is much larger here and growing (girls' average points score is 11.3 points ahead of boys', up from 8.8 points in 2010). See Department for Education (2016), *Revised A level and other level 3 results in England, 2014/2015*
[214] HESA (2015) *UKPIs: Widening participation of under-represented groups (table SP6)*
[215] UUK analysis of HESA (multiple years), *Student Record*
[216] BIS (2015) *Socio-economic, ethnic and gender differences in HE participation*
[217] The analysis uses the same database as their analysis of entry rates by ethnicity alone discussed earlier, so remains likely to be underreporting white participation.

The caveats on the data used by UCAS notwithstanding, it is clear that there is an issue with the participation rate of white boys from the lowest socio-economic groups. But there is also an issue of a similar magnitude with disadvantaged white girls and mixed race boys. In all three cases, part of this issue will be driven by low prior attainment: all three groups have low average performance at GCSE, with GCSE performance a strong predictor of entry to higher education.

However, it is not solely prior attainment which impacts here: black boys from a non-African background in the free school meals group also have very low GCSE attainment, and higher (though not high) entry rates. IFS researchers found that when participation was looked at by ethnicity alone, there was a positive association between higher participation and having English as an additional language. This could suggest that more recent migrants have higher aspirations for their children. There was also a positive association with living in London (outside of the additional attainment of London pupils due to the 'London schools' effect'), which could be linked to the number of universities in London and the tendency of students from ethnic minorities to go to local universities.

Selective institutions

The entry rate for those from all disadvantaged groups is lowest at the most selective institutions (those in the top third of institutions by average entrant tariff points). Although there have been large headline increases in the entry rate to the most selective institutions for those from POLAR3 quintile 1, they only rose above 3% in 2014 (reaching 3.3% in 2015) and remain 84% (17 percentage points) lower than the entry rates for quintile 5 to the same institutions. OFFA has also examined[218] this issue, using a different measure of disadvantage (the proportion of young people who have a parent with a higher education qualification at census ward level, with wards grouped into quintiles) and found that participation by the most disadvantaged has remained broadly similar since the 1990s.

The IFS research mentioned previously also suggests that pupils from all ethnic minority groups are more likely than white British pupils to attend a selective institution (though white British students make up a much larger proportion of students at these institutions because of the larger numbers in the population at large), and that this gap has grown to become significant over time. The gap between white pupils and those from ethnic minorities at selective institutions is smaller, however, than for overall participation in higher education, suggesting that pupils from ethnic minorities are more likely to attend less selective institutions.

Both OFFA and the IFS acknowledge the role of prior attainment in the low participation of disadvantaged pupils at selective institutions, with the IFS finding that this has an even greater role than participation generally (particularly when key stage 4 attainment is considered). OFFA argues that other factors, like encouraging highly qualified applicants from disadvantaged backgrounds to apply to more selective institutions, may also be important. In terms of ethnicity, however, the IFS found that the gap between participation for white pupils and those from all other

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[218] OFFA (2014) *Trends in young participation by student background and selectivity of institution*

ethnic groups remain once prior attainment and background characteristics are controlled for, suggesting that other factors are at play here.

Another consideration is offer-making by institutions. UCAS examined[219] the higher tariff institution offer rate for different applicant characteristics by grade profile and course applied to against the average offer rate for those grade profiles and courses at the October and January deadlines. In most cases the offer rate was in line with the range of variation which would be expected, or a very small amount below this. However, there was a slightly larger gap for applicants receiving free school meals who had been predicted top grades.

The recent release by UCAS of data[220] covering applications, offers and placed applicants by sex, area background and ethnic group suggest across all tariff groups and at an aggregate national level for England, the offer rates for applicants from quintile 1 and for Asian and black applicants are slightly below what would otherwise be expected, given the level of their predicted grade and the general subject area of the course they are applying for. At the same time those for quintile 5 and white applicants are slightly above what would otherwise be expected.

The differences are small and there may be legitimate reasons for them (UCAS suggests that there may be factors which explain this such as the subjects studied and the grades held by applicants. For example, UCAS's calculations could only account for the total level of predicted grades and the *mix* of predicted grades, or A-level or other subjects, personal statements and references. UCAS states that it is not possible to take these further factors into account without making assumptions about how universities should offer from pooled averages from across the sector, something which is not a good match to the differing academic offer making policies used by institutions). It should also be noted that UCAS believe that the differences in offer-making are too small to make a material impact to the differences seen in entry rates. However, it is important that institutions look at an institutional level at their offer-making to ensure that it follows best practice and is unbiased.

Mature students

It is less easy to produce accurate entry rates for mature students as the proportions of those taking up undergraduate study each year will not reflect the proportion of the population already holding higher education qualifications. From the HESA student record[221] we know that the number of full- and part-time undergraduates aged over 25 fell by 37% between 2009–10 and 2014–15 so this is likely to be a change in mature applicant behaviour rather than an increase in the number. Data from the 2016 UCAS cycle[222] suggests that although the number of mature applicants for full-time undergraduate education through UCAS is falling, the proportion who

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[219] UCAS (2015) *End of Cycle report*
[220] UCAS (2016) *UCAS Undergraduate reports by sex, area background, and ethnic group* https://www.ucas.com/corporate/data-and-analysis/ucas-undergraduate-releases/ucas-undergraduate-reports-sex-area
[221] UUK analysis of HESA (multiple years), *Student Record*
[222] UCAS (2016), *2016 cycle applicant figures – 30 June deadline* and UCAS (2016) Daily Clearing analysis 2016 https://www.ucas.com/corporate/data-and-analysis/ucas-undergraduate-releases/daily-clearing-analysis-2016

are accepted is rising. It is too early to say whether this will impact on the numbers of mature undergraduates starting courses.

Participation by mature students is important because mature undergraduates are more likely to be from ethnic minority groups, particularly of black heritage, have non-traditional or no entry qualifications, and to have a known disability. The number of mature students are likely to have been affected by the falling number of students on 'other undergraduate' courses (e.g. foundation degrees and certificates and diplomas), as over-25s make up a higher proportion of these students.

Part-time students

The HESA student record[223] also shows a fall in the number of part-time undergraduate entrants between 2009–10 and 2014–15 of 50%. This is important because part-time undergraduates are more likely to have no or low entrance qualifications, meaning that part-time provision opens up access to those who have been left out of higher education by prior attainment at school. Part-time students are also more likely to be mature (although mature students are only more likely to be part-time over the age of 30).

Analysis by the Independent Student Funding Panel established by Universities UK in 2014 has shown that a number of factors have converged to create a particularly challenging environment for part-time study in England[224]. The number of students entering part-time study in recent years has been affected by the removal in 2008–09 of funding for students taking qualifications equivalent to or lower than ones which they already had, and by reforms to undergraduate funding in 2012–13, including an increase in fees following cuts to teaching grants and issues around eligibility for tuition fee loans. At the same time the economic downturn has also caused a reduction in the number of students able to self-fund part-time study, and a reduction in the number of employers willing to support employees through part-time study.

POTENTIAL METHODS OF RESPONDING TO THESE CHALLENGES

Existing research and analysis suggests that underrepresented students are more likely to have lower prior attainment and different entry qualifications and entry routes to higher education, including entering as part-time or mature students. It is possible that the effects of this may be exacerbated over the next few years as curriculum and qualification changes take effect across the country. Different schools will respond to these changes in different ways (e.g. dropping AS levels, no longer providing certain subjects) which may be affected by school and local authority resources, further compounding issues of disadvantage and place. The changes are also likely to make predicted grades less reliable.

All of this would suggest two possible areas for exploration:

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[223] UUK analysis of HESA (multiple years), *Student Record*
[224] Student Funding Panel (2015) *An analysis of the design, impact and options for reform of the student fees and loans system in England*

- improving awareness of all the possible routes into higher education, so all potential students are aware of what is required and whether they are currently on track
- improving the ability of potential students to take advantage of these routes, possibly by improving their attainment.

Both of these aims come under the provision of accessible information, advice and guidance to potential students, and this is highlighted as key by OFFA and HEFCE's joint access and student strategy[225]. The increasing priority over this parliament for new apprenticeships also highlights the importance of ensuring the availability of high quality guidance and information on higher level apprenticeships.

There is some discussion about whether the provision of information, advice and guidance should include the raising of underrepresented groups' educational aspirations. Work by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation[226] suggests that at least in the case of socio-economic disadvantage, pupil and parent aspiration is high, and may be underestimated by teachers and other professionals. In their view it would be more effective to focus more directly on improving attainment for these pupils and on keeping aspirations on track.

One way of working towards improving both the awareness of potential learners of the different routes into higher education and their ability to take up those opportunities is through the links and partnerships universities have with schools, colleges and other sectors with potential learners (e.g. employers). HEFCE have established two programmes to try to encourage collaboration and partnerships between schools, colleges, universities and the third sector in this area: the National Networks for Collaborative Outreach[227] (NNCOs), and the National Collaborative Outreach Programme[228] (NCOP). The NNCOs have received funding from January 2015 to December 2016 and bring together 200 universities and further education colleges, with 4,300 secondary schools and colleges, in 35 local and three national networks (one each for those looking to go to Oxford or Cambridge, for older students looking to continue to or return to study, and for care leavers). The NCOP, which will run from academic year 2016–17 to 2019–20, will support consortia of higher education institutions, schools, colleges and third sector organisation to deliver collaborative outreach in specific local areas with low higher education participation or participation which is lower than expected given GCSE attainment levels.

The government has also recently announced[229] its intention to require universities to either open or sponsor schools in exchange for the right to raise their tuition fees, as part of raising pre-higher education attainment.

Outside of attainment-raising, another possible way of increasing the ability of underrepresented groups to enter higher education is the provision of supplementary

[225] BIS (2014) *National strategy for access and student success in higher education*
[226] Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2012), *Can changing aspirations and attitudes impact on educational attainment? A review of interventions*
[227] For more information see http://www.hefce.ac.uk/sas/nnco/faq/
[228] For more information see http://www.hefce.ac.uk/sas/ncop/
[229] Department for Education (2016) *Schools that work for everyone: Government consultation*

admissions routes. International research for OFFA and HEFCE[230] has suggested that this has been particularly effective at improving access for underrepresented students. Supplementary routes could include pre-entry access and foundation courses delivered collaboratively by schools, colleges and higher education providers, as well as alternative entry routes for adults to develop the skills of the workforce. Some work has previously been done on this with Progression Agreements as part of HEFCE's previous Lifelong Learning Networks.

Higher Education Academy (HEA) analysis[231] suggests that these were primarily effective at building links between higher education institutions and colleges and employers.

Consideration could also be given to focusing efforts on those areas identified by HEFCE as currently having higher education participation rates below what would be expected given their GCSE attainment.

It is important to note that evaluation of current outreach and widening participation activity and interventions by institutions, although improving, remains limited. Providing a robust evidence base is critical and both OFFA and HEFCE have done work to support the development of effective monitoring and evaluation. HEFCE has developed a conceptual framework for evaluating widening participation. They have also provided funding for the rolling out of the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT)[232] across England, allowing individuals to be tracked following entry onto an institution's access, retention, success or progression programmes. OFFA has also developed a project with the Sutton Trust to look at effective ways to evaluate outreach which began in spring 2016.

2. RETENTION

State of play and current challenges

Whilst at university there are differences in the completion and success rates of students on the basis of socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender, disability, and type of study. These remain when adjusted to take account of entry qualifications, age and subject of study. The biggest gaps are for students of black and other Asian (that is, not Chinese or Indian) heritage and those from the lowest socio-economic groups as measured by POLAR3.

Disadvantaged students

In 2013–14 the proportion of UK-wide young full-time first degree students from POLAR3 quintile 1 who are no longer in higher education one year after entry (8.2%) is two and a half percentage points higher than the proportion of students from the

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[230] Edge Hill University and CFE research (2013), *International Research on the Effectiveness of Widening Participation*

[231] Higher Education Academy (2012) *Promoting social mobility by creating pathways to the professions and vocational careers: the role of progression agreements*

[232] The Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) is a monitoring and evaluation service tracking engagement in outreach activities and building evidence of future student achievement. For more information, see https://www.highereducationaccesstracker.org.uk/login.aspx

other four POLAR3 quintiles no longer in higher education (5.7%)[233]. England-only figures from 2003–04 to 2013-14 from HEFCE[234] show the same pattern, with both young and mature entrants from POLAR3 quintile 1 more likely to drop out of full-time first degree study than those from more advantaged backgrounds. This difference remained even when controlled for age, subject of study and entrance qualifications, leaving those in POLAR3 quintile 1 alone in having an above sector-adjusted average drop-out rate for young students, and a rising, above sector-adjusted average non-continuation rate for mature students.

Although the UK-wide non-continuation rates[235] for both disadvantaged and more advantaged students rose in the latest year for which we have data (2013–14) following longer-term reductions, the rate for more advantaged students rose by less (6% proportionally compared to 13% for POLAR3 quintile 1); the England-only rates for disadvantaged students have been stable for the past two years.

HEFCE research[236] shows that the likelihood of leaving higher education in the year following entry falls for each POLAR3 quintile, and that although there has been a clear downward trajectory in non-continuation rates for all POLAR3 quintiles, the gap between them has remained similar. It is also worth noting that the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission identified in 2015[237] that many of the institutions with the biggest gaps in non-continuation rates between the most and least advantaged, were also the most selective institutions.

HEFCE have also undertaken research[238] into the proportion of entrants from each of the POLAR3 quintiles going on to obtain degree qualifications. This mirrors the non-continuation rates, with only 77% of those from quintile 1 going on to obtain a degree qualification, compared to 85% of those in quintile 5. There is a clear upward trajectory in the proportions obtaining degree qualification by POLAR quintile, with the biggest percentage change between the proportions in quintile 1 and quintile 2. This trajectory remains once the results are controlled for entry qualification, subject of study, sex and ethnicity, although the gap between quintiles 1, 2 and 3 reduces. Entrants from both quintiles 1 and 2 are significantly less likely than would otherwise be expected, given their other characteristics, to obtain a degree.

Ethnic minority students

HEFCE's England-only non-continuation rates show that of UK-domiciled entrants, white entrants and those of Indian and Chinese heritage had the lowest non-continuation rates, with entrants with black Caribbean, black other and black African heritage having the highest rates. Once controlled for entry qualification, subject of study and age, this changes slightly, with entrants of Bangladeshi, Chinese, Indian and other Asian heritage less likely than would be expected to drop out given these other characteristics, and white entrants having non-continuation rates in line with

[233] HESA (2016) *UKPIs: Non-continuation following year of entry (table T3b)*
[234] HEFCE (2016) Non-continuation rates: Trends and profiles http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/ncr/
[235] HESA (2016) *UKPIs: Non-continuation rates (table T3b)*
[236] Cited in BIS (2014) *National strategy for access and student success in higher education*
[237] Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (2015), *State of the Nation 2015: Social Mobility and Child Poverty in Great Britain*
[238] HEFCE (2013) *Higher education and beyond: Outcomes from full-time first degree study*

what would be expected. However, the non-continuation rates for entrants in all three black groups are all above what would be expected and rising, as are those for entrants in the mixed/other and Pakistani groups[239].

HEFCE research[240] has also shown differences between the proportion of entrants from each ethnic group going on to obtain a degree qualification, with the highest proportions coming from white entrants and those with Chinese and Indian heritage, and the lowest proportion coming from entrants with black and other Asian heritage. Once controlled for entry qualification, subject of study and sex, entrants with Chinese and Indian heritage are more likely than would be expected to achieve degree qualification, given their age, subject of study and entry qualifications. However, those with black heritage are significantly less likely than would be expected to obtain a degree, given these other characteristics. White entrants and those with other Asian heritage have completion rates in line with what would be expected, given their other characteristics.

Male students

In England a higher proportion of male than female full-time first degree entrants leave higher education in their first year of study[241]. This difference remains when controlled for entry qualification, subject of study and age, with male entrants more likely than female entrants to drop out of higher education regardless of background. However, the rates have got closer in recent years.

Male entrants to higher education are also significantly less likely than would otherwise be expected to complete their degree, whilst female entrants are significantly more likely to, suggesting that the fact of being male makes male entrants less likely to obtain a degree, regardless of their background[242].

Disabled students

HEFCE's analysis of England-only non-continuation rates[243] show a higher proportion of entrants to full-time first degree study with disabilities leaving higher education in their first year than those without a specified disability. This difference remains once controlled for entry qualification, subject of study and sex, suggesting that disabled students are more likely to drop out of higher education (this might also be affected by the size of the group, with far fewer disabled students than non-disabled students).

Earlier and more detailed analysis by HEFCE[244] of the proportion of entrants who complete their degrees gives a slightly different picture. A slightly higher proportion of entrants receiving the DSA obtain degree qualifications than those entrants without any disability at all, but the proportion of entrants with a disability who do

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[239] HEFCE (2016) *Non-continuation rates: Trends and profiles* http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/ncr/nhe/
[240] HEFCE (2013) *Higher education and beyond: Outcomes from full-time first degree study*
[241] HEFCE, *Non-continuation rates: Trends and profiles* http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/ncr/nc/
[242] HEFCE (2013) *Higher education and beyond: Outcomes from full-time first degree study*
[243] HEFCE (2016) *Non-continuation rates: Trends and profiles* http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/ncr/nhe/
[244] HEFCE (2013) *Higher education and beyond: Outcomes from full-time first degree study*

not receive the DSA who go on to obtain a degree is lower than for both. When adjusted for entry qualification, subject of study, sex and ethnicity, disabled students in receipt of the DSA are more likely than would be expected to obtain a degree, whilst those without the DSA are significantly less likely.

Mature students

The non-continuation rate for mature full-time first degree students[245] is considerably higher than that for young full-time first degree students (12.5% for first time mature students compared to 6.0% for young students in 2013–14). HEFCE's England-only analysis[246] shows that the highest non-continuation rates are for those in the 21-24-year-old age group, followed by those aged 25 and over. Although once these rates are controlled for entry qualification, subject of study and sex, only students aged 19-20 and 21-24 are more likely than would otherwise be expected to drop-out, the non-continuation rate for students aged 25 and over is increasing. Mature students are most likely to leave higher education because of difficulty balancing their studies with other commitments and because of financial difficulties.

Part-time students

The highest non-continuation rate is for part-time students, with 36.4% of part-time first degree students leaving higher education two years after entry in 2012–13, compared to the 7.2% of all full-time entrants who left after their first year. This rate has barely changed since 2006–07, when it was 35.3%[247].

There is a link between the retention of part-time students and the level of intensity of their study: those studying at 30% of full-time or higher are more likely to remain in higher education.

Other undergraduate students

The HESA student record[248] shows that in 2014–15 students from POLAR3 quintile 1 made up a higher proportion of students taking other undergraduate courses (foundation degrees, certificates and diplomas, etc.) rather than first degree study. The non-continuation rates for these courses are higher than for first-degree study and rose for both young and mature entrants in 2013–14 to reach 15.6% for young entrants (compared to 6.0% for first degree entrants) and 12.9% for mature entrants (compared to 11.8% for first degree entrants)[249].

[245] HESA (2016) *UKPIs: Non-continuation following year of entry (table T3c)*
[246] HEFCE (2016) *Non-continuation rates: Trends and profiles*
http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/ncr/nhe/
[247] HESA (2016) *UKPIs: Non-continuation following year of entry (tables T3a and T3e)*
[248] HESA (2016) HESA Student Record
[249] HESA (2016) *UKPIs: Non-continuation following year of entry (tables T3a and T3d)*

POTENTIAL METHODS OF RESPONDING TO THESE CHALLENGES

Research undertaken by the Higher Education Academy[250] (HEA) suggests that almost a third of *all* students think about leaving higher education, primarily for academic reasons (either not feeling that they are at the level required by their course or that they made the wrong course choice). The reasons students gave for staying on their course, however, were primarily social – about the support of friends (whether based at their institution or networks from home) and family. This suggests three areas to explore: how to ensure that applicants are given adequate information, advice and guidance about their course; how to ensure that entrants are prepared academically for their course before they start, perhaps through some form of outreach activity; and how to develop student social and informal support networks, to give them a sense of belonging.

One potential method of delivering improved information, advice and guidance to applicants and ensuring that they are better prepared for the academic requirements of their course is better outreach. It is important that the links built through the collaborative outreach described above in part 1 are sustainable, and that the collaborative element of any networks is not lost to competition as institutions increasingly work on a recruitment rather than selection footing.

It has historically been more difficult to help students studying at institutions local to their home, students who live at home, and part-time students to build networks and a sense of belonging to an institution, as they spend less time at their institution and are more likely to already have existing local networks outside of the institution. As students from POLAR3 quintile 1, students from black and minority ethnic groups and mature students are all likely to be in these groups, this will require particular focus. Qualitative analysis by the HEA[251] also identified social segregation along ethnic lines amongst students, which could be another area of focus.

Peer mentoring and tutoring is a possible method of building social and informal support networks for students who are more at risk of dropping out, both before entry to and through their transition into higher education, and then during their degree. Research by the HEA[252] has suggested that interaction with higher education students increases the confidence of potential leaners as well as improving motivation and attainment, all of which may help to mitigate feelings of academic inadequacy once at university. There has been insufficient research on the impact of peer mentors once students have started higher education to be able to assess their impact on retention, although anecdotal evidence suggests that the relationship is beneficial for both mentor and mentee. There has also been little research on how to match students to potential peer mentees.

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[250] Higher Education Academy (2012) *The contribution of pre-entry interventions to student retention and success: A literature synthesis of the Widening Access, Student Retention and Success National Programme Archives*

[251] Higher Education Academy (2012) *Black and minority ethnic student degree retention and attainment*

[252] Higher Education Academy (2012) *The role of higher education students in widening access, retention and success: A literature synthesis of the Widening Access, Students Retention and Success National Programmes Archive*

It is likely that measures to improve access would impact on student retention, so interaction between these two should also be considered.

3. ATTAINMENT

STATE OF PLAY AND CURRENT CHALLENGES

There are also gaps in students' outcomes from university study, with differences in the degree classifications received by students on the basis of socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender and disability. Again, these gaps remain when adjusted to take account of other characteristics and are biggest for students of black and other Asian heritage.

Disadvantaged students

HEFCE found[253] that only 45% of entrants to higher education in POLAR3 quintile 1 go on to obtain a first or upper second class degree, compared to 58.6% in quintile 5. There is a clear upward trajectory between the quintiles, with the lowest difference between quintiles 2 and 3.

Once controlled for entry qualification, subject of study, sex and ethnicity the trajectory remains, with quintile 1 and 2 students significantly less likely than would be expected, given their other background characteristics, to obtain a first or upper second class degree, and quintile 4 and 5 students significantly above what would be expected of them. The largest gap is between quintile 1 students and their sector-adjusted average[254]. HEFCE found an unexplained gap of three percentage points in the proportions of 2013–14 graduates from quintile 1 obtaining a first or upper second class degree, compared to quintile 5 graduates[255].

Ethnic minority students

The largest gaps for BME students are in their degree attainment. In English higher education institutions in 2014–15 58% of black and minority ethnic qualifying students obtained first or upper second class degrees compared to 75% of white students doing the same[256]. When HEFCE examined degree outcomes for 2006–07 entrants[257], they found that all BME groups (using the categories black, Chinese, Indian, other Asian and other/unknown) were less likely than would be expected given their other characteristics to obtain first or upper-second class degrees, with the gap over ten percentage points for black students and around eight percentage points for other Asian students. Later analysis by HEFCE[258] of degree outcomes by entry qualifications found an unexplained gap of 15 percentage points between white and BME graduates in 2013–14, similar to the observed difference of 16 percentage

253 HEFCE (2013) *Higher education and beyond: Outcomes from full-time first degree study*

254 HEFCE (2013) *Higher education and beyond: Outcomes from full-time first degree study*

255 HEFCE (2015) *Differences in degree outcomes: The effect of subject and student characteristics*

256 UUK analysis of the HESA Student Record (2016).

257 HEFCE (2013) *Higher education and beyond: Outcomes from full-time first degree study*. Although HEFCE did not control for differential participation rates across ethnic groups, separate analysis by Universities UK suggests that the gap remains even when these are controlled for.

258 HEFCE (2015) *Differences in degree outcomes: The effect of subject and student characteristics*

points. The gaps ranged from five percentage points for graduates with four As at A-level, to 18 percentage points for graduates with non-A-level entry qualifications.
In recent years, degree attainment has improved across all ethnic groups, but the gap between white and ethnic minority student attainment remains wide, particularly for students of black heritage. HEA research[259] suggests that BME student outcomes are lower across the higher education sector, including at Russell Group institutions, but that black and minority ethnic students do achieve higher grades at Russell Group institutions.

Male students

There are also persistent gaps in the proportions of male and female students obtaining first or upper second class degrees. In England in 2014–15, 70% of female qualifying students obtained a first or upper second, compared to 66% of male qualifying students. The gap is at upper second level, with the proportion of male students obtaining first class degrees actually slightly higher than the proportion of women doing so (22% compared to 21%).

HEFCE[260] found that the gap remained once controlled for entry qualification, subject of study and ethnicity with male entrants significantly less likely than would be expected to obtain a first or upper second class degree, whilst women are significantly more likely.

Disabled students

Across the UK the proportion of disabled students obtaining a first or upper second class degree has risen, but they remain slightly less likely than non-disabled students to do so whether or not they receive the DSA, with those disabled students who do not receive the DSA least likely to obtain first or upper second class degrees. HEFCE found an unexplained gap of three percentage points in the proportions of 2013–14 graduates with disabilities obtaining a first or 2.1[261]. Their earlier analysis by DSA status found that disabled graduates not in receipt of the DSA were three percentage points less likely than would be expected to get a top degree classification, whilst the likelihood that those in receipt of the DSA would achieve a top classification was in line with what was expected[262].

Mature students

ECU analysis of the HESA student record showed that although mature students across the UK are more likely than young entrants to obtain a first class degree (with that likelihood going up by age), they are significantly less likely to obtain an upper second class degree and are more likely to obtain 2.2 or third class or pass degree[263]. The gap is widest in England, with 76% of young qualifying students obtaining a first or upper second class degree, compared to 67% of mature qualifiers.

[259] HEA (2012) *Black and minority ethnic student degree retention and attainment*
[260] HEFCE (2015) *Differences in degree outcomes: The effect of subject and student characteristics*
[261] HEFCE (2015) *Differences in degree outcomes: The effect of subject and student characteristics*
[262] HEFCE (2013) *Higher education and beyond: Outcomes from full-time first degree study*
[263] Equality Challenge Unit (2015) *Equality in higher education: statistical report 2015, Part 2: students*

However, analysis by HEFCE[264] suggests that other characteristics are an important factor in this gap, with the nine percentage point observed gap in graduates obtaining a first or upper second class degree almost reversed when this is controlled for entry qualifications.

Part-time students

Analysis by HEFCE[265] of 2013–14 graduates found that 75% of full-time graduates and 57% of part-time graduates achieving a first or upper second class degree. When they controlled these results for entry qualifications and student characteristics the gaps remained high, with between four and 15 percentage points difference remaining depending on what those entry qualifications were.

POTENTIAL METHODS OF RESPONDING TO THESE CHALLENGES

Whilst some of the differences in degree attainment are linked to prior attainment they cannot all be explained in this way, as the gaps continue once degree qualifications have been controlled on the basis of student background characteristics and entry qualifications. HEA analysis[266] found multiple factors were at play in the attainment gap but that learning and teaching practices within higher education, both in terms of existing practices and how these were experienced by students, were significant and should be considered on a strategic institutional basis.

Possible areas for exploration in terms of existing learning and teaching practices are:
- curriculum development: ensuring that the curriculum is diverse and inclusive
- curriculum delivery: ensuring that teaching practices are varied and engage all students
- assessment and marking: ensuring that assessment and marking practices are inclusive and do not disadvantage any particular student group

Possible areas for exploration in terms of how students currently experience learning and teaching are:
- student experience: how students with different background characteristics experience the curriculum and teaching delivery
- student relationships: how students with different background characteristics relate to staff and each other, and how staff relate to students of different backgrounds
- student understanding: ensuring that students understand what is expected and required of them academically, including on assessments, with particular focus on assessment guidelines and marking

A further area to explore is whether particular student groups should receive targeted support or whether this support should be 'mainstreamed', and, if the support is to be 'mainstreamed', how to ensure that students who require the most support receive it.

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[264] HEFCE (2015) *Differences in degree outcomes: The effect of subject and student characteristics*
[265] HEFCE (2015) *Differences in degree outcomes: The effect of subject and student characteristics*
[266] Higher Education Academy (2012) *Black and minority ethnic student degree retention and attainment*

Another clear area for exploration is the link between the DSA and student achievement. Is it the DSA which enables disabled students receiving it to succeed in line with expectations, or is there something specific to the group receiving the DSA which makes them more likely to succeed? How can this effect be maintained once significant changes are made to the DSA?

It is likely that measures to improve retention would also impact on student success, so overlap between these two should also be considered.

4. PROGRESSION

STATE OF PLAY AND CURRENT CHALLENGES

There are also gaps in students' outcomes from university study, with differences in the rates of students going on to employment and further study on the basis of socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender and disability, and particular differences in graduate employment. Again, these gaps remain when adjusted to take account of other characteristics and are biggest for students of black and Asian heritage.

Disadvantaged graduates

HEFCE examined[267] employment rates for 2010–11 graduates and found that the gap in employment rates between those from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds were in line with what would be expected, given the graduates' other characteristics. However, they found a significant difference between the proportions of disadvantaged graduates going on to *professional* employment[268]. Those in quintile 1 were 4.3 percentage points less likely to go onto professional employment than quintile 5 graduates once results were controlled for student characteristic. This gap widened over time as well, so 40 months after graduation graduates from quintile 1 were 5.3 percentage points less likely to be in professional employment.

In addition to the gaps in the numbers of disadvantaged students going on to professional employment, research by the London School of Economics for the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission found that even those who did were paid less than their advantaged peers[269]. This finding has been further highlighted by the IFS's 2016 report on graduate earnings[270]. By linking HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and Student Loans Company data, IFS researchers were able to show that graduates from wealthy family backgrounds earn significantly more after graduation than those from poorer backgrounds, even after completing the same degrees from the same universities, and that these gaps were bigger for higher-paid graduates.

[267] HEFCE (2016) *Differences in employment outcomes: Comparison of 2008–09 and 2010–11 first degree graduates*
[268] There is no one definition of professional employment. The Standard Occupational Classification (SOC 2010) system features ten major categories of occupations. HESA terms all occupations that sit within major categories one (managers, directors and senior officials), two (professional occupations) and three (associate professional and technical occupations) 'professional employment'. The former Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, in its Graduate Labour Market Statistics series of publications, labelled these 'high skilled employment'.
[269] London School of Economics (2015) *Introducing the Class Ceiling: Social Mobility and Britain's Elite Occupations*
[270] IFS (2016) *How English domiciled graduate earnings vary with gender, institution attended, subject and socio-economic background*

Separate analysis by HEFCE[271] has also shown that although slightly higher proportions of disadvantaged students intend to continue to postgraduate education than their advantaged peers, almost 15% fewer of those that want to go do so. Those that do are more likely to go on to 'other postgraduate' study (courses with certificates and diplomas or for credit) rather than masters or PhD study[272]. This is important as postgraduate qualifications are becomingly increasingly important in the workplace and those with postgraduate degrees gain a significant wage premium[273].

Ethnic minority graduates

Students from BME groups have significantly worse employment outcomes than white students. HEFCE analysis[274] found that graduates from almost all BME groups[275] were less likely than white graduates to go on to employment or further study six months after graduating. Once controlled for student characteristics, the biggest gaps were for graduates from Chinese and black African backgrounds, both of whom were more than seven percentage points less likely to be employed than would be expected if they were white. Graduates from Pakistani backgrounds were also more than six percentage points less likely to be in employment.

The gaps tended to be smaller for professional employment, but graduates from both Bangladeshi and black African backgrounds were more than six percentage points less likely to be in professional employment than would be expected if they were white. Forty months after graduation many of the gaps in professional employment rates increased, with graduates with Pakistani, black Caribbean and black African heritage all having professional employment rates more than eight percentage points below what would be expected, and graduates with Bangladeshi heritage having a gap of nearly seven percentage points.

HEFCE analysis[276] has also shown that, as with disadvantaged students, although a higher proportion of black and minority ethnic students than white students intend to move on to postgraduate study, a lower proportion of them go on to do so (a gap of around 10 percentage points). HEFCE also found[277] that BME students were more likely than white students to go on to postgraduate taught study, but less likely to go on to postgraduate research study. This may in part be due to the higher numbers of BME students from London, as Londoners appear to be more likely to go on to taught masters study. The analysis also showed gaps by ethnic groups within the BME

[271] HEFCE (2015) *Higher education in England 2015*
[272] HEFCE (2013) *Trends in transition from first degree to postgraduate study: Qualifiers between 2002–03 and 2010–11*
[273] Sutton Trust (2013) *The Postgraduate Premium: Revisiting Trends in Social Mobility and Educational Inequalities in Britain and America;* BIS (2013), *The Impact of University Degrees on the Lifecycle of Earnings: some further analysis*
[274] HEFCE (2016) *Differences in employment outcomes: Comparison of 2008–09 and 2010–11 first degree graduates*
[275] The exception was those from 'other black' backgrounds (that is, not African or Caribbean backgrounds).
[276] HEFCE (2015) *Higher education in England 2015*
[277] HEFCE (2013) *Trends in transition from first degree to postgraduate study: Qualifiers between 2002–03 and 2010–11*

grouping. Students with Chinese, other Asian[278] and black African heritage have high rates of transition to postgraduate study, whilst those with black Caribbean heritage have low transition rates, consistently below those of white students.

Male students

The employment outcomes of male graduates are an interesting case. HEFCE[279] found that although male graduates of 2010–11 had a lower overall employment rate six months after graduation than female graduates (87.0% compared to 91.2%), they had a higher professional employment rate (64.3% compared to 59.6%). In both cases, once controlled for student characteristics, the gaps were nearly four percentage points. The gaps also remained 40 months after graduation, but had reduced for the overall employment rate (the employment rate for men was 0.8 percentage points lower than expected). Analysis[280] of the HESA *Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education* salary data adds a further interesting perspective on this, showing that although female graduates are more likely to be in work, they earn considerably less than male graduates, regardless of subject choice.

HEFCE also found[281] that men were more likely than women to progress to postgraduate taught or research study, while women were more likely to progress to other postgraduate study. This appears to hold true regardless of degree classification, subject area and POLAR quintile.

Disabled students

The gaps found earlier in the lifecycle for disabled students appear to carry through to employment outcomes. HEFCE found[282] that disabled students were between 1.9 (for those not receiving the DSA) and 3.2 percentage points (for those receiving the DSA) less likely to be in employment or further study six months after graduation than non-disabled students with the same characteristics. Interestingly they found no immediate gap in professional employment rates, but found that 40 months after graduation, gaps had opened up. Those who received the DSA were 3.1 percentage points less likely to be in professional employment than their non-disabled peers, while disabled graduates who had not received the DSA were 3.5 percentage points less likely to be in professional employment. This is in a broader context of poor disability employment rates, with Scope noting[283] that the gap between the disabled and non-disabled employment rates has been broadly static at around 30% for over a decade.

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[278] In this context, not Bangladeshi, Indian or Pakistani.
[279] HEFCE (2016) *Differences in employment outcomes: Comparison of 2008–09 and 2010–11 first degree graduates*
[280] The Visible Hand in Economics (25 July 2015) 'The male wage premium' http://www.tvhe.co.nz/2015/07/25/the-male-wage-premium/
[281] HEFCE (2013) *Trends in transition from first degree to postgraduate study: Qualifiers between 2002–03 and 2010–11*
[282] HEFCE (2016) *Briefing: Differences in employment outcomes* http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/employment/201011/
[283] Scope (2014) *A million futures: halving the disability employment gap*

HEFCE analysis[284] has found no gap in the proportions of disabled students going on to postgraduate research study, and a slightly higher proportion going on to postgraduate taught study than their non-disabled peers.

POTENTIAL METHODS OF RESPONDING TO THESE CHALLENGES

On the issue of employability, existing research and analysis points to three clear areas for exploration: raising aspirations and social capital for underrepresented students; the provision of core employability skills as part of the curriculum, including through work experience and placements; and graduate employer recruitment practices. There is also a link back to the provision of information, advice and guidance to applicants, as graduate outcomes differ significantly by subject.

Many institutions are already doing work on raising aspiration and social capital for underrepresented students, including using alumni and employer mentors for students in underrepresented groups and encouraging all students to take on extra-curricular activities in order to develop broader workplace skills. This fits with work going on in terms of access and retention, and is mentioned as a priority in the Independent Reviewer on Social Mobility and Child Poverty's 2012 progress report[285].

There is some debate on the impact of provision of employability skills as part of the curriculum[286]. Some have argued that the shift to making curriculums 'relevant' rather than based on theory has exacerbated the inequalities between the student experience at different institutions and different courses. Those writing on employability, however, consistently emphasise the importance of embedding employability in the curriculum.

There is some evidence[287] to suggest that graduate employer recruitment practices are entrenching the inequalities in higher education by focusing their efforts on a small number of highly selective institutions, encouraging more advantaged pupils who are already focused on gaining graduate employment to go to these institutions. This reflects HEFCE's analysis[288] on student outcomes which suggested that entrants to lower tariff institutions (those in the bottom third of institutions on entrant tariff points) are less likely than would be expected, given their other characteristics, to enter either employment or further study, or graduate employment or further study. It is not clear what impact an increasing focus on recruiting graduates who have already undertaken work experience for a company (32% of 2016's entry-level graduate roles are expected to be filled by graduates who have already worked for their organisations, with nearly half of graduate recruiters stating that it was not likely that they would recruit graduates who had no previous experience, regardless

HEFCE (2013) *Trends in transition from first degree to postgraduate study: Qualifiers between 2002–03 and 2010–11*

[285] Independent Reviewer on Social Mobility and Child Poverty (2012) *University Challenge: How Higher Education Can Advance Social Mobility*

[286] See King's College London, ARC Network and The University of Manchester (2015), *Causes of differences in student outcomes*

[287] The Bridge Group (2016) *Inspiring Policy: Graduate Outcomes and Social Mobility*; HEFCE (2015) *Delivering opportunities for students and maximising their success: Evidence for policy and practice 2015–20;* High Fliers Research (2016), *The Graduate Market in 2016*

[288] HEFCE (2013) *Higher education and beyond: Outcomes from full-time first degree study*

of their academic achievements[289]) will have on graduate outcomes for underrepresented groups. Some schemes have been created to help ensure that underrepresented groups are able to gain access to work experience in top professions, including PRIME[290] (which works in law) and Access Accountancy[291].

Graduate employers may also be entrenching inequalities introduced earlier in the education system by requiring a minimum number of UCAS tariff points for applicants. Two different surveys[292] of the graduate recruitment market in 2013 found employers specifying minimum tariff points, with one finding that a quarter of recruiters did and the other finding that 35% of recruiters did. However, some of the largest graduate recruiters have since taken action on these points with some, including PwC[293] and Ernst & Young[294] removing minimum UCAS tariff point scores for applicants, and others, including Deloitte[295] and Clifford Chance[296], using contextualised data to look at these measures in the round of applicant performance.

The Bridge Group[297] and others have recommended the use of contextual data in recruitment and a number of contextual data services have been developed to help employers in this area. The Cabinet Office[298] is also working with the Bridge Group to develop a common set of measures for employers to understand the socio-economic backgrounds of their staff body and recruitment pool.

Access to postgraduate study may also be entrenching the inequalities introduced earlier in the education system. Research by HEFCE[299] has shown that, in addition to the differences identified in the section above, students at high tariff institutions are substantially more likely to go on to postgraduate study within a year of graduating.

Although inequalities in access to postgraduate study appear to be smaller than at undergraduate level, they are important for two reasons. Firstly, because research[300] suggests that the postgraduate premium and demand for postgraduate employees are both increasing. And secondly, because the academic staff of the future will be drawn, at least in part, from current postgraduate students, and staff diversity is an

[289] High Fliers Research (2016) *The Graduate Market in 2016*
[290] See http://www.primecommitment.org/
[291] See http://www.accessaccountancy.org/
[292] High Fliers Research Graduate Market in 2013 and Association of Graduate Recruiters Graduate Recruitment Survey 2013, cited in HEFCE (2015) *Delivering opportunities for students and maximising their success: Evidence for policy and practice 2015–20*
[293] See http://www.pwc.co.uk/careers/student/applying/ucas-tariff-changes.html
[294] See http://www.ey.com/UK/en/Newsroom/News-releases/15-08-03---EY-transforms-its-recruitment-selection-process-for-graduates-undergraduates-and-school-leavers
[295] See http://www2.deloitte.com/uk/en/pages/press-releases/articles/largest-british-business-to-adopt-contextualised-recruitment.html
[296] See https://jobs.thelawyer.com/article/magic-circle-signs-up-to-contextual-recruitment-in-new-social-mobility-push/
[297] Bridge Group (2015) *Good Practice in Contextual Recruitment*
[298] Cabinet Office (2016) *Engagement Document: Developing a Common set of Measures for Employers on the Socio-Economic Backgrounds of their Workforce and Applicants.*
[299] HEFCE (2013) *Trends in transition from first degree to postgraduate study: Qualifiers between 2002–03 and 2010–11*
[300] LSE Centre for Economic Performance (2011) CEP Discussion Paper No 1075 *Rising Wage Inequality and Postgraduate Education*

important part of developing an inclusive institution which recognises and supports underrepresented groups[301].

Until very recently there has been very limited consideration of diversity within postgraduate entry. This is partly because the numbers going on to postgraduate study remain relatively small and partly because postgraduate study is more diverse and complex than undergraduate study. In addition to the differences in postgraduate progression by student characteristic, there are differences by subject discipline, different levels of qualification offering different possible outcomes, considerable differences in student characteristics and intentions, and sparse and varied funding.

Funding is a clear issue in the take-up of postgraduate study[302]. Although loans for postgraduates will be introduced in autumn 2016, the impact of this is difficult to predict and will need to be closely monitored. The loan has been designed to make a contribution to costs rather than the full costs of study and it remains to be seen how students without any other access to finance make up the gap between the £10,000 loan and their actual tuition fee and living costs.

In addition to funding, research has identified issues around the aspirations and social capital of underrepresented student groups as a concern for postgraduate progression, with a need for greater visibility of postgraduate education[303]; and the importance of underrepresented students developing strong relationships with staff[304]. The measures covered earlier in this paper will be important in addressing these problems, and most particularly improvements to information, advice and guidance to prospective postgraduate (and current undergraduate) students; and the adoption of diverse and inclusive curriculum development, delivery and assessment.

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[301] See section 3.3.1.2 in King's College London, ARC Network and The University of Manchester (2015) *Causes of differences in student outcomes*

[302] See, for example, Paul Wakeling (2015) *Programme Analysis of HEFCE's Postgraduate Support Scheme: Final Report to ESRC and HEFCE*

[303] Wakeling (2015) op cit

[304] King's College London, ARC Network and The University of Manchester (2015) *Causes of differences in student outcomes*

ANNEXE B: A REVIEW OF THE EVIDENCE OF HOW YOUTH SOCIAL ACTION CAN BOOST SOCIAL MOBILITY INTO, AND AFTER UNIVERSITY

A REVIEW OF THE QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE EVIDENCE FROM ACROSS THE #IWILL CAMPAIGN PARTNERS

When young people engage in social action, they develop the key skills and character qualities that will set them up for work and life, while making a positive impact in their communities. However, young people from less affluent backgrounds are significantly less likely to be reaping these rewards of participating in social action compared to their wealthier peers. Baseline data in 2014 showed that 51% of young people from more affluent backgrounds and 31% of young people from less affluent backgrounds participated in social action (Ipsos MORI 2014).

The #iwill campaign is led by over 600 organisations from across sectors who are all dedicated to closing this socio-economic gap in participation, and in turn boosting upwards social mobility of the UK's most disadvantaged young people. Their ambitious goal is to increase participation in youth social action among 10- to 20-year-olds across the UK to over 60% by 2020.

Getting involved in social action helps young people directly and indirectly access higher education, increase retention and performance at university, and boost their future career opportunities. The following presents an overview of the evidence, both qualitative and quantitative, that supports these statements and presents ideas on how to further boost upwards social mobility through social action.

ACCESS TO UNIVERSITY

Getting involved in social action develops the character qualities and skills that are beneficial for young people as they access university in both personal statement writing and in interviews.

The evidence:

- In 2016 the Behavioural Insights Team's[305] Random Controlled Trials found that young people aged between 10 and 20 who took part in social action activities in which the six quality principles of social action[306] were embedded, displayed significantly improved character qualities and skills. The trials measured levels of empathy, cooperation, grit and resilience as well as problem-solving skills, sense of community and educational attitudes. Across

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[305] The Behavioural Insights Team use insights from behavioural science to encourage people to make better choices for themselves and society. It is a social purpose company, jointly owned by the UK government, Nesta (the innovation charity) and their employees. Further information is available at http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk

[306] The six principles are: embedded, progressive, youth led, challenging, socially impactful and reflective.

all six of these areas there was an uplift of between 6 and 16% when compared with the control group (BIT 2016).[307]

- The same research found that in a mock job interview, young people who had taken part in social action were more likely to be successful than those who had not.

- In 2015, UCAS worked with #iwill partners to develop guidance for young people on how to draw on their social action experience to write an effective personal statement.

These soft skills prepare young people not only for university but also for the workplace. Embedding social action in schools in areas of low social mobility will maximise character building and soft skills development, therefore enhancing young people's personal statements and ability to access university, while also positively impacting employability opportunities.

Social action participation can also boost attainment at school. #iwill partner schools have woven social action into their school culture and curriculum and report improvements in behaviour in the classroom, time management and engagement in lessons. The 2014 National Citizen Service (NCS) evaluation[308] demonstrated a link between participating in NCS and participants' plans for undertaking further education (5% increase, compared to a control group). These case studies are particularly encouraging with regards to young people attending schools in areas of low social mobility and increasing their chances of accessing university.

STAYING ON AT UNIVERSITY AND ACHIEVING THE BEST POSSIBLE RESULT AT THE END OF UNIVERSITY

Evidence suggests engaging in social action can help increase wellbeing, helping young people not only access but also stay on at university. There are countless pieces of evidence indicating a link between poor wellbeing and areas of low social mobility. Research[309] also shows better wellbeing increases the likelihood of achieving academically (JRF 2011). For example, pupils with better emotional wellbeing at the age of seven had a value-added key stage 2 score 2.46 points higher than pupils with poorer emotional wellbeing (DfE). Participation in youth social action is significantly associated with improved wellbeing (IPSOS Mori 2014[310]). A Behavioural Insights Team study found that participants in the Citizenship Foundation programme had levels of anxiety 22% lower than those in the control group.

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[307] The Behavioural Insights Team in partnership with the Cabinet Office (2015) *Evaluating Youth Social Action – Interim report* http://www.behaviouralinsights.co.uk/publications/evaluating-youth-social-action/
[308] IPSOS Mori (2015) *The National Citizen Service 2014 Evaluation* https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/publications/1784/National-Citizen-Service-2014-Evaluation.aspx
[309] Joseph Roundtree Foundation (2015) *Does income inequality cause health and social problems?* https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/inequality-income-social-problems-full.pdf
[310] IPSOS Mori (2014) *Youth social action in the UK-2014. A face-to-face survey for 10-20 year olds* https://www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Publications/sri-ecf-youth-social-action-in-the-uk-2014.pdf

With students demanding more than just a degree from their university experience, engaging in social action helps improve a student's university experience and raises student satisfaction levels, increases attainment at university and helps towards achieving better results.

FUTURE CAREER OPTIONS

Social action increases young people's networks, helping them develop their future career options. Half of the poorest children are educated together in just 20% of schools (DfE). We know that extending relationships and networks positively influence social mobility. Studies show that young people who have been in contact with four or more employers are nearly twice as likely to know what types of skills they need to get the job they want (Inspiring the Future).

It is important to open up these networks at a young age throughout school. It is also critical to maintain opportunities throughout university to help with future career options.

A CIPD survey[311] (2015) reported 67% of employers say candidates with social action experience demonstrate better employability skills. In its Education and Skills survey, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and Pearson found that a mere 24% of employers count exam results as paramount when recruiting school or college leavers, compared with a significant 85% who regard character and attitude as among the most important things they look for.

The Career Colleges Trust released research[312] showing that students themselves think schools are too focused on exam results and are not preparing them enough for the world of work. Lord Baker, founder of the Career Colleges Trust, described how the research highlights the extent of the problem that the UK is facing: a huge skills gap across many industries. He said, 'If young people themselves are not feeling prepared for work, employers will continue to struggle with the recruitment issues that have become such a challenge for UK industry.'

For those students unable to find relevant work experience during university, or unable to engage in unpaid work placements, social action allows them to develop key employability skills that can help them immensely when applying for jobs after university. Aside from developing character and compassion, engaging in social action also signals to potential employers a young person's proactive nature and their ability to work in a variety of environments.

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[311] CIPD (2015) *A guide for employers; how to unlock social action in recruitment,* available at https://www.cipd.co.uk/binaries/talent-social-action-recruitment.pdf
[312] http://careercolleges.org.uk/2015/08/19/young-people-do-not-feel-prepared-for-the-world-of-work/

ANNEXE C: SOCIAL MOBILITY ADVISORY GROUP AND REFERENCE GROUP MEMBERS

SOCIAL MOBILITY ADVISORY GROUP

- Nicola Dandridge (Chair), Chief Executive, Universities UK
- Shirley Atkinson, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, University of Sunderland
- Gaenor Bagley, Head of People, Community and Sustainability, PwC
- Caroline Bicknell, Deputy Director of Higher Education, Department for Education
- Anne-Marie Canning, Director of Widening Participation (Student Lifecycle), King's College London
- Professor Joy Carter, Vice-Chancellor, University of Winchester, and chair of GuildHE
- Megan Dunn, President, National Union of Students (until May 2016)
- Professor Les Ebdon, Director, Office for Fair Access
- Allan Foulds, President, Association of School and College Leaders
- Nicholas Glossop, Head of Inclusion and Learning Support, BPP University
- Gerry Godley, Principal and Managing Director, Leeds College of Music
- Peter Horrocks, Vice-Chancellor, The Open University
- Omar Khan, Director, The Runnymede Trust
- Professor Geoff Layer, Vice-Chancellor, University of Wolverhampton
- Gary Loke, Head of Policy, Equality Challenge Unit
- Steve McArdle, Chair of Post-16 and Higher Education, Association of School and College Leaders and Assistant Head (Post-16) Durham Johnson School
- Nona McDuff, Director of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Kingston University and Chair of the Higher Education Race Action Group
- Chris Millward, Director (Policy), Higher Education Funding Council for England
- Raphael Mokades, founder and Managing Director, Rare Recruitment
- Mike Nicholson, Chair of the Higher Education Liaison Officers Association, and Director of Student Recruitment and Admissions, University of Bath
- Professor Sir Steve Smith, Chair of UCAS, and Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, University of Exeter
- Professor John Storan, Director of Continuum, Centre for Widening Participation Policy Studies, University of East London
- Professor Mary Stuart, Vice-Chancellor, University of Lincoln
- Sorana Vieru, Vice-President (Higher Education), National Union of Students, (from June 2016)
- John Widdowson, Principal of New College Durham, and President of the Association of Colleges

UNIVERSITIES UK SECRETARIAT

- Chris Hale, Director of Policy
- Kate Jackson, Senior Political Affairs Officer
- Eleanor Jubb, Policy Analyst

- Ian Morton, Campaigns Manager
- Fiona Waye, Senior Policy Lead, Social Mobility, Equality and Diversity

ACADEMIC REFERENCE GROUP

- Professor Mary Stuart, Vice-Chancellor, University of Lincoln (Chair)
- Jane Artess, Principal Research Fellow, University of Derby
- Jo Blanden, Research Associate, Centre for Economic Performance, London School of Economics and Political Science, and University of Surrey
- Dr Vikki Boliver, Acting Deputy Head of School (Research), Senior Lecturer in Sociology/Social Policy in the School of Applied Social Sciences, University of Durham
- Dr Mark Corver, Director of Analysis and Research, UCAS
- Sam Friedman, Assistant Professor in Sociology, London School of Economics and Political Science
- Sarah Howls, Head of Widening Participation, Higher Education Funding Council for England
- Dr Steven Jones, Senior Lecturer, Manchester Institute of Education, University of Manchester
- Dr Daniel Laurison, Postdoctoral Fellow in the Sociology Department, London School of Economics and Political Science
- Professor Steven Machin, Centre for Economic Performance Research Director and Programme Director Labour Markets – Education and Skills, Community, at the London School of Economics and Political Science
- Heidi Mirza, Professor of Race, Faith and Culture, Goldsmiths, University of London
- Dr Anna Mountford–Zimdars, Senior Lecturer in Higher Education, King's College London
- Dr Gurnam Singh, Principal Lecturer in Social Work, Coventry University
- Professor Liz Thomas, Edge Hill University
- Professor Mike Savage, Martin White Professor of Sociology, Head of Department, London School of Economics and Political Science
- Professor Anna Vignoles, Professor of Education, Director of Research, University of Cambridge
- Dr Paul Wakeling, Senior Lecturer, University of York
- Dr Gill Wyness, UCL Institute of Education

PRACTITIONERS' REFERENCE GROUP

- Anne-Marie Canning, Director of Widening Participation, King's College London (Joint Chair)
- Mike Nicholson, Director of Student Recruitment and Admissions, University of Bath; Chair, Higher Education Liaison Officers Association (Joint Chair)
- John Adams, Vice-Principal, Wiltshire College
- Oliver Cardinali, Policy and Public Affairs, Sutton Trust
- Rachel Carr, Chief Executive and Co-Founder, IntoUniversity
- Richard Gould, Chief Executive, Villiers Trust Educational Park
- Janet Graham, Director, Supporting Professionalism in Admissions
- Dr Joan O'Mahony, Academic Lead, Retention, Higher Education Academy

- Nona McDuff, Director of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Kingston University; Chair, Higher Education Race Action Group
- Nadira Mirza, Director of Student Success, University of Bradford and Universities Association of Lifelong Learning
- Josh Oware, Rare Recruitment and Target Oxbridge
- Claire Owen, Policy Adviser, Medical Schools Council
- Jenny North, Guidance Adviser, Birmingham Metropolitan College
- Anand Shukla, Chief Executive, Brightside
- Ian Sinker, Associate Dean (Academic Development and Innovation), University of Cumbria
- Dr Helen Thorne, Director of External Relations, UCAS
- Alice Wilby, Director of UK Recruitment and Partnerships, Oxford Brookes University
- Chris Wilson, National Programme Director, The Scholars Programme, The Brilliant Club

ATTENDANCE AT EMPLOYERS' ROUNDTABLE

- Nicola Dandridge, Chief Executive, Universities UK (Chair)
- Gaenor Bagley, Head of People, Community and Sustainability, PwC
- Matt Baker, Attraction and Outreach Assistant Manager, Student Recruitment, KPMG
- Jennifer Beckwith, Policy Adviser (Employment Law and Diversity), CBI
- Anna Birley, Corporate Adviser, Business in the Community
- Elaine Boyes, Executive Director, AGCAS
- Jane Clark, Group Head of Graduate Resourcing and Development, Barclays
- Daniel Ellis, Partner, Baker & McKenzie
- Dr Sam Friedman, Assistant Professor in Sociology, London School of Economics and Political Science
- Stephen Isherwood, Chief Executive, Association of Graduate Recruiters
- Martha Jennings, Starting Out Manager, Sky
- Sabrina Luisi, Head of Access Department (Acting Associate Director), Teach First
- Nik Miller, Director, The Bridge Group
- Raphael Mokades, Founder and Managing Director, Rare Recruitment
- Annie Peate, Policy Advisor, Education and Skills, Federation of Small Businesses
- Dan Richards, Recruiting Leader UK and Ireland, EY
- Clare Sullivan, Corporate Responsibility Programme Manager, Deloitte LLP
- Justine Thompson, Senior Inclusion and Diversity Manager, Baker & McKenzie
- Jackie Trench, Graduate Recruitment Manager, Clifford Chance LLP
- Philip Wilson, Provost and Chief Executive, CSR Resourcing

ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOLS' ROUNDTABLE

- Nicola Dandridge, Chief Executive, Universities UK (Chair)
- Dill Anstey, Vice Principal – Federation Sixth Form, Harris Federation
- Amandip Bisel, Vice-Chair (Group Development), Higher Education Liaison Officers Association
- Professor Joy Carter, Vice-Chancellor, University of Winchester
- Anthony Fitzpatrick, Higher Education Coordinator, St Paul's Way Trust School
- Allan Foulds, President, Association of School and College Leaders
- Hilary French, Co-Chair of Girls School Association/Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference Joint Universities Committee
- Steve McArdle, Assistant Head (Post-16), Durham Johnston School
- Hannah McAuley, Head of University and Careers Success, Ark
- James Skinner, Chief Executive, Grammar School Heads' Association

ATTENDANCE AT ALTERNATIVE PROVIDERS' ROUNDTABLE

- Chris Hale, Director of Policy, Universities UK (Chair)
- Professor Aldwyn Cooper, Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Regent's University, London
- Joy Elliott-Bowman, Policy and Public Affairs Manager, Independent Higher Education
- John Fairhurst, Managing Director and Academic Principal, The London School of Business and Management
- Nicholas Glossop, Head of Inclusion and Learning Support, BPP University
- Professor Haymo Thiel, Principal of the Anglo-European College of Chiropractic
- Paul Kirkham, Managing Director, The Institute of Contemporary Music Performance
- Paul Lockhart-Thomas, Director of Academic and Support Services, Cambridge Ruskin International College
- Raffaele Marcellino, Chief Academic Officer, SAE Institute
- Alex Proudfoot, Chief Executive, Independent Higher Education
- Sir Anthony Seldon, Vice-Chancellor, University of Buckingham

This publication has been produced by Universities UK (UUK), the representative organisation for the UK's universities. Founded in 1918, its mission is to be the voice of universities in the UK, providing high quality leadership and support to its members to promote a successful and diverse higher education sector. With 135 members and offices in London, Cardiff (Universities Wales) and Edinburgh (Universities Scotland), it promotes the strength and success of UK universities nationally and internationally.

Universities UK